Politeness strategies in firms' answers to customer complaints

Pierre-Nicolas Schwab and Laurence Rosier

Justice theory is an established framework for analysing the complaining behaviours of customers (Homburg and Fürst, 2005; del Rio-Lanza *et al.*, 2008) and developing complaint-handling practices (Tax *et al.*, 1998). A component of the interactional justice, (im)politeness plays an important role in the origin of complaints (Harrison-Walker, 2001; Bolkan, 2007; Cowan and Anthony, 2008).

Despite a rich literature and numerous managerial recommendations, most research into justice theory has focused on the customer side (Davidow, 2003; Parasuraman, 2006; Homburg *et al.*, 2010). Researchers have largely ignored politeness as a component of a complaints response. Research into complaint-handling is also primarily based on experiments initiated by the researchers using non-current or fictitious complaints. Research rarely mentions politeness as a dimension of interactional justice, either (see e.g., Strauss and Hill, 2001; Bolkan, 2007). Tax *et al.* (2008) proposed to analyze politeness as a component of interactional justice, for instance, but measured perceived politeness and did not consider concrete antecedents of politeness. Aside from Mattsson *et al.* (2004) and Dickinger and Bauernfeind (2009), no other research appears to analyse antecedents of politeness in written exchanges.

Our research seeks to fill three main gaps: (1) a methodological gap by relying on naturally occurring data excluding possible researcher bias (Silverman, 2006); (2) a theoretical gap by proposing to marketing scholars new dimensions for measuring politeness objectively; and (3) an epistemological gap by answering Homburg and Fürst (2005, 2007) and Homburg *et al.* (2010) calls for a better understanding of firms' practices and more managerial guidance.

Keywords: Justice Theory, Interactional justice, Complaining behavior, Theory of Face, Maxims of Grice, Politeness

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Purpose: The aim of this research is three-fold: to study actual firms' practices in a complaint setting, to show the relevance of linguistics frameworks for the analysis of politeness strategies used by firms, to identify and measure antecedents of perceived politeness.

Design/methodology/approach: Linguistics frameworks (theory of face, cooperation principle) and common markers of politeness were used for discourse analysis coding of the dimensions of politeness appearing in 226 actual responses to customer complaints made via an online forum. This was followed by a quantitative investigation of the correlations between these dimensions and a measure of perceived politeness.

Findings: Results showed the formalist framework used in academic marketing research to be incomplete and demonstrated that a culturalist approach allows for a better analysis of politeness strategies. Firms also did not comply with their stated satisfaction claims, with actual claims practices threatening customer satisfaction and loyalty by lowering the level of perceived politeness.

Research Limitations: The results are limited to French language usage and to complaints in an online setting. A larger sample is also needed for the confirmation of results.

Practical implications: Using common markers of politeness is not the most efficient strategy for increasing the perception of politeness. Firms should consider the theory of faces and the cooperation principles to improve politeness perceptions.

Originality/value: Unlike previous studies, primary data and an interdisciplinary approach were applied in this study to propose a more complete framework for analysis of politeness strategies in a complaint setting.

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Article Classification: Research Paper

Introduction

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Theoretical framework

The role of complaint handling on customer satisfaction

Managing customer dissatisfaction is part of operating a business. Companies receiving a complaint have two alternatives: ignore it or respond (Wirtz and Mattila, 2004). Effective resolution of complaints has been shown to consistently and dramatically improve customer satisfaction and customer retention (Hart *et al.*, 1990; Tax *et al.*, 1998). Customer retention has further been shown to improve firms' financial metrics and in particular profitability (Halloweel, 1996) which should motivate firms to scrutinize their complaint handling practices and improve them.

Many complaints are made verbally and to a frontline employee, resulting in an immediate answer. Harrisson-Walker (2001), however, found that 49.6% of customers complained in writing, leading to non-immediate answers that are usually sent via the same communication channel, mainly by email or letter.

The perceived justice framework

Although several frameworks exist for analyzing complaining behaviors, justice theory has been successfully applied in a variety of settings and is the prevalent model (Goodwin and Ross, 1992; Tax *et al.*, 1998; Sabadie *et al.*, 2006).

Justice theory has three components. Distributive justice models the equity perceived by the consumer in the complaint handling process (Maxham and Netemeyer, 2002). Procedural justice studies how rules and procedures impact the overall perception of justice (Tax et al. 2008). Interactional justice analyses the relationship between the complaining customer and the personnel in charge of the complaint handling.

Politeness belongs along other antecedents to interactional justice. Sabadie *et al.* (2006) differentiate the antecedents of interactional justice related to the respect of the customer from the antecedents related to the decision or the problem at the heart of the complaint. Among those related to respect, politeness and empathy emerge as important dimensions (McColl-Kennedy and Sparks 2003; Blodgett *et al.*, 1997; Mattila and Cranage, 2005; Johnston, 2001). As Sabadie *et al.*, (2006) state, however, research has yet to yield a consistent hierarchy of importance among the three justice theory components. Teo and Lim (2001) and Orsingher *et al.* (2010) observed the predominant role of distributive justice in customer satisfaction, while other researchers found procedural justice (McColl-Kennedy and Sparks, 2003; Oliver, 2009), or interactional justice predominant (del Rio-Lanza *et al.* 2009).

The role of politeness within the perceived justice framework
Politeness is an important component of the perceived justice framework (McColl-Kennedy and Sparks, 2003; Blodgett *et al.*, 1997; Mattila and Cranage, 2005). Given the proportion of complaints made in writing, hence requiring the same response format (Harrisson-Walker 2001), the rise of online channel has made politeness a central element in corporate communication.

To the best of our knowledge however, only two papers define and measure the antecedents of politeness in a complaint setting. Mattsson *et al.* (2004) investigated complaint letters and evaluated procedural and relational politeness. Relational politeness was measured by counting the frequency of "Thank You", "Please", "Look forward", and "Appreciate." Procedural politeness was the sum of the following variables: the opening phrase "Dear" and the closing phrases "yours sincerely" and "yours truly". Dickinger and Bauernfeind (2009) considered politeness as an antecedent of quality. The authors used a sample of written answers by airline companies and used four criteria to measure politeness: the presence/absence of an appropriate salutation, an acknowledgment, the firm representative's identity and the firm's identity.

The two papers cited above employ a methodology that correlates the level of politeness to the occurrence and frequency of certain words. Yet, there are no justifications as to whether this methodology effectively measures the perceived politeness. This limitation has led us to study politeness using alternative and perhaps more accurate indicators of how customers perceive politeness.

Politeness theory
Mattsson *et al.* (2004) and Dickinger and Bauernfeind (2009) employ a formalism-based approach of politeness that reduces politeness to certain words or expressions. Research on politeness in linguistics and pragmatics, however, has long used the culturalist approach, which assumes the regulation of socially- and culturally-normalized exchanges (Kerbat Orrechioni 1986). This approach posits that being polite requires the protagonists to adapt their speech register to the cultural context. If the exchange is formalized (e.g., due to the social gap between the protagonists), the protagonists will expect more politeness, resulting in a higher frequency of politeness markers. With a less formalized exchanged, the protagonists tacitly accept that politeness will not result in frequent politeness markers. Therefore, politeness should be studied within the appropriate context (Simonin, 2010). Accordingly, we have decided to use the theory of face and the concept of face-threatening acts (FTA) in our work (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

If the presence of politeness markers depends on the context, a lower frequency of markers is not sufficient to conclude on the overall politeness of the exchange. Being polite also depends on the level of cooperation between the different parties (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1986). In the complaint setting, where one protagonist (the complainant) seeks compensation, being

cooperative is essential to come to a positive outcome. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1994) posits that different levels of cooperation exist: between confrontation and consensus companies eventually tend to choose the latter to ensure a higher customer satisfaction. The importance of the cooperation principle leads us to include the cooperation principle by Grice (1975) in our conceptual model.

Theory of face
Linguistics defines politeness as the regulation of exchanges between participants and the adaptation of their linguistic registers (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1986). This need for regulation introduced the broadly accepted concept of face and of Face-Threatening Act (FTA), previously used in the complaint context (Reiter, 2005; Lerman, 2006).
Goffman (1967) first defined the theory of face to explain that the participants of an exchange try simultaneously to defend their personal territory and give a positive image of themselves. Territory relates to how a person uses space and time to create a distance from others. Territories can be spatial, temporal, or material.
Brown and Levinson (1987) advanced the concept of territory to define negative and positive faces. The positive face corresponds to the positive images that protagonists develop to associate to themselves during an exchange. The negative face corresponds to one's own territory. Since any exchange will affect protagonists' faces, the framework of FTA was proposed to understand how protagonists regulated their exchange. The underlying mechanism is based on politeness as a strategy to reformulate the message when a FTA cannot be avoided and when a recipient's face is threatened. In a complaint setting, the theory of face states that firms will defend their ethos in being consensual and adapt their responses in function of the customer's type of communication (Maingueneau 2000).
In a complaint setting, four faces should be taken into account: the positive and negative faces of the firm and the customer. Based on the definition of positive and negative faces and the notion of territory, Table 1 summarizes the dimensions of the threatening acts.

"Take in Table No.1"

Cooperation principle
Communication depends on cooperation between protagonists more than exchanging viewpoints. The parties must cooperate. The principles of cooperation (Grice, 1975) are based on four underlying maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner:

> The maxim of Quality
>> try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically:
>>> i. do not say what you believe to be false.
>>> ii. do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence
> The maxim of Quantity
>>> i. make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange.
>>> ii. do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
> The maxim of Relevance
>>> i. make your contributions relevant
> The maxim of Manner
>> be perspicuous, and specifically:
>>> i. avoid obscurity of expression
>>> ii avoid ambiguity
>>> iii. be brief

iv. be orderly (Grice 1975 in Stewart 1992: 28)

With these four maxims, maximum efficiency is reached when the speaker ensures that their contribution to the exchange is made at the right time in a conversation, so as to be fully and immediately understood (Stewart 1992).

Hypothesis development
We propose four hypotheses for this study.
Based on the markers of politeness used by Mattsson *et al.* (2004) and Dickinger and Bauernfeind (2009), we propose:
H1: The presence of common markers of politeness in the firm's answer positively correlates with perceived politeness

Based on the theory of face (Brown and Levinson, 1987) we propose:
H2a: threatening the customer's face negatively correlates with politeness
H2b: threatening the firm's face positively correlates with politeness

Based on the cooperation principle (Grice 1975) we propose:
H3: respecting the maxims of Grice positively correlates with politeness

Methodology
Researching companies' answers to individual complaints is difficult because the communications are often private. We looked, however, for a public source where the correspondence between complainants and companies could be retrieved without requesting authorisations. We found online forums met our criteria. Using online forums as a source of primary data for research is a well-accepted practice, which has already been used in a complaint setting (Harrison-Walker 2001). The exchanges on such forums are free of researcher bias (Silverman, 2006) and can be used for a content analysis (McAlister and Erffmeyer 2003).
The online forum we chose is managed by a non-profit organisation whose goal is helping customers get unresolved complaints addressed. Whenever a complaint is posted, the association is an intermediary and invites companies to post replies online.
We used a two-step methodology similar to Mattsson et al. (2004). First, we performed a discourse analysis and coded the politeness concepts used in companies' answers. Second, we quantitatively analysed the data to determine which politeness concepts were correlated with perceived politeness.

Data collection
The initial sample comprised 19117 exchanges between companies and complainants. Some 297 accounts of participating companies had been identified. Each exchange corresponded to a unique complaint per the forum guidelines. Statistics showed that 71 representatives' accounts had remained inactive, which left us with 226 active accounts. Mattson *et al.* (2004) have shown that employees tend to be homogenous in dealing with complaints. Based on the latter and following the methodology used by McLaren (2001), we therefore reduced the sample to one exchange by company. The final sample comprised 226 exchanges—still larger than the sample used by McAlister and Erffmeyer (2003).

Discourse analysis methodology
Consistent with Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1994), our analysis uses a culturalist model of politeness inherited from Brown and Levinson (1987), where the politeness and cooperation principle

are clearly differentiated. Complaints remain cooperation exchanges *per se* in spite of the conflict between the complainant and the company. Politeness, as a verbal strategy, allows that a consensus be looked for and to escape the risk of rupture in the dialogue (Bradley et al. 2010).

The purpose of the discourse analysis was to qualify the usage made by firms of the relevant politeness concepts. To achieve this, we coded the 226 exchanges based on the dimensions identified in the literature: six marks of politeness as defined by Mattsson *et al.* (2004) and Dickinger and Bauernfeind (2009). Further we coded the compliance of the answer with the four maxims of Grice (1975), and the presence/absence of the four types of FTA's (Brown and Levinson 1987). We also added FTA's for the firm's representative to reflect our finding (conform to Dickinger and Bauernfeind, 2009) that answers tended to mix the use of we/us/our and I. In total, we coded independently 16 different dimensions (referred to as "items" in Table 3). We achieved an initial inter-rater correlation of 0.84. Differences in coding between the two authors were resolved through discussion (Taylor 1999). Finally, we removed from the sample all answers that were not in French, were not addressing a complaint, or were sent after the complaint had been resolved. We ended up with 184 exploitable answers.

Quantitative analysis

The purpose of the quantitative phase was to determine which items studied in the qualitative phase were correlated with politeness. This required a measurement of each answer's perceived politeness.

To obtain this measurement, we used a double blind rating of perceived politeness on a 5-point Likert scale (Cherry, 1988; Lerman, 2006; Burke and Kraut, 2008). Two students (one male, one female) from our university performed the rating. To avoid any bias, we provided only practical instructions on how to rate the answers, but not as to what the definition of politeness was or what the purpose of the study was (Jansen and Janssen 2010). The two students received the 184 answers on individual sheets of paper without any other information than the identification number of each answer. All answers had been edited to avoid any discrepancy as far as fonts and colors used are concerned. The original formatting as it appeared on the forum had been kept.

We obtained an initial inter-rater correlation factor of 0.6, higher than what was obtained by Lerman (2006). As in the qualitative phase, the differences were resolved between the coders through discussion of their evaluations.

The binary nature of the dependent variables invalidates the use of an ordinary regression method and requires that a Logit regression be used (Mattsson *et al.*, 2004). The calculations were performed with Stata (see Table 3 for results): a Log Likelihood of -171.46 and a McFadden Pseudo R² of 0.3099 were obtained.

Results

Common marks of politeness

The analysis revealed the almost systematic use of salutation (84.4%) and closing phrase in companies' answers to complaints (70.4%). This confirms the results by Dickinger and Bauernfeind (2009), who found that 82.8% of companies' answers contained a formal greeting. The name of the company is mentioned in our sample only in 45.2% of the cases, whereas Dickinger and Bauernfeind report a 67.7% rate. More surprising are the differences for Dickinger and Bauernfeind categories "Was any customer's name used in the greeting?" (item 2) and "Was the customer thanked in the reply?" (item 4). Whereas the authors reported rates of 89.7% and 89.5% respectively, we found only 18.3% and 14.7%. This could be

caused by the medium used for answering the complaint. High percentages were measured in answers sent by mail whereas our sample was based on electronic communication. Marcoccia (2005) has showed that online communication has completely changed the previously accepted standards of politeness. Letters may convey higher expectations in terms of politeness, resulting in the differences observed when compared to our sample.

Face-threatening acts
The analysis showed surprising results about face-threatening acts, although we are aware of no previous research that has investigated quantitatively the FTA in a complaint setting.
In 43.5% of the answers, the customer's positive face was threatened. In other words, the company criticised the customer, refuted the customer's claim, or used irony or made fun of the customer. In 36.0% of the answers, the company asked the customer to perform an action, which according to the face theory concept is a threat for the negative face of the customer. Most of the firms' enquiries actually aimed at getting necessary information to investigate the customers' claim.
Also surprising are the results related to FTAs for the firm's face. In only 52.9% of the answers (item 9), the firm's answer contained an apology which resulted in a FTA for the firm's positive face. This means that in 47.1% of the answers, the firm didn't apologize for the customer's problem. Also surprising is that 50.0% of the answers contained no promise (item 10) that would threaten the firm's negative face. This promise is not necessarily linked to a redress; the promise can also be linked to further investigations of the origin of the problem and a future follow-up on the part of the firm.
Finally, based on the Dickinger and Bauernfeind (2009) proposal to analyse empathy through the use of we/us/our and I, we took FTAs for the faces of the firm's representative into account. We found out that 45.7% of the answers contained both we/us/our and I. In only 20.9% of those answers (item 11) did the firm's representative apologise. In 41.9% of those answers, however, the employee made a promise.

Maxims of Grice
In a setting of complaint, cooperation is from the beginning unbalanced since the customer expects a solution to his or her problem. The customer has the right to be less cooperative. The company, on the other hand, has to satisfy the client although the complaint in itself threatens several of its faces.
The maximal cooperation should follow the Gricean maxims: it should be true, brief, relevant, and clear. Companies flout the maxim of quality (be true) when they imply the customer is not telling the truth, or when they make claim that are either untrue or that can hardly be verified. The maxim of quantity (be brief) is flouted when the company provides an unnecessarily long answer. The maxim of relation (be relevant) is flouted when the company doesn't address the very subject of the complaint. The maxim of manner (be clear) states that an answer should be organized and free of any obscure explanation ambiguous terms. Although most answers fulfill the maxim of quality (item 14: 89.2%) and of manner (item 16: 85.5%), almost one-fourth of the answers flouted the maxims of quantity and relevance. In particular, firms flout the maxim of quantity when they produce lengthy answers with records of detailed facts as an answer to a complaint which was itself based on factual and detailed arguments. Even more intriguing is the fact that only 72.6% of firms' answers are relevant (maxim of relation), indicating that 27.4% of the answers didn't address the very subject of the complaint. This is particularly problematic as relevance is the most important dimension of all (Sperber and Wilson, 1989).

Dimensions correlated to perceived politeness

Table 2 summarises our evaluation of perceived politeness ratings.

"Take in Table No. 2"

Table 3 illustrates the logistic regression results and shows that only four out of sixteen dimensions are significantly correlated at p<0.05 (items 3, 7, 8 and 11) and one (item 16) at p<0.10.

"Take in Table No. 3"

H1 is validated for the "closing phrase" dimension defined in the work by Mattsson *et al.* (2004) and shows, as expected, a positive correlation of 0.89 (p=0.018). All other markers of politeness were not significantly correlated to the response. This is not really a surprise. Given our online context and the culturalist approach, expectations are lower and the recipient's (complainant's) emphasis is on other dimensions. Given the growing use of online communication channels, relevance of common markers of politeness is put in the online context.

H2a is validated for the customer's positive face, with a high and statistically very significant coefficient of -1.2677 (p=0.003). This proves that firms criticizing customers or using irony in their answers to customers expose themselves to negative consequences in terms of perceived politeness. Although this result may seem intuitive, the qualitative results show that 43.5% of firms' answers contain a FTA of this type. Review of these two results questions the satisfaction policy claimed by most firms and highlights most companies' lack of guidelines for answering complaints.

H2a is not confirmed for the customer's negative face. The coefficient of 0.7358 (p=0.036) is positive, indicating perceived politeness increases with a threat of the customer's negative face. Although counterintuitive, this result can be explained by the very nature of the threats. Most firms requested information from the customer to research the origin of the problem. Customers could perceive this as the firm's effort to resolve the complaint. Previous research indicates effort is positively correlated to customer satisfaction, possibly explaining the sign of the correlation (Tax et al. 2008).

H2b could only be validated for the firm's representative positive face, which shows a positive and very significant correlation of 1.6016 (p=0.008), whereas no significant correlation could be found for the firm's faces and the firm's representative's negative face. Our results showed 45.7% of answers mixed the use of first person singular pronouns and first person plural pronouns.

H3 could only be validated for the maxim of manner ("be clear") with a positive correlation of 1.0458 at p=0.051. This result underpins the importance of providing clear answers to complaining customers and to respect the principle of cooperation even in situations where the lack of objectivity on the part of the customer may impede his perception.

Conclusions and managerial recommendations

From a conceptual viewpoint, we find that marketing scholars have used incomplete frameworks to analyze politeness. The quantitative analysis of our dataset shows that the dimensions used by Dickinger and Bauernfeind (2009) and Mattsson *et al.* (2004) are incomplete to fully assess politeness. Apologizing (item 11) and being clear (item 16) are better and statistically more significant strategies than using common markers to increase politeness. The highly negative effect of criticism (item 7) indicates that perceived politeness can be greatly increased when firms try not to threaten the customer's positive face. Adding

FTAs and the maxims of Grice as additional frameworks to analyse politeness improves our understanding of politeness strategies and their effect on perceived politeness. These are important findings for firms when answering customer complaints.

From an analytical viewpoint, our qualitative analysis shows some convergence with previous research carried out on letters (Mattsson et al. 2004, Dickinger and Bauernfeind 2009) but also some major differences. In particular, our sample shows that companies seldom use the customer's name or pseudonym in the salutation and even more rarely thank the customer for the complaint. We explain these discrepancies by the context of the online forum, which remains informal and conveys lower expectations of politeness markers (Marcoccia, 2005). We also hypothesize that the cultural context may play a role. Dickinger and Bauernfeind had indeed carried out their research in the U.S., where companies acknowledge more easily than in Europe (van Mulken and van der Meer, 2005).

For the cooperation principle, we showed that despite the complaint setting, firms flout Grice's maxims by not respecting the principles of cooperation. In particular, the most important maxim of all, relation (Sperber and Wilson, 1989), is flouted in 27.4% of the exchanges. This puts the very outcome of the complaint at risk. In the context of an online forum, this strategy is damaging since the complainants propose their versions of the truth, which requires firm's increased effort to cooperate (McLaren, 2001).

Despite the general usage of some commonly accepted forms of politeness, we find that firms frequently threaten customers' faces and try to preserve their faces as much as possible. Jansen and Janssens (2010) observation that firms must maintain the balance between "keeping the client happy and preserving the image of the organization" applies here. This behavior is particularly damaging in the online context since the threats to the customer's faces are made publicly, which negatively enhances firm's reputation. Our study of actual answers is therefore an indication that firms' actual practices do not reflect their typical "satisfaction guaranteed" policies.

The findings above are a first step to address Homburg and Fürst (2005, 2007) and Homburg et al. (2010) calls for better managerial guidance. As far as politeness in a complaint setting is concerned, our research tells that managers should better pay attention to faces than rely on common markers to increase the perceived politeness of their answers. In particular managers should teach employees how to avoid criticism and refusal of customers' arguments and encourage them to apologize in their own name. Employees should also be taught how to respect the cooperation principle and in particular how to produce clear answers that can be understood under emotional circumstances.

Limitations

First, politeness is culture- and obviously language-based. The exchanges we examined were in French, so the results apply only to the French language. Second, the differences between our research and Dickinger and Bauernfeind (2009) also suggest that the medium used for answering a complaint (letter vs. email) influences the formalization and the expectations in terms of politeness. Our results are therefore limited to online communications and complaint settings. Third, firmer conclusions would require a larger sample with multiple exchanges per firm.

Further research

We believe this exploratory study indicates several avenues for further research.

First, the additional dimensions proposed to assess perceived politeness will have to be measured on a larger sample to confirm the correlations and measure the relative weights of the different dimensions to conclude on the most effective strategies to follow.

Second, the differences observed between offline (letters) and online contexts lead us to think that a broader look should be taken at firms' practices when answering complaints and the relevance of the perceived justice dimensions in dependence of the context.

Third, the variety of firms analyzed may allow for a segmentation of the sample and a better understanding of firms' practices in terms of size and industry.

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Threatening act for	Negative face	Positive face
Firm	The negative face of the firm can be threatened by • Making a promise to the customer • Accept an offer made by the customer • Making an offer reluctantly to the customer	The positive face of the firm can be threatened by • Confessing a previous FTA • Accepting a compliment • Confessing guiltiness • Apologising • Acknowledging the customer's complaint • Not controlling one's own reaction or emotions
Customer	The negative face of the customer can be threatened by a firm's : • Request to provide evidence and factual information • Ban on the customer to do something • Advice to the customer • Request to provide confidential information	The positive face of the customer can be threatened by the firm through • Criticism of the customer's behaviour or arguments • Irony • Reproaches • Mocking

Table 1. The dimensions of positive and negative faces for the firm and for the complainant (based on Brown and Levinson, 1987; Enache and Popa, 2008)

Value	1 (very impolite)	2 (impolite)	3 (neither impolite, nor polite)	4 (polite)	5 (very polite)
Count (N=184)	4	26	54	76	24
Proportion	2.17%	14.13%	29.35%	41.30%	13.04%

Table 2. Distribution of the perceived politeness responses on a 5-point Likert scale

Criteria	Item no.	Result of coding as a percentage of firms' answers fulfilling the criteria		Logit regression	
		Current research	Dickinger and Bauernfeind (2009)	Coefficient	p
Salutation	1	84.4%	82.8%	-0.5082872	0.25
Name of the customer or pseudonym	2	18.3%	89.7%	0.0370948	0.928
Closing phrase	3	70.4%	n/a	0.8991231	0.018**
"Thank you" or equivalent	4	14.5%	89.5%	-0.0800534	0.869
Identity of the company's representative	5	44.1%	n/a	-0.0130702	0.967
Identity of the company	6	45.2%	67.7%	0.2290661	0.498
FTA for customer's positive face	7	43.5%	n/a	-1.267728	0.003*
FTA for customer's negative face	8	36.0%	n/a	0.7358564	0.036**
FTA for firm's positive face	9	52.2%	n/a	0.514153	0.181
FTA for firm's negative face	10	50.0%	n/a	0.3075718	0.367
FTA for firm's representative's positive face	11	20.9%	n/a	1.601635	0.008*
FTA for firm's representative's negative face	12	41.9%	n/a	0.6025905	0.133
"Be Brief" (Maxim of quantity)	13	73.7%	n/a	0.3298832	0.469
"Be True" (Maxim of quality)	14	89.2%	n/a	0.6575666	0.267
"Be Relevant" (Maxim of relation)	15	72,6%	n/a	-0.2816236	0.468
"Be Clear" (maxim of manner)	16	85.5%	n/a	1.045841	0.051***
* significant at p<0.01; ** significant at p<0.05; *** significant at p<0.10 Log likelihood = -171.46292 Pseudo R2 = 0.3099					

Table 3. Results of the qualitative and quantitative analysis