

Complaint management on Twitter – evolution of interactional patterns on Polish corporate profiles

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The study concerns complaint management on Polish brand profiles on Twitter. The aim was to investigate selected language properties of corporate tweets and trace potential changes in the interactional patterns on the profiles occurring between 2015 and 2017. The study focuses on the structure and frequency of the respective strategies, as well as formality, the use of non-standard structures and emoticons. The study indicates the following directions of change: an increase in the use of address terms and explanations, a greater degree of language formality and indirectness, among others. The changes point to increased formulaicity and conventionalisation of expression, as well as an increased use of fixed patterns and templates. The changes constitute evidence of standardisation of the means of expression in customer encounters and a transfer of the conventions typical of other channels of interaction with consumers to the online context.

Keywords: customer encounters, Twitter, interactional patterns, corporate profiles, evolution

1. Introduction

The following analysis is devoted to consumer encounters on Polish brand profiles on Twitter. Twitter has been introduced as a channel of interaction in Poland in 2010. The medium is actively used not only by ordinary users, but also by public figures and institutions. It is also one of the most frequently used channels for brand communication, be it in business-to-business or business-to-consumer

interaction.¹ The conventions of the use of the channel in corporate communication, however, still appear to be evolving. Since the introduction of the medium, companies have been trying to devise an appropriate and effective way of managing interaction on the profiles, and various innovative and creative practices have been observed.²

Though the use of Twitter in the context of branding communication has already been studied extensively, existing studies have predominantly focused on English and there is a shortage of research into the practices and linguistic features of corporate responses in other languages. Similarly, the evolution of interactional patterns in social media over time has not yet been investigated and it is not known if and how interactional conventions of customer encounters change.

In Polish, the studies have primarily focused on the use of social media in marketing from a business-oriented perspective. As part of the research, the role of social media was analysed, their significance as a tool in marketing communication, the activities in which companies are engaged on the channels (Drzazga 2013; Chwiłkowska 2014; Lupa 2016), the impact of social media and social media communities on consumer behaviour and purchase decisions (Dejnaka 2014), consumers' perceptions of companies' social media profiles and brand image (Brzozowska-Woś 2013). Relatively little research has been done into corporate social media from a linguistic perspective. Analyses concerned predominantly politeness conventions in business interaction between customers and providers on various corporate profiles (Tereszkiewicz 2015), with only a few studies focusing on the process of complaint management on Twitter (Tereszkiewicz 2017; Tereszkiwicz 2019).

Taking the above-mentioned into consideration, the following study was designed to investigate possible evolution in the strategies of customer encounters, with a particular consideration of apologies as part of complaint management practices. With reference to Page's (2014) study of corporate apologies in English, the analysis was first to extract strategies used in replying to consumer complaints in the Polish corpora, and then to investigate if the strategies are used consistently across the period of two years, between 2015 and 2017. In this way, the

1. As of March 2018 Twitter is used by around 4mln users, 16% of all internet users in Poland. The channel is predominantly popular among those aged 15–34 years old. Sources: <http://www.wirtualnemedial.pl/artykul/twitter-z-4-mln-polskich-uzytownikow-coraz-wiecej-starszych-dobrze-wyksztalconych-i-z-miast>; <http://www.wirtualnemedial.pl/artykul/facebook-youtube-whatsapp-instagram-twitter-netflix-snapchat-linkedin-i-periscope-statystyki-w-polsce-i-globalnie>; <https://www.sotrender.com/blog/pl/2017/01/twitter-w-polsce-podsumowanie-2016-r-infografika>

2. <https://www.signs.pl/najbardziej-kreatywne-agencje-i-marki-na-twitterze-w-polsce,31396,artykul.html>

study aimed to discover potential variations in interactional patterns of complaint management on Twitter occurring over time. The analysis focuses on the use of conventional politeness, the structure and frequency of chosen strategies, as well as selected language properties of tweets, such as the degree of informality and the use of non-standard structures. More specifically, the study aimed at answering the following questions:

- have any changes in complaint management strategies used in the interaction occurred between 2015 and 2017?
- has the level of formality and directness of the tweets changed over time?
- has the use of informal, non-standard language, social media natives' slang and emoticons in the tweets changed?

Though the period of two years might seem not long enough for a study of potential changes in the interactional patterns, it needs to be underlined that social media represent a rather dynamic environment, where users' practices and conventions of interaction appear to be constantly changing. A dynamic and evolving character of corporate tweets has been observed in the research devoted to English corporate encounters on Twitter, which pointed out changes in the companies' practices occurring over the period of 2012–2014 (Page 2014). An evolving nature of communication norms and online interactional practices triggered by new technologies of communication has also been underlined by Darics (2015, 1), who states that

... the way in which people use language to communicate via these evolving communicative technologies is also in a state of flux. Computer-mediated discourse is still an emerging phenomenon and 'has not yet had time (nor attained the requisite social status) to become formalised in 'rules,' but rather, varies according to the technological and social contexts online' (Herring 2012, 2338).

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Twitter as a medium

Twitter is a social networking service in which users publish short messages, i.e. tweets. The length of a single message is limited to 280 characters. Users may post and share messages, but also like and comment on the tweets published by others.

In addition to its use in individual, institutional, and public interaction (cf. Java et al. 2007; Marwick and boyd 2011; Zappavigna 2012; Weller et al. 2014), Twitter is successfully exploited in the area of marketing and corporate communication, offering important possibilities for both brands and consumers. It allows

direct interaction between consumers and the company, and thus exemplifies a blurring of the traditional barriers in organisational communication (Fischer and Reuber 2014; Girginova 2015). Twitter is considered a valuable tool of communication with consumers due to its dialogic character, user-friendliness, and functionality (Jansen et al. 2009, 2186; Rybalko and Seltzer 2010; Kwon and Sung 2011; Zhang et al. 2011).

2.2 Complaint management online

The functionality of new channels of online communication has facilitated sharing and distributing information and opinions about goods and services among consumers. The popularity of opinion sharing has created a need among companies to respond and take appropriate action. Handling comments published online has become a significant component of companies' reputation management strategies. The responses and subsequent actions taken by companies have been subsumed under the terms of "customer care", "webcare" or "service recovery".

So far considerable research has been devoted to online complaints, consumer reviews and complaint management in the context of online customer communication. However, as indicated above, research into complaint management has mainly focused on English, with relatively few studies into reviews published in other languages. A short overview of the existing research into English and Polish online reviews will be provided below.

Studies focusing on consumer reviews published on different websites have been devoted to the structure of online complaints, complaint strategies, the means of expressing evaluation and authority, among others (Meinl 2010; Sparks and Browning 2010; Vásquez 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015).

Research into complaint management, in turn, examined response strategies employed by companies in social media. Studies into the management of customer reviews have focused mainly on negative review management strategies and an effective service recovery process. It has been underlined that owing to a significant impact of negative reviews, companies need to handle this type of reaction carefully. Providing feedback to negative comments and a proper management of complaints is considered an effective marketing tool showing companies' care (Zhang and Daugherty 2009; Zhang et al. 2011; Creelman 2015; Márquez Reiter et al. 2015).

Extensive research has been done into the strategies used in companies' posts and rhetorical moves constituting the structure of the responses. The most typical moves occurring in managerial responses comprise acts of requesting and providing information, acts of referral, acknowledging and thanking for the complaint,

promising corrective actions, rectification and compensation acts, apologies, as well as explanations, justifications or denials (cf. Coyle et al. 2012; Zhang and Vásquez 2014; Einwiller and Steilen 2015; Sparks and Bradley 2017). Research was also devoted specifically to the strategy of denial, considered particularly face-threatening to the company's and the customer's faces. The study by Ho (2017) showed that companies use a variety of denial strategies, involving moves such as: challenge reviewer's decision, frame problem as isolated incident, rebut, suggest or recommend, highlight facility or service, emphasise practice or mission. It was also observed that to diminish the face-threatening potential of the act, the denial tends to be accompanied by moves aiming at making amends with the consumers, softening the denial, such as apology, acknowledgment of problems, rectification, explanation, appreciation or expression of feelings.

The studies indicated that the content and form of the response, the choice and shape of particular rhetorical moves may reflect the company's approach to the review. The use of the so-called generic or specific responses was distinguished (Zhang and Vásquez 2014), with the former not referring to the problems indicated by consumers, and the latter referring clearly to the consumer's message and providing a detailed explanation of the problems mentioned. Generic responses are further characterised by the use of routine language and repetitive formulas. A higher frequency of generic responses was attributed to companies' focus on increasing the degree of standardisation of the messages, as well as improving the efficiency of responding to consumers' reviews (Zhang and Vásquez 2014, 62).

In light of the present study, as regards analyses devoted specifically to complaint management on Twitter, it is worth mentioning research by Page (2014), who examined components of corporate apology acts in this medium. More specifically, Page analysed the act of apologies based on the framework proposed by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) and interpreted the strategies with reference to Benoit's (1995) strategies of image repair. In Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989) framework, apologies may comprise such acts as: Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID), taking responsibility, explanation, offer of repair, and promise of forbearance. The analysis showed that among the IFIDs used in the apologies, "sorry" and "apologise" were the most frequent. In explanations, which proved rather infrequent, the companies expressed different degrees of denial and acceptance of responsibility. In the acts, the companies resorted to different face-saving devices, such as attributing blame to a third party, to factors outside the company's control, or to minimisation of blame. Offers of repair, which proved frequent, involved reporting problems for further investigation and offers of material compensation. As Page (2014, 38) observed, in the context of corporate apologies, these acts function as face-saving strategies which may help the company to

restore reputation. Among follow-up moves accompanying apologies, questions and imperatives were the most frequent. These acts comprise requests for further information, clarification of the offence, as well as indirect solutions to consumer's problems. The acts constitute face-restoring strategies showing the company's readiness to assist the consumer. Opening and closing units of the apologies involve greetings and thanks. Since these components are rather infrequent in the posts by ordinary users, Page (2014, 40–41) considered them characteristic of corporate apologies. Further elements which distinguish these apologies involve using address forms and signatures. Page (2014, 41), however, underlined a repetitive and generic use of these components in the apologies, which decreases their rapport-building potential. The study also showed a less frequent use of discourse markers and emoticons in corporate apologies as compared with apologies by ordinary users. The greetings, discourse markers, and emoticons accompanying apologies in corporate tweets were interpreted as means serving to enhance the relationship with consumers.

The studies mentioned above concerned interaction on English-speaking profiles. Research devoted to complaint management on Twitter on Polish corporate microblogs focused on complaint handling strategies and indicated that the responses comprise acts such as: requests for information and contact, apologies, explanations, offers of assistance, acts of denial of responsibility or criticism of the complainer (Tereszkiewicz 2017). A contrastive English-Polish study of complaint handling on Twitter pointed to a greater frequency of acts of denial and evasion of responsibility, as well as a greater level of directness and informality in the Polish messages (Tereszkiewicz 2019).

3. Materials and methods

The material for the following analysis was obtained from profiles of five different companies (Allegro, Orange, InPost, Netia, Samsung) selected on the basis of the popularity of their products in Poland. Each of the companies represents a different sector of industry: Orange (telecommunication), Samsung (technology), Allegro (e-commerce), Netia (internet and cable TV provider), InPost (postal services). The profiles of the companies serve similar purposes – the companies publish updates with information on products and services, advertisements, and contests, as well as engage in individual interaction with consumers. The complaints addressed to the company at both periods of time on all the analysed profiles also proved to be comparable and concerned similar issues. Consumers most frequently expressed negative evaluation of the service, commented on the lack of services, shared their dissatisfaction with the company's product or with customer

care services. Companies' responses comprised apologies, requests, and denials, amongst others, as will be indicated below.

The tweets were collected randomly at two periods – November/December 2015 and July/August 2017. The first corpus was collected in 2015 since it was the period of an intensive increase in the use of the channel in Poland.³ The second corpus was collected two years later in 2017 with the aim of investigating trends in the development of interactional practices on corporate profiles. In the process of collecting the material for the analysis, consumers' complaints were identified and a subsequent response to the complaint given by the company. The material encompasses only immediate adjacency pairs, i.e. the company's response to the consumer's message expressing a complaint and negative opinion published on the public profile, and does not include subsequent discussions following the responses. The final collection of responses from each period analysed in the study comprises 425 messages, 85 messages from each of the profiles to guarantee uniformity.

As far as the methodology used in the study is concerned, the analysis follows previous approaches to the investigation of social media data, i.e. comprises the analysis of structural and pragmatic components in the tweets. The study focuses on complaint management strategies, with a particular consideration of apology acts. The analysis encompasses these acts, as they perform an important role in customer care interactions. In service encounters, apologies constitute a major strategy which is to compensate the customer for the fault in the service (Márquez Reiter 2008, 5). More specifically, the analysis was conducted with reference to the framework designed by Page (2014) in the above-mentioned study. Following Page's (2014) approach, each message was coded for the structure of the act of apology. In particular, the study analyses the use of IFIDs as well as requests and offers of help, both as follow-up acts to the apologies and as stand-alone strategies. The study was broadened to include an analysis of other speech acts, such as denial of the offence and disagreement with the consumer. The analysis also investigates the use of greetings, address terms, and emoticons. The study was further expanded to include an analysis of selected structural and stylistic aspects of the tweets as well, i.e. the complexity of the tweets, the presence of formal language, informal, non-standard elements, and code-switching. The study also relies on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. In particular, the analysis draws on the concepts of positive and negative politeness and positive and negative face in the investigation of the pragmatic effects of the strategies used in the interaction.

3. <http://www.wirtualnemedial.pl/arttykul/twitter-z-4-mln-polskich-uzytownikow-coraz-wiecej-starszych-dobrze-wyksztalconych-i-z-miast>

The tweets in both corpora were coded for the respective components and the frequency of the strategies was calculated. Following these procedures, the occurrence of the features across the two corpora was compared. The two collections of data were contrasted to see if any potential patterns of change emerge from the comparison. User names were removed from the examples for the sake of privacy issues.

4. Results and discussion

What follows is a discussion of the most conspicuous differences identified between the corpora. The changes concern the structure of tweets, the level of formality and directness, the frequency of complaint handling strategies, the use of conventional politeness acts, such as address terms, and the use of emoticons.

4.1 The structure of tweets

Differences between the two corpora as to the structure of the tweets can be observed. Table 1 presents the frequency of selected structural features of the tweets in the two corpora.

Table 1. The language of company tweets – the frequency of selected structures

Feature	2015	2017
Number of tweets	425	425
Number of words in the corpus	4406	5356
Average number of words in a tweet	9,0	11,2
Multi-tweet posts	1	10
Simple tweets	200	113
Complex tweets	225	312

As Table 1 shows, the corpora differ as to the number of words in the corpus. An increase in the number of words in the corpus and in the number of words in a tweet points to an increase in the density, structural and substantial complexity of the messages. This is also confirmed by a decrease in the number of simple tweets, i.e. one speech act tweets, as exemplified in (1), with a simultaneous increase in the frequency of complex tweets, speech act sets, a combination of speech acts with a different illocutionary force, as exemplified in (2) and (3). An

increase in the number of multi-tweet posts was also observed, i.e. in the number of responses not confined to a single tweet but comprising a series of tweets, as shown in (4).

The most frequent sequence used in complex tweets includes an expression of apology, a request for information or action, and an offer of help, as exemplified in (2), (3), and (4).

Examples from the 2015 corpus:

- (1) *Postaramy się Panu pomóc. [@NETIA_SA]*
'We will try to help you. [@NETIA_SA]'
- (2) *Przepraszamy za tę sytuację. Prześlij nam zgłoszenie poprzez <https://pomoc.orange.pl/> Sprawdzimy jak możemy Ci pomóc. [@Orange_Polska]*
'We apologise for this situation. Send us a report through <https://pomoc.orange.pl/> We'll check how we can help you. [@Orange_Polska]'

Examples from the 2017 corpus:

- (3) *Przykro nam, że odczuwasz utrudnienia w korzystaniu z usługi. Skontaktuj się z nami <https://oran.ge/2u2vttf>. Sprawdzimy to. [@Orange_Polska]*
'We're sorry that you're having difficulties in using the service. Contact us <https://oran.ge/2u2vttf>. We'll check it. [@Orange_Polska]'
- (4) *1/2 przykro nam, że masz problem z działaniem Neostrady. Rozumiemy, że to dla Ciebie ważna sprawa. 2/2 Prosimy o kontakt na numer 510100100 lub poprzez aplikację Mój Orange, a sprawdzimy Twoje łącze i zajmiemy się opisaną sprawą. [@Orange_Polska]*
'1/2 we're sorry that you're having a problem with the working of Neostrada. We understand that it is an important thing for you. 2/2 We ask for contact at number 510100100 or via My Orange application, and we'll check your connection and take care of the case described. [@Orange_Polska]'

The tendency to post complex tweets and combine different speech acts in a single message may be dictated by the context, public nature of the interaction, as well as its asynchronous character, which creates a need to place more focus on immediate customer care, i.e. expressing attention to the consumers, declaring willingness and readiness to assist them, and providing immediate corrective solutions.

A repetitive and more frequent use of this pattern of speech act sequencing can be seen across the 2017 corpus, which points to an increased customer-orientation of the interaction. Moreover, since a frequent use of such patterns of speech act sets has been observed on English corporate profiles (Tereszkiewicz 2019), an increased presence of this phenomenon in Polish may be seen as an indication of the spread of conventions typical of English in the interaction.

Further differences can be observed in the frequency and structure of selected speech acts. The most significant differences are described below.

4.2 Address terms

An increase in the occurrence of address terms constitutes one of the most conspicuous properties differentiating the two analysed corpora. Changes can be observed in the use and variety of address terms occurring in the datasets. The frequency of respective address terms in the corpora is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The use of address terms in the corpora

Feature	2015	2017
Address terms – total	48	152
<i>Pan/Pani</i> [Mr/Mrs] +/- name	33	16
First name	15	94
User name	–	42

As indicated in Table 2, in the corpus of 2015, both the more formal V-forms and the less formal first name address terms were used (as in (5) and (6)), with a more frequent occurrence of the formal terms. A decrease in the use of the V-form of address can be observed in the corpus of 2017, with a considerable increase in the frequency of first name and user name terms of address. The use of user names (as in e.g. (8) and (10)) indicates an adaptation of the practices and conventions typical of social media interaction. One of the interesting forms occurring frequently in the 2017 corpus comprises the use of user names as address terms in a more formal shape with the V-form of address – *Pan/Pani* [Mr/Mrs] + user name, as exemplified in (8). This address form reflects a merger of the conventions typical of traditional customer encounters and online conventions of using nicknames in the interaction in social media. The use of nicknames has not been observed in the 2015 corpus.

Examples from the 2015 corpus:

- (5) *Panie Rafale, maksymalny czas oczekiwania na rozpatrzenie reklamacji to 30 dni. [@NETIA_SA]*
 ‘Mr Rafał, the maximum waiting time for a complaint review is 30 days.
 [@NETIA_SA]’
- (6) *Cześć Radek. Mieliśmy wczoraj opóźnienia, mamy nadzieję, że dostałeś już wiadomość? [@PaczkomatyPL]*

'Hi Radek. We had delays yesterday, we hope you have already gotten a message? [@PaczkomatyPL]'

Examples from the 2017 corpus:

- (7) *Pani Jadwigo, czy zgłaszała Pani awarię? [@NETIA_SA]*
 'Mrs Jadwiga, have you reported the breakdown? [@NETIA_SA]'
- (8) *Panie @LakaLe, skontaktuj się z infolinią 801 802 803, sprawdzimy jakie możliwości są w Pana okolicy. [@NETIA_SA]*
 'Mr @LakaLe, contact the information center 801 802 803, we'll check the possibilities in your area. [@NETIA_SA]'
- (9) *Wojciechu, czy możemy pomóc? Czy kontaktowałeś się z naszą infolinią? [@NETIA_SA]*
 'Wojciech, can we help? Have you contacted our information center? [@NETIA_SA]'
- (10) *Bobiko, więcej informacji znajdziesz tutaj: [https://inpost.pl/skrocenie-czasu-odbioru ...](https://inpost.pl/skrocenie-czasu-odbioru...) :) [@PaczkomatyPL]*
 'Bobiko, you will find more information here: [https://inpost.pl/skrocenie-czasu-odbioru ...](https://inpost.pl/skrocenie-czasu-odbioru...) :) [@PaczkomatyPL]'

The changes in the address patterns point to a decrease in the formality of the address, which may be dictated by the context of social media interaction. Address terms in the analysed context perform a similar role to their function in other communicative situations, i.e. they increase personalisation, activate the hearer, attract and maintain his/her attention, perform a phatic function of maintaining contact between the interlocutors (Ożóg 1990, 29). The use of address terms for identification of the addressee appears to be particularly meaningful in the analysed situation, as it helps to specify the addressee of the message (Page 2014, 41). More importantly, the use of names also increases the level of politeness and indirectness of the response.

The increase in the use of address terms reflects the discourse patterns found in English profiles. Page (2014), namely, as mentioned above, identified the use of first name terms of address as a characteristic feature of corporate tweets in English. An increase in the use of terms of address may thus also be interpreted as an indication of an influence of the interactional conventions typical of English on Polish.

4.3 Apology acts

The two corpora differ as to the frequency of apology acts used in response to consumer complaints and inquiries. An increase in the number of all apology expressions can be seen in 2017.

Table 3. Apology acts in the corpora

Feature	2015	2017
Apology	31	66
<i>Przepraszamy</i> [We apologise]	18	32
<i>Przykro nam</i> [We are sorry]	10	21
<i>Wybacz</i> [Forgive]	3	7
Empathy expressions	–	6

Apology expressions used in the corpora comprise the use of the performative *przepraszac* [to apologise], as in (11), an expression of regret *przykro nam* [we're sorry], exemplified in (12) and (13) or (14), and asking for forgiveness *wybacz* [forgive], as in (15). The first two of the above-mentioned occurred in both corpora, while the request for forgiveness was found only in the 2017 corpus. In both corpora, the IFIDs were used in isolation (as in (11)) as well as in acts in which the offence was restated, either in the form of a generalised statement (*sorry because of that, sorry for the situation*), as in (12) or (13), or in the form of statements admitting a negative character of the issues (*sorry because of the damage, forgive the inconveniences*), as in (14) (cf. Page 2014, 36).

Apology acts from the 2015 corpus:

- (11) *Cześć Przemek. Przepraszamy – koniecznie złóż reklamację za pomocą formularza <https://inpost.pl/pl/kontakt/zloz-reklamacje> ...* [*@PaczkomatyPL*]
 ‘Hi Przemek. We apologise – definitely file a complaint through the form <https://inpost.pl/pl/kontakt/zloz-reklamacje> ...’ [*@PaczkomatyPL*]
- (12) *Przykro nam z tego powodu. Jednocześnie informujemy, że staramy się problem usunąć. Prosimy o cierpliwość.* [*@Orange_Polska*]
 ‘We are sorry because of that. At the same time we inform that we are trying to remove the problem. We ask for patience.’ [*@Orange_Polska*]

Apology acts from the 2017 corpus:

- (13) *Bardzo nam przykro z powodu sytuacji, jaka Cię spotkała i mamy nadzieję, że sprawa szybko się wyjaśni. Pozdrawiamy!* [*@Allegro_Group*]

'We are really sorry for the situation which you have encountered and we hope that the issue will be explained quickly. We greet you! [@Allegro_Group]'

- (14) *Michale, wybacz utrudnienia :/ Jeśli problem z Paczkomatem nadal występuje prosimy o podesłanie sygnatury, zajmiemy się sprawą. [@PaczkomatyPL]*
 'Michal, forgive inconveniences :/ If there is still a problem with Paczkomat please send the signature, we'll take care of the case. [@PaczkomatyPL]'

An increase in the frequency of apologies points to a more customer-oriented perspective and more attention awarded to the consumer's face. It indicates that companies place more focus on negative politeness and on diminishing the threat to the consumer's face posed by the infraction. The change also reflects the trend identified for customer encounters in other cultural contexts. An increase in the frequency of apologies on corporate profiles over time, namely, has been stated for English company profiles (Page 2014). Apology acts have been considered as a tool enhancing a company's reputation and rapport with the customer.

Further differences between the two corpora associated with the act of apology comprise the use of empathy expressions, which have not been identified in the 2015 corpus. The empathy expressions assume the form of acts expressing an understanding of the consumer's situation, i.e. *we understand that X is important / we understand that X may cause inconvenience*, as exemplified in (15) and (16). The expressions focus on the speaker's feelings and his/her evaluation of the customer's situation and reported issues.

Empathy acts have the intention of an apology, yet do not attribute the blame for the infraction to the company. The acts are designed to express the company's attentiveness and appreciation of the customer's dissatisfaction (cf. Lubecka 2000, 161; Kozicka-Borysowska 2009). The occurrence of the expressions, analogically to the above-mentioned apologies, indicates an increase in customer-orientation and attendance to the consumer's needs. Nevertheless, owing to a highly repetitive use of the acts, they have acquired a rather formulaic character.

Examples from the 2017 corpus:

- (15) *1/2 przykro nam, że masz problem z działaniem internetu. Rozumiemy, że to dla Ciebie ważna sprawa. 2/2 prosimy napisz na jakiej ulicy w Uniejowie masz założoną Neostradę, a sprawdzimy informacje o awariach. [@Orange_Polska]*
 '1/2 we're sorry that you're having a problem with internet. We understand that it is an important thing for you. 2/2 we ask you to write on which street in Uniejów you have Neostrada installed, and we'll check information on breakdowns. [@Orange_Polska]'

- (16) 1/ *Rozumiemy, że brak dostępu do usługi może powodować wiele niedogodności. Twoje zgłoszenie jest w realizacji. 2/ Prosimy o cierpliwość. Przywrócimy działanie Neostrady najszybciej jak to będzie możliwe. [@Orange_Polska]*
 '1/ We understand that lack of access to service may cause a lot of inconveniences. Your report is in progress. 2/ We ask for patience. We will restore the working of Neostrada as soon as possible. [@Orange_Polska]'

Previous research into complaint management on English and Polish profiles pointed to a frequent use of empathy expressions in English (Tereszkiewicz 2019). An increased use of such expressions in Polish across the analysed time period may constitute a further indication of a transfer of English conventions to the Polish profiles.

4.4 Offers of help and assistance

The two corpora differ as to the frequency of acts offering help and assistance. These acts proved significantly more frequent in the 2017 corpus.

Table 4. Offers of help and repair in the corpora

Feature	2015	2017
Offers of help/repair	66	136

Offers and promises of help and repair express readiness to investigate and/or solve the problem, and a promise to help the consumer. They are used as stand-alone acts, but also constitute the most frequent follow-up strategies accompanying requests, where they diminish the face-threat posed to the customer's face (cf. Page 2014). Offers of help in the analysed material comprise promises to undertake corrective actions, to check or investigate the reported issues (17)–(19), and to solve problems (20).

Examples from the 2015 corpus:

- (17) *Prześlij nam zgłoszenie poprzez <https://pomoc.orange.pl/> Sprawdzimy to. [@Orange_Polska]*
 'Send a report via <https://pomoc.orange.pl/> We'll check it. [@Orange_Polska]'
- (18) *Najlepiej daj nam o tym znać przez formularz: <http://bit.ly/1XK1LMR> Dokładnie opisz sprawę, sprawdzimy o co może chodzić. [@Allegro_Group]*
 'Best let us know via the form: <http://bit.ly/1XK1LMR> Describe the case in detail, we'll check what the problem may be about. [@Allegro_Group]'

Examples from the 2017 corpus:

- (19) *Prześlij nam zgłoszenie korzystając z formularza na stronie: <http://oran.ge/1TOjiUm>. Sprawdzimy co się dzieje i udzielimy odpowiedzi. [Orange_Polska]*
 ‘Send the report using the form on the website: <http://oran.ge/1TOjiUm>. We’ll check what is happening and we’ll provide an answer. [Orange_Polska]’
- (20) *Anzelmie, wybacz utrudnienia :(Nasze Wsparcie Techniczne już zajmuje się sprawą, usterka zostanie usunięta możliwie jak najszybciej. [PaczkomatyPL]*
 ‘Anzelm, forgive inconveniences :(Our Technical Support is taking care of the case, the problem will be removed as soon as possible. [PaczkomatyPL]’

The increase in the occurrence of the acts confirms a greater customer-orientation in the interaction. The increased frequency of these acts is also associated with a greater occurrence of the above-mentioned complex acts and multi-tweet responses, a clear tendency to use follow-up strategies accompanying requests and apologies, as well as an increased use of templates, described below.

4.5 Performative requests

Changes between the two corpora concern the patterns used in requests, with a visible increase in the frequency of use of performative requests.

Table 5. Performative requests in the corpora

Feature	2015	2017
Performative <i>Prosić</i> [Ask for]	34	81

While in the corpus collected in 2015 requests in the form of imperatives (as exemplified in (21)) and interrogative acts (e.g. (22)) were the most frequent, more requests with the performative verb *prosić* [to ask for something] were found in the collection from 2017 (as in (23)–(25)). Directive acts in these forms involve requests for further contact and for information, as well as suggestions on corrective actions users may undertake to solve the problems.

Examples from the 2015 corpus:

- (21) *Odczekaj kilka godzin, jeśli dalej nic – zgłoś się na priv z nr paczki. [PaczkomatyPL]*
 ‘Wait a few hours, if nothing happens – contact us on priv with the package number. [PaczkomatyPL]’
- (22) *Nie ma żadnej awarii, więc to jakiś indywidualny problem. Zgłosisz przez formularz? Wtedy będziemy mieć wszystkie niezbędne dane. [Allegro_Group]*

‘There is no breakdown, so it is an individual problem. Will you report it through the form? We will have all the necessary data then. [@Allegro_Group]’

Examples from the 2017 corpus:

- (23) *Arturze, prosimy o kontynuowanie korespondencji w jednym miejscu. Otrzymasz odpowiedź najszybciej, jak to będzie możliwe. Pozdrawiamy! [@Allegro_Group]*
 ‘Artur, we ask for a continuation of correspondence in one place. You will receive a reply as soon as possible. We greet you! [@Allegro_Group]’
- (24) *prosimy o zrestartowanie routera. Jeśli nadal strona nie będzie działać, czekamy na wiadomość. [@NETIA_SA]*
 ‘we ask for restarting the router. If the page is still not working, we’re waiting for your message. [@NETIA_SA]’
- (25) *Hegemonie, jeszcze raz prosimy Cię o wiadomość prywatną wraz z Twoim numerem telefonu. Jest to niezbędne, żeby rozwiązać powyższą sprawę. [@NETIA_SA]*
 ‘Hegemon, we ask you once again for a private message with your phone number. It is necessary to resolve the above-mentioned case. [@NETIA_SA]’

In the 2017 corpus, requests most often assume the form of acts with the performative verb used in the first-person plural in the present tense. The structure *prosimy o* [we ask for] + NP, occurring most frequently, is considered polite and formal, and indicates distance between the interlocutors. The act in this shape is often found in the interaction between participants remaining in neutral relations and in institutional discourse (Marcjanik 2000, 172). In the present context, the use of this form of the act may be also dictated by a wish to avoid addressing the customer directly.

Requests and advice-giving acts with the performative verb are considered less direct and more polite than acts in the imperative or interrogative form, which were used more often in 2015. Since these forms are the most frequent in neutral relationships in face-to-face or telephone communication as well, their use may signal a transfer of the conventions typical of other channels and may be dictated by a wish to diminish the directive force of the request and thus make it more polite.

The changes concerning the form of requests comprise an increase in external modification of the acts, which involves the use of reasons and grounders justifying the imposition on the customer. The speakers politely mitigate the requests by declaring help, promising corrective action, and by explaining that its fulfilment is necessary to proceed with corrective actions, as in (22)–(25). The means

of external modification serve to minimise the imposition, mitigate the force of the request, diminish the face-threatening tone of the directive acts, and increase the politeness of the request.

4.6 Denial and disagreement

The two corpora differ as to the frequency of acts of denial and disagreement, which were more common in 2015.

Table 6. Acts of denial and disagreement in the corpora

Feature	2015	2017
Denial and disagreement	18	5

The acts in the corpus of 2015 comprise more instances of explicit denials of the infraction, acts of disagreeing and criticising consumers.

Examples from the 2015 corpus:

- (26) *Nie ma żadnej awarii, więc to jakiś indywidualny problem. Zgłosisz przez formularz? Wtedy będziemy mieć wszystkie niezbędne dane. [@Allegro_Group]*
 ‘There is no breakdown, so it is an individual problem. Will you report it through the form? We will have all the necessary data then. [@Allegro_Group]’
- (27) *U nas wszystko ok. [@Allegro_Group]*
 ‘Everything is fine on our side. [@Allegro_Group]’

Examples from the 2017 corpus:

- (28) *Nie mamy informacji na temat utrudnień w tej okolicy. Czy próbowałeś restartować urządzenie? [@Orange_Polska]*
 ‘We do not have information on problems in the area. Have you tried restarting the device? [@Orange_Polska]’

In 2015, the acts rejecting consumers’ complaints and denying the complainable more frequently assumed the form of explicit denials, where the speakers negated the occurrence of service failures (as in (26)), and implicit denials and rejections, in which the speakers rejected the complaints by stating a positive functioning of the services (as in (27)). Such phrasing of the denials could be interpreted as more face-saving for the company, and yet more face-threatening for the consumer, whose complaint is rejected in a straightforward way. Such acts were not found in the corpus of 2017, in which the acts denying the complainable more often assume the form of statements of a lack of information

concerning the complainable, as can be seen in (28). The speakers thus reject the complaints in a less direct manner. The change shows more attention awarded to the consumer's face and a more customer-oriented perspective. It indicates a more politeness-oriented phrasing of the acts.

4.7 Formality

Differences between the two corpora also concern the degree of formality of the tweets, the use of informal, non-standard language items, and code-switching.

Table 7. Formal, informal language, emoticons, and code-switching in the corpora

Feature	2015	2017
Formal institutional language (nominalisation, passive voice, impersonal structures)	19	68
Informal and non-standard language	55	12
Emoticons	141	76
Code-switching	23	11

The 2015 corpus exhibited a greater occurrence of informal elements, code-switching, and emoticons, as exemplified in (29)–(31). These components performed important functions, as they served to decrease distance, indicate emotionality and expressiveness, in this way marking socialisation, accommodation with the interlocutors, belonging to the same discourse community of social media users, and underlining the company's positive politeness orientation. By contrast, only individual items of this kind were found in the 2017 corpus.

Examples from the 2015 corpus:

- (29) *SOON* – *na razie ogarniamy preordery samych urzqdzeń* :) [*@SamsungPolska*]
 ‘*SOON* – we’re still dealing with preorders of the devices :) [*@SamsungPolska*]
- (30) *Yup ;)* [*@SamsungPolska*]
 ‘Yup ;) [*@SamsungPolska*]
- (31) *Dobry deal dla obu stron* :) [*@PaczkomatyPL*]
 ‘A good deal for both sides :) [*@PaczkomatyPL*]

The differences between the 2015 and the 2017 corpora also concern the use of formal language. In both corpora, formality can be observed on the syntactic and lexical levels, in the use of impersonal structures, such as the passive voice (as in

(32), (33)), nominalisations (as in (32)–(35)), and complex clauses (e.g. (33), (34)). Formality on the lexical level can also be seen in the use of specific terminology, jargon, and formal expressions (e.g. *due to technical, formal and financial reasons, in line with, file a complaint, warranty repair, physical damage*, etc.). Though such structures were found in 2015, the occurrence and variety of the forms in the 2017 corpus is considerably higher.

Examples from the 2015 corpus:

- (32) *Aplikacja tymczasowo została wycofana ze sklepu. Po jej poprawieniu zostanie przywrócona. [@Orange_Polska]*
 ‘The application has been removed from the shop for the time being. After its correction it will be restored. [@Orange_Polska]’

Examples from the 2017 corpus:

- (33) *Jeśli przesyłka została uszkodzona konieczne będzie spisanie protokołu szkody w Oddziale i złożenie oficjalnej reklamacji. [@PaczkomatyPL]*
 ‘If the postage has been damaged, writing a protocol of the damage in the Branch and filing an official complaint will be necessary. [@PaczkomatyPL]’
- (34) *Każda naprawa gwarancyjna wymaga wyeliminowania uszkodzenia fizycznego aby zapewnić 100% sprawności Twojemu urządzeniu. [@SamsungPolska]*
 ‘Every warranty repair requires a removal of the physical damage to ensure 100% capacity of your device. [@SamsungPolska]’
- (35) *Rafał, Twoje zgłoszenie jest w trakcie rozpatrywania przez nasz Dział Reklamacji, wkrótce otrzymasz odpowiedź. [@PaczkomatyPL]*
 ‘Rafał, your report is under review by our Complaints Sector, you will receive a response soon. [@PaczkomatyPL]’

Formality of expression is typical of customer encounters in other contexts, especially in written correspondence with consumers. Formality constitutes a means of expressing authority and professionalism, as well as a means of indicating distance between the interlocutors (cf. Sifianou and Tzanne 2018, 8). The changes in the formality of expression constitute evidence of a decrease in the degree of associative expressiveness (cf. Page 2014, 43) observed in the tweets in 2015, greater conventionalisation and standardisation of expression. The evolution proves a more institutional and professional perspective reflected in the tweets, at the expense of increased engagement and accommodation to the consumers.

The use of emoticons in the corpus collected in 2017 is also noticeably lower. An infrequent use of emoticons was observed by Page (2014) for English corporate tweets. A rare occurrence of emoticons, as the author observed, indicates a more corporate-oriented tone of the tweets and distinguishes the messages from

those posted by ordinary users. This change in the Polish messages thus indicates a greater corporate-orientation of the messages and may constitute further evidence of the adaptation of the English conventions of interaction.

4.8 The use of templates

A further change in the pattern of interaction comprises an increased use of templates and increased repetitiveness of expression. The speakers to a greater extent resort to “ready-made phrases” (Tagg 2012, 147), or templates. Structures used repetitively across the corpus comprise the templates in which the speakers ask for customer identification or for service details and offer repair (as in (36)), or, as indicated above, templates comprising an empathy expression and/or an apology, request, and an offer of repair (as in (37), (38)).

Examples from the 2017 corpus:

- (36) *prosimy o podanie numeru abonenta w wiadomości prywatnej, sprawdzimy to.*
 [@NETIA_SA]
 ‘we ask for providing the user number in a private message, we’ll check it.
 [@NETIA_SA]’
- (37) *1/ Rozumiemy, że brak dostępu do usługi może powodować wiele niedogodności. Twoje zgłoszenie jest w realizacji. 2/ Prosimy o cierpliwość. Przywrócimy działanie Neostrady najszybciej jak to będzie możliwe.* [@Orange_Polska]
 ‘1/ We understand that lack of access to a service may cause a lot of inconveniences. Your report is in progress. 2/ We ask for patience. We’ll restore the working of Neostrada as soon as possible. [@Orange_Polska]’
- (38) *1/2 przykro nam, że masz problem z działaniem Neostrady. Rozumiemy, że to dla Ciebie ważna sprawa. 2/2 Prosimy o kontakt na numer 510100100 lub poprzez aplikację Mój Orange, a sprawdzimy Twoje łącze i zajmiemy się opisaną sprawą.* [@Orange_Polska]
 ‘1/2 we’re sorry that you’re having problems with the working of Neostrada. We understand that it is an important thing for you. 2/2 We ask for contact at number 510100100 or via My Orange application, and we’ll check your connection and take care of the case described. [@Orange_Polska]’

An increased use of such templates may be dictated by a growing popularity of this channel of interaction and a greater number of messages which the companies need to process. The use of templates allows the representatives to provide a quick response and avoid a time lag between the user’s query and the company’s feedback, and in this way to lower the risk of consumers’ dissatisfaction. The

repetitive nature of the compositional structures, however, confirms a greater formulaicity and a lower individualisation of the interaction.

The above-mentioned conventionalisation and the increased use of templates, the occurrence of routine and uniform responses constitute evidence of the process of standardisation of the company practices and the employees' responses in effect on the profiles.

5. Conclusions

The present study investigated the evolution of interactional patterns in customer encounters on Polish brand profiles on Twitter. The study showed that the interactional patterns evolve along several dimensions. The differences between the two corpora occur along the dimension of directness, conventionality, and customer-orientation. The higher frequency of apologies, empathy expressions, offers of help and repair, as well as the decrease in the occurrence of denials of consumers' complaints points to a greater emphasis on a customer-oriented approach to the encounter, a stronger preference for accommodative strategies, that is strategies perceived more positively and favourably by consumers, as pointed out above (cf. Sparks and Fredline 2007; Levy et al. 2013; Einwiller and Steilen 2015; Ye and Ki 2017). The strategies and the language choices in the tweets of 2017 indicate that the evolution proceeds from greater directness, individualisation, and expressiveness to increased indirectness, institutionalisation, and conventionality of expression. The tweets reflect an evolution from a more emotional, natural, and spontaneous speech to a reliance on fixed and conventional patterns of expression. The corpus of 2017 reveals lower levels of creativity, an increased reliance on clichés, standardisation, formality, and formulaicity. Moreover, a greater similarity of the patterns occurring across the profiles can be observed, which points to a unification of the norms of interaction. This reflects a movement towards generic, homogeneous, and repetitive responses, observed in other studies concerning corporate encounters (cf. Zhang and Vásquez 2014), motivated by technological factors and the need to improve the efficiency of the interaction, and reflecting the movement towards professionalisation of the interaction. The representatives at an earlier stage of development of the encounters to a greater extent relied on the conventions typical of personal interaction in social media. The evolution marks an important change in the conventions of customer encounters, a movement back towards the so-called ceremonial style typical of traditional customer encounters and the transfer of the conventions typical of customer encounters in other channels (Marcjanik 2006; Ptaszek 2008, 2009; cf. Ogiermann 2012).

The differences between the corpora can be interpreted as a reflection of certain globalisation tendencies in corporate discourse and online customer encounters in particular. As Sifianou and Tzanne (2018) observe, the impact of globalisation involves three major language-related issues, i.e. the diffusion of English discourse patterns, the regulation of employees' speech, and informalisation of discourse. The analysed corpora seem to reflect the globalising tendencies in the first two areas, i.e. the adaptation of English interactional conventions and an increased standardisation of corporate discourse patterns.

The above-presented analysis contributes to the discussion of corporate encounters on Twitter. More significantly, however, the study contributes to cross-cultural research by reflecting trends in interactional patterns in interaction in a language other than English. The analysis also initiates a discussion of interactional evolution in online media, a discussion of changes in the patterns and directions of the evolution, as such studies, to the author's knowledge, have not yet been conducted. However, more research is needed, encompassing larger corpora, a greater number of tweets, other brand profiles, and covering a longer time span.

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