

LANGUAGE IN WEBCARE:  
INTERDISCIPLINARY  
PERSPECTIVES

Ghent, Belgium  
November 22-23, 2018





**Organizers**

Sofie Decock (Ghent University)

Bernard De Clerck (Ghent University)

Rebecca Van Herck (Ghent University)

Bart Larivière (KULeuven)

**Funding**

Department of Translation, Interpreting & Communication, Ghent University

Faculty of Arts and Philosophy, Ghent University

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# Programme

Keynote lectures and presentations: Room A104

Catering: Room A004

THURSDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2018

9.00-9.30	Registration / Welcome Desk / Breakfast Reception
9.30-10.00	Word of welcome and introduction
10.00-11.00	<b>Keynote lecture 1: Camilla Vasquez (University of South Florida)</b> <i>Considering etic and emic perspectives on webcare</i>
11.00-11.15	Coffee break
11.15-12.45	<b>Presentations (3):</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ursula Lutzky (Vienna University of Economics and Business). <i>"You keep saying you are sorry": Exploring the use of apologies in customer communication on Twitter.</i></li> <li>2. Irene Cenni, Patrick Goethals (Ghent University). <i>Hotel responses to tourists' reviews. A cross-linguistic analysis.</i></li> <li>3. Rebecca Van Herck, Sofie Decock, Bridgit Fastrich (Ghent University and Justus-Liebig University Gießen). <i>A move analysis of complaint response e-mails in a B2C setting.</i></li> </ol>
12.45-14.00	Lunch
14.00-15.00	<b>Keynote lecture 2: Guda van Noort (University of Amsterdam)</b> <i>Webcare: Current trends and future perspectives.</i>
15.00-15.15	Coffee break
15.15-17.15	<b>Presentations (4):</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Jos Bartels, Job Steen, Christine Liebrecht (Tilburg University): <i>A Decade of Conversational Human Voice. Systematic Literature Review and Propositions for Future Research.</i></li> <li>2. Renée van Os, Daphne Hachmang, Mustafa Akpinar, Els van der Pool (HAN University of Applied Sciences). <i>Conversational Human Voice in webcare. A study in the Public Transport sector.</i></li> <li>3. Christine Liebrecht (Tilburg University), Charlotte van Hooijdonk (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam). <i>Employing the Conversational Human Voice in Public and Private Webcare Channels.</i></li> <li>4. Michelle van Pinxteren, Mark Pluymaekers, Jos Lemmink (Zuyd University of Applied Sciences). <i>The future of online service interactions: How communicative and linguistic strategies affect user perception of chatbots and other conversational agents.</i></li> </ol>
17.15-18.15	Drinks
19.15	Dinner

FRIDAY 23 NOVEMBER 2018

9.00-10.00	<b>Keynote lecture 3: Rob le Pair (Radboud University Nijmegen)</b> <i>Why does @Organization not react to my question? A pragmalinguistic and stylistic perspective on complaint tweets and webcare.</i>
10.00-10.30	Coffee break
10.30-12.00	<b>Presentations (3):</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Wolfgang Weitzl (University of Vienna), Clemens Hutzinger (Private University Seeburg Castle), Sabine Einwiller (University of Vienna). <i>How (un-)committed customers cope with (non-)economic service failures and online recovery attempts.</i></li> <li>2. Paola Catenaccio (Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy). <i>Discursive strategies of legitimation on the web: stakeholder dialogue in the agrobiotech industry.</i></li> <li>3. Svenja Widdershoven, Mark Pluymaekers, José M.M. Bloemer (Zuyd University of Applied Sciences). <i>Disentangling a web of emotions: How the characteristics of Facebook and Twitter affect service employees' perceived ability to regulate emotions.</i></li> </ol>
12.00-13.30	Lunch
13.30-14.30	<b>Keynote lecture 4: Valerie Creelman (Saint-Mary's University)</b> <i>"Thank you for reaching out": Conversational Human Voice in Customer Care During Crisis Events.</i>
14.30-14.45	Coffee break
14.45-15.45	<b>Presentations (2):</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Marie-Louise Brunner, Stefan Diemer (Trier University of Applied Sciences and Saarland University). <i>Evaluating Channel-Specific Customer Communication via Social Media – A Case Study</i></li> <li>2. Chloé Lybaert, Bernard De Clerck and Mathias Seghers (Ghent University). <i>The influence of (sub)standard language on credibility during critical moments in online customer communication.</i></li> </ol>
15.45	Rounding up discussion

# Abstracts: Keynote lectures

# Camilla Vasquez

Department of World Languages  
University of South Florida, USA

## Considering etic and emic perspectives on webcare.

Webcare has been defined by scholars as a communicative practice in which businesses engage in online interactions with (dissatisfied) consumers, with the aim of addressing consumer feedback – especially negative feedback (Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012). In this presentation, I share the findings of a study that investigated a range of practices observed in businesses' reactions to nWOM, or negative word of mouth. Specifically, the study focused on 50 successful restaurants in a metropolitan area of the southeastern U.S. and examined the various ways in which those restaurants responded to negative reviews on two popular reviewing platforms, *TripAdvisor* and *Yelp*. I further triangulate the patterns of online responses observed with interview data gathered from the same set of businesses. In particular, I pay close attention to the metadiscourse used by businesses in describing their approaches to, and their interactions with, nWOM. Drawing on key notions from applied linguistics, such as *activity type* (Levinson, 1992; Sarangi, 2000) and *audience design* (Bell, 1984, 2001), I further explore the question of whether businesses conceptualize their own online practices as webcare – or rather, as some *other* type of activity. I argue that how businesses talk about their communicative practices is not only consequential, but that by attending to the language that they use in this regard, we can gain emic insights into how they understand the very activity they are – or are not – engaging in.

# Guda van Noort

Department of Communication Science  
University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands

## **Webcare: Current trends and future perspectives.**

Somewhat more than a decade ago (in 2006) UPC started with a webcare team, to switch 'cold handling' to engage with consumers more reactively, proactively and interactively. They became an example for many organizations both in the profit and non-profit sector. Along with practice of webcare, webcare research developed.

In 2012 webcare was first defined, bridging the customer service, reputation management, marketing purposes of this practice, and a new field of research emerged. Webcare research focused mainly on responding to negative word of mouth (nWOM) and in general answers the questions *whether* and *when* one should respond, with *what* response, and *how* one should respond. While researchers are answering these questions, and provide important insights, the world is changing. New communication channels emerge, such as human-to-machine channels, and the way consumers communicate about brands and interact with brands is changing, for example from textual to visual modes. At the same time digital communication methods are in development as well, expanding modes of data collection and analyses. This presentation outlines current trends and developments in communication and communication technology and the challenges and opportunities these developments bring for future webcare research.

## Rob le Pair

Centre for Language Studies

Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands

### **Why does @Organization not react to my question? A pragmalinguistic and stylistic perspective on complaint tweets and webcare.**

An organization's webcare is aimed at dealing with as many consumer complaints as possible. In this contribution, I will raise the question whether linguistic features of negative word-of-mouth tweets may lead to differences in the perception of these complaints, and consequently to differences in webcare response. Our study shows that a pragmalinguistic approach to complaint tweets is helpful in explaining the occurrence of webcare interaction between organizations and complaining consumers. The results of two corpus analyses (with 6533 and 1479 negative word-of-mouth tweets) suggest that the perception of the illocutionary force of the complaint tweet depends both on the position of @Organization in the tweet (at the very beginning or elsewhere in the tweet), and on the direct or indirect way of addressing an organization when realizing the speech act of complaining in a tweet.

When we examine complaints and (the succes of) webcare interaction, it is also important to pay attention to the communication style in webcare. In recent research, the framework for analysing linguistic realizations of a conversational human voice in webcare has been refined and investigated systematically. I will show how some of these linguistic features seem to influence the amount of webcare interaction.

# Valerie Creelman

Sobey School of Business

Department of Marketing and Business Communication

Saint-Mary's University, Canada

## **"Thank you for reaching out": Conversational Human Voice in Customer Care During Crisis Events.**

Digital conversations and their effective management in online forums constitute what Michael Hulme once described as integral to an organization's Reputational Resource when cultivating and controlling its brand and global image across social media platforms. These platforms have become the digital marketplace where the give-and-take of conversation, at its best, takes on a cooperative aspect, as companies collaborate with their customers and clients to sustain, mitigate, and, in some cases, repair their relationships with customers through these digital conversations. Yet language and its effective use in these online encounters has gained remarkably little attention in studies dedicated to computer-mediated communication and interactive online marketing in retail and service settings. Even less attention, or so it seems, has been dedicated to examining how companies should respond to customers online during a crisis event. Drawing from the existing customer service literature on how best to respond to customers' complaints and concerns in social media forums, this presentation will showcase the importance of sustaining a conversational, human voice in online exchanges by comparing the social media advice presented as best practices with the actual practices demonstrated by customer care representatives engaging with customers online during two crisis events: one in the service sector, the other in the retail sector.

# Abstracts: Presentations

# “You keep saying you are sorry”. Exploring the use of apologies in customer communication on Twitter.

Ursula Lutzky

Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria

Contacting airlines about a specific issue, such as lost luggage, cancellations or refunds, can be very time-consuming and may require high levels of patience, especially when resorting to the usual means of customer service communication, such as phone calls or email. At the same time, trying to find specific information on their websites may involve advanced navigation skills given the maze of subpages and hyperlinks with which customers are often met. It is thus not surprising that passengers increasingly accept airlines' offer of getting in touch with them on Twitter (see e.g. the Contacts page for British Airways).

This article addresses the application of the social media site Twitter in the world of business and focuses in particular on its use by airlines to interact with their customers. The analysis is based on the Planes Twitter Corpus, which comprises 6.7 million words. It includes tweets that customers directed at 13 British and Irish airlines over a period of four months as well as the airlines' replies. The aim of this study is to explore the use of apologies in online customer communication (see also Page 2014) and to investigate their perception as a discursive strategy for the legitimization of corporate activity.

With reference to customer service exchanges on social media, it has been noted recently that “[t]his is the Age of Sorry” (Segal 2018). While this observation was made regarding British train companies, the current article explores to what extent the same can be said about British airlines. It focuses on the use of the Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID) sorry in tweets addressed to customers, in an attempt to save an airline's face and maintain its reputation as a reliable air travel provider. At the same time, the analysis explores the customers' use of sorry, with a view to discovering its metapragmatic potential (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2014). That is to say that both performative and descriptive uses are studied, including customers' reaction to and discussion of airlines' use of the apology IFID. Embedded in the theoretical framework of pragmatics, this study uses a corpus linguistic methodology to gain further insights into the speech act of apologising and its communicative function in the context of customer service exchanges online. By exploring its effectiveness as a communicative strategy, it therefore contributes to an increased understanding of service interactions on social media and to enhancing customer communication in 280 characters.

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# Hotel responses to tourists' reviews. A cross-linguistic analysis.

Irene Cenni, Patrick Goethals

Department of Translation, Interpreting and Communication  
Ghent University, Belgium

TripAdvisor is currently the most popular travel platform where tourists can share information and opinions about travel services such as accommodation, restaurants and attractions. It mainly contains user-generated rankings, ratings and reviews (Mauri & Minazzi, 2013; Vásquez, 2011).

In this contribution we will analyze responses written by the accommodations' management to negative reviews posted on TripAdvisor. We will analyze a total number of 300 responses written in three languages, namely English, Dutch and Italian concerning accommodations located in London, Amsterdam and Rome.

Hotel responses to online reviews have mostly been studied within marketing and hospitality studies (e.g. Chan & Guillet, 2011; Levy et al., 2013; Sparks & Bradley, 2017; Wei et al., 2013). Fewer studies have dealt with these specific examples of online reputation management from a communicative and linguistic perspective, one of the few remarkable exceptions, though, being the study of Zhang and Vásquez (2014).

Based on Zhang and Vásquez's research we will contribute to the study of hotels' responses extending the discussion to reviews written not only in English but also in Dutch and Italian, thus adding a cross-linguistic dimension to the analysis. More specifically, discourse characteristics will be examined, paying attention not only to the rhetorical moves structuring the responses, but also investigating the relative frequencies and different linguistic realizations of those moves in the three languages under examination. Results brought to light a substantial similarity between English and Dutch responses in terms of move frequencies, while consistent divergences have been found when the English and Dutch data were compared with the Italian subset. In particular, Italian response writers use more often moves as 'justifications' and 'deny responsibility' than their English or Dutch counterparts, thus highlighting how Italian responses are potentially written differently, preferring a more 'defensive' style when addressing a service failure.

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# A move analysis of complaint response e-mails in a B2C setting.

**Rebecca Van Herck, Sofie Decock**

Department of Translation, Interpreting and Communication  
Ghent University, Belgium

**Bridgit Fastrich**

Department of English  
Justus-Liebig University Gießen, Germany

With the rise of new media, consumers are now more than ever empowered to reach out to companies and give negative feedback when the received product or service was not up to expected standards. Posting reviews and complaints publicly on social media is a popular option, and this type of negative feedback as well as organizations' responses to it have been analyzed in recent studies (Zhang and Vásquez, 2014; Einwiller and Steilen, 2015; Cenni and Goethals, 2017). However, companies prefer to handle complaints privately as opposed to publicly (Einwiller and Steilen, 2015). Many complaints are handled via e-mail, and – to our knowledge – only few studies (Decock and Spiessens, 2017; Packard et al, 2018) have discussed the genre of organizational e-mail responses to customer complaints.

In this paper we want to present the results of a move analysis to understand the specific discourse structure and the linguistic realization of the moves within this genre (Swales and Najjar, 1987; Bhatia, 1993, 2008; Upton and Cohen, 2009). We collected 150 English-language organizational e-mail replies to complaints (23.157 words) from 17 large UK companies in four industries (telecommunications, travel, delivery, and online retail).

Our analysis reveals that six moves are used frequently (i.e. more than 60%): *salutation*, *gratitude*, *apology*, *explanation*, *conclusion*, and *closing*. Moves that occur less frequently are *empathy*, *improvement of services or products*, *reference to standards*, and *investigation*. This suggests that organizational e-mail replies to complaints are a rather conventionalized genre in which interpersonal and transactional stance are kept in balance, with some companies putting more effort than others in stressing the importance they place in professionalism and quality standards. A specific characteristic of interpersonal moves such as apology and gratitude is that they can occur both at the beginning and towards the end of e-mails, that they are flexible in terms of content, and that they can be repeated. When comparing these results with studies on B2B organizational e-mail replies to complaints and with responses to reviews on TripAdvisor (Decock and De Clerck, subm.; Zhang and Vásquez, 2014), we see, inter alia, that interpersonal moves are more likely to be present in B2C, low transaction settings as opposed to B2B, high transaction settings. As far as the linguistic realization of interpersonal moves is concerned, we found variation with respect to the use of formal or informal language and the degree of specificity in referring to the content of the customer's complaint, and we noticed that interpersonal moves are far more often written from a personal (rather than corporate) perspective in comparison to transactional moves. The study's findings provide insights into how customer service agents tend to handle complaints via e-mail in B2C settings, and they serve as a necessary first step to be able to conduct experiments in order to find out what the best communicative strategies are in organizational e-mail replies to complaints in these settings.

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# A Decade of Conversational Human Voice. Systematic Literature Review and Propositions for Future Research.

Jos Bartels, Job Steen, Christine Liebrecht

Tilburg Center for Cognition and Communication (TiCC)

Tilburg University, the Netherlands

Conversational human voice (CHV, Kelleher & Miller, 2006; Kelleher, 2009) is considered to be a key concept in improving relationships between organizations and its publics via online communication. This personal and engaging communication style was introduced in the interactive communication environment of organizational blogs (e.g., Kelleher, 2009; Park & Cameron, 2014) and has been implemented in a variety of webcare contexts (e.g., Huibers & Verhoeven, 2014; Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012; Van Noort, Willemsen & Antheunis, 2013).

Although the specifics of CHV as defined by Kelleher (2009) seem to concretize the abstract and wide-ranging definition of the concept, it still allows divergent interpretations, resulting in various operationalizations and findings in empirical research (Van Hooijdonk & Liebrecht, 2018). The aim of the current study is to capture the most important characteristics and results of research on CHV. We conducted a systematic literature review on the concept of CHV by using articles from 2006 to March 2017 available in Web of Science and SciVerse Scopus. The final analyses included 48 articles.

There seems to be some connection with other fields of research, but a vast majority of the studies are conducted in the field of public relations (e.g., Public Relations Review, Journal of Public Relations Research). With the exception of Journal of Interactive Marketing, the focus does not seem to be on business or marketing journals, making it a much more narrow construct than it could be, based on its theoretical concept. Most of these studies in public relations further use CHV as arguments on their hypotheses. Only a minority of the studies involve CHV as manipulation or construct in empirical research. These studies mostly conduct an experimental design and to a lesser extent questionnaires. Striking, although all empirical studies rely on the same definition of CHV, the findings further revealed that these studies use a variety of manipulations and operationalizations. These differences seem to make CHV a more fuzzy concept than desirable.

Based on the systematic literature review, we conclude that although the construct of CHV has great potential in interactive online settings between organizations and its publics, but it does not maximize its full potential yet. Implications for future research are elaborated.

# Conversational Human Voice in webcare. A study in the Public Transport sector.

Renée van Os, Daphne Hachmang, Mustafa Akpınar, Els van der Pool

lectoraat Human Communication Development / Online Interactie

HAN University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands

This article reports on a content analysis of conversations started by travelers (consumers) on various public and private social media channels with a Dutch Public Transport (PT) operator – a phenomenon that is referred to in the literature as ‘reactive webcare’ (Van Noort & Willemsen, 2011; Van Os, Hachmang & Van der Pool, 2016). The study investigates the relation between the use of ‘Conversational Human Voice’ (CHV) by the PT operator and the change in sentiment by the traveler during the conversation. Comparisons are made between conversations taking place on public vs. private social media channels.

The research questions of the study were as follows:

1. Which CHV aspects are used, and to what extent, by the PT operator in reactive webcare-conversations with travelers?
2. What is the effect of the use of CHV by the PT operator on the change of sentiment by the traveler during the conversation?
3. To what extent differs the use of CHV + effect on the traveler per channel (public vs. private)?

Conversational Human Voice (CHV) is defined by Kelleher (2009) as “an engaging and natural style of organizational communication as perceived by an organization’s public based on interactions between individuals in the organization and individuals in publics” (Kelleher, 2009). An operationalization of CHV in a webcare-context is provided by Van Noort, Willemsen, Kerkhof and Verhoeven (2014). They define three tactics for organizations to establish CHV in webcare conversations, including (1) message personalization, (2) informal speech, and (3) invitational rhetoric.

In this study, CHV is further unraveled into eight aspects. 241 conversations were analyzed, with a total of 1390 messages. Each message in the conversation was analyzed individually (messages sent by the PT operator were coded for CHV; messages of travelers were coded for sentiment – based on which the change in sentiment could be calculated throughout the conversation). The interreliability scores of the separate coding elements (aspects + sentiment) varied between 0.79 and 1.00 (Cohen’s Kappa).

Results show that the aspects (a) organization responds as an individual (97,1%) and (b) use of informal language (77,0%) are used the most by the PT operator. CHV aspects that determine a positive change in sentiment by the traveler during the conversation are (a) use of informal language and (b) showing sympathy (both  $p < .05$ ).

The comparison between the public and private channel show a significant higher use of (a) informal language and (b) language to compensate for the lack of non-verbal communication on the private channel (both  $p < .001$ ). For the effect of the use of CHV on the change of sentiment by the traveler, no significant differences were found.

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# Employing the Conversational Human Voice in Public and Private Webcare Channels.

**Christine Liebrecht**

Tilburg Center for Cognition and Communication (TiCC)

Tilburg University, the Netherlands

**Charlotte van Hooijdonk**

Department of Language, Literature and Communication

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands

The Dutch Red Cross engages in webcare through public (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram) and private social media channels (e.g., Twitter DM, Facebook Messenger, and Whatsapp). An important factor affecting the effectiveness of webcare is the organisation's communication style, which is referred to as the Conversational Human Voice (CHV, Kelleher, 2009; Kelleher & Miller, 2006). CHV is a personal and engaging communication style from the organisation to its stakeholders and positively affects stakeholders' perception of the organisation (Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012). However, the definition of CHV allows divergent interpretations, resulting in various operationalisations in experimental webcare research (see for an extensive discussion Van Hooijdonk & Liebrecht, 2018, to appear). This project (funded by a NWO KIEM grant for creative industries) aims to investigate which conversational linguistic elements are used in webcare messages of the Dutch Red Cross and how the channel type influences the conversational linguistic elements used.

## Method

Via the OBI4wan monitoring tool a random sample of 410 webcare dialogues between the Dutch Red Cross and their stakeholders was collected. This sample contained public conversations on Twitter (75), Facebook (75), Instagram (35) and private conversations on Twitter DM (75), Facebook Messenger (75), and Whatsapp (75). The conversational linguistic elements were manually coded using the identification instrument of Van Hooijdonk and Liebrecht (2018, to appear). This instrument distinguishes several conversational linguistic elements divided in three main categories, i.e., personalisation (such as greeting the customer), informal language (such as using abbreviations), and invitational rhetoric (such as showing sympathy) (Van Noort, Willemsen, Kerkhof, & Verhoeven, 2014). Besides the linguistic elements of CHV, the monitoring strategy (reactive versus proactive) and the stakeholders' sentiment at the start and end of the conversation was also coded.

## Results

The Dutch Red Cross often personalise their webcare responses, but hardly use informal language and invitational rhetoric. Moreover, differences in the organisation's tone of voice were found between the public and private channels and the sentiment in the stakeholders' messages. For example, on Instagram the Dutch Red Cross often responded to positive stakeholders' messages using informal language whereas on Facebook Messenger they often responded to stakeholders' negative remarks using personalisation. It can be concluded that the Dutch Red Cross and its stakeholders adapt their messages to the social norms and characteristics of the channels (e.g., Waterloo, Baumgartner, Peter, & Valkenburg, 2017).

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# The future of online service interactions: How communicative and linguistic strategies affect user perception of chatbots and other conversational agents.

Michelle van Pinxteren, Mark Pluymaekers, Jos Lemmink

Research Center for International Relationship Management

Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands

The advent of self-service technologies (SSTs) has repeatedly been proclaimed to revolutionize interactions between consumers and service providers (Meuter et al., 2000). This has severe implications for online service management (Parasuraman and Grewal, 2000). Since an increasing proportion of service interactions is now handled by intelligent machines (e.g. chatbots, virtual agents, robots), it is crucial to gain insight into the communicative and linguistic strategies that foster trust in these machines and the service providers behind them. The research reported in this study is part of a PhD project that aims to uncover to what extent strategies used by human service employees can be implemented successfully in such machines.

As a first step, a literature review was conducted to identify (1) which communicative and linguistic strategies human service employees employ during service interactions and (2) which of these strategies already have been researched in the context of human-machine interactions. The literature review, which spans 136 articles published in different streams of literature ranging from service marketing to human-computer interaction, reveals that many of the strategies that have been researched in human-to-human service interactions have not yet been tested in human-machine interactions.

One of these strategies, *linguistic mimicry*, was the focus of a first pilot experiment. Linguistic mimicry is the repetition of words and phrases and has been found to foster trust in human-to-human interactions (e.g. Maddux et al., 2008; Swaab et al., 2011). We used a 2x4 between-subjects design in which participants were asked to observe a chat interaction between a customer and a customer service agent, who was indicated to be either a human or a chatbot. The agent's level of mimicry was manipulated by either repeating the customer's content words, phrase structures, emotion characters and abbreviations, or using synonyms that were similar in content but different in form. In this way, four conditions were created in which the number of instances of linguistic mimicry by the agent was either 0, 12, 24 or 36. After the interaction, perceived trust in the agent and theoretically related variables (e.g. liking and self-other overlap) were measured using a survey.

Preliminary results indicate that (1) linguistic mimicry does not have a linear positive effect on the different outcome variables and (2) the effect of linguistic mimicry depends on whether participants think they are speaking to a human or a chatbot. Currently, additional data are being collected to shed more light on these patterns.

# How (un-)committed customers cope with (non-)economic service failures and online recovery attempts.

**Wolfgang Weitzl**

Department of Communication

University of Vienna, Austria

**Clemens Hutzinger**

Department of Management

Private University Seeburg Castle, Austria

**Sabine Einwiller**

Department of Communication

University of Vienna, Austria

Scholars (e.g., Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Brown, Barry, Dacin, & Gunst, 2005) agree that customer commitment has various positive effects for brands (e.g., inclination to pay a price premium; heightened loyalty). Empirical support for this 'bright side' of customer commitment is compelling. However, literature is still inconclusive whether strong customer-brand relationships protect the brand against customers' grudge following a service failure or have detrimental effects. In this study, we investigate the 'dark side' of strong customer-brand emotional connections by shedding light on the joint effects of customer commitment, failure type and 'webcare' (i.e., marketer's communicative reactions to online complaints; van Noort & Willemsen, 2012) on three different coping strategies of (un-)committed customers: (i) *avoidance*, (ii) *revenge*, and (iii) *forgiving*. By investigating these three coping strategies we gain a profound insight into the mechanisms explaining relationship exit, negative word of mouth and the settlement of the conflict with the brand. Our investigation is guided by the assumption that marketers can trigger different post-failure cognitive/emotional coping mechanisms by means of webcare. However, this ability is contingent on the customer's prior relationship with the brand (i.e., customer commitment) as well as whether the service failure was economic (e.g., defective product) or non-economic (e.g., unfriendly staff). Empirical findings based on a multi-country survey among 697 adult online complainants suggest that committed customers are more inclined to react negatively to recovery efforts than uncommitted customers. Our research, hence, supports the 'love becomes hate' effect (e.g., Grégoire & Fisher, 2006, 2008). Regarding webcare, we show that organizations are well advised to employ appropriate language in recovering online complainants. Most importantly, however, findings provide empirical support that not only active organizational responses (e.g., a response including a sincere apology and/or a refund) but also a company's no-response can – under specific circumstances – mitigate customer post-failure retaliation. Nevertheless, no-responses can also have detrimental effects as they, for instance, can increase avoidance of (un-)committed customers following non-economic failures. In contrast to common sense, well-intended active responses can severely backfire on the brand. That is, as compared to no-responses, accommodative responses addressed to committed customers who had experienced an economic failure increase their desire for revenge. Given that, we also find the opposite effect for uncommitted customers. This research helps marketers to better anticipate the benefits and perils of communicative responses typically used to intervene customers' post-failure reactions.

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# Discursive strategies of legitimation on the web: stakeholder dialogue in the agrobiotech industry.

**Paola Catenaccio**

Department of Studies in Language Mediation and Intercultural Communication  
Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy

The agrobiotechnology industry has been for over two decades at the centre of a heated controversy, with concerns being voiced about the threat that agrobiotechnologies pose to biodiversity, the social impact of their adoption, and the political implications of allowing a few powerful corporate actors to control a substantial portion of the world's staple food supply, to name but the most prominent ones.

In the face of sustained criticism, agrobiotech companies have been mounting over the years a self-legitimising campaign aimed at generating consensus around their core activities and their business practices. The rise of the Internet first and, later, of social media, has contributed to spreading the debate, mobilising social actors all over the world and giving the topic salience beyond the reach of traditional media outlets. The controversy over biotechnologies is now primarily fought in the cybersphere, an arena which has been shown to exacerbate polarisation, but which also offers an opportunity for dialogue (cf. Williams et al 2016 on the climate change debate).

This study investigates selected aspects of the rhetorical web- and social media presence of two major players in the field, Monsanto and Bayer CropScience. Both companies have enhanced their presence and openly manifested the intention to engage in dialogue with their multiple stakeholders, including their detractors. Recent developments in the communication strategies adopted suggest growing awareness for dialogic engagement and web-care as part of a legitimation process which is conducted first and foremost rhetorically and which relies extensively on argumentatively framed debates and responses (cf. Colleoni 2013; Eberle et al. 2013; Kent and Taylor 2016).

The methodology adopted draws on discourse analysis and argumentation theory (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969; van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004; Walton 2007) to investigate macro-strategies of self-representation and patterns of dialogic interaction, including favoured argumentative schemes, pairing them with analyses at the meso- and micro-levels aimed at highlighting converging and competing pragmatic implications of linguistic choices. In particular, special attention will be devoted to the alignment (or dis-alignment) of lexical and syntactic choices and rhetorical strutting with manifested dialogic intent (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004).

The analysis shows that moving from consolidated one-way modes of communication to two-way dialogue in corporate communication is a challenge which calls for more extensive rhetorical action than the opening of a channel (Castelló et al 2013). Greater awareness of the pragmatic effects of rhetorical openings and closures may contribute to developing meaningful dialogue with stakeholders.

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# Disentangling a web of emotions: How the characteristics of Facebook and Twitter affect service employees' perceived ability to regulate emotions.

Svenja Widdershoven, Mark Pluymaekers, José M.M. Bloemer  
Research Center for International Relationship Management  
Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, the Netherlands

Service employees who are responsible for webcare are confronted with several challenges. First of all, they operate in a public environment that is characterized by negativity (Stieglitz & Dang-Xua, 2013). Furthermore, the media they have at their disposal (mostly Twitter and Facebook) are relatively low in media richness, which makes it difficult to correctly recognize and express emotions (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The current study investigates how the characteristics of Facebook and Twitter affect service employees' perceived ability to regulate customers' emotions, as well as their own. It is important to gain a better understanding of this, because (1) customers rely on their emotions when determining how satisfied they are with a service provider (Schwartz & Clore, 1988; Oliver, 1993; Bhattacharjya et al., 2016) and (2) service employees can only be effective in influencing customer emotions if they are able to keep their own emotions in check (Delcourt et al., 2013; Delcourt et al., 2016).

By conducting semi-structured interviews with service employees (N=17) who use social media, as well as other media (phone, email, chat) to communicate with customers, we identified five social media characteristics that affect employees' regulation of their own emotions and those of customers. These are 1) the public nature, 2) asynchronousness of communication, 3) the limited cues, 4) the negative atmosphere and, 5) the informal communication style. Although most of these characteristics have been discussed in previous literature, their effects on the working circumstances of the employees turn out to be more pervasive than expected. Therefore, it is pivotal for service managers to equip these employees with the necessary resources, such as a training programme that covers the implications of working with Facebook and Twitter.

Interestingly, the interviewees also mention a number of tactics that help them cope with the sometimes problematic characteristics of social media. For example, employees who are struggling with the limited cues available on Twitter can take two possible routes: Either reside to another medium, such as a phone, to be better able to perceive, understand and express emotions (Delcourt et al., 2016) or, when wanting to express or regulate emotions, make use of substitute cues available on social media (Huang et al., 2008; Walther & Parks, 2002).

All in all, this study sheds more light on the demanding conditions under which employees who are responsible for webcare work and provides concrete, practical advice for managers and professionals working in the sector.

# Evaluating Channel-Specific Customer Communication via Social Media – A Case Study.

**Marie-Louise Brunner, Stefan Diemer**

International Business Communication and Digital Business / Department of English  
Trier University of Applied Sciences and Saarland University, Germany

The paper examines social media customer communication in selected German companies with an international customer base. Our aim is to document existing practice, to evaluate success (likes, reach, engagement, sentiment), and to formulate recommendations with a view to optimizing channel-specific customer communication for an international and multilingual audience.

While marketing studies on social media initially focused on the hybridity introduced into the marketing mix (Bughin 2009, Faulds & Mangold 2009) and the development of social media strategies for increasing business value (e.g. Culnan et al. 2010), current applied approaches on social media marketing emphasize the need for adaptation, continuous auditing, and the creation of a social media identity (e.g. Tuten & Solomon 2017, Kelly 2016). As current key social media Tuten & Solomon (2017) name Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and Youtube. Our approach aims at extending this research to a multilingual, cross-border setting, focusing in particular on how companies can address international audiences, starting from a documentation of existing practice.

For the study, publicly accessible social media interactions of selected companies were collected (2017/18) and analyzed. All existing social media channels were documented. Companies in the study only used Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, with occasional links to Youtube. Documented communication includes branding, advertising, sales, customer engagement, and complaint management. Communicative issues were identified through customer sentiment and examined, analyzing reaction, resolution and aftermath, followed by recommendations for optimizing communication and increasing customer satisfaction. Although the examined companies possess an international customer base, multilingual interaction is limited to multilingual hashtags, occasional English posts and responses, automated translation, and hybrid English-German advertising in a largely German monolingual setting.

First results indicate that successful social media use is achieved through distinct company tone and media specific content. Hashtags, for example, are used to extend messages and portray a social media identity. Not every medium is suitable for all company types, and social media customers expect authentic, fast responses. The study suggests that Instagram seems to be most suitable for companies that are new to social media marketing to reach a young multinational customer base. Facebook and Instagram can facilitate branding and sales, while Twitter mostly works for B2C and B2B image and brand management.

In sum, the study illustrates both advantages and pitfalls of social media marketing and gives recommendations on how companies can create an authentic and effective social media presence both for a national and an international customer base.

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# The influence of (sub)standard language on credibility during critical moments in online customer communication.

Chloé Lybaert, Bernard De Clerck, Mathias Seghers

Department of Translation, Interpreting and Communication  
Ghent University, Belgium

In the current climate of customer empowerment, both organizations and consumers see themselves confronted with an exponential growth in customer reviews and complaints, the sheer volume of which is sometimes hard to manage and monitor. The easy access to online platforms has not only given rise to an avalanche of information with consumer feedback, the language with which the information is provided in many cases presents itself as deviant from 'standard' language, with blends that include spoken features in written form (emulating pronunciation), flooding, capitalization and colloquial patterns, alongside typical spelling mistakes, typos and bad grammar.

While instances of the latter kind, i.e. 'incorrect' language use have amply been shown to have a negative impact on perceptions of source and author credibility and content reliability – even triggering companies to resort ethically questionable practices of cleaning up consumer reviews – much less attention has been devoted to the impact of the more hybrid language features that are typical of chatspeak in (informal) online environments on perceived credibility, reliability and expertise. This reveals an interesting tension between the possibly opposing forces of using 'correct' language on the one hand (to sound professional and credible) and the use of substandard language that reflect societal changes such as informalization, democratization and changes in standard language ideologies in Europe.

In this study we pick up on this complex issue and will report on a number of experiments in which we probed into the effect of form (i.e. mistakes, substandard features and flooding) on the credibility of content in Belgian Dutch negative consumer reviews. Results confirm the negative impact of mistakes but also reveal that despite the coolness factor they have acquired in spoken language, substandard features, too, have a pervasively negative effect on consumer and review credibility and observed professionalism. Flooding in its turn seems to act as a catalyst and further fuels negative perceptions. Additionally, the experiments also reveal that reviewer gender has a substantial impact on perceptions in standard language scenarios.

## Network access

Participants can use the wireless UGentGuest network during the duration of the conference:

Gebruikersnaam/Login : guestLangua

Wachtwoord/Password : ht9DHtyJ

Make a wireless connection with "UGentGuest". If you have set up to request an IP address automatically, you will receive an IP address starting with 193.190.8x.

Now you are connected, but not yet authenticated. You should start a webbrowser and you will be redirected to a logon screen. If not surf to <http://www.ugent.be>. Enter the username and password as mentioned above.

After correct authentication you can use the Internet connection.

Your connection to this wireless LAN is not encrypted. To protect your personal data, please use encrypted connections like https, imaps, ssh etc. or a VPN client.

You're not allowed to pass on the login information to others.

# Maps

Route from the conference venue (Abdisstraat 1, Gent) to the restaurant (De Stokerij, Tichelrei 2A, Gent).

