

FINETUNING A BUSINESS VOICE

A CASE STUDY ON THE TONE OF VOICE OF FLUVIUS

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Abstract

The current research is focused on the tone of voice of businesses. A tone of voice is often described as ‘Not what you say, but how you say it’ and refers to the specific way in which a business communicates via text. In the literature, it is often stated that a tone of voice is a good way to convey a brand’s identity and personality to the target audience.

The current research aimed to test the importance of defining a consistent tone of voice for businesses. In this, a case study was set up around the Flemish utility company Fluvius, as this company has defined a specific writing style in their style guide. By presenting texts from the Fluvius website to participants, in both Fluvius’ usual tone of voice and in an alternative tone of voice, which was created in light of the current study, this research aimed to answer three research questions: Does a tone of voice come across in the way it was intended? Do customers notice when an existing company uses different tones of voice across texts? And does a specific tone of voice impact the perception of a brand’s personality.

Results supported the importance of using a consistent and defined tone of voice. First, it was found that a tone of voice largely comes across in the way it was intended by the writers. Secondly, participants indeed noticed when an existing business uses a different tone across their communications. Lastly, the characteristics of a tone of voice have the ability to impact the perception of a brand’s personality, as participants rated the company’s personality different, based on the two tones of voice that were used in this research.

In sum, the current research supports the importance of using a consistent tone of voice across business communication. As people notice deviations from a business’ usual tone of voice and as this impacts their perception of a brand’s personality, it is to a company’s advantage to use a consistent writing style. This promotes recognition and trust within the target group, which is important to establish a sustainable business-customer relationship.

Keywords: tone of voice, tone of voice dimensions, brand identity, brand personality, business communication

Nederlandstalige Samenvatting

Door de komst van het internet, veranderde het commerciële speelveld in één wereldwijde marktplaats. Daardoor is het voor bedrijven nog moeilijker geworden om er tussen de berichten van hun concurrenten uit te springen en hun doelgroep te bereiken. Bovendien verlangen klanten ook steeds meer. Een goed product of goede service alleen volstaat niet langer, klanten verlangen ook om een connectie te vormen met het bedrijf erachter. Daarom is het voor merken nog belangrijker geworden om een stevige merkidentiteit, merkpersoonlijkheid, en communicatiestijl neer te zetten.

De communicatiestijl van een bedrijf wordt ook wel de ‘tone of voice’ genoemd. Het verwijst naar het typisch stemgeluid dat weerklinkt in de communicatie van een bedrijf en is een middel om de merkidentiteit en -persoonlijkheid over te brengen naar de klant.

In deze thesis wordt dieper ingegaan op die tone of voice. De kernconcepten bij het definiëren van een tone of voice worden overlopen en er wordt ingegaan op de zaken waaruit een tone of voice bestaat. Zo bleek uit voorgaand onderzoek dat een tone of voice omschreven kan worden door een positionering op vier dimensies: humor, formaliteit, respect, en enthousiasme.

Daarnaast wordt ook onderzocht hoe belangrijk het is om een consistente tone of voice te gebruiken. Aan de hand van een case study rond het bedrijf Fluvijs – de Vlaamse netbeheerder van elektriciteit en aardgas – wordt onderzocht of een bepaalde tone of voice overkomt op dezelfde manier waarop het bedoeld is. Verder wordt nagegaan of klanten effectief een verschil merken indien een andere tone of voice gebruikt wordt. Ten slotte wordt onderzocht of het gebruik van een bepaalde tone of voice ook een impact heeft op de manier waarop klanten de persoonlijkheid van een bedrijf percipiëren.

Deze onderzoeksvragen werden behandeld door participanten teksten vanop de Fluvijs website voor te leggen. Deze teksten werden geschreven in twee verschillende schrijfstijlen: de tone of voice, zoals gedefinieerd in de stijlgijs van Fluvijs, en een alternatieve tone of voice, die opgesteld werd in kader van dit onderzoek, op basis van de vier tone of voice dimensies

Uit de resultaten van dit onderzoek blijkt dat klanten de tone of voice van een bedrijf grotendeels percipiëren op dezelfde manier waarop het bedoeld is. Daarnaast werd gevonden dat klanten een verschil merken wanneer een bestaand bedrijf plots een andere schrijfstijl hanteert. Ten slotte ondersteunden de resultaten het idee dat een tone of voice een belangrijk medium is om de unieke persoonlijkheid van een merk over te brengen naar de doelgroep. Er werd een duidelijk verschil gevonden tussen de beoordeling van de merkpersoonlijkheid, wanneer twee verschillende schrijfstijlen gebruikt werden.

Samengevat biedt het huidige onderzoek ondersteuning voor het belang van het creëren van een consistente en gedefinieerde tone of voice. Naast het overbrengen van de merkpersoonlijkheid, zorgt een consistente schrijfstijl voor een eenheid binnen de communicatie van een bedrijf. Dat creëert op zijn beurt herkenbaarheid en vertrouwen binnen de doelgroep, belangrijk voor het bouwen van een duurzame klantenrelatie.

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Besides the educational side, I also got to know a lot of great people: my fellow MTB-colleagues. After this year, I am very happy to call them my friends. Thanks to them, the challenges of this exciting year became possible, because we tackled them together. Consequently, small and large victories were properly celebrated each time. Therefore, I am more than happy to complete my student career in such enriching and fulfilling way.

This thesis constitutes my final feat of the exciting ride called MTB. Since I would not have been able to submit my thesis without the help and support of a number of people, I would like to take this opportunity to thank them.

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Introduction

The widespread adoption of the Internet has changed the world into one global marketplace (Rodriguez-Moran, 2020; Thompson, 2003). As businesses are no longer restricted by physical limitations and geographical boundaries, the whole connected population suddenly becomes a reachable target audience (Gupta, 2014; Rodriguez-Moran, 2020; Terzi, 2011). Moreover, tools such as data-driven advertising on social media platforms allow businesses to create personalized content in real time and present it to specific target groups (Barcelos et al., 2019; Desai & Vidyapeeth, 2019).

Naturally, the assets of the digital marketplace are available to competitors as well. As a result, the competition within the online commercial landscape has become stronger and fiercer than ever (Das et al., 2012; Keller & Richey, 2006). Businesses are no longer competing with solely the players of the industry within the national borders. Because of the Internet, the commercial playing field is internationally accessible. Therefore, the challenge to reach the target audience and break through the stream of posts and advertisements of the competition is at an all-time high (Cantor, 2020; Das et al., 2012; Thompson, 2003; Tinico, 2023).

Moreover, the Internet has shifted the power to the purchaser and created the empowered customer: they decide what they read, where they collect their information, and where they eventually make a purchase (Constantinides, 2008; Rodriguez-Moran, 2020). Due to this shift, consumers raised their standards (Thompson, 2003). Nowadays, a strong product or service no longer suffices for a company to differentiate itself from the competition (Keller & Richey, 2006). Instead, customers are looking for brands that truly resonate with them.

Both in the B2C (business to customer) and the B2B (business to business) sector, customers prefer businesses that come across as authentic, real, honest, and open (The Acrolinx Team, 2021). They are looking for a brand experience: customers want to form a lasting connection with the brand. That connection is prerequisite for winning the trust of a purchaser and for turning an opportunist into a loyal customer (Rodriguez-Moran, 2020; The Acrolinx Team, 2021; Timothy, 2022; Wijaya, 2013).

Therefore, constructing a strong and authentic brand identity and brand personality is a necessity to survive in today's competitive global marketplace. These elements help businesses to position their brand by defining who they are and what they stand for. It humanizes a brand and makes it

easier for customers to relate to it. To communicate these distinctive traits, the tone of voice of a business plays an increasingly crucial role (Cha, 2017). In short, a tone of voice is described as 'Not what you say, but how you say it'. It is the way a brand communicates and connects with its target audience through customer interactions, social media posts, blogs, etc.

The current thesis discusses the topic 'tone of voice in brand communication' in depth. An answer is provided to the following questions: What is a tone of voice? Why it is important? And how is it related to branding in its entirety? Further, an in-depth look at how to create a strong tone of voice for a particular company is provided. In this, the elements of which a tone of voice consists of, and what characteristics capture a specific tone of voice are discussed.

After clarifying the concept of tone of voice and the related concepts, the results of a case study about the tone of voice of a real-life business – Fluvius – are discussed. This study aims to shed more light on the true value of defining a business's tone of voice.

To this end, three main research questions are addressed:

- 1) Do customers perceive the tone of voice in the same way as the content creators intended it?
- 2) Do people notice a difference when two different tones of voice are used across texts from an existing business?
- 3) Does the tone of voice impact the way that customers assess a business' brand personality? I.e., is there a measurable difference in the perception of the company's brand personality, due to a difference in tone of voice?

Theoretical Background

In this section, the concept of tone of voice and the related branding concepts are discussed. For the main concepts, the relevant theoretical framework is highlighted as well. The order that structures this chapter is based on an extensive literature review and corresponds to the process of creating a unique tone of voice. That is, the concepts that are related to the beginning of the process are explained first and the concept of tone of voice is addressed at the end of this section.

Brand Identity

Brand identity is the most encompassing concept in the context of creating a business' tone of voice. It collects all elements that a company uses to make itself unique and portray an image of itself to the customer. A brand identity is created from the point of view of the business and reflects how that business wants to be perceived by its audience (Andrivet, 2023; deBara, 2022; Tarver, 2022; van Haaften, n.d.). In this, brand identity can be distinguished from brand image, which reflects how a customer thinks and feels about a brand (Wijaya, 2013; Zhang, 2015).

How many and which elements brand identity comprises, depends on the model used. Below one of the most prominent brand identity models is discussed.

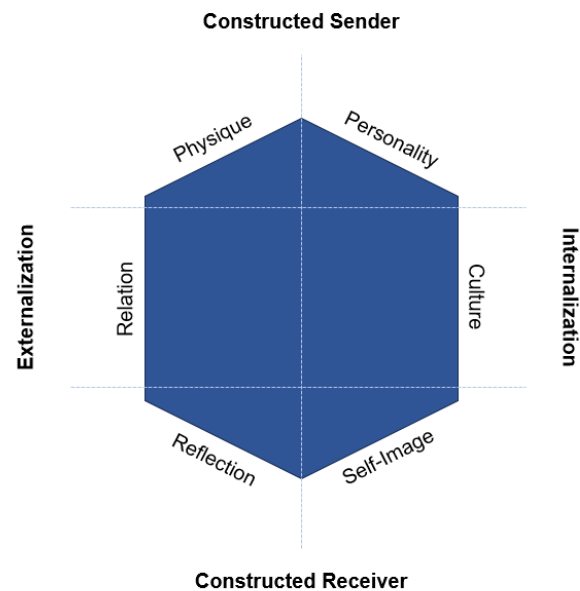
The Brand Identity Prism.

The Brand Identity Prism model was developed in 1986 by Kapferer. The researcher created the model as a tool to define brand identity. In addition, the model serves as a guide for businesses to help them create a clear, stable, and coherent brand identity. According to Kapferer, brand identity consists of six facets: the physical, the personality, the relational, the cultural, the customer's reflection, and the customer's self-concept facet (Kapferer, 1986, see Figure 1).

The six facets of the Brand Identity Prism are organized around two axes (see Figure 1). The horizontal axis distinguishes between the external facets, found on the left side of the model, and the internal aspects of brand identity, located on the right. In turn, the vertical axis separates the facets at the top, which relate to the "constructed sender" – the business –, and the facets at the bottom of the model, which are linked to the "constructed receiver" – the target audience. Here, the word *constructed* is important as it emphasizes that model reflects the reality as created by the business itself (Kapferer, 2008).

Figure 1

Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism



Note. Adapted from “Kapferer’s Brand-Identity Prism model” by J.N. Kapferer, 2009, *European Institute for Brand Management*, p. 1. Copyright [2009] EURIB.

Kapferer defined the six facets of the Brand Identity Prism model as follows:

- **The physical facet** refers to the visual and tangible elements of a brand. These elements define what the brand looks like and how it can be visually recognized: e.g., the colors and fonts that a brand uses, the logo, and the shape of the packaging (Baakman, 2023; Kapferer, 2008, 2009; Wallstreetmojo Team, 2022).
- **The personality facet** captures a brand’s character. That is, the personality traits it would hold if it were a person. Some brands use a mascot or a famous person to convey and reinforce this brand personality (Baakman, 2023; Kapferer, 2008).
- **The relational facet** describes the type of relationship that is established between a brand and its customer. It entails the manner of approaching a customer, the attitude of the sales team and the type of service a customer can expect outside of the service or

product that they bought. For example, some brands are profiling themselves as a sibling, a friend, a parent, or a sage (Janse, 2022; Kapferer, 2008; Stringfellow, 2023).

- **The cultural facet** refers to the deep roots of a business. These are the values and principles that a company conveys. Often, the cultural facet is related to the land of origin, but that is not necessarily the case (Baakman, 2023; Janse, 2022; Kapferer, 2008, 2009).
- **The customer's reflection facet** corresponds to the image of an ideal customer according to a company's own standards. It is the portrayal of a stereotypical consumer. However, this image is not necessarily an accurate representation of the actual target group. For example, it may be a representation of a person who appeals to the target group. In this case, it involves an image that the customer wants to imitate or identify with (Janse, 2022; Kapferer, 2008, 2009).
- **The customer's self-concept facet** entails the internal concept that customers create of themselves as a customer of a certain company. This facet is best explained by means of examples: customers of the sports brand Lacoste often see themselves as a member of a sports club, even if they are not actively partaking in a sport. Porsche drivers, on the other hand, see themselves as rich because they can afford such car. Businesses can capitalize on these types of intrinsic drivers by shaping this facet of brand identity (Baakman, 2023; Janse, 2022; Kapferer, 2008, 2009).

The Cultural Facet as the Core of Brand Identity

The cultural facet of the Brand Identity Prism serves as a solid foundation on which the other facets can be built (Johnson, 2023; Thompson, 2003). For example, if a brand incorporates sustainability into its cultural facet, the business is likely to reflect this value in its physical facet as well, such as in its logo and packaging choices.

Likewise, the cultural facet serves as a firm starting point to develop the personality and relational facet of a brand's identity (Snel, 2017; Thompson, 2003) because, before a business can decide how they will communicate and connect with their audience, the business must first have a firm image of what they want to communicate about (D. Gilbert, 2022; Leonard, 2019; Verbina, 2022).

Therefore, in the context of creating a tone of voice, a business should start with defining a mission, vision, and core values – the three elements of an organizational culture (Fenner, 2017;

Meysman et al., 2019). In doing so, a business reflects on what makes them unique. It allows them to contemplate about who they are as an organization, what they want to be, and what they don't want to be (Verbina, 2022).

Mission.

A brand's mission expresses the reason that the business exists (Braun et al., 2012). It conveys the purpose of the brand: what the organization is passionate about, what its goals are, and how the business intends to achieve those goals (Aboulhosn, 2020; Szyperski, 2022; Urde, 1999; Verbina, 2022). In addition, the brand's mission defines its central tasks. It explains what the brand does for its customers and its employees (Braun et al., 2012; Groenteman, 2019; Johnson, 2023).

Vision.

A brand's vision describes an optimistic picture of the future that the organization wants to help create. This image relates to both the future of the company itself, and the future of the broader society (Braun et al., 2012; Johnson, 2023; Leonard, 2019; Urde, 1999).

Core Values.

The third component that serves as a central building block of a brand's identity are its core values. They encompass the values to which a company is committed (e.g., sustainability and fairness) and underpin a brand's mission and vision (Braun et al., 2012; Groenteman, 2019). Core values are often related to the product or service of the company (Urde, 1999).

In sum, a brand's culture gives rise to the attitudes and behavior of the company. They influence an organization's decisions and provide a guideline for its communication style (Braun et al., 2012; Grammarly Business, 2021; Thompson, 2003). Therefore, defining a brand's mission, vision and core values is a prerequisite for forming its personality and, subsequently, its tone of voice (Snel, 2017).

Brand Personality

This brings us to the second main concept in defining a business' tone of voice: brand personality, one of the facets of brand identity. As described above, a brand's personality is the aggregation of the human traits ascribed to a certain brand (Keller & Richey, 2006; Tarver, 2023). It is those qualities that make a business human as it refers to its stable emotional, psychological, and behavioral qualities (Paul, 2022).

On the one hand, brand personality is shaped by the company's culture. A brand's mission, vision and core values influence a company's decisions, attitudes, and behavior. But on the other hand, brand personality is also the tool via which businesses can share these principles with their target audience by behaving accordingly in public expressions (Keller & Richey, 2006). When a company manages to successfully align their culture with their personality, they make an authentic impression on their target audience (Ellis, 2020; Morhart et al., 2013). That authenticity is, in turn, important for creating brand trust within their target audience (Portal et al., 2019; Tong et al., 2018).

Furthermore, a brand personality plays a key role in the type of customers the business attracts. The reason for this is that customers subconsciously look for brands that express values and characteristics that resonate with them (Baakman, 2022; Moura, 2021; Phau & Lau, 2000; Wu & Chen, 2019). This way, a brand's human characteristics can create a lasting impression with their customers (Ellis, 2020). As a result, brand personality further fosters the development of a sustainable business-customer relationship (Baakman, 2022; Tarver, 2023; Tong et al., 2018).

There are multiple frameworks that a business can use to shape its brand personality. For the research purposes of the current study, Aaker's Brand Personality model was chosen because the scale that resulted from this model is suitable to use in research contexts such as the current.

Aakers' Brand Personality Model.

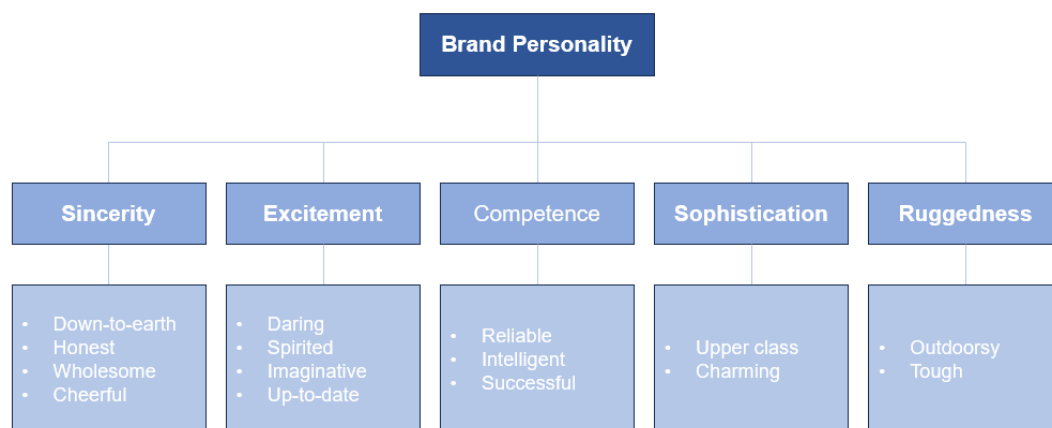
In 1997, Aaker published their research on brand personality. Aaker (1997) defined brand personality as "a set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (p.347); a definition that is in line with the personality facet of the Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer, 2008). The goal of Aaker's research was to conceptualize a theoretical framework, that could serve as the corporate counterpart of the Big Five – a framework from personality psychology that summarizes human personality into five main personality traits (Aaker, 1997).

To this end, the researcher analyzed the personality trait ratings of 37 American brands – i.e., a mix of product and service brands. By performing an exploratory principal components factor analysis, Aaker found that brand identity could be captured in five main factors. These factors are Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness. Each of the five main factors encompasses two to four facets (Aaker, 1997; see Figure 2).

This pioneering study resulted in a framework that can be used to develop a brand identity (see Figure 2). In addition, the theoretical framework gave rise to a reliable, valid, and generalizable scale that is suited for research concerning the brand personality of product and service brands (Aaker, 1997). Aaker's Brand Personality Scale can be found in Appendix A.

Figure 2

Aaker's Brand Personality Framework



Note. Figure 2 depicts the five factors of Aaker's Brand Personality framework, each with its corresponding facets. Adapted from "Dimensions of Brand Personality" by J. Aaker, 1997, *Journal of Marketing Research*, Volume (34), p. 352. Copyright [2023] by JSTOR.

Tone of Voice

Once a business has decided on their brand personality, they can start with creating their unique tone of voice. As shortly touched upon in the Introduction, a brand's tone of voice can be described as 'Not what you say, but how you say it'. It refers to the characteristic manner in which a business communicates with and addresses their target audience (Kenan, 2023).

A tone of voice is the extension of a brand's personality and identity as it expresses these brand components in communication (Delin, 2007; Ferrai, 2020; D. Gilbert, 2022; Tinico, 2023). In other words, a tone of voice reinforces the values that a company stand for and conveys a brands unique personality (De Jong, 2022; Duberg, 2022; Groenteman, 2019; Snel, 2017). As brand communication often serves as a first customer touchpoint, a business' tone of voice should reflect these elements accurately, because this touchpoint can largely impact customers first impression of the brand (Leonard, 2019).

Besides brand identity and personality, a business' tone of voice is shaped by the word choice, characteristic expressions, sentence structure, punctuation, rhythm, and pace (Duberg, 2022; D. Gilbert, 2022; Groenteman, 2019; Kenan, 2023; Timothy, 2022; Verbina, 2022). In addition, it captures the emotional quality of a business' writing style. It reflects how a brand feels about the subject of writing and influences how the reader feels about the message (Ferrai, 2020; Fryer, 2021).

Importance.

In today's global marketplace, creating a unique tone of voice is becoming increasingly important (Cha, 2017). Besides conveying a brand's identity and personality, the implementation of a tone of voice has several other strengths.

Consistent Messaging.

Creating a tone of voice creates consistency in a brand's communication. It allows all members of a company to communicate in a way that sounds like it is coming from a single source. It ensures that the brand's communication is standardized, regardless of whether the message is coming from the marketing team, sales department, or the customer service (K. Gilbert, 2022; Map&Fire, 2019; Rock Content Writer, 2020). In this, tone of voice is an important tool to create well-rounded messaging and marketing.

Stand Out From the Competition.

Regarding the strong and fierce competition in today's commercial landscape, defining a unique tone of voice can help cutting through the competitors' messaging. By communicating in a distinctive and recognizable way, such as using typical words or expressions or communicating in a dialect, a business can stand out from the rest and make a positive and lasting impression on its target audience (D. Gilbert, 2022; Toomes, 2023). If a tone of voice is very successful, a company may even be recognized without its logo or name mentioned anywhere (Snel, 2017).

Boost Customer Trust.

According to the Psychology of Persuasion, there is a strong link between familiarity and trust. Familiar things require little effort to process. Therefore, people are more likely to feel at ease around them (Cialdini, 2007). By implementing a consistent and recognizable tone of voice, the writing of a business becomes familiar to the customers. As a result, a tone of voice helps to build trust and lays foundation for a strong business-customer relationship (Kenan, 2023; Map&Fire, 2019; The Acrolinx Team, 2021; Valchanova, 2022). In turn, trust can be the deciding factor when a customer has to make a purchase decision, making tone of voice an important aspect of sales as well (Toomes, 2023).

Humanize a Brand.

For consumers, every communication is a clue regarding a company's character (Bullmore, 2001). When a business has an approachable voice, customers will want to spend more time interacting with them (Ferrai, 2020; Valchanova, 2022). The reason for this is that people like to deal with people. Customers prefer brands that have a personality they can recognize and bond with. This is the case in both the B2B and the B2C sector (The Acrolinx Team, 2021). An approachable and relatable tone further helps with creating a business-customer relationship as it helps businesses to take part in conversations in a natural way (Lee, 2014; Valchanova, 2022).

Brand voice.

In the literature, the term *tone of voice* is often used interchangeably with the term *brand voice*. Despite the two terms going hand-in hand, there is a subtle difference between them (Lee, 2014). While a tone of voice is slightly adapted regarding the channel, situation, topic, and customer segment, a brand voice is consistent at all times (De Jong, 2022; Duberg, 2022; Toomes, 2023; Verbina, 2022).

A brand voice refers to the stable representation of a brand's personality in communication and refers to a brand's core message (Toomes, 2023; Valchanova, 2022). It applies to all channels and customer touchpoints. One could see brand voice as the common thread running through the tone of all communication. The more equal the tone and the brand voice, the more recognizable a brand's communication (Toomes, 2023).

Four Dimensions of a Tone of Voice.

In 2016, the Nielson Norman group conducted a study on the main characteristics that define a tone of voice. By analyzing, eliminating, and clustering an encompassing set of literary tone words, the researchers were able to summarize all the tone words that were applicable to business communication into four dimensions: i.e., Funny-Serious, Formal-Casual, Respectful-Irreverent, and Enthusiastic-Matter-of-Fact (Moran, 2016c).

These four scales can describe the tone of voice of any brand. Furthermore, the scales serve as a practical tool for creating and maintaining a consistent tone of voice throughout a business' communication (Maitra, 2020; Moran, 2016c). In addition, the scale can be used for research purposes, such as the current (Moran, 2016d).

Funny – Serious.

The first dimension of tone of voice is about humor. Here, the distinction is made about whether a business attempts to come across as humorous or rather approaches the subject and his reader in a more serious way (Moran, 2016c).

Formal – Casual.

The second dimension concerns whether a more casual or formal approach is chosen in a brand's communication (Moran, 2016c). A brand's positioning on this dimension is noticeable in for example the manner of addressing the reader. In this, the business will create more distance between them and the reader when opting for a more formal style and will come across as closer when choosing a casual tone of voice.

Respectful – Irreverent.

The third dimension describes whether a business chooses to approach the topic – and maybe even its reader – in a calm and respectful manner, or rather in a more bold and irreverent way (Moran, 2016c). When choosing for an irreverent tone of voice, a brand is more likely to stand out (Clara, 2022).

Enthusiastic – Matter-of-Fact.

The last dimension involves the choice between an enthusiastic and vivid writing style and a drier writing style that focuses on conveying information (Maitra, 2020; Moran, 2016c). An enthusiastic writing style will come across as more familiar, which makes it easier to connect with customers. A matter-of-fact tone is suited to inform and educate an audience (Fryer, 2021).

Tone of Voice Words.

Once a business has decided on their positioning on the four dimensions of tone of voice, they can refine their tone profile by using descriptive tone of voice words (Moran, 2016e). These tone words relate to the four dimensions but create a more detailed picture of the positioning on the tone dimensions. For example, when a company decides on a humorous tone of voice, they can further specify the tone with words such as *sarcastic* or *witty*. These target tone words help to foster a more consistent tone throughout their communication.

Prior Research

The Nielsen Norman Group wanted to test whether the four tone of voice dimensions that they distilled were more than just theoretical concepts. Therefore, they designed two experimental studies. The first study intended to test whether consumers noticed changes in the tone of voice of website texts (Moran, 2016c). The second study – which was a follow-up study – tested whether a change in tone of voice affected the readers impression of a business (Moran, 2016f).

In the light of this twofold study, the research group created content pieces for the landing page of hypothetical companies from four industries. For each industry, they created two texts that differed solely in terms of the four dimensions of tone of voice. Other than that, the texts were quasi-identical regarding layout and text content. The material of the study thus consisted of four paired texts, i.e., one pair for each industry¹ (Moran, 2016d).

The participants of the first study were asked to read the landing pages and rate the companies in terms of friendliness and formality, using a 5-point Likert scale (Moran, 2016c). The respondents of the second study read the same landing pages and were asked to rate the business on friendliness and trustworthiness, using a 5-point Likert scale. In addition, the respondents of the second study also had to indicate to what extent they would recommend the company to their friends, using a 5-point Likert scale – this rating was seen as a measure of desirability (Moran, 2016c).

The results of the first study showed that the respondents indeed noticed the change in tone of voice within the pairs. The scores on both measures within each pair differed significantly at $p < .05$ – reflecting a score difference of about 0.5 to 1 point. The researchers deemed this score difference as a reasonable finding for realistic tones (Moran, 2016c). The results of the second study supported these first findings. Here, the scores for friendliness, trustworthiness, and desirability differed significantly ($p < .05$) for respectively four, three and two of the four sample pairs (Moran, 2016f).

Based on the results of these two studies, the researchers concluded that the four dimensions of tone of voice were indeed more than just theoretical concepts. Since variations in the tone of voice of hypothetical companies were noticed and yielded measurable differences in the

¹ The material of the study is available on nngroup.com/articles/tone-of-voice-samples/.

impression of customers regarding the company in question, the researchers deemed the four dimensions of tone of voice as important qualities when creating content (Moran, 2016c, 2016f).

Regarding future research, the researchers proposed to use a product-reaction test using the more specific tone of voice words to test whether tone of voice comes across in the same way as intended by the content creators (Moran, 2016f). This research method is also known as a *controlled vocabulary test*.

Current Study

The current study builds on the findings of the Nielsen Norman Group (Moran, 2016c, 2016f). Their research supported the finding that consumers notice a change in tone of voice (Moran, 2016c). In addition, they also found that using a different tone of voice affected the way consumers perceived certain companies in the same industry – even though the layout and content were roughly the same between the two companies (Moran, 2016f). However, the research of the Nielsen Norman Group involved written content from hypothetical companies (Moran, 2016d, 2016c, 2016f).

Therefore, the current research wants to expand the above findings by testing tone of voice and tone of voice variations within the context of an existing company: Fluvius. Fluvius is the Belgian system operator of electricity and natural gas in all municipalities of the Flemish Region. The company thus caters to a broad target audience. Even though the tone of voice of Fluvius is not created based on the four tone of voice dimensions, the company does have a comprehensive style guide, making it very suitable for the current research.

To this end, two content pieces were taken from the Fluvius website. By presenting these texts to the participants of the current study, and questioning them about how they perceive the text using both the four dimensions of tone of voice and a controlled vocabulary test, this study intends to answer research question 1:

- 1) Do customers perceive the tone of voice in the same way as the content creators intended it?

In addition, the two content pieces of Fluvius' website were rewritten in an alternative tone of voice, which does not match Fluvius' usual style. These texts were also presented to the participants of the current study. By questioning the participants about their impression of the texts in this alternative tone of voice as well, this study intends to answer research questions 2:

- 2) Do people notice a difference when two different tones of voice are used across the texts from an existing business?

Lastly, this study also aims to test whether the two tones of voice that are used have a different impact on the brand personality perception amongst the participants. By asking the participants about their impression of the company that sent out the texts in question, the current study aims to answer research question 3:

- 3) Does the tone of voice impact the way that customers assess a business' brand personality? I.e., is there a measurable difference in the perception of the company's brand personality, due to the difference in tone of voice?

With this research design, the current study aims to gain more insight into the importance of (a consistent) tone of voice in existing businesses.

Method

In order to answer the research questions of the current study, an online questionnaire was launched. Data collection took place from May 29, 2023, until June 15, 2023. The questionnaire was distributed via the social networking sites Facebook and LinkedIn, mainly within the researcher's extended network.

For answering research question number 1 "Do customers perceive the tone of voice in the same way as the content creators intended it?", an abbreviated questionnaire was presented to the com&co² content creators who write for Fluvius and to the Head of Brand and Creative of Fluvius. Their scores served as a measure of the intended tone of voice and were used as a reference against which the scores of the participants could be tested during the analysis.

Participants

The current study consisted of two participant groups: the main sample, and the group which consisted of the com&co content creators of Fluvius and Fluvius' Head of Brand and Creative.

Main Sample

As grid operator for the entire Flemish community, Fluvius caters to a broad target audience. Therefore, besides a minimum age of 18, no other restrictions were imposed to participate in the current study.

In total, 169 people fully completed the online questionnaire. Fifteen participants were removed from the sample due to filling out the questionnaire in an unusual short amount of time (see Analysis for the details on data cleaning), resulting in 154 usable responses for the analysis.

In the main sample ($N = 154$), 107 participants identified themselves as women, 46 as men, and one as non-binary. All participants had an age between the ranges of 18 and 73, with an average age of 33.49 ($M = 33.49$, $Mdn = 26$, $SD = 14.49$).

Further, in terms of highest obtained degree, one participant had a doctoral degree, 67 participants had a master's degree, 41 participants had a bachelor's degree, 11 participants had

² Com&co is a Belgian communication and marketing agency that creates content for companies such as Fluvius.

a degree of higher professional education (i.e., HBO 5), 31 participants had a secondary education degree, one participant had a primary education degree, and two participants preferred not to disclose this information.

Next, 153 participants indicated that their native language was Dutch. The native language of one participant was French. Since this participant lived in the Dutch part of Belgium, they were considered as fluent enough in Dutch and were, therefore, kept in the sample of the current study. Lastly, the principal residence of 106 participants was located in West-Flanders, 37 participants mainly lived in East-Flanders, four participants in Flemish Brabant, three in Brussels Capital Region, two in Antwerp, one in Hainaut, and one in Limburg.

Each participant of the main sample signed an informed consent form prior to participation and after sufficient information about the study was provided. Further, participation was voluntary, and no compensation was provided.

Content Creators

The group of content creators – including the Head of Brand and Creative of Fluvius – consisted of four people. One of them identified as a woman, the other three identified as men. The ages within the group were 25, 26, 39 and 40, with an average age of 32.5 ($M = 32.50$, $Mdn = 32.50$, $SD = 7.02$). All members of this group obtained a master's degree. Further, Dutch was the native language of all content creators and they all resided in East-Flanders.

Material

Tones of Voice: Fluvius and the Alternative Style

In the Fluvius' style guide, Fluvius usual tone of voice is described as follows:

- Fluvius wants to be **customer-oriented**, **open**, and **approachable**.
- Fluvius writes from **the point of view of their customers**, not from the point of view of the business or its processes. They try to cater to the needs of the customer. E.g., they write from the thought 'What information does the customer want to read?'
- Fluvius writes in **short**, and **active** sentences.
- Fluvius **does not use jargon and refrains from writing in a formal tone**.
- Fluvius is **friendly**, **soft**, and **inclusive**.

In the light of the current study, to assess whether the participants perceive a difference in tone of voice, and whether it impacts their perception of the brand's personality, an alternative tone of voice was created:

- The alternative tone sounds **intelligent, reliable, and successful**, and tries to reflect **prestige**.
- The alternative tone **is written from the point of view of the company** and its processes, not from the point of view of the customer.
- The alternative tone uses **passive structures** and **middle-long to long sentences** from time to time.
- The alternative tone **incorporates jargon** into its texts and is **written in a formal manner**.
- The alternative is **polite**, but **to-the-point** and is **aimed at the higher class**.

This alternative tone was created with the four dimensions of tone of voice and Aaker's Brand Personality framework in mind. The goal of this alternative tone of voice was to create and reflect a subtle yet noticeably different tone and personality. Some key points of the differences are discussed below.

In terms of the tone of voice dimensions, Fluvius' tone of voice is meant to come across as rather informal. For example, Fluvius uses the Dutch pronoun *je* (i.e., the informal word for *you*) to address their customers. This pronoun adds to the approachable and informal style of Fluvius. Further, they share their information in an inclusive and accessible manner to ensure that the information is clear to their entire target audience. In addition, Fluvius' tone is slightly vivid. It uses active sentences and is meant to suit the customer's environment.

In contrast, the alternative tone of voice was designed to reflect a more formal and matter-of-fact tone. For example, in the alternative tone of voice, the Dutch pronoun *u* (i.e., the formal word for *you*) was used to address the readers. Furthermore, this alternative tone intended to share the information in a more dry and to-the-point manner. With this, the alternative tone of voice was meant to come across as less approachable and create more distance between the company and the reader as it was written from the point of view of the company.

In terms of brand personality, Fluvius' tone of voice is meant to sound customer-oriented, open, and friendly. These are traits, that fall under the Brand Personality facet *Sincerity*. To reflect these traits in their communication, the Fluvius content creators write their text in a clear manner with

the customer in mind. For example, complex processes are explained in an approachable manner, and simple terms are used – or, if necessary, technical terms are used but explained in an accessible manner.

The alternative tone of voice, on the other hand, was designed to score higher on the Brand Personality factors *Sophistication* and *Competence*. By using more technical terms and by addressing the readers in a more formal way, the alternative tone of voice is intended to portray the business as more corporate, formal, and aimed at the upper class. That way, the alternative tone is less inclusive and accessible.

Content Pieces

To present Fluvius usual tone of voice to the participants, two content pieces were taken from the Fluvius website: one was about Fluvius as emergency supplier, the other one was about the renewed Fluvius application. The Fluvius website was chosen as channel to select content from because it is one of the main channels through which Fluvius connects with their audience.

The content pieces were primarily selected based on length, to keep the duration of the questionnaire within limits. For that reason, the two content pieces were slightly shortened as well. The two texts in the tone of voice of Fluvius that were used in the current study were presented in Dutch and can be found in Appendix B.

To present the alternative tone of voice to the participants, the two selected and adapted content pieces were rewritten in the alternative tone of voice. The two texts in the alternative writing style that were used in the current study were presented in Dutch and can be found in Appendix C.

An important note here is that all the texts were labeled with the Fluvius logo, had the same layout, and were written as if they were official texts that were published by Fluvius. In addition, each participant saw only two of the four texts: they read each content piece only once, either in the Fluvius tone or in the alternative tone. The reason for this was twofold. On the one hand, this was to obscure the real object of the study for the participants: the survey was seemingly only about how content is perceived by users. By presenting two different texts, the attention of the participants was less focused on the fact that two different tones were used.

On the other hand, this experimental design allowed to test the impact of a tone of voice change within the context of one existing company. Since the texts seemingly came from the same company, the manipulation within this study revolves solely around the tone of voice. In addition,

by presenting the two content pieces in the two tones of voice, a possible influence of the content itself on the perception was ruled out.

Questionnaires

The texts and questionnaires were presented to the participants via the Qualtrics software³ (Qualtrics, 2023).

Tone of Voice Questionnaire.

In order to quantify the participants' perception of tone of voice, each text was accompanied by the Dutch translation of the tone of voice questionnaire (Maitra, 2020; Moran, 2016c). Here, the participants had to rate each text on the four dimensions of tone of voice, using 5-point Likert scales. The scales were labeled as the following:

- **Funny – Serious (i.e., *Grappig – Serieus*)**
 - Very Funny – Funny – Somewhat Funny – Neutral – Somewhat Serious – Serious – Very Serious
- **Causal – Formal (i.e., *Informeel – Formeel*)**
 - Very Informal – Informal – Somewhat Informal – Neutral – Somewhat Formal – Formal – Very Formal
- **Respectful – Irreverent (i.e., *Respectvol – Bijdehand*)**
 - Very Respectful – Respectful – Somewhat Respectful – Neutral – Somewhat Irreverent – Irreverent – Very Irreverent
- **Matter-of-Fact – Enthusiastic (i.e., *Feitelijk – Levendig*)**
 - Very Factual – Factual – Somewhat Factual – Neutral - Somewhat Vivid – Vivid – Very Vivid

³ Version May – June 2023 of Qualtrics. Copyright ©2023. Qualtrics and all other Qualtrics product or service names are registered trademarks or trademarks of Qualtrics, Provo, UT, USA.
<https://www.qualtrics.com>

Further, to ensure that each participant would interpret the labels in the same way, definitions were provided for each tone of voice dimension. The Dutch translation of the definition that was used in the actual questionnaire, is provided between parentheses:

- **Funny** = with humor (i.e., '*met humor*')
- **Serious** = grave (i.e., '*ernstig*')
- **Formal** = corporate, official, solemn (i.e., '*zakelijk, officieel, plechtig*')
- **Informal** = convivial, unofficial, familiar (i.e., '*gemoedelijk, onofficieel, familiair*')
- **Respectful** = reverent, with respect (i.e., '*eerbiedig, met respect*')
- **Irreverent** = witty/smart, self-assured, sharp, bold (i.e., '*gevat/slim, zelfverzekerd, scherp, gedurfd*')
- **Factual** = purely sharing facts (i.e., '*puur de feiten delen*')
- **Vivid** = sharing the facts in a passionate and enthusiastic way (i.e., '*de feiten delen op een gepassioneerde en enthousiaste manier*')

Controlled Vocabulary Test: Tone of Voice Words.

Secondly, a controlled vocabulary test was administered with each presented text (Benedek & Miner, 2002; Moran, 2016a). This test involves the presentation of a maximum of 25 tone of voice words. In this, the participants have to indicate every word that they think fit the text. The controlled vocabulary test serves as a method to gain a more profound understanding of the participants perception regarding the tone of voice of the texts.

To this end, 21 tone of voice words were selected from various sources (Enos, 2022; Moran, 2016b; Valchanova, 2022). The selection was based on the four dimensions of tone of voice, on the target tone of Fluvius, and on the alternative tone that was designed for the current study. Some examples of the selected tone of voice words were *customer-oriented*, *simple*, *distant*, and *complex*. The complete set of words, and the Dutch translation that was used in the survey can be found in Appendix D. To control for the primacy and recency bias during data collection, the presentation of the 21 tone of voice words happened in a randomized order (Choi et al., 2005).

Brand Personality Questionnaire.

Lastly, to test whether the two presented tones of voice impacted the participants' perception of Fluvius' brand personality, the participants also had to rate the company based on the texts that they read. To this end, the participants had to score the company on 11 brand personality traits. The rating scale ranged from 0 to 100, in which a higher score reflected a better fit with the company.

The 11 brand personality traits that were used for the current questionnaire were selected from Aaker's Brand Personality Scale, and the style guide of Fluvius (Aaker, 1997). The origin of the selected word and the Dutch translation that was used in the questionnaire is provided between parentheses:

- **Customer-oriented** (i.e., *Klantgericht*; Fluvius' style guide)
- **Approachable** (i.e., *Toegankelijk*; Fluvius' style guide)
- **Friendly** (i.e., *Vriendelijk*; Fluvius' style guide & Aaker's Brand Personality scale: Sincerity factor)
- **Trustworthy** (i.e., *Betrouwbaar*, Aaker's Brand Personality scale: Sincerity factor)
- **Intelligent** (i.e., *Intelligent*, Aaker's Brand Personality scale: Competence factor)
- **High-class** (i.e., *Gericht op de hogere klasse*, Aaker's Brand Personality scale: Competence factor)
- **Sophisticated** (i.e., *Gesofisticeerd*, Aaker's Brand Personality scale: Sophistication factor)
- **Contemporary** (i.e., *Hedendaags*, Aaker's Brand Personality scale: Excitement factor)
- **Vivid** (i.e., *Levendig*, Aaker's Brand Personality scale: Excitement factor)
- **Transparent** (i.e., *Transparant*, Aaker's Brand Personality scale: Sincerity factor)
- **Down-to-earth** (i.e., *Down-to-earth*, Aaker's Brand Personality scale: Sincerity factor)

Note that there was no brand personality trait selected from the Ruggedness factor of Aaker's Brand Personality Framework as it was not deemed suitable in the context of Fluvius' brand personality. Therefore, this factor was left out of the current questionnaire, to keep the duration of the questionnaire within limits.

Design

The current study made use of a mixed-design, as it contained both between- and within-subjects elements. First, in terms of textual content, this study consisted of two different texts: one about Fluvius as emergency supplier, and one about the renewed Fluvius application. Secondly, of each content piece there was a version in Fluvius actual tone of voice, and one in the alternative tone of voice, created within the context of this study (see Appendix B and C). Each participant read two texts: for some this was content piece 1 in the tone of voice of Fluvius and content piece 2 in the alternative tone of voice, for others this was content piece 1 in the alternative tone of voice and content piece 2 in the tone of voice of Fluvius. Lastly, the order in which the participants saw the texts was counterbalanced across participants. The current study thus used a 2x2x2 experimental design (2 content pieces x 2 tones of voice x 2 presentation orders).

Procedure

When starting the questionnaire, the participants were first provided with a general explanation of the study. Here, it was stated that the study was about the perception of corporate communication. The participants were informed that they would have to read two texts and give their opinion about the text by answering a number of questions. Next, the participants signed an informed consent that listed their rights and by which they gave permission to analyze their responses in an anonymous way.

Then, the participants read the first text. Depending on the randomization software of Qualtrics this was either content piece 1 or 2, in either the Fluvius' or the alternative tone of voice. Once the participants had read the text, they completed the tone of voice questionnaire, the controlled vocabulary test, and the brand personality questionnaire.

After that, the participants read the second text. This text involved the content piece they had not read yet (i.e., content piece 1 if they previously read content piece 2, and vice versa), in the tone of voice they had not encountered yet (i.e., the alternative tone of voice, if they previously encountered Fluvius' tone of voice, and vice versa). After reading the second text, the tone of voice questionnaire, the controlled vocabulary test, and the brand personality test were again administered.

Finally, the respondents filled out their sociodemographic information, i.e., age, gender, education level, county of residence, and native language. In total, the time to complete the questionnaire

was estimated at about 10 minutes. Upon completion, the participants were debriefed about the true nature of the study. The debriefing text can be found in Appendix E.

Analysis

The data cleaning and analyses were performed using the Spyder software (Raybout, 2009) and IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28) (IBM Corp, 2021).

Data Cleaning

Prior to the data analysis, the data was cleaned. Since several participants finished the entire questionnaire in an unusually short amount of time, it seemed plausible that these participants did not read the presented texts thoroughly. As a result, their responses were likely to skew the results. Therefore, a cutoff regarding the completion time was used to clean the data.

The cutoff was based on the average reading speed, and an estimation of how long it takes to fill out the questionnaire. According to Brysbaert (2019), the average silent reading rate for adults is 238 words per minute (ranging between 175 to 300 words per minute). The texts that were included in the current research had an average word length of 284 words. Based on these records, the participants of this study would have spent about 2 minutes reading, since each participant had to read two texts. In addition, the estimated time to complete the rest of the survey was at least 2 minutes. Therefore, the cutoff for data cleaning was set at 4 minutes. Using this cutoff time, 15 participants were excluded from data analysis, resulting in 154 usable responses.

Data Preprocessing

For the two tones of voice, the answers from both content pieces were aggregated into answers per tone of voice. In this way, it was possible to control for a difference in text content between the two tones of voice. As a result, the main data for the analysis consisted of two sets: the responses regarding Fluvius' tone of voice, and the responses regarding the alternative tone of voice.

Data Analysis

Research Questions One.

Research question 1 regards whether customers perceive the tone of voice of a business in the same way as the content creators intended it. To this end, the participants and content creators filled out the tone of voice dimensions questionnaire and the controlled vocabulary test, which consisted of tone of voice words.

Tone of Voice Dimensions.

To test the participant's scores regarding the four dimensions of tone of voice against those scores of the content creators, an independent samples t test was performed on the means of the two samples, for each dimension of tone of voice.

Tone of Voice Words.

To test whether the participants associated the same tone of voice words to Fluvius' writing style as the content creators, a Fisher's exact test was performed for each tone of voice word. In this, the proportions of the number of people that associated a specific tone word with the tone of voice of Fluvius was compared across the two samples. There was opted for a Fisher's exact test instead of a Chi-Squared test, as this test is suited for samples with little observations as well. This feature makes the Fisher's exact test suitable for this analysis, since the group of content creators consisted of four people.

Research Question Two.

Research question 2 regards whether customers notice a difference in terms of tone of voice when an existing business uses two different tones of voice. To this end, participants rated the tone of Fluvius and the alternative tone in terms of the four dimensions and the tone of voice words.

Tone of Voice Dimensions.

To test whether the participants scores regarding to four dimensions of tones of voice differ when a company uses two different tones of voice, a paired samples t test was performed for the scores of each dimension.

Tone of Voice Words.

To test whether participants associated different tone of voice words with texts from an existing company that use a different tone of voice, a McNemar Chi-Squared test was performed for each tone of voice word. This test is the within-subjects variant of the Chi-Squared test, which tests whether proportions of dichotomous nominal data differ across two sets of data.

Research Question Three.

Research question 3 regards the importance of a business' tone of voice as an influence on the customer's perception of brand personality. To this end, the participants rated both Fluvius' tone and the alternative tone on the brand personality questionnaire.

Brand Personality.

To test whether the use of a different tone of voice impacts the reader's perception of a brand's personality, a paired samples t test was performed on the data of the two tones, for each brand personality trait.

Results

Research Question One

The first research question involves whether customers perceive the tone of voice in the same way as the content creators intended it.

Tone of Voice Dimensions

Before performing the independent samples *t* tests, the assumptions of the statistical test were checked. The assumptions 'independence of observations', 'no significant outliers', and 'normality of data' were met for the data of the four tone of voice dimensions. The fourth assumption 'homogeneity of variances' was met for the dimensions Funny-Serious, Respectful-Irreverent, and Enthusiastic-Matter-of-Fact. Therefore, a Student's *t* test was used for these dimensions. The variances of the two groups were not equal for the Formal-Casual dimension. Therefore, a Welch's *t* test was used for this statistical test, as this test does not assume equal variances.

For each result, the *t* value, *p* value, and effect size (Cohen's *d*⁴) are reported.

Funny – Serious.

Within the Funny-Serious dimension, the participants scored the tone of voice of Fluvius as *somewhat serious* ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 1.05$). This rating was in agreement with the score of the content creators, who also rated Fluvius' tone as *somewhat serious* ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 0.82$). The results of the independent *t* test supported this observation, as there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups ($t(156) = 0.68$, $p = .49$, $d = 0.35$).

Formal – Casual.

On the Formal-Casual dimension, the participants perceived the tone of voice of Fluvius as *somewhat formal* ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.50$), while the content creators scored the Fluvius' tone as *somewhat informal* ($M = 2.75$, $SD = 0.50$). The results of Welch's *t* test supported this difference, as there was a statistically significant difference between the two means ($t(156) = 7.17$, $p = .001$, $d = 1.34$, $d = 1.34$).

⁴ A Cohen's *d* of 0.2 reflects a small effect size, a Cohen's *d* of 0.5 reflects a medium effect size, and a Cohen's *d* of 0.8 or larger reflects a large effect size.

Respectful – Irreverent.

Regarding the Respectful-Irreverent dimension, the participants rated the tone of Fluvius as *somewhat respectful* ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 1.26$), as did the content creators ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.00$). This observation was supported by the t test, which result was not statistically significant ($t(156) = 1.00$, $p = .32$, $d = 0.51$).

Enthusiastic – Matter-of-Fact.

For the Enthusiastic-Matter-of-Fact dimension, the participants scored Fluvius' tone as *somewhat factual* ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 1.47$). The content creators rated it as *neutral* on this dimension ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.41$). Based on the results of the t test, this difference was negligible as the test did not yielded a statistical significant result ($t(156) = 1.39$, $p = .17$, $d = 0.71$).

In sum, the perception of the participant thus matched the intention of the content creators for three out of the four tone of voice dimensions. Their scores differed significantly on solely the Formal-Casual dimension.

Tone of Voice Words

Before performing the Fisher's exact tests, the assumptions were tested. As the assumptions were met (random sample, independence of observations, and mutually exclusive groups), the test was conducted for each tone of voice word.

For each tone word, the frequencies of people who did (i.e., *yes*) and did not (i.e., *no*) select the word in question are reported in Table 1, in addition to the result of the Fisher's exact test (i.e., the p value).

Overall, the results of the Fisher's exact tests support that the participants' perception of the tone of voice corresponds largely to the way it is intended by the content creators, as their opinions did not differ for 18 out of 21 tone words. The perception of the participants only deviated for four tone words, i.e., the tone of Fluvius was rated as less *simple*, *soft*, and *inclusive* than intended. These results are thus largely in line with the matching perception of the four dimensions of tone of voice, as reported above.

Table 1*Results of the Fisher's Exact Test Regarding the Tone of Voice Words*

Tone of Voice Word	Content Creators (N =4)		Participants (N = 154)		p value
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Customer-Oriented	3	1	113	41	1
Simple	4	0	48	106	.01**
Cheerful	0	4	12	142	1
Jargon	0	4	32	122	.58
Friendly	2	2	51	103	.60
Soft	2	2	7	147	.02*
Likeable	1	3	23	131	.49
Distant	0	4	18	136	1
Professional	1	3	93	61	.30
Complex	0	4	21	133	1
To-the-point	2	2	75	79	1
Empathetic	2	2	15	139	.06
Impersonal	0	4	26	128	1
Dry	0	4	21	133	1
Colloquial language	2	2	35	119	.23
Intelligent	0	4	28	126	1
Accessible	3	1	72	82	.35
Inclusive	2	2	10	144	.03*
Corporate	0	4	69	85	.13
Playful	0	4	6	148	1
Informative	3	1	121	33	1

Note. * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Research Question Two

The second research question was whether customers notice a difference when a business uses two different tones of voice across their communication.

Tone of Voice Dimensions

The assumptions for conducting a paired samples t test (i.e., paired groups, no significant outliers, and normally distributed data) were met for the data of the four dimensions of tone of voice. For each result, the t value, p value, and effect size (Cohen's d) are reported.

Funny – Serious.

The participants rated Fluvius' tone as *somewhat serious* ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 1.05$), and the alternative tone as *serious* ($M = 5.81$, $SD = 1.02$). The paired samples t test supported this difference in perception, as the t test yielded a statistically significant result ($t(153) = -4.30$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.35$).

Formal – Casual.

Next, the participants perceived the tone of voice of Fluvius as *somewhat formal* ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.50$) and the alternative tone as *formal* ($M = 5.51$, $SD = 1.29$). This difference was found to be statistically significant, using a paired samples t test ($t(153) = -5.12$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.41$).

Respectful – Irreverent.

In terms of the Respectful-Irreverent dimension, the participants rated both the tone of Fluvius ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 1.26$) and the alternative tone ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 1.28$) as *somewhat respectful*. This observation was supported by the paired samples t test, which was not statistically significant ($t(153) = .35$, $p = .36$, $d = 0.03$).

Enthusiastic – Matter-of-Fact.

Lastly, the participants scored Fluvius' tone as *somewhat factual* ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 1.47$) and the alternative tone of voice as *factual* ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.40$). The paired samples t test supported this difference as it yielded a statistically significant result ($t(153) = 3.71$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.30$).

In sum, the participants' perception regarding the four dimensions of tone of voice differed across the two tones in terms of seriousness, formality, and factuality, while the two tones were seen as equally respectful.

Tone of Voice Words

Before performing the McNemar Chi-Squared tests, the assumptions were tested. As the assumptions were met (one dichotomous independent variable, one dichotomous dependent variable which is mutually exclusive, and a random paired sample), the test was conducted for each tone of voice word.

For the tone words *cheerful*, *soft*, *empathetic*, *inclusive*, and *playful*, an exact conditional test was used, since it contained small frequencies. For the other tone of voice words, the asymptotic conditional test was used, as this test has a better power but is only suited for observations with larger frequencies (i.e. > 10) (Fagerland et al., 2013; Sundjaja & Shrestha, 2022).

In Table 2, the chi-squared test statistic and p value are reported for the asymptotic tests, and the p value is reported for the exact tests, as this test does not yield a test statistic.

The results of the chi-squared tests largely supported that the alternative tone of voice was indeed perceived as different than Fluvius' tone of voice, as the participants' opinion differed for 14 out of 21 tone words. The two tones were only rated similar in terms of the words *cheerful*, *professional*, *to-the-point*, *intelligent*, *inclusive*, *playful* and *informative*. These results are in line with the findings regarding the four dimensions of tone of voice, as reported above.

Table 2*Results of the McNemar Chi-Squared Tests Regarding the Tone of Voice Words*

Tone of Voice Word	Fluvius' Tone of Voice		Alternative Tone of Voice		χ^2	p value
	Yes	No	Yes	No		
Customer-Oriented	113	41	78	76	17.25	<.001***
Simple	48	106	20	134	11.76	<.001***
Cheerful	12	142	8	146		.50
Jargon	32	122	62	92	11.07	<.001***
Friendly	51	103	25	129	10.78	.001***
Soft	7	147	1	153		.03*
Likeable	23	131	3	151	13.89	<.001***
Distant	18	136	48	106	17.52	<.001***
Professional	93	61	98	56	.24	.63
Complex	21	133	49	105	10.72	.001***
To-the-point	75	79	79	75	.11	.74
Empathetic	15	139	3	151		.01**
Impersonal	26	128	56	98	13.57	<.001***
Dry	21	133	47	107	12.50	<.001***
Colloquial language	35	119	10	144	15.57	<.001***
Intelligent	28	126	31	123	.12	.73
Accessible	72	82	42	112	10.51	.001***
Inclusive	10	144	6	148		.42
Corporate	69	85	108	46	18.75	<.001***
Playful	6	148	1	153		.13
Informative	121	33	115	39	.50	.48

Note. * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Research Question Three

For the third research question it was of interest whether the customers would have a different perception of a company's brand personality depending on the tone of voice that was used.

Brand Personality

Before conducting the paired samples t test, the assumptions (continuous dependent variable, independence of observations, normality of the data, and no significant outliers) were checked. Since the assumptions were met for all the brand personality traits, the paired-samples t test was conducted for all traits. In Table 3, the mean, standard deviation, t value, p value, and effect size (Cohen's d) is reported for each trait.

The results of the paired samples t test supported that using a different tone of voice will indeed impact customers' opinion regarding a brand's personality. Here, Fluvius was seen as more *customer-oriented*, *approachable*, *friendly*, *contemporary*, and *vivid* when using their actual writing style. This finding is in line with the tone that Fluvius defines in their style guide.

Further, when using the alternative tone, the company was seen as more *sophisticated*, and aimed at the *high-class*, also in line with the characteristics that were defined for the alternative tone.

Table 3*Results of the Paired Samples T Tests Regarding the Brand Personality Traits*

Trait	Fluvius' Tone of Voice	Alternative Tone of Voice	Statistics		
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>t</i> value	<i>p</i> value	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Customer-oriented	71.24(20.77)	60.70(24.37)	4.55	<.001***	0.37
Approachable	64.11(22.39)	50.94(25.06)	5.33	<.001***	0.43
Friendly	62.81(24.41)	55.49(22.94)	3.03	.003**	0.24
Trustworthy	68.86(19.65)	65.72(20.10)	1.56	.12	0.13
Intelligent	63.60(21.56)	67.29(20.30)	-1.83	.07	.15
High-class	43.61(25.40)	51.70(28.11)	-3.07	.003**	.25
Sophisticated	51.03(25.19)	59.52(23.59)	-3.49	<.001***	0.28
Contemporary	67.64(21.61)	61.75(22.55)	2.61	.01**	.21
Vivid	49.84(25.20)	37.98(26.16)	4.91	<.001***	.40
Transparant	64.28(23.83)	59.26(24.88)	1.87	.06	.15
Down-to-earth	65.06(22.03)	63.01(21.17)	0.90	.37	.07

Note. * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Discussion

The current research was grounded in the theoretical framework of Brand Identity, Brand Personality, and the four dimensions of tone of voice (Aaker, 1997; Kapferer, 2008; Moran, 2016c). By testing the tone of voice of an existing company – Fluvius – the current study aimed to build on the findings of the Nielsen Norman group (Moran, 2016c, 2016f) and shed light on the value of using a consistent and defined tone of voice.

To this end, existing content of the Fluvius website was selected and presented to the participants of the current study. In addition, an alternative tone of voice was created and the selected content of Fluvius was rewritten into this alternative tone. By presenting the content in the two tones of voice to participants and questioning them about the perception of the texts and their impression of the company based on the text, the current research intended to answer three research questions:

- 1) Do customers perceive the tone of voice of a company in the same way as the content creators intended it?
- 2) Do people notice a difference when two different tones of voice are used in the texts from an existing business?
- 3) Does the tone of voice impact the way that customers assess a business' brand personality? I.e., is there a measurable difference in the perception of the company's brand personality, due to the difference in tone of voice?

Research Question One

To test whether participants perceived the tone of voice of Fluvius in the way it was intended, the scores on the four dimensions of tone of voice were compared between the participants and the content creators. The results of the *t* tests were largely in favor of a consistent perception across the participants and content creators, as the *t* test for the dimensions Funny-Serious, Respectful-Irreverent, and Enthusiastic-Matter-of-Fact each yielded a nonsignificant result. However, there was a large significant difference regarding the perception of formality. While the content creators rated Fluvius' tone of *rather informal*, the participants rated it as *rather formal*.

Further, in terms of the more specific tone of voice words, the opinions of the participants largely matched the view of the content creators. For 18 words, there was no significant difference between the perception of the participants and the content creators. The other three tone words

simple, soft, and inclusive were less associated with Fluvius' tone by the participants compared to the content creators.

Based on these findings, we can conclude that a well-defined tone of voice – such as in Fluvius style guide – has the ability to impact the perceptions of customers regarding the writing style. By describing a business's tone of voice, a consistent writing style can be maintained throughout their communication. In this way, a consistent brand image regarding the business's tone is created within the target audience. In the literature, this consistency was found to be key in establishing trust and a solid business-customer relationship (Cialdini, 2007; Kenan, 2023; Valchanova, 2022).

Research Question Two

The current study also intended to expand the research of the Nielson Norman group (Moran, 2016c) by testing whether customers would notice the difference between two tones of voice, even if this communication seemingly came from one existing business.

By comparing the participants' ratings in terms of the four dimensions of tone of voice, we found support for a measurable difference in perception between the two writing styles. The scores for the dimensions Funny-Serious, Formal-Casual, and Enthusiastic-Matter-of-Fact all differed significantly. These effects were found to be small to medium, and were in line with the description of the two tones of voice that were tested, i.e., the alternative tone was designed to sound more serious, formal, and to-the-point. Further, the scores for the dimension Respectful-Irreverent did not differ across the two tones. However, the two tones were not designed specifically to make a different impression regarding this tone of voice dimension.

Subsequently, in terms of the more specific tone of voice words, the two tones of the current research were rated differently for 14 of the 21 tone words, further supporting the notion that participants notice when a different tone of voice is used in a brand's communication. In line with two defined tones of voice, Fluvius came across as, more customer-oriented, simple, friendly, soft, likeable, accessible, and colloquial, while the alternative tone was rated as more jargon, distant, complex, impersonal, dry, and corporate. These results thus supported that the two used tones of voice were successful, as they came across as intended.

In sum, the results regarding the second research question further supported the importance of defining a consistent tone of voice, as customers notice a change in writing style – even if the communication comes from one existing company.

Research Question Three

The last research question also aimed to expand the prior research of the Nielsen Norman group (Moran, 2016f) and was about whether a change in tone of voice alters the customers' perception of a brand's personality as well. To this end, the participants' perception regarding brand personality traits was compared across the two tones of voice that were used in the current research.

The results of the *t* tests largely supported that a tone of voice indeed impacts the perception of a brand's personality. Based on Fluvius tone of voice, the company was perceived as more vivid, customer-oriented, and approachable – with a medium effect size – and as more friendly and contemporary – with a small effect size –, in comparison with the alternative tone. The alternative tone, on the other hand, was perceived as more high class, and more sophisticated – with a small effect size. These findings were in line with the personality as described in Fluvius' style guide, and the style of the alternative tone of voice, as created in the light of the current research. Further, the company was perceived as equally trustworthy, intelligent, transparent, and down-to-earth, regardless of the tone.

In sum, the results of the current research were largely in favor of the ability of a tone of voice to impact customers' perception of a brand's personality, in line with the literature. Here, a brand's tone of voice is often described as a tool to convey a brand's personality (Delin, 2007; Ferrai, 2020; D. Gilbert, 2022; Tinico, 2023). Defining a business's tone of voice thus indeed seems to be an important way to express brand identity and personality, as it reflects these traits through communication (Aaker, 1997; Delin, 2007; Kapferer, 2008; Paul, 2022).

Limitations and tracks for future research

There are some limitations concerning the current study. First, it should be noted that the two groups of raters whose scores were compared in the analyses of the first research question (i.e., the participants and the content creators), were largely imbalanced. That is, the group of content creators consisted of solely four people, while the main sample counted 154. Even though this limitation was inevitable considering the current research design and measures were taken to

control for this limitation (e.g., by using a Fischer's exact test), this is a remark that must be considered when interpreting the current results because, on the one hand, conducting a statistical test on largely imbalanced groups might obscure invariance of the data, resulting in incorrect conclusions (Yoon & Lai, 2018). On the other hand, a small sample size results in a lower power, i.e., the probability to detect true effects (Bhandari, 2022).

Secondly, the current research considered only one type of content: texts from the Fluvius website. These content pieces proved to be long enough to convey a brand's tone of voice and brand personality. However, regarding future research, it might be interesting to build on the current findings and see if they transfer to other content types as well. For example, future research might consider studying the ability to convey a tone of voice and brand personality via social media posts, which contain shorter captions.

Further, future research might consider other types of brands as well. In the current study, a service brand that provides a service to the entire Flemish population was chosen as subject of the case study. It might be interesting to test the current research questions in the context of, for example, a product brand, which is more optional for customers. In this the current research questions can be expanded with a fourth research question: "Does a tone of voice impact the buying intentions of customers?".

Conclusion

The results of the current research largely support the importance of creating and maintaining a strong and consistent tone of voice. The results showed that customers perceive a well-defined tone in the same way as intended by the content creators. Furthermore, customers also notice when a company deviates from their usual tone of voice. This is an important result since literature shows that using a consistent tone of voice fosters familiarity within customers, which adds to a customer's trust in a brand (Cialdini, 2007; Kenan, 2023; Valchanova, 2022).

In addition, using a consistent tone of voice is also important as the current results showed that a business' writing style impacts the customers' perception of a brand's personality. In other words, if a company wants to create a firm image in the minds of its customers, that company is advised to create a fitting tone of voice that reflects the intended personality. The current research thus supports tone of voice as a tool to convey a brand's personality, which is a key factor for establishing a sustainable business-customer relationship (Baakman, 2022; Delin, 2007; Ferrai, 2020; Tong et al., 2018).

Finally, the current study supports the practical relevance of the four dimensions of tone of voice, as defined by the Nielson Norman Group (Moran, 2016c, 2016f). They did not only prove to be noticeable characteristics in the context of an existing business, but they also helped to set up a successful alternative tone of voice in the light of the current experimental design.

Recommendations

Create an Encompassing Style Guide

In the light of the current results, it is advisable for a company to create a style guide – as done by Fluvius – which contains the company's identity, personality, and positioning on the four dimensions of tone of voice. In addition, this style guide can be supplemented by guidelines regarding the other aspects of tone of voice, such as word choice, characteristic expressions, sentence structure, punctuation, etc.

Creating such style guide is beneficial for a company's positioning. It ensures that all the communication that leaves the office is in line with the image that the business wants to create. Since the current research showed that customers are sensitive for deviations, creating a style guide will foster the ability to recognize the communication of a business, and thus stand out in the global marketplace. Further, a consistent tone of voice also creates a sense of familiarity and trust within the target audience (Cialdini, 2007; Valchanova, 2022).

Lastly, since a company's tone was found to influence the customer's perception of brand personality, a well-defined tone of voice will help with reflecting a brand's personality to the target group. In the literature, a brand's personality was found to foster an authentic connection, important to create sustainable customer-business relationships (Tong et al., 2018).

Submit a Tone of Voice to a Product-Reaction Test

Once a brand's tone of voice is defined in a style guide, it is advisable to submit a selection of content pieces to a product-reaction test using the tone of voice and brand personality questionnaires, as done in the current research. This can reassure a company that its defined tone is successful and comes across well to its target audience. On the other hand, if the product-reaction test proves that the tone is not successful, it can help a brand to finetune its tone of voice, so that the desired result can be achieved.

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Appendix A

Aaker's Brand Personality Scale

Factor Name	Facet Name	Traits
Sincerity	Down-to-earth	Down-to-earth Family-oriented Small-town
	Honest	Honest Sincere Real
	Wholesome	Wholesome Original
	Cheerful	Cheerful Sentimental Friendly
Excitement	Daring	Daring Trendy Exciting
	Spirited	Spirited Cool Young
	Imaginative	Imaginative Unique

	Up-to-date	Up-to-date Independent Contemporary
Competence	Reliable	Reliable Hard working Secure
	Intelligent	Intelligent Technical Corporate
	Successful	Successful Leader Confident
Sophistication	Upper class	Upper class Glamorous Good looking
	Charming	Charming Feminine Smooth
Ruggedness	Outdoorsy	Outdoorsy Masculine Western
	Tough	Tough Rugged

Appendix B

The Two Content Pieces in the Tone of Voice of Fluvius, Used in the Current Study

Content Piece 1: Fluvius as Emergency Supplier

Fluvius als noodleverancier: wat houdt dat in?

Als je energieleverancier om welke reden dan ook geen energie meer kan leveren, hoef je je geen zorgen te maken. Fluvius treedt tijdelijk op als noodleverancier en zorgt dat je niet zonder elektriciteit of gas komt te zitten. Hoe verloopt de noodprocedure precies? En welke stappen moet je zelf ondernemen?

Welke stappen onderneemt Fluvius als noodleverancier?

In eerste instantie **brenge** we je op de hoogte van de regeling en het noodtarief. Als de energieleverancier officieel zijn activiteiten stopzet, treden we onmiddellijk op als **noodleverancier**. Vanaf dat moment zijn we **tegelijk je energieleverancier en distributienetbeheerder**.

Hoelang treedt Fluvius op als leverancier?

De noodleveranciersregeling is slechts **een tijdelijke oplossing**:

- **residentiële klanten** (gezinne) kunnen er gedurende **1 jaar** op terugvallen;
- **niet-residentiële klanten** (bedrijven en buitenverblijven) hebben **2 maanden** om een nieuwe leverancier te vinden.

Bovendien is het **in het belang van je portefeuille** om zo snel mogelijk op zoek te gaan naar een nieuwe leverancier: **onze tarieven zijn minder interessant** dan bij de meeste commerciële leveranciers omdat we van de ene op de andere dag de energie moeten inkopen. Dat geeft ons een kwetsbare onderhandelingspositie, waardoor we simpelweg niet tegen gunstige tarieven kunnen aankopen.

Wat moet je als getroffen klant doen?

Je gaat best **onmiddellijk op zoek naar een nieuwe leverancier**. Met de V-test van de VREG kan je makkelijk de tarieven van alle leveranciers vergelijken. Breng je nieuwe leverancier zeker op de hoogte van de situatie om een snelle en vlotte overgang te garanderen.

Vraag je nieuwe energieleverancier verder om je contract met **terugwerkende kracht** te laten ingaan. Dat wil zeggen dat de startdatum van je nieuwe contract aansluit op de einddatum van je vorige – bij de leverancier die eerder in de noodsituatie terechtkwam. Zo blijf je bij een commerciële leverancier aangesloten en krijg je geen rekening van Fluvius. Je kan een beroep doen op deze regeling tot één maand nadat je leverancier ermee opgehouden is.

Wat de situatie ook is, **Fluvius helpt je als noodleverancier uit de nood**.

Wat is er nieuw in Mijn Fluvius?

Ons klantenportaal [Mijn Fluvius](#) kreeg een nieuwe look. De zaken die je het vaakst doet in Mijn Fluvius, zie je nu meteen bovenaan staan. In het keuzemenu krijg je een overzicht van alles waarvoor je terecht kan in ons portaal.

Capaciteitstarief verduidelijkt

Mijn Fluvius biedt heel wat inzichten in de **nieuwe nettarieven** die vanaf februari op je slotafrekening verschijnen. Zo kan je sinds de update bij de maandpieken kijken wannéér je de **hoogste maandpiek** van de afgelopen maand maakte. Die maandpiek is dan weer belangrijk voor je **facturatiepiek**, die je kan bekijken onder de tegel 'Netkosten'. Daar krijg je stapsgewijs inzicht in hoe die facturatiepiek berekend wordt.

Meer informatie? Die vind je op onze pagina over het [capaciteitstarief](#)

Energiedelen voor iedereen

Vanaf nu kan je in Mijn Fluvius naast de bestaande, ook **drie extra vormen van energiedelen** aanvragen: meervoudige persoon-aan-persoonverkoop, energiegemeenschap van burgers en de hernieuwbare energiegemeenschap. Wanneer je energie deelt met meerderen, kan je vanaf nu naast de vaste en de relatieve verdeelsleutel, ook kiezen voor de **optimale verdeelsleutel**.

Graag meer info? [Lees dan onze blog over energiedelen](#)

Premies Riolering

Heb je recht op een premie voor het scheiden van de afvoer van regen- en afvalwater of voor de aanleg van een hemelwaterput of een infiltratievoorziening dan kan je die vanaf nu aanvragen via Mijn Fluvius. Zo kan je je premie nog efficiënter én correcter aanvragen en dat helpt ons bij de verwerking van de premie.

Premies vraag je aan in [Mijn Fluvius](#) via de tegel 'Premies'. Alles wat je moet weten over premies, vind je op www.fluvius.be/premies.

Appendix C

The Two Content Pieces in the Alternative Tone of Voice, Used in the Current Study

Content Piece 1: Fluvius as Emergency Supplier

Meer info over Fluvius als noodleverancier.

Wanneer een energieleverancier er – om gelijk welke reden – niet langer in slaagt om energie te voorzien voor zijn klanten, dan treedt Fluvius tijdelijk op als noodleverancier. Zo worden de getroffen partijen ondanks de omstandigheden voortdurend voorzien van elektriciteit of gas. In deze blogpost leggen we deze noodprocedure uit.

Welke stappen onderneemt Fluvius als noodleverancier?

Vooreerst informeren we u, als gedupeerde, over de regeling en het noodtarief. Indien uw voormalige energieleverancier zijn activiteiten officieel stopzet, treedt onze noodprocedure meteen in werking: **Fluvius is vanaf dan uw energieleverancier en distributienetbeheerder**.

Hoelang treedt Fluvius op als leverancier?

De noodleveranciersregeling is een **tijdelijke oplossing**:

- **residentiële klanten** kunnen er gedurende **1 jaar** op terugvallen;
- **niet-residentiële klanten** hebben **2 maanden** om een nieuwe leverancier te vinden.

U hebt baat bij het snel vinden van een nieuwe leverancier. **De noodtarieven bij Fluvius liggen hoger** dan bij het merendeel van de commerciële leveranciers. Aangezien we op korte tijd energie moeten inkopen, heeft Fluvius een zwakke onderhandelingspositie, wat zich vertaalt in de hogere tarieven.

Welke stappen kunt u zelf nemen?

Stap één is een nieuwe leverancier zoeken. De V-test van de VREG leent zich ertoe tarieven van alle leveranciers te vergelijken. Eenmaal gekozen, dan brengt u de nieuwe leverancier op de hoogte van de situatie. Dat faciliteert een snelle en vlotte overgang.

Vraag uw nieuwe energieleverancier om uw contract met **terugwerkende kracht** te laten ingaan. Zo wordt de periode waarin de noodprocedure van Fluvius in werking was, contractueel overbrugt en worden de noodtarieven niet aangerekend: u ontvangt geen rekening van Fluvius. U kunt van deze regeling gebruikmaken tot één maand nadat uw vorige leverancier zijn diensten staakte.

Fluvius treedt op als noodleverancier, ondanks de omstandigheden.

De veranderingen binnen Mijn Fluvius.

De geüpdatete lay-out van Mijn Fluvius straalt vernieuwing uit en stroomlijnt het gebruik van het portaal. Zo staan de meest gebruikte tools vanaf heden bovenaan de webpagina en vindt u in de toolbar een overzicht van alle zaken die u met het portaal kunt afhandelen.

Een inzichtelijk capaciteitstarief

Vanaf februari gelden **nieuwe nettarieven**. Deze kunt u raadplegen op Mijn Fluvius. Daarnaast biedt het vernieuwde klantenportaal ook heel wat vernuftige inzichten, zoals uw **piekverbruiksmoment** van de afgelopen maand en de daaruit volgende **facturatiepiek**. Deze kan geraadpleegd worden onder het tabblad 'Netkosten', waar de berekening van de facturatiepiek wordt toegelicht.

Meer informatie hieromtrent vindt u op de pagina over [capaciteitstarief](#).

Energiedelen werd uitgebreid

Naast de oorspronkelijke vorm van energiedelen, biedt Mijn Fluvius vanaf heden de optie om drie **vormen van energiedelen** aan te vragen: meervoudige persoon-aan-persoonverkoop, energiegemeenschap van burgers en de hernieuwbare energiegemeenschap.

Bij een energiedeling met meer dan één entiteit, kunt u sinds de update van het klantenportaal naast de vaste en de relatieve verdeelsleutel, ook kiezen voor de **optimale verdeelsleutel**. Meer informatie vindt u op de blog.

Premies inzake Riolering

Indien u aanspraak kunt maken op een **premie** voor een **gescheiden afvoersysteem**, of voor de aanleg van een **cisterne** of een **infiltratievoorziening**, dan kunt u een aanvraag indienen via Mijn Fluvius. Langs deze weg garandeert Fluvius een vlotte en correcte verwerking van de aanvraag.

U kunt een premie aanvragen via het klantenportaal door te navigeren naar het tabblad 'Premies'. Daarnaast kan alle essentiële informatie over bovenstaande premies geraadpleegd worden op www.fluvius.be/premies.

Appendix D

The Selection of Tone of Voice Words, Used in the Current Study

Tone of Voice Word	Dutch Translation	Reason for Inclusion
Sincerity	Klantgericht	Fluvius Tone of Voice Word
Simple	Eenvoudig	Fluvius Tone of Voice Word
Cheerful	Opgewekt	Tone of Voice Dimension Enthusiastic – Matter-of-Fact
Jargon	Vaktaal	Alternative Tone of Voice Word
Friendly	Vriendelijk	Fluvius Tone of Voice Word
Soft	Zacht	Fluvius Tone of Voice Word
Likeable	Sympathiek	Tone of Voice Dimension Informal – Formal
Distant	Afstandelijk	Alternative Tone of Voice Word
Professional	Professioneel	Tone of Voice Dimension Funny – Serious
Complex	Complex	Alternative Tone of Voice Word
To-the-point	To-the-point	Tone of Voice Dimension Enthusiastic – Matter-of-Fact
Empathetic	Empathisch	Fluvius Tone of Voice Word

Impersonal	Onpersoonlijk	Alternative Tone of Voice Word
Dry	Droog	Tone of Voice Dimension Enthusiastic – Matter-of-Fact
Colloquial language	Spreektaal	Fluvius Tone of Voice Word
Intelligent	Intelligent	Alternative Tone of Voice Word
Accessible	Toegankelijk	Fluvius Tone of Voice Word
Inclusive	Inclusief	Fluvius Tone of Voice Word
Corporate	Zakelijk	Alternative Tone of Voice Word
Playful	Speels	Tone of Voice Dimension Enthusiastic – Matter-of-Fact
Informative	Informatief	Tone of Voice Dimension Enthusiastic – Matter-of-Fact

Appendix E

Debriefing Text for the Participants of the Current Study

Beste deelnemer,

nogmaals bedankt voor de tijd die je nam om mijn vragenlijst in te vullen!
In dit document vind je meer achtergrondinformatie over de opzet en de doelstelling van mijn onderzoek.

Zoals je in de introductie kon lezen, gaat mijn onderzoek over de perceptie van bedrijfscommunicatie. Meer bepaald, ik voer onderzoek naar de impact van de gebruikte 'tone of voice' in deze communicatie.

Wat is tone of voice?

Tone of voice wordt vaak beschreven als 'niet wát je zegt, maar hóe je het zegt'. Met andere woorden: het is de manier waarop een bedrijf communiceert met zijn doelpubliek. Vele dingen dragen eraan bij: de woordkeuze, hoe een boodschap geformuleerd wordt, de manier waarop een bedrijf zijn publiek aanspreekt...

Het doel van een consistente tone of voice is om een herkenbaar imago op te bouwen. Dat zorgt voor een betere relatie met de klant én het helpt om zich te onderscheiden van de concurrentie.

Eerder [onderzoek](#) bracht de tone of voice van bedrijven terug tot een positionering op 4 dimensies:

- grappig - serieus
- informeel - formeel
- feitelijk - levendig
- respectvol - bijdehand

Een uiting van merkpersoonlijkheid

Hoe een bedrijf zijn klanten aanspreekt, hangt vaak af van zijn merkpersoonlijkheid. Dat zijn de menselijke eigenschappen die je aan een bedrijf zou toekennen. Een tone of voice is dus een ideale manier om deze merkpersoonlijkheid op te bouwen en naar buiten te brengen.

Voorgaand [onderzoek](#) toonde reeds aan dat de tone of voice een impact had op hoe klanten fictieve bedrijven percipieerden.

Deze studie

Maar hoe zwaar tillen klanten aan de tone of voice van een bestaand bedrijf?
Percipiëren ze de toon op de manier waarop ze bedoeld wordt?

Valt een variatie in toon op? En zo ja: heeft die variatie een impact op hoe klanten de persoonlijkheid van het bedrijf percipiëren? Dat zijn de onderzoeksvragen van dit onderzoek.

Deze studie werd daarom opgezet rond de communicatie van het nutsbedrijf Fluvius. Doorgaans kiest Fluvius voor een klantgerichte, toegankelijke, informele en vriendelijke toon in hun communicatie.

→ één van de teksten die je las was dan ook rechtstreeks afkomstig van de site van Fluvius

Je las ook een tekst in een iets formelere, afstandelijkere en exclusievere toon. Deze tone of voice wijkt dus af van hoe Fluvius doorgaans met zijn klanten communiceert.

De antwoorden die je gaf zullen binnenkort op anonieme wijze verwerkt worden met als doel bovenstaande onderzoeksvragen te beantwoorden. Daarna zal dit onderzoek verwerkt worden in mijn masterproef.

Daarom wil ik je nog een laatste keer bedanken voor je hulp.

Bij vragen over dit onderzoek mag je me steeds contacteren op julie.hardeman@ugent.be

Met vriendelijke groeten,

Julie Hardeman

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