

# **What drives illegitimate complaining behavior?**

*A research study on the drivers of complaining illegitimately.*

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Master thesis, 2018

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Hereby I state that this master thesis is originally and exclusive written by myself. When I used knowledge or ideas of other resources, I have mentioned this explicitly in the text and references.

## Preface

In front of you lies the thesis *‘What drives illegitimate complaining behavior?’* which investigates possible drivers of complaining illegitimately. This thesis was written in the context of my graduation process of the master’s degree in Business Administration with a specialization in Marketing at the Radboud University in Nijmegen. From September 2017 until June 2018 I have put time and effort in conducting the research and writing this thesis. Hence, I am proud to be able to present it to you.

The research question was developed in consultation with my supervisor dr. H. Joosten and aimed to extend a research study he previously conducted. The current study had an exploratory purpose. As a consequence, the study contained many constructs which made it a complex, iterative and challenging process. Nevertheless, I was willing to accept the challenge as the study was expected to contribute significantly to academic literature. In the end, after extensive quantitative research, I was able to answer the research question.

During the process, my supervisor dr. H.W.M. Joosten provided guidance and answered my questions which enabled me to complete the research. Therefore, I would like to thank him for his expertise and helpful insights. In addition, I would like to thank the individuals who participated in this study. Without their participation I could not have finished the research. Last but not least, special thanks go to J.M.L. van Bokhoven, who collaborated with me on the collection and analysis of the data. Moreover, he wrote half of the theoretical background and the corresponding measures. I would like to thank him in particular for his contribution and the good collaboration.

I hope you enjoy reading this thesis.

Esther van Laar

Wijhe, June 11, 2018

## Abstract

Complaint handling is the order of the day for practitioners and as complaints are not always legitimate, businesses seem to overspend in complaint handling. Hence, important practical insights can be gathered by investigating the drivers of complaining illegitimately. This issue also contributes theoretically because academic research on the drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior is lacking. Therefore, the current study investigates the following research question: *What are drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior?* Specifically, using an online survey, it investigates various theories which could shed light on the drivers of illegitimate complaining. Each theory results in a hypothesis which is further researched empirically to find out whether the assumptions hold in reality.

A regression analysis revealed the following drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior: opportunism, a personal-based conflict framing style, a task-based conflict framing style and financial greed of which a task-based conflict framing style inhibits rather than reinforces illegitimate complaining. The drivers point respectively at the ‘when’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ of illegitimate complaining behavior: the findings suggest customers complain illegitimately when an opportunity to do so occurs (opportunism), by pressurizing the firm (personal-based conflict framing style) instead of being solution-oriented (task-based conflict framing style), because they want to earn money (financial greed).

Based on the findings, practitioners are recommended to limit the opportunities for customers to complain illegitimately, to stimulate a task-based conflict framing style, and, lastly, to let an expert examine the complaint to detect illegitimate ones and prevent overspending in complaint handling. However, future research is called for to validate the results by replicating the study while taking the limitations in consideration as a lot of possible drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior remain unexamined. Hence, the researcher sincerely hopes academics will extend the current study in order to improve the theoretical knowledge regarding this fascinating, under-researched topic.

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# **1. Introduction**

Practitioners today have to deal with a lot of competition. Therefore, organizations try to ensure the highest possible quality in order to satisfy their customers. However, the chance exists that actual performance of a product or service does not meet or exceed the expectations customers have as shortfalls and such discrepancies are inevitable (Hess, Ganesan & Klein, 2003). Accordingly, quality failures lead to dissatisfaction and dissatisfied customers voice their complaint which makes complaint handling the order of the day (Anderson, 1973; Tang, Jia, Zhou & Yin, 2010; Blodgett & Li, 2007).

## **1.1 Complaint handling**

Once a customer voices a complaint, he or she gives the organization an opportunity to recover it; this is where the process of complaint handling starts (Blodgett & Li, 2007). Complaint handling refers to “the process of dealing with a situation whereby a customer has experienced a failure in the firm’s offering” (Sparks & McColl-Kennedy, 2001, p. 210), and in which the firm tries to recover and learn from the product and service failures (Tax & Brown, 1998). As already emphasized by Hart, Heskett and Sasser in 1990, recruiting new customers is five times more expensive than retaining current ones, showing the importance of complaint handling. Accordingly, when a complaint is handled successfully, it can make the difference between retention and defection and the outcome can impact the profitability of a firm (Stauss & Friege, 1999). Therefore, the goal of complaint handling lies in increasing customer satisfaction and building customer loyalty in order to remain profitable (Gelbrich & Roschk, 2011; Homburg & Fürst, 2005).

Existing studies focus in the area of complaint handling on justice theory to explain how customers become satisfied with the complaint handling process. Justice theory can be used to investigate the evaluations of customers regarding that process (Sparks & McColl-Kennedy, 2001). More specifically, justice theory related to complaint handling refers to customers evaluating complaint handling in terms of the received outcomes (distributive justice), the used procedures to come to that outcome (procedural justice), and the nature of the interpersonal treatment during that process (interactional justice) (Tax, Brown & Chandrashekar, 1998). Hence, the effectiveness of the complaint handling depends on the process aspects as well as the outcome of that process (Sparks & McColl-Kennedy, 2001).



## 1.2 Illegitimate complaining

Until now, complaint handling has been discussed as a consequence of product or service failure. However, a related research topic that has been investigated to some extent is whether the customer is always right and genuine while complaining (e.g. Baker, 2013; Berry & Seiders, 2008; Reynolds & Harris, 2005).

Farrington already mentioned in 1914 that it might be that customers are not always right or even complain illegitimately or opportunistically. While most studies have mainly argued that customer complaints are caused by dissatisfaction as a consequence of product or service failures (e.g. Bearden & Teel, 1983; Prim & Pras, 1999; Singh, 1988), there have been some researchers that followed Farrington's reasoning and acknowledged that customers may complain without any cause (e.g. Berry & Seiders, 2008; Reynolds & Harris, 2009; Daunt & Harris, 2012). However, these studies are mostly conceptual, experimental or based on limited data. As mentioned by Ro and Wong (2012) "clear evidence of opportunistic customer complaints is hard to find" (p. 424). Echoing this, Macintosh and Stevens (2013) state that "only limited research has examined customer claiming behavior and potential opportunistic behavior related to claiming" (p. 16).

As an explanation for lacking research on that topic, academic literature mentions that measuring this construct is "nearly impossible" (Baker, Magnini & Perdue, 2012, p. 295). Others argue that this task is "challenging and fraught with difficulties owing to its sensitive nature and potential for bias" (Fisk *et al.*, 2010, p. 423). Despite the fact that it is hard to measure, it is a "potential significant issue" to researchers and practitioners (Wirtz & McColl-Kennedy, 2010, p. 654). Hence, it is a fruitful area for future research.

Last year, Joosten (unpublished) investigated that fruitful area within hundreds of files of the Dutch "Geschillencommissie". More specifically, he investigated whether, to what extent, when, and how customers complain illegitimately. The most important finding is that two-thirds (64%) of the complaints are illegitimate, indicating that customers are not always right and genuine while complaining (Joosten, unpublished). Those findings are worrying since firms invest a lot of money and effort in complaint handling. Another finding is that while justice theory helps in explaining legitimate complaining, it does not help in explaining illegitimate complaining (Joosten, unpublished). Therefore, Joosten (unpublished) tried to find out more about what does explain illegitimate complaining; what are the drivers for complaining illegitimately? However, while providing some suggestions, the data of his study was not suitable to draw strong conclusions about that.

Before Joosten (unpublished), a limited number of other researchers tried to investigate the drivers of illegitimate complaining (e.g. Baker *et al.*, 2012; Daunt & Harris, 2012; Reynolds & Harris, 2005, 2009). However, as mentioned before, those studies are mostly conceptual, experimental or based on limited data. Therefore, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, the possible drivers for complaining illegitimately have not yet been fully examined. The authors of the previous studies regarding this issue acknowledge the lack of research in that field and the importance of further investigating such drivers in a broader perspective as well. For example, Daunt and Harris (2012) state that "currently, a dearth of research exists concerning why individual consumers misbehave", and "future research would benefit from investigating a wider range of motivations for customer misbehaviors" (p. 293, 303). In a similar vein, Reynolds and Harris (2005) acknowledge that there is "a need to reevaluate existing insights and theories into complaining behaviors in the light of findings regarding illegitimate motives for customer complaining" (p. 330).

### **1.3 Research aim**

The purpose of the current study is to contribute to the aforementioned research gap and to answer the calls for more research on the drivers of illegitimate complaining by extending the research of Joosten (unpublished). In this way, the current research aims to provide additional insights and to contribute to academic literature regarding illegitimate complaining behavior. More specifically, this study aims to answer the following research question: *What are drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior?* In order to answer this research question in a structured way, the following sub questions are formulated:

1. *What are illegitimate complaints?*
2. *What are possible drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior?*

This research takes a holistic view on the possible explanations for customers to complain illegitimately and has an exploratory purpose. Therefore, several theories are investigated which could shed light on the drivers for illegitimate complaining.

## 1.4 Initial conceptual model

Based on the previous elaboration of the research objective of this study, an initial conceptual model was developed (figure 1). The initial conceptual model provides a structural representation of the relationship that was investigated in the current study in order to generate a clear understanding.



Figure 1. Initial conceptual model

## 1.5 Theoretical relevance

As mentioned before, previous research has studied the phenomenon of illegitimate complaining (e.g. Berry & Seiders, 2008; Macintosh & Stevens, 2013; Wirtz & McColl-Kennedy, 2010) as well as, to some extent, the drivers for doing that (e.g. Baker *et al.*, 2012; Daunt & Harris, 2012; Reynolds & Harris, 2005). However, because of the challenge of measuring illegitimate complaints among other things, the number of investigations focusing on the drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior is lacking and the studies remain conceptual, experimental or based on limited data. Given its importance for improving existing theories on illegitimate complaining behavior, investigating the research question of this study in a methodologically correct manner gathers important knowledge which adds to existing literature. Therefore, this study is theoretically relevant and is expected to significantly contribute to academic literature.

## 1.6 Practical relevance

Since “the customer is always right” still holds in almost every company to date, most companies spend a lot of time, money, and effort in complaint handling. As mentioned before, Joosten (unpublished) found that customers are not always right which indicates that companies are overspending in complaint handling. The average case value of the files Joosten (unpublished) has studied was € 6,400 showing the high financial costs of illegitimate complaining. In addition, Harris and Reynolds (2003) found that dysfunctional customer behavior has effects on both indirect and direct financial costs. Echoing this, Reynolds and Harris (2005) suggest that compensating customers for problems for which organizations are not legally liable leads to high financial costs. Summarizing previous statements provides the

relevance of the current study for practitioners. A better understanding of the drivers of complaining illegitimately provides important insights to managers which can help them decide whether to continue overinvesting time, money, and effort in complaint handling, and whether the firm itself can do something about it.

## **1.7 Thesis outline**

In order to answer the research questions in a structured way, the remainder of this report is organized as follows: chapter 2 elaborates on the different forms of illegitimate complaints as well as on the existing theories that shed light on the possible drivers of complaining illegitimately. Therefore, chapter 2 aims to answer the formulated sub questions: *What are illegitimate complaints?* and *What are possible drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior?* The chapters thereafter are focused on answering the research question since this question cannot be answered from literature and therefore has to be empirically investigated: *What are drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior?* Chapter 3 provides an explanation of the methodology used in this study followed by chapter 4 which presents the analysis and results. Chapter 5 closes with a discussion including the conclusion, theoretical contributions, managerial implications and the limitations along with the directions for future research.

## 2. Theoretical background

This chapter is partly focused on defining illegitimate complaints and therefore on answering the first sub question: *What are illegitimate complaints?* In addition, this chapter is focused on answering the second sub question as well by investigating several theories that shed light on possible explanations for complaining illegitimately: *What are possible drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior?*

### 2.1 Illegitimate complaints

Academic literature uses a broad range of labels to describe customers who exaggerate their claims and who are not in the right. Joosten (unpublished) bundles the different labels into three categories. The first category refers to literature that addresses complaints driven by “wrong” drivers. Examples of such labels are: dishonest and feigned complaints (Reynolds & Harris, 2005), unfair customers (Berry & Seiders, 2008), and opportunistic complaints (Wirtz & McColl-Kennedy, 2010). These labels suggest that customers act with bad intentions and consciously fraud the complaint. However, it is also possible that the customer sincerely believes that his or her complaint is right and has no wrong drivers in advance. Therefore, these labels should only be used when wrong drivers are proven (Joosten, unpublished).

The second category that can be distinguished is the group of labels that classify the behavior as “not normal”. These are, among others: aberrant customer behavior (Fullerton & Punj, 1993), jay customer behavior (Harris & Reynolds, 2004), and deviant customer behavior (Harris & Daunt, 2011). Since these labels suggest that such behavior is not normal, they simultaneously propose that the majority of the complaining customers acts normal. However, research still remains silent on whether such behavior occurs routinely or by exception (Joosten, unpublished).

The last bundle of labels suggests that such behavior is “problematic”. For example, problem customers (Bitner, Booms & Mohr, 1994), consumer misbehavior (Baker, 2013; Harris & Daunt, 2013), and dysfunctional customer behavior (Harris & Reynolds, 2003). However, in order to state whether such behavior is problematic, the point of view of the person judging it must be taken into consideration. For a customer, there can be positive consequences in the case of the firm compensating him or her, while it can be problematic for the firm in terms of the costs, time, and energy invested (Joosten, unpublished).

It can be concluded from the above that neither of the three labels is ideal. Therefore, the current study prefers to follow Joosten (unpublished) in using the term *‘illegitimate*

*complaints'* which results in a more neutral and holistic point of view. Reynolds and Harris (2005) define illegitimate complaints as complaints “without experiencing service failure or dissatisfaction” (p. 323). However, the focus of the current study will also be on initially dissatisfied complaining customers who exaggerate their claim. Echoing this, Ro and Wong (2012) state that complaining also occurs whilst “exaggerating, altering, or lying about the fact or situation, or abusing service guarantees” (p. 420). Combining aforementioned definitions, the definition of illegitimate complaints used in the current study is twofold: 1) complaints without experiencing dissatisfaction which results in a complaint that is completely made up (a made up complaint), and 2) complaints resulting from dissatisfaction but in which the fact or situation is exaggerated, altered, or lied about (an exaggerated complaint).

Previous sections elaborated on the distinction between complaints that are made up or exaggerated. However, as acknowledged by several researchers, a complaint consists of two components, namely the problem and the proposed solution for it (e.g. Spreng, Harrell & Mackoy, 1995; Wendel, Bes, De Jong & Curfs, 2013; Maxham III & Netemeyer, 2002). Customers may experience a problem with the product or service but it is also possible that customers experience dissatisfaction with the resolution of those problems (Spreng *et al.*, 1995). Adapting it to the context of the current study, this means that when someone voices an illegitimate complaint, the complaint can refer to a problem of the specific product (e.g. a hole in a t-shirt) or to the proposed solution for it (e.g. a new t-shirt for free in exchange). Therefore, a distinction can be made between the problem and the solution of a complaint. Combining it with the distinction made in the previous section, it is possible to exaggerate the problem of a product or service as well as the proposed solution or so-called claim the complainant demands. Additionally, it is even possible to completely make up the problem which then automatically means the proposed solution is made up as well.

By the above discussion, the first sub question can be answered: *What are illegitimate complaints?* Illegitimate complaints are complaints without experiencing dissatisfaction as well as complaints resulting from dissatisfaction but in which the complaint is exaggerated, altered, or lied about. In addition, a complaint can be illegitimate regarding the problem in relation to the proposed solution. Composing previous information results in three different forms of illegitimate complaints, namely: an exaggerated problem, an exaggerated claim, and a made up problem. These forms have been leading in operationalizing the construct of illegitimate complaining behavior.

## **2.2 Possible drivers for complaining illegitimately**

In order to investigate the possible drivers for complaining illegitimately, this section discusses several theories that shed light on such possible explanations. After each discussion of a specific theory, a hypothesis is formulated which is further researched empirically in this study to find out whether the assumptions hold in reality. Noteworthy, all theories discussed in this section are divided into two parts of which the last part (sections 2.2.9 until 2.2.17) were written by Van Bokhoven (unpublished).

### **2.2.1 Loss of control**

Control is defined as “the belief one can determine one's own internal states and behavior, influence one's environment, and/or bring about desired outcomes” (Wallston, Wallston, Smith & Dobbins, 1987, p. 5). Stated differently, “when people perceive that they can take responsibility for causing outcomes (both desired and undesired) instead of attributing them to external factors, they feel in control” (Chang, 2006, p. 207). A sense of control is very important for understanding the reactions of customers to services (Joosten, Bloemer & Hillebrand, 2017). It is even more important during complaint handling since a service failure indicates that the behavior of the customer does not lead to the desired outcomes (Chang, 2006). The perception of loss of control then “represents a very unpleasant sensation and provides a strong motivation to try to re-establish control” (Hui & Toffoli, 2002, p. 1840). The phenomenon of trying to re-establish the loss of control can be explained by reactance theory which suggests that when the behavioral freedom of an individual is threatened, the individual becomes motivated to regain it (Brehm, 1966).

That urge to regain freedom increases even more when a second loss of control occurs due to a firm not responding to the complaint of a customer or a firm not adhering to the agreements that have been made (Joosten, unpublished). It is possible that the customer then tries to capture the firm's attention by exaggerating or making up the complaint. Customers may think that the firm feels more forced to respond to their complaint when the complaint is more extensive and intense, and that therefore the chance they will get a response and regain control increases. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H1: The more customers experience a loss of control, the more they will complain illegitimately.*

### 2.2.2 Opportunism

A well-known definition of opportunism is formulated as “self-interest seeking with guile” (Williamson, 1985, p. 30). That is, an individual is likely to take advantage of the opportunity at hand to further his or her self-interest (Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000). More specifically, opportunism involves the intention of one party to enhance its position “at the expense of the other party involved in the exchange” (Kelley, Skinner & Ferrell, 1989, p. 329). In addition, opportunism is related to an opportunity that occurs in which customers “take what they can, rather than what they should” (Wirtz & McColl-Kennedy, 2010, p. 654).

Wirtz and McColl-Kennedy (2010) put opportunistic complaints, defined as “the customer appearing to be taking advantage of the firm given the context”, against legitimate complaints, defined as “reasonable in the circumstances” indicating opportunism could lead to illegitimate complaining behavior (p. 659). A possible explanation for opportunistic behavior is given by Mazar, Amir and Ariely (2008) who found that when people face a possibility to behave opportunistically, they do so, but only in a relative modest manner. In this way, people gain profit but without disrupting the positive self-view (Mazar *et al.*, 2008). Keeping aforementioned reasoning in mind, this study assumes that customers will easily complain illegitimately in order to exploit the opportunity that arises and to take advantage. Therefore, the current study proposes the following:

*H2: The more customers experience an opportunity to complain illegitimately, the more they will complain illegitimately.*

### 2.2.3 Desire for revenge

Joireman, Grégoire, Devezer and Tripp (2013) define the desire for revenge as “the extent to which an individual wants to punish and cause harm to a firm for the harm it has caused” (p. 318). In other words, this definition shows that, from the customer’s point of view, the firm did not act in a correct manner which has negative consequences for the customer and therefore the firm should be punished. More specifically, in terms of failed complaint handling, the firm has “blown his chance to win back the customer” and therefore has committed a so-called double deviation (Joireman *et al.*, 2013, p. 315). Consequently, “customers become much more likely to seek revenge after a firm has failed to redress an initial service failure” (Grégoire, Laufer & Tripp, 2010, p. 739).

Failures can turn customers into “enemies” and “terrorists” (Grégoire & Fischer, 2008, p. 247; Tax & Brown, 1998, p. 86). However, instead of customers perceiving themselves as



enemies or terrorists, they mostly view themselves as being a victim of negative circumstances caused by the firm which leads to retaliation (Funches, Markley & Davis, 2009; Grégoire, Tripp & Legoux, 2009). The procedure of retaliation requires cognitive processing rather than it being an impulsive act: the customer consciously determines the action and the target of that action (Funches *et al.*, 2009). Revenge-driven actions can take many forms. For example, physical violence or vandalism (Bunker & Ball, 2008) or creating brand-specific hate sites (Bechwati & Morrin, 2003). Moreover, revenge-driven actions could be illegitimate since “motivations for retaliation extend beyond simple getting even” (Funches *et al.*, 2009, p. 231). Therefore, in terms of the central theme of this research, it is possible that customers who experience negative emotions and feelings of revenge as a result of failed complaint handling, complain illegitimately as a response. Accordingly, the following is formulated:

*H3: The more customers experience a desire for revenge, the more they will complain illegitimately.*

#### **2.2.4 Financial greed**

Complaining customers who are driven by financial greed “attempt to obtain free goods and services without experiencing any genuine dissatisfactory incidences” (Reynolds & Harris, 2005, p. 327). In a more general way, this means that customers want to gain something for nothing. This construct was already researched by Resnik and Harmon in 1983. They conducted an exploratory study on the perceptions of managers and customers of appropriate responses to complaint letters. The results showed that managers were more skeptic than customers about the complaint being legitimate. The most important reason for that was the managers’ perception of the customers wanting to gain something for nothing. Reynolds and Harris (2005) and Baker and colleagues (2012) confirmed the findings of financial greed influencing complaint behavior in a study on the impact of financial greed on opportunistic complaining behavior. Opportunistic complaints are part of illegitimate complaining behavior (Reynolds & Harris, 2005). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that, more generally, financial greed acts as a potential driver for customers to complain illegitimately as well. Hence, the current study assumes:

*H4: The more customers are driven by financial greed, the more they will complain illegitimately.*

### **2.2.5 Perceptions of injustice**

Customers evaluate complaint handling in terms of perceived fairness (Tax *et al.*, 1998; Gelbrich & Roschk, 2011). More specifically, using justice theory, Tax *et al.* (1998) found that customers judge complaint handling within firms based on the outcomes they receive (distributive justice), the used procedures to come to these outcomes (procedural justice), and the interaction with the service provider (interactional justice). Consequently, the justice perception of the customer has an influence on the post-complaint satisfaction (Gelbrich & Roschk, 2011). In a similar vein, Voorhees and Brady (2005) studied the influence of the fairness perceptions on satisfaction and intentions to complain. They discovered that distributive and interactional justice have a positive and direct effect on satisfaction and decrease future complaint intentions, which suggests that firms treating dissatisfied customers fairly will be rewarded with future benefits (Voorhees & Brady, 2005).

However, it is also possible that customers perceive the complaint handling as unfair. Real or imagined injustices can lead to feelings of revenge which results in customers' misbehavior (Fullerton & Punj, 2004). In this regard, Wirtz and McColl-Kennedy (2010) discovered that customers experiencing lower distributive, procedural, and interactional justice were more likely to complain opportunistically than customers not experiencing such forms of injustice. These findings are comparable to results of studies in other research fields. For example, perceived injustice can lead to employee theft (Greenberg, 1990). It is therefore reasonable to argue that perceptions of injustice lead to increased illegitimate complaining as well. Thus, this study proposes the following:

*H5: The more customers experience injustice, the more they will complain illegitimately.*

### **2.2.6 Lack of morality**

Attribution theory is developed by Heider (1958) and suggests people seek to understand the causes of behavior (Kelley & Michela, 1980). People attribute causes in an external and internal way (Thibaut & Riecken, 1955). In the context of a service failure, most complaining customers attribute the cause in an external way, namely to the service provider (Joosten, unpublished). Within attributing causes in an external way, customers have two options (Joosten, unpublished). One option of external attribution is an attribution to lack of ability of the service provider, another option is an attribution to lack of morality of the service provider (Wooten, 2009; Grégoire *et al.*, 2010; Joosten, unpublished). In other words, it means that the

complaining customer feels that the service provider did not have the skills to act in the right way (lack of ability) or that the service provider did not act in the right way on purpose, for his own sake (lack of morality). Lack of morality is comparable to perceived greed which is defined as “the judgement that the perpetrator is causing damage to others in order to obtain a personal advantage” (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016, p. 432). In terms of the central theme of this research, this means the complaining customer perceives the service failure as a result of the service provider acting to gain personal advantage instead of doing what is best for the customer.

Previous research has found that lack of morality is perceived differently than lack of ability (Wooten, 2009; Grégoire *et al.*, 2010). More specifically, the service provider failing on purpose (lack of morality) creates a higher urge for punishment than the service provider lacking ability (Wooten, 2009). In a similar vein, researchers have found that perceived greed is a well-documented driver of hate and retaliation to questionable corporate behavior (e.g. McGovern & Moon, 2007; Grégoire *et al.*, 2010; Antonetti & Maklan, 2016). In the context of the current study, such punishment or retaliation can be expressed by complaining illegitimately. Therefore, this study posits:

*H6: The more customers experience a lack of morality of the service provider, the more they will complain illegitimately.*

### **2.2.7 Anger**

Emotions play a crucial role in the complaint handling process (Holloway, Wang & Beatty, 2009; Dasu & Chase, 2010; Bougie, Pieters & Zeelenberg, 2003). More specifically, negative emotions play a bigger role than positive emotions; especially the role of anger is found to be important (Holloway *et al.*, 2009; Bougie *et al.*, 2003; Kim, Wang & Matilla, 2010). Anger is an emotion which is “associated with appraising an event as harmful and frustrating” and can be directed at an institution among others (Bougie *et al.*, 2003, p. 379). An important element distinguishing anger from other negative emotions is the aspect of blame or the belief of the individual experiencing such an emotion that he or she has been treated deliberately unfair (Bougie *et al.*, 2003).

In addition, anger is an emotional response often experienced at the moment of a failing complaint handling process (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004). Echoing this, Holloway *et al.* (2009) and Bougie *et al.* (2003) suspect that negative responses which may come up in the complaint handling process are manifested through anger. Consequently, customers experiencing an emotion of anger will behave in an aggressive and hostile way (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004).

Anger results in the customer not searching for a solution anymore, but rather maliciously attempting to hurt the institution (Joosten, unpublished; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2004). In the context of the current study, causing harm to the company may take the form of complaining illegitimately. Therefore, the current study suspects anger induces illegitimate complaining behavior and assumes the following:

*H7: The more customers experience a feeling of anger, the more they will complain illegitimately.*

### **2.2.8 Prior experience with the firm**

Prior experience with the firm is commonly understood as the previous interaction a customer has had with the company in question (e.g. a purchase or just a phone call with an employee) and it can be positive as well as negative. However, in the context the current study, it is more likely that the previous interaction has been positive as it is questionable whether a dissatisfied customer would visit that company again (Joosten, unpublished). Academic literature suggests two ways in which prior experience with the firm can influence the response of a customer to a product or service failure: by buffering or by magnifying (Joosten, unpublished; Holloway *et al.*, 2009). Buffering refers to the effect of a very positive prior experience with the firm leading to one failure having a less damaging impact (Tax *et al.*, 1998; Holloway *et al.*, 2009; Joosten, unpublished). In contrast, magnifying refers to the effect of a very positive prior experience with the firm leading to high expectations which results in one failure having a damaging impact (Kelley & Davis, 1994; Holloway *et al.*, 2009; Joosten, unpublished).

Prior interactions with a company that have been very positive could have similar effects regarding illegitimate complaining behavior (Joosten, unpublished). Prior positive experience could buffer against illegitimate complaining behavior while it is also possible that it magnifies expectations and increases illegitimate complaints. Joosten (unpublished) has tried to investigate the relationship between the prior experience with the firm and illegitimate complaining behavior. However, his study did not allow any definitive conclusions concerning this effect to be drawn. Therefore, the current study follows his suggestions and posits:

*H8a: The more positive the prior experience with the firm has been, the less the customer will complain illegitimately (buffering).*

*H8b: The more positive the prior experience with the firm has been, the more the customer will complain illegitimately (magnifying).*

The upcoming paragraphs (sections 2.2.9 until 2.2.17) and the corresponding hypotheses are written by Van Bokhoven (unpublished).

### **2.2.9 Conflict framing style**

Customers respond to conflicts with service providers in several ways, the same customer even reacts differently to the same service failure (Beverland, Kates, Lindgreen & Chung, 2010). Reason for this is that each customer frames a situation differently. Beverland *et al.* (2010) found out two central conflict frames, namely task and personal. Customers who adopt a task-based conflict framing style tend to focus on those things that led to the conflict and they adopt a conflict style with the aim of achieving practical outcomes (Beverland *et al.*, 2010). Customers who frame conflict in a personal style tend to frame the situation more in a personal way, they perceive the actions of the service provider as completely unjustified and are out for revenge. They believe the company could have full control over the mistakes made, resulting in anger and less willingness to reason.

Customers with a personal-based conflict style are not mollified by a practical solution like an economic recompense. Such customers voice emotive language to the service provider and they tend to take revenge (Beverland *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that customers with a personal-based conflict style behave more illegitimate. Besides, customers who frame conflict through a task-based style are solution-oriented and they are willing to offer the service provider an opportunity to repair the situation (Beverland *et al.*, 2010). Based on this reasoning, the following hypotheses are formulated:

*H9a: The more customers adopt a personal-based conflict framing style, the more they will complain illegitimately.*

*H9b: The more customers adopt a task-based conflict framing style, the less they will complain illegitimately.*

### **2.2.10 Contrast theory**

Anderson (1973) found out that customers have certain expectations of a product and when these expectations do not meet actual product performance, customers will evaluate that product disproportionately negative. In other words, if the discrepancy between expectations and reality is too large, customers are ‘surprised’ and through this negatively exaggerate this discrepancy.

Applying this theory in a service recovery context, it could be argued that customers will exaggerate their complaints when a contrast effect occurs. For example, complainants

could have high expectations of a firm through high prices or a company's reputation, but these expectations were not met by actual performance. These perceived poor performances result in dissatisfaction, which in turn causes that complainants exaggerate their complaint. This is also mentioned by Tang *et al.* (2010), who pinpoint that a disparity between expectations and the delivered services or products leads to stronger disappointment and exaggerated discrepancy.

Based on the mentioned above, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H10: The more customers experience a discrepancy between expectations and the actual performance, the more they will complain illegitimately.*

### **2.2.11 Negotiation tactic**

As customers have access to both the internet, mobile applications and social networks to retrieve information, they are more informed and critical than ever before (Holmes *et al.*, 2017). Through these possibilities, customers are capable to compare products and pricing information making them more powerful in negotiations (Grewal, Iyer and Levy, in Holmes *et al.*, 2017). Negotiation refers to “the process whereby people attempt to settle what each shall give and take or perform and receive in a transaction between them” (Rubin & Brown, in Thompson, 1990). Nowadays, customers can use their information availability to empower their negotiation position in daily practices. As firms are familiar with this power shift, they are open to negotiate with customers in order to build loyalty (Holmes *et al.*, 2017). However, because companies want to keep customers satisfied and loyal, this could lead to unfavorable outcomes like economic inefficiency as customers try to get the best out of negotiations (Srivastava & Chakravarti, in Holmes *et al.*, 2017). This could also occur in a service recovery context when customers file complaints. For example, instead of asking reasonable compensations for a service failure, customers could exaggerate their complaint and claim inappropriate compensations. In other words, customers could utilize a negotiation strategy by which they consciously exaggerate or made up their complaint, in order to meet their wishes or even more. To investigate this relationship the following hypothesis has been drawn up:

*H11: The more customers use a negotiation tactic, the more they will complain illegitimately.*

### 2.2.12 Neutralization techniques

Sykes and Matza (1957) were the first who introduced neutralization techniques people use to justify their misbehavior. Their theory explains various techniques to neutralize misbehavior, like the ‘denial of injury’, ‘denial of responsibility’ and ‘denial of the victim’. By using these cognitive techniques, people could persuade or justify themselves that their actions were appropriate. Subsequently, Harris and Daunt (2011) list other neutralization techniques from literature which could explain why people justify misbehavior, like ‘defense of necessity’, ‘metaphor of the ledger’ and ‘claims of relative acceptability’.

There are several neutralization techniques people could adopt in a service recovery context. To start with, ‘denial of injury’ refers to the cognitions that particular illegitimate behavior would not harm anyone (Sykes and Matza, 1957). For example, a customer can argue that a large wealthy company is not harmed by a small monetary loss of an unjustified complain. Further, the ‘metaphor of ledger’ (e.g. Hinduja, 2007) involves the comparison between one’s good and bad behaviors and thereby arguing that a sufficient degree of good behavior compensates for that specific instance of misbehavior. For example, a policyholder can rationalize that he or she always behaves according the rules and therefore he or she thinks it’s appropriate to claim illegitimately once. Next, ‘justification by comparison’ (e.g. Cromwell and Thurman, 2003) relates to comparing misbehavior with much worse behavior. In a service recovery context, a customer could argue that filing an illegitimate complaint is not that serious compared to theft. Another neutralization technique concerns ‘defense of necessity’ (Harris and Daunt, 2011), which refers to the believe of an individual that it’s necessary to misbehave, even if that person consciously knows it is morally wrong. A customer could complain illegitimately because he knows it is the only way to get a refund or to drive the business to action. To end with, Sykes and Matza (1957) mentioned that some criminals felt regret after their crimes. In order to justify their crimes, they internalize their norms and values because of these regrets. This is also in line with Barriga, Sullivan-Cosetti and Gibbs (2009), who argue that people try to excuse misbehavior by showing regret. Related to a service recovery context, customers could neutralize their illegitimate complaint through a regret. Based on these neutralization techniques, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

*H12a: The more customers use the technique of ‘denial of injury’, the more they will complain illegitimately.*

*H12b: The more customers use the technique of ‘metaphor of the ledger’, the more they will complain illegitimately.*

*H12c: The more customers use the technique of ‘justification by comparison’, the more they will complain illegitimately.*

*H12d: The more customers use the technique of ‘defense of necessity’, the more they will complain illegitimately.*

*H12e: The more customers use the technique of ‘regret’, the more they will complain illegitimately.*

### **2.2.13 Assimilation theory**

Companies constantly offer services and products to customers and hereby are service failures order of the day. Customers sometimes accept these product or service failures and don't complaint about them, which could indicate assimilation (Joosten, 2017). Based on the cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, in Anderson, 1973), when people experience discrepancies between cognitions, they are exposed to dissonance. People experience this dissonance as uncomfortable and therefore alter their cognitions in order to reduce or eliminate this dissonance (Anderson, 1973; Oliver & DeSarbo, 1988). For example, if a customer has high expectations of a product and the actual product performance is disappointing, customers could soften their evaluation of that product to reduce this dissonance.

Related to the service recovery context, it could be expected that customers would not exaggerate or made up their complaints when a service failure occurs. Customers could still be dissatisfied with the service recovery outcome but based on the assimilation theory they will mitigate or positively raise their evaluation of the service or product and accept small failures. Vice versa, when customers file illegitimate complaints, it can be expected that customers didn't assimilate the cognitive dissonance. The following hypothesis can be formulated:

*H13: The more customers experience a need to assimilate through cognitive dissonance, the less they will complain illegitimately.*

### **2.2.14 Theory of reasoned action**

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) developed the theory of reasoned action, which assumes that an individual's behavioral intents are a function of attitudes and beliefs (Madden, Ellen & Ajzen, 1992). In other words, someone's attitude towards certain behavior and perception of what others see as the social norm influence a person's intention to engage in specific behavior. In a



service failure context, the theory of reasoned action relates to a customer's attitude towards complaining and the social norm towards complaining in a particular situation.

### ***Attitude towards complaining***

More specifically, attitude towards complaining refers to a person's predisposition toward voicing a complain after experiencing a service failure (Blodgett, Granbois & Walters, 1993). Some customers who are dissatisfied with a product or service will seek redress, while other displeased customers would not seek redress because they are reluctant towards complaining (Blodgett *et al.*, 1993). This is also confirmed by Richins (1982), who appoints that customers with a positive attitude towards complaining are more likely to complain because they perceive it is successful to do so or because of a sense of comfortability about complaining. It could be suggested that customers who have a negative attitude towards complaining will be less willing to file illegitimate complaints. Hence, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

*H14a: The more customers are reluctant to complain, the less they will complain illegitimately.*

### ***Social norm***

However, a customer's complaining behavior is not only affected by their attitude towards complaining, also the concern with the social norm determines whether or not customers complaint. Kowalski (1996) mentioned that people can be afraid of the negative social consequences of complaining. For example, people who complain more frequently tend to be perceived more negatively due to the negative connotations complaining has (Kowalski, 1996). Therefore, people voice less complaints to avoid negative impressions of others and it could be suggested that customers who believe that their environment will turn against illegitimate complaining behavior will voice less illegitimate complaints. This leads to the following hypothesis:

*H14b: The more a customer's environment abhors illegitimate complaining behavior, the less they will complain illegitimately.*

### **2.2.15 Halo effect**

When a service failure occurs, customers are more aware of the organization's actions (Magnini, Ford, Markowski, & Honeycutt, 2007). Due to this state of focus, customers could remark more mistakes in a product or service. However, the emergence of a halo effect is also possible. A halo effect refers to "the notion that a singly service failure could potentially lead to multiple complaints" (Halstead *et al.*, 1996, p.109). For example, a customer who bought one bottle of orange juice and one bottle of raspberry juice voiced a complaint to the greengrocer about the freshness of both juices. After the customer noticed a deviating taste of the orange juice, he tasted the other bottle of raspberry juice critically and also experienced an abnormal taste. The customer returned the bottles of juice and received two new ones. However, it turned out later that the raspberry juice was in perfect condition, so the negative experience of the orange juice bottle predisposes the customers to negatively evaluate the other juice.

In summary, it can be assumed that customers file illegitimate complaints when an earlier service failure occurs. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

*H15: The stronger the halo effect customers experience, the more they will complain illegitimately.*

### **2.2.16 Attribution theory**

The attribution theory assumes that people make causal explanations, in other words people are interested in the causes of observed behavior (Kelley, 1973). The core of the theory is that people 'attribute' causes of events in two possible ways: internal and external. When an individual attributes a cause of observed behavior as internal, behavior is under personal control of the individual. In the case of external attribution, people infer that the outside forces you to behave a certain way.

The attribution theory is used in several research contexts, including the context of consumer complaining behavior (Folkes, 1984). In this context, the attribution theory is used to predict how customers respond to reasons why a product or service failed (Folkes, 1984). Customers investigate causes for product or service failure, and this perceived cause of failure influences how customers react. Folkes mentioned in his study (1984) that anger or revenge are the resulting outcomes of external attribution. In other words, when a service failure occurs through a mistake outside yourself, customers will be angry or willing to take revenge via an illegitimate complaint. Besides, it should be noted that a self-serving attribution bias could emerge, which refers to the tendency of people to assign success to themselves and blaming

failure to others (Bitner, Booms & Mohr, 1994). So, when a service failure occurs, customers tend to avoid responsibility for this. Further, when a (partly) self-inflicted service failure or a service failure who is not committed by the company occurs, customers tend to look for solutions and their desire to harm the company decreases (Folkes, 1984). This leads to the following hypothesis:

*H16: The more customers attribute the failure externally (compared to internally), the more they will complain illegitimately.*

#### **2.2.17 Firm size**

Several researchers examined firm-centric drivers of illegitimate complaining, including firm size (e.g.: Baker *et al.*, 2012; Wirtz & McColl-Kennedy, 2010). They point out that customers could complaint differently towards small or large firms. For example, some customers file more complaints to large firms because they believe that large firms could afford more claims as their profit margins are higher compared to small firms (Wirtz & McColl-Kennedy, 2010). This reasoning can be explained with the ‘denial of injury’ neutralization technique described in previous paragraph (Sykes & Matza, 1957). A second argument why customers behave more illegitimate towards large firms concerns that large companies possess both formal service recovery policies and systems in place that consider expensive customer refunds (Wirtz & McColl-Kennedy, 2010). To summarize, customers give it a try to exaggerate their claims in their relationship with a large company because of perceived low damaged caused to the company and established service recovery policies. Therefore, the following hypothesis has been drawn up:

*H17: The larger customers experience the size of a firm, the more they will complain illegitimately.*

### 2.2.18 Definitive conceptual model

Summarizing previous elaboration of possible drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior results in the definitive conceptual model of this research (figure 2). Based on this information, the second sub question can be answered. To repeat, the second sub question is: *What are possible drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior?* Possible drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior are: loss of control, opportunism, desire for revenge, financial greed, perceptions of injustice, perceptions of lack of morality, anger, prior experience with the firm, a personal-based conflict framing style, a task-based conflict framing style, a discrepancy between expectations and actual performance (contrast effect), negotiation tactic, neutralization techniques, assimilation, attitude towards complaining, social norm towards illegitimate complaining, halo effect, external (versus internal) attribution and a large firm size.

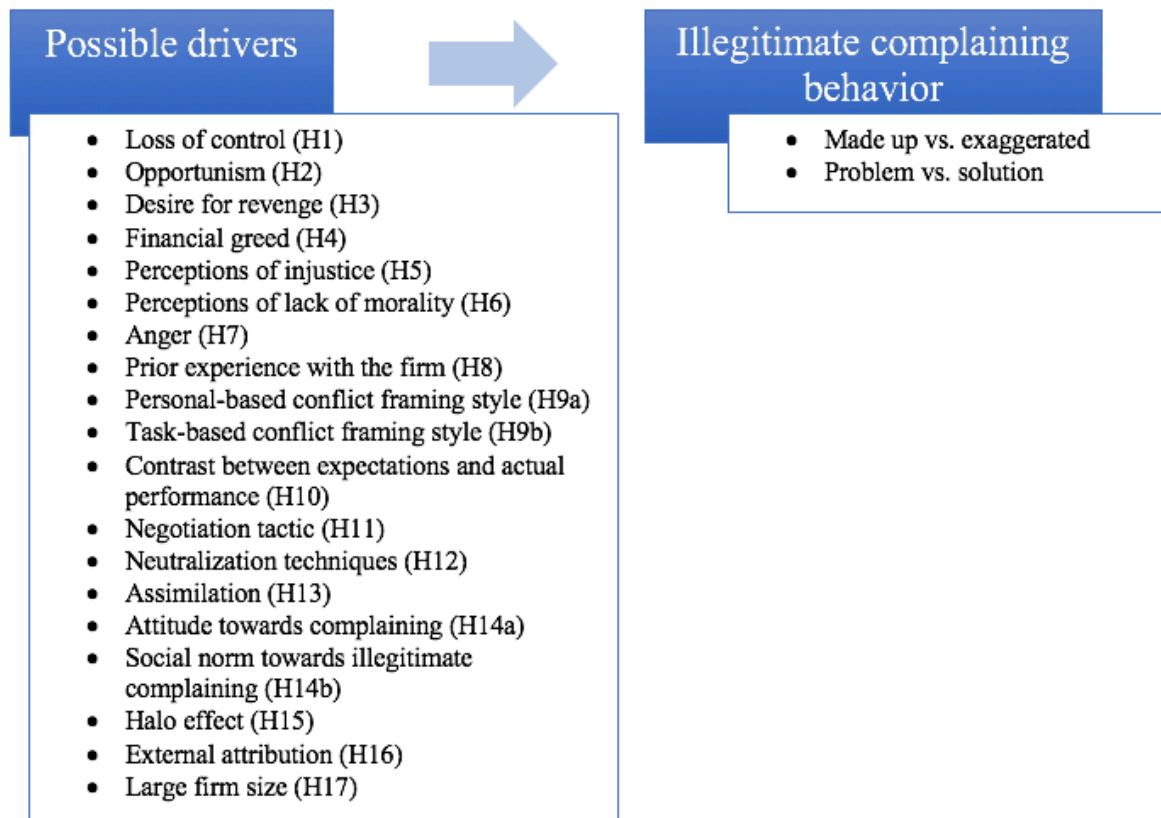


Figure 2. Definitive conceptual model

### **3. Method**

This chapter elaborates on the methodology that was used to arrive at the conclusion. First an explanation of the data collection is given including the research design, procedure, research ethics, sampling method and measures. Subsequently, the data analysis strategy is provided including the statistical technique that was applied.

#### **3.1 Research design**

To test the hypotheses, a quantitative research was conducted. Specifically, an online survey was used to gather self-reported data about the perceptions of the participants. An online survey was chosen because of its ability to ensure anonymity of the respondents which is important given the sensitive subject of the current study, namely illegitimate complaining behavior. Illegitimate complaining behavior can be classified in the category of deviant behavior which is one of several research areas that are more threatening than others due to their sensitivity (Lee & Renzetti, 1990). Furthermore, as illegitimate complaining behavior is not only deviant and illegal but also considered unethical, it could have discouraged people to participate in this study. Accordingly, anonymity was a very important consideration regarding the decision to use an online survey.

In addition, ensuring anonymity was crucial for gathering self-reported data as well. As self-reported data can be influenced by the method of data collection, a survey with assured anonymity is preferred (Krohn, Waldo & Chiricos, 1974). Besides that, an online survey measuring self-reported data made it able to study data resulting from actual behavior. “It is a common observation that people often fail to act in accordance with their stated intentions” (Ajzen, Brown & Carvajal, 2004, p. 1108). Due to this possibility of a discrepancy between intentions and actual behavior, it was important to study actual behavior instead of intentions.

Additional advantages of an online survey are the speed of data collection, low costs and instant access to a wider audience (Wright, 2005). These advantages were important in the light of the context of the current study because of limited time and money available, and the sensitivity of the subject of the study. As mentioned before, it is possible that the latter caused discouragement to participate. Therefore, instant access to a wider audience was an important advantage because of its ability to limit the risk of a low response rate.

A disadvantage of self-reported data on a sensitive and unethical issue is related to the social desirability. Social desirability bias is higher in a situation which is encountered to be more unethical (Chung & Monroe, 2003). Decreased validity and reliability of the survey could

be a consequence of that social desirability bias (King & Bruner, 2000; Tourangeau & Yan, 2007). Several aspects were considered in developing the survey in order to address the issue of social desirability bias, for example transparency, normalizing, assuming the behavior is already occurring and addressing confidentiality concerns (McBride, 2010). These aspects are explained more extensively in section 3.2.

Finally, a survey was used successfully in previous research on illegitimate complaining behavior and related subjects. Daunt and Harris (2012) have used a survey to study the motives of dysfunctional customer behavior. In a similar vein, a survey was conducted to study fraudulent return proclivity (Harris, 2008), consumer misbehavior (Albers-Miller, 1999), and deviant behavior (Akers, Massey, Clarke & Lauer, 1983). Berry and Seiders (2008) even recommend in their study regarding unfair customers to “survey customers previously involved in unfairness to gain their perspective on what happened and why” (p. 36). Taking into account the advantages as well as the success stories, using an online survey was an appropriate method for the current study.

### **3.2 Procedure**

The survey was pre-tested using the plus-minus method as well as online in order to finalize the draft version, to make sure it was understandable, and to investigate whether certain relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable already occurred. The sample of the online pre-test consisted of 40 individuals and the plus-minus method was pre-tested among six individuals who differed in gender and age as well as intellectuality. The plus-minus method is a helpful and an appropriate method for pre-testing a survey because participants are able to detect a great number of different types of problems and offer a lot of suggestions about how to solve those problems (Sienot, 1997). Based on the outcomes of the pre-test, the introduction was rewritten in a running and consistent story and several statements were adjusted for more clarification. More importantly, the overarching question prior to the list of statements was changed because it was too lengthy and did not match all statements which caused confusion among the participants. The final survey is provided in Appendix I.

The survey started by giving an introduction containing information about the purpose of the survey followed by information about the subject. Since the subject contained a sensitive issue, attention was paid to the way the information was provided in order to encourage people to further fill in the survey and answer the questions in complete honesty. Action was undertaken in light of that purpose. As mentioned before, McBride (2010) has addressed some

possibilities to reduce the risk of a low response rate. Several of these recommendations were followed in composing the introduction of the survey. First, transparency is an important aspect which is related to the reason why the questions are asked; to be open about the purpose (McBride, 2010). Transparency was applied by providing an explanation about the underlying reasons for the study as well as why participants that fill in the questionnaire are valuable. Second, normalizing is essential which means universal statements are used (McBride, 2010). Normalizing was applied by stating that almost everyone has voiced a complaint and that a lot of people want to admit that their complaint was not completely honest. Third, it is crucial to assume the behavior is already occurring (McBride, 2010). That was applied in the introduction of the survey by giving participants time to think about a situation in which they have complained illegitimately assuming they have done that before. Fourth, addressing confidentiality concerns is key (McBride, 2010). It was applied by assuring participants the survey is for research purposes only and that their responses will remain completely confidential and anonymous. Two other aspects were emphasized in the introduction of the survey in order to address the sensitivity of the subject. First, providing an example of the authors in which they have complained illegitimately causes feelings of reciprocity leading to participants wanting to come up with a situation in which they have done that as well (Harris, 2008). Second, regarding the lay-out of the survey, pictures of the authors themselves as well as the logo of the Radboud University were provided for addressing the professionalism of the study and making it more trustworthy.

After the carefully thought-out introduction, questions about the specific situation of the participant followed in which participants were asked to provide information about the company, complaint, problem and solution. Subsequently, statements were given that address the possible drivers of illegitimately complaining behavior. Participants were asked to assess the extent to which these statements were applicable to their situation. The survey closed with several factual questions about their situation of illegitimate complaining behavior as well as questions regarding demographic variables. After completing the survey, respondents were debriefed and thanked for their participation. The entire participation took approximately 10 to 15 minutes. The survey was distributed through social media channels (mainly Facebook, LinkedIn and WhatsApp) and email. Since this study focused on the Dutch population, the questionnaire was translated into Dutch.

### **3.3 Research ethics**

Ethical principles had to be considered throughout the whole procedure (Goodwin, 2003). The research ethics are discussed next and based on the general ethical principles of the American Psychological Association (APA) (n.d.). While several of these ethical considerations are discussed in the previous section in light of the sensitivity of the subject, they are addressed again in this section from an ethical perspective.

First of all, the researcher strived to take care with whom she worked in addition to maintaining trustworthy relationships and taking responsibility. Moreover, the researcher sought to produce information accurate, honest and truthful and to pursue fairness and justice in conducting the current study. Second, the current study followed APA-guidelines in the references for giving credit to the original authors of information used. Third, participation in the study was completely voluntary as participants were informed about the opportunity to quit the questionnaire at any moment. In addition, concerning privacy issues, participants' confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed by assuring participants the data would only be used for research purposes, the information would not be made available to anyone not directly involved in the current study, and participants would remain anonymous throughout the whole study. Fourth, any risks of harm were kept as low as possible and openness and transparency were ensured by providing information about the purpose and subject of the study. Overall, all the information about the research study was provided to the participants in complete honesty and data was carefully considered by respecting human dignity.

### **3.4 Sampling method**

In order to gather participants for the survey, a convenience sampling technique was used. Convenience sampling is classified in the category of nonprobability sampling techniques (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). In contrast to probability sampling, nonprobability sampling is a technique in which not all the people in the population have equal chances of being included (Etikan *et al.*, 2016). While nonprobability sampling techniques have several limitations due to the subjective nature, those sampling procedures also offer advantages including the speed with which the data can be gathered (Etikan *et al.*, 2016; Kivunja, 2015). More specifically, convenience sampling is a sampling technique that uses practical criteria in order to compose the sample. Such practical criteria consist of “easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate” (Etikan *et al.*, 2016, p. 2). In the current study, especially easy accessibility and willingness to participate were two important



aspects to be considered. One reason for the decision to use convenience sampling was related to the limited time available to conduct the current study. Taking the limited time in consideration, it is important that participants are easily accessible. Another reason concerns the subject of the study which is illegitimate complaining. As mentioned before, the sensitive issue of it could have discouraged people to participate. Accordingly, every single person willing to participate was of high value to the study. Because of the reasons given above, a convenience sample was deemed an appropriate sampling technique.

### **3.5 Measures**

The survey was composed of different scales which are presented next. The constructs were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from ‘completely disagree’ to ‘completely agree’. An overview of the operationalization is given in Appendix II. As the current research investigated a lot of possible drivers due to its exploratory purpose, attention had to be paid to the length of the survey. When filling in the survey would take too much time, it becomes likely that participants would not be willing to fill in the survey completely resulting in a low response rate. Therefore, although the researcher was aware of the possible negative consequences of using single-item measures, several constructs were measured with a single-item. The impact of that decision will be discussed further in section 5.4 regarding the limitations. Furthermore, as no measurement scales existed for the constructs regarding assimilation theory, halo effect, negotiation tactic and the neutralization techniques, the scales were newly developed based on theories and definitions.

*Illegitimate complaints* – The definition of illegitimate complaints used in the current study is twofold: 1) complaints without experiencing dissatisfaction which results in a complaint that is completely made up, and 2) complaints resulting from dissatisfaction but in which the fact or situation is exaggerated, altered, or lied about. In addition, a complaint can be illegitimate regarding the problem as well as regarding the claim which results in three different kind of illegitimate complaints, namely: exaggerated problem, exaggerated claim and a made up problem. Illegitimate complaining behavior was measured using a three-item scale newly operationalized based on the definition mentioned before: “I have exaggerated the problem”, “I have fabricated the problem” and “I have exaggerated the proposed solution”.

*Loss of control* – Since control is defined as “the belief one can determine one's own internal states and behavior, influence one's environment, and/or bring about desired outcomes” (Wallston *et al.*, 1987, p. 5), loss of control can be defined as the opposite of that definition,

namely the belief one cannot determine one's own internal states and behavior, influence one's environment, and/or bring about desired outcomes. Loss of control was measured with a three-item scale adapted from Chae, Boyoun and Zhu (2014). An example is: "I felt as if I no longer had any control over the process".

*Opportunism* – Opportunism was operationalized in the context of the current study as an individual taking advantage of an opportunity at hand (Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000). It was measured with a four-item scale adapted from Daunt and Harris (2012). An example is: "I responded to a possibility that occurred".

*Desire for revenge* – Desire for revenge is defined as "the extent to which an individual wants to punish and cause harm to a firm for the harm it has caused" (Joireman, *et al.*, 2013, p. 318). It was measured with a three-item scale adapted from Grégoire *et al.* (2010). An example of an item is: "I wanted to punish the firm in some way".

*Financial greed* – Financial greed is defined as customers wanting to gain something for nothing. It was measured with a three-item scale adapted from Daunt and Harris (2012). An example is: "I made some money from behaving in this way".

*Perceptions of injustice* – "Justice perceptions are the individual subjective assessments of organizational responses" (Gelbrich & Roschk, 2011, p. 26). Perceptions of injustice can then be defined as the negative individual subjective assessment of an organizational response. It was measured with a three-item scale adapted from Joosten *et al.* (2017). An example is: "The way the company treated me during the complaint was rude".

*Lack of morality* – Lack of morality is comparable to perceived greed which is defined as "the judgement that the perpetrator is causing damage to others in order to obtain a personal advantage" (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016, p. 432). It was measured with a three-item scale adapted from Grégoire *et al.* (2010). An example is: "The company had wrong intentions".

*Anger* – Anger is defined as an emotion which is "associated with appraising an event as harmful and frustrating" (Bougie *et al.*, 2003, p. 379). It was measured with a three-item scale adapted from Grégoire *et al.* (2010). An example is: "I was outraged about the company".

*Prior experience with the firm* – Prior experience with the firm is defined as the previous interaction a customer has had with the company in question. It was measured with a two-item scale adapted from Hess *et al.* (2003) and Tax *et al.* (1998). An example is: "My prior experience(s) with the firm was/were positive".

The upcoming measures are produced by Van Bokhoven (unpublished).

*Conflict framing style* – Conflict framing style can be divided into two central conflict frames, namely task and personal (Beverland *et al.*, 2010). *Personal based* framing style refers to people who approach and deal with conflict by aiming to achieve practical solutions in collaboration with the service provider (Beverland *et al.*, 2010). *Task based* framing style refers to people who approach and deal with conflict by thinking the service provider behaves unjustly and therefore they pressurize the firm in order to get the best out of the conflict. Derived from Oetzel (1998) and adapted to the context based on the article of Beverland *et al.* (2010), a one-item scale is developed for each framing style. An example is: “During the complaint process I tried to pressurize the entrepreneur as much as possible to get my way” (personal-based).

*Contrast theory* – The contrast effect is defined as the negatively perceived discrepancy between expectations and product performance (Anderson, 1973). Derived from Allen, Brady, Robinson & Voorhees (2015), a three-item scale was used to gauge the extent of contrast. An example is “My experience with the product/service was much worse than expected”.

*Negotiation tactic* – Negotiation refers to “the process whereby people attempt to settle what each shall give and take or perform and receive in a transaction between them” (Rubin & Brown, in Thompson, 1990). Based on that definition, a single-item measure was developed: “I exaggerated/made-up the complaint because I know I have to set high standards in order to get what I want”.

*Neutralization techniques* – Various techniques exist to neutralize misbehavior. Every technique included in the current study was measured with a single item based on theories of Sykes and Matza (1957), Harris and Daunt (2011), Hinduja (2007) and Cromwell and Thurman (2003). An example is: “I think the firm will not experience a great loss as a result of my exaggerated/made up complaint” (denial of injury).

*Assimilation theory* – Assimilation means that customers detect service failures but do not complain about them as people do not like to perceive cognitive dissonance (Joosten, 2017; Anderson, 1973). To measure this construct, a newly composed two-item scale is used. An example is: “Despite the fact the product/service had more defects, I took it for granted”.

*Attitude towards complaining and social norm* – Both are constructs derived from Fischbein and Ajzen’s (1975) theory of reasoned action. They refer – in the context of illegitimate complaining – to someone’s predisposition towards voicing a complain after experiencing a service failure and the social norm towards the justice of illegitimate complaining (Blodgett *et al.*, 1993). Derived from Thøgersen, Juhl and Poulsen (2009), both a two-item scale for attitude towards complaining and a two-item scale for social norm towards illegitimate complaining is used to measure these constructs. Examples are: “I believe people

complain too quickly” and “I think my friends and acquaintances would have forged or exaggerated their complaint in the same situation”.

*Halo effect* – The halo effect is defined as “the notion that a singly service failure could potentially lead to multiple complaints” (Halstead *et al.*, 1996, p.109). It was measured with a newly composed two-item scale. An example is: “After I discovered an error in the product/service, I discovered more defects”.

*Attribution theory* – Attribution theory refers to what extent customers assign causes internal or external (Folkes, 1984). Derived from the attributional style questionnaire (ASQ) from Peterson *et al.* (1982), a three-item scale was used to gauge the extent of internal or external attribution. An example is “The cause of the problem was the responsibility of the company”.

*Firm size* – Firm size is conceptualized in several different ways in previous literature by various researchers. For example, the CBS (2017) uses the Dutch term ‘*Algemeen Bedrijfsregister (ABR)*’ – meaning: ‘general company register’ – to classify organizations in size classes based on the number of FTE employees. However, because this study examines whether perceived firm size influences customer’s extent of illegitimate complaining, the perception of company size by the respondents themselves needs to be measured. Therefore, firm size is defined in terms of a large, medium or small firm.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

Whereas preceding sections of this chapter solely dealt with the data collection of the current study, this section provides the applied data analysis strategy. This study aimed to identify the impact and predictive power of each independent variable on the dependent variable in order to ascertain the drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior. Moreover, the study relied on an online questionnaire in which 12 metrically scaled independent variables and one metrically scaled dependent variable were involved. Multiple regression analysis is a suitable statistical technique in the light of those characteristics since it is a technique that can be used to “analyze the relationship between a single dependent variable and several independent variables” (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2014, p. 157). Furthermore, the purpose of multiple regression analysis is to use several independent variables to predict the dependent variable selected by the researcher (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Hence, the decision was made to conduct a multiple regression analysis in order to answer the research question.

After data collection, the dataset was obtained from Qualtrics, the program in which the survey was composed and through which it was distributed. Analyzing the dataset was done using the statistical program IBM SPSS Statistics 24.0. Before being able to analyze the dataset in SPSS, the data was renamed and prepared for the appropriate format for analysis.

## 4. Results

This chapter presents the results of the applied analysis and elaborates on the confirmation or rejection of the hypotheses formulated previously. First, the final model is presented. Thereafter, a description of the sample is given followed by the factor analysis as well as the reliability analysis of the study. The chapter concludes with the results of the hypotheses testing.

### 4.1 Final model

It is important to note that after examining the factor analysis as well as the reliability analysis, the multiple regression analysis of the model including all variables appeared to be insignificant ( $F(25, 50) = .965, p = .526$ ). However, as conducting research is an iterative process, by using forward and backward elimination the researcher tried to identify an ideal model in view of the circumstances. The variables causing noise in the analysis, meaning odd results appeared when those variables were included, were disregarded. Accordingly, the most optimal model according to the researcher is shown in figure 3.

The factor analysis as well as the reliability analysis of the variables included in this final model are discussed in this chapter followed by a discussion of the hypotheses tested by means of the regression analysis of this model. Possible causes of the initial model being insignificant are discussed further in chapter 5.

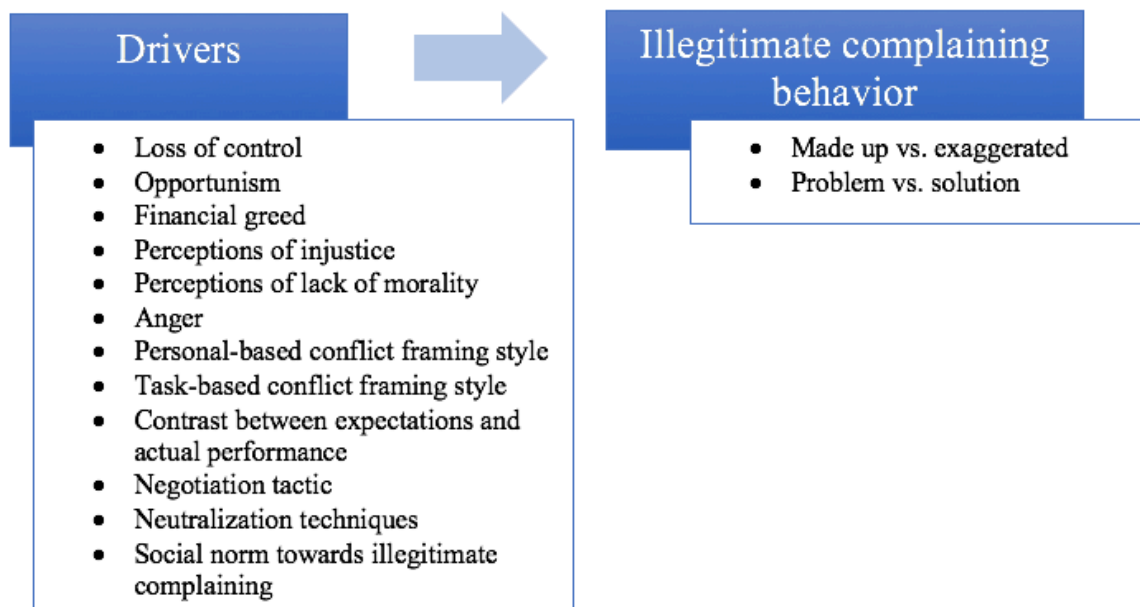


Figure 3. Final model

## 4.2 Sample

By means of a convenient sampling method, 242 native Dutch individuals participated in the survey of which 186 described a case in which they had complained illegitimately. Of those participants, 174 filled in the entire survey and 7 did not complete it but filled it in for at least 60%. As this study concerns a sensitive issue, every participant is of high value. Therefore, the decision was made to also include participants who completed the survey for at least 60% and to use pairwise deletion. Hence, 181 participants were useful for testing the hypotheses. According to Hair *et al.* (2014) the minimum ratio for a regression analysis is five participants per variable. However, the desired level for the sample size is 15 to 20 observations for each independent variable (Hair *et al.*, 2014). With 12 independent variables and a sample size of 181, the requirement was met.

Furthermore, concerning the descriptive statistics of the sample, 58 men (32.0%) and 116 women (64.1%) participated in the survey. Additionally, the average age of the participants is 28 years, ranging from 15 to 64 years old and the sample is highly educated, namely 75.3% of the participants was educated on HBO or University level. Furthermore, regarding the size of the firm in which the individuals voiced their complaint, the frequencies table showed 12 individuals (6.6%) voiced their complaint within a small firm, 32 individuals (17.7%) voiced their complaint within a medium size firm and 137 individuals (75.7%) voiced their complaint within a big firm.

## 4.3 Factor analysis

An exploratory factor analysis was conducted in order to define the underlying structure of the variables, to assess the discriminant validity of the measurement scales and to check whether they were in accordance with theoretical expectations. More specifically, principal axis factoring was chosen because factors based on the common variance are of interest. As conducting a factor analysis requires constructs measured with a scale consisting of multiple items, the single-item constructs were not included. As a result, the items measuring illegitimate complaining behavior, perceptions of injustice, lack of morality, loss of control, contrast, financial greed, anger and social norm towards illegitimate complaining were included in the factor analysis. Noteworthy, opportunism is not included because the initial reliability analysis of the model including all variables showed a low reliability for that construct (Cronbach's Alpha = .53). After assessing it theoretically, the insight was gathered that only one item

measured the construct in the right way. Therefore, the decision was made to continue the analysis with opportunism as a single-item construct.

An oblique rotation method (Direct Oblimin) was chosen because factors were allowed to be correlated. The results of this factor analysis are shown in Appendix III. First of all, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure exceeded the threshold value of .50 ( $KMO = .872$ ) which means the sample adequacy of the analysis is verified (Field, 2013). In addition, the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant indicating that factor analysis is appropriate ( $\chi^2 (231) = 1951.4, p < .001$ ) (Field, 2013). Furthermore, the factor correlation matrix showed the chosen rotation method was approved as the correlation between at least two factors was  $>|.30|$  (Hair *et al.*, 2014). After examination of the communalities, 'Contrast1' did not exceed the threshold of .20 which means that item shared too little of its variance with any other variable (Field, 2013). In addition, when assessing it theoretically, 'Contrast1' was indeed not in accordance with the other items measuring that construct. Hence, 'Contrast1' was excluded of the analysis.

Thereafter, the factor analysis was run again without 'Contrast1'. That second attempt of the factor analysis is shown in Appendix IV ( $KMO = .876$ ; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity:  $\chi^2 (210) = 1922.5, p < .001$ ). While in this second attempt 'IllegitimateComp11' also showed a communality  $<.20$ , this item was preserved in the analysis based on theoretical reasoning; 'IllegitimateComp11' measured a key aspect of the operationalization of illegitimate complaining behavior and therefore could not be deleted. Furthermore, the pattern matrix did not show a significant factor loading of  $>|.50|$  for 'IllegitimateComp11', 'Injustice1' and 'Finance2'. However, as the factor loadings do exceed the minimum level of  $|.30|$  for interpretation of the factor structure in addition to the theoretical reasons for not deleting them, the decision was made to keep those items in the analysis (Hair *et al.*, 2014). This final factor analysis extracted 5 factors with an eigenvalue above 1 and a cumulative explained variance of 55.7%. The number of factors is not completely in accordance with the initial intended measurement scales since the items of perceptions of injustice, lack of morality and loss of control loaded on the same factor as well as anger and contrast which results in five factors instead of eight. However, while the purpose of a factor analysis is to gain insight in the dimensionality of the scales, it is not conclusive. Therefore, the decision was made to focus on theory and follow its reasoning regarding the number of variables. The final results of the factor analysis are shown in table 1.



Table 1. Factor analysis final results

|                    | Factor |      |      |      |      | Communalities |
|--------------------|--------|------|------|------|------|---------------|
|                    | 1      | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    |               |
| IllegitimateCompl1 |        |      |      |      | .437 | .173          |
| IllegitimateCompl2 |        |      |      |      | .513 | .429          |
| IllegitimateCompl3 |        |      |      |      | .573 | .401          |
| Injustice1         | .464   |      |      |      |      | .382          |
| Injustice2         | .830   |      |      |      |      | .677          |
| Injustice3         | .608   |      |      |      |      | .468          |
| LackMoral1         | .760   |      |      |      |      | .619          |
| LackMoral2         | .883   |      |      |      |      | .725          |
| LackMoral3         | .809   |      |      |      |      | .685          |
| LossControl1       | .735   |      |      |      |      | .528          |
| LossControl2       | .698   |      |      |      |      | .598          |
| LossControl3       | .578   |      |      |      |      | .605          |
| Anger1             |        |      |      | .688 |      | .733          |
| Anger2             |        |      |      | .574 |      | .585          |
| Finance1           |        | .849 |      |      |      | .749          |
| Finance2           |        | .438 |      |      |      | .328          |
| Finance3           |        | .796 |      |      |      | .600          |
| SocialNorm1        |        |      | .824 |      |      | .676          |
| SocialNorm2        |        |      | .591 |      |      | .373          |
| Contrast2          |        |      |      | .767 |      | .666          |
| Contrast3          |        |      |      | .804 |      | .699          |

Note. Factorloadings below .30 were suppressed.

#### 4.4 Reliability analyses

Besides evaluating the underlying structure of the variables, it was required to assess the reliability of the measurement scales in order to validate the internal consistency (Hair *et al.*, 2014). The reliability was assessed by means of calculating the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of each scale. For a sufficient reliability, the required threshold of the coefficient in an exploratory factor analysis is  $>.60$  and the desired threshold is  $>.70$  (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Table 2 shows the reliability of each construct containing more than one item, including illegitimate complaining behavior, perceptions of injustice, lack of morality, loss of control, contrast, financial greed, anger and social norm towards illegitimate complaining. A more detailed presentation of the reliability analyses can be found in Appendix V.

The Cronbach's alpha coefficients confirmed the internal consistency of the constructs except for the construct of illegitimate complaining behavior. The Cronbach's alpha of the

construct illegitimate complaining behavior is not satisfactory, rather problematic. However, since the Cronbach's alpha of .53 was close to the required threshold of .60 and it could not be improved, it was decided to continue the analysis with this construct. Implications of this shortcoming will be discussed further in chapter 5. In addition, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of social norm towards illegitimate complaining did not exceed the desired threshold. However, as it did exceed the required threshold and it could not be improved because it consists of two items, the decision was made to continue the analysis with this construct as well.

*Table 2. Reliability Analyses*

| <b>Construct</b>                  | <b>N of items</b> | <b>Cronbach's Alpha</b> |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Illegitimate complaining behavior | 3                 | .53                     |
| Loss of control                   | 3                 | .80                     |
| Financial greed                   | 3                 | .74                     |
| Perceptions of injustice          | 3                 | .78                     |
| Lack of morality                  | 3                 | .89                     |
| Anger                             | 2                 | .86                     |
| Contrast effect                   | 2                 | .87                     |
| Social norm                       | 2                 | .65                     |

## 4.5 Assumptions

Before being able to test the hypotheses by means of a multiple regression analysis, several assumptions had to be met. The examination of those assumptions is discussed in this section. First of all, multicollinearity and outliers had to be checked (Pallant, 2001). All the independent variables included in the analysis revealed a VIF of <10 and Tolerance of >.10 showing there were no signs of multicollinearity (Appendix VI) (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Besides, outliers seemed to be valid answers and therefore did not create a problem in the analysis.

In addition, normality of the error term distribution must be assessed (Hair *et al.*, 2014). The normal P-P plot and histogram showed a normal distribution of the dependent variable (Appendix VI). However, examining the skewness and kurtosis showed normality could be improved for the dependent variable. Therefore, the decision was made to improve this by transforming the dependent variable in the squared root of this construct because that transformation is effective in bringing large scores closer to the center (Field, 2013). It resulted in a more desirable score of the skewness as it is closer to zero (Appendix VI) (Field, 2013).

Furthermore, the most critical issue in multiple regression analysis concerns the assumption of linearity of the phenomenon measured (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Linearity was assessed for the variate as a whole and examined with the scatterplot (Hair *et al.*, 2014). The scatterplot showed a linear relationship since no curvilinear pattern in the residuals occurs which means the assumption of linearity was met (Appendix VI) (Hair *et al.*, 2014; Field, 2013). In addition, as it is an important assumption, the researcher checked the linearity by including polynomial terms. However, these were insignificant. Hence, linearity could not be improved (Field, 2013).

The fourth assumption concerns constant variance of the error terms, also known as homoscedasticity, and can be assessed by looking at the scatterplot (Hair *et al.*, 2014). The scatterplot showed a pattern indicating heteroscedasticity (Appendix VI). Several remedies are possible in order to solve this problem: transforming the dependent variable or using the method of Weighted Least Squares (Field, 2013). Neither remedy resulted in homoscedasticity. Therefore, the decision was made to continue the analysis with some extent of heteroscedasticity and discuss the consequences and shortcomings of this phenomenon further in chapter 5.

The last assumption points at independence of the error terms (Hair *et al.*, 2014). For estimation of this assumption, the researcher can look at the Durban Watson score which should be around 2 (Field, 2013). As the model summary table showed a score of 2.098, this assumption is met.

#### **4.6 Hypotheses testing**

The results of the final regression analysis are shown in Appendix VII. With regard to the overall model ( $F(12, 164) = 5.191, p < .001$ ), the results of the regression analysis showed the variables together explained 22.2% (Adjusted  $R^2 = .222$ ) of illegitimate complaining behavior. For social sciences, this number is fairly high and acceptable (Field, 2013).

By assessing the results of the multiple regression analysis, this section further elaborates on confirmation or rejection of the hypotheses of the current study. Hypothesis 1 covers the theory of loss of control and examines whether it is the case that the more customers experience a loss of control, the more they will complain illegitimately. The results of the multiple regression analysis showed a negative insignificant relationship between loss of control and illegitimate complaining behavior ( $\beta = -.113, p = .343$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 1 is rejected.

Hypothesis 2 covers the theory of opportunism and examines whether it is the case that the more customers experience an opportunity to complain illegitimately, the more they will complain illegitimately. The results of the multiple regression analysis showed a positive and highly significant relationship between opportunism and illegitimate complaining behavior ( $\beta = .289, p < .01$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 2 is confirmed.

Hypothesis 3 covers the theory of revenge and examines whether it is the case that the more customers experience a desire for revenge, the more they will complain illegitimately. However, this variable was not tested in the final model. Subsequently, hypothesis 3 could neither be rejected nor confirmed.

Hypothesis 4 covers the theory of financial greed and examines whether it is the case that the more customers are driven by financial greed, the more they will complain illegitimately. The results of the multiple regression analysis showed a positive and significant relationship between financial greed and illegitimate complaining behavior ( $\beta = .167, p < .05$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 4 is confirmed.

Hypothesis 5 covers the justice theory and examines whether it is the case that the more customers experience injustice, the more they will complain illegitimately. The results showed a negatively insignificant relationship between perceptions of injustice and illegitimate complaining behavior ( $\beta = -.085, p = .437$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 5 is rejected.

Hypothesis 6 covers the theory of lack of morality and examines whether it is the case that the more customers experience a lack of morality of the service provider, the more they will complain illegitimately. Although the relationship was in the right direction, the results showed it was insignificant ( $\beta = .098, p = .365$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 6 is rejected.

Hypothesis 7 covers the theory of anger and examines whether it is the case that the more customers experience a feeling of anger, the more they will complain illegitimately. The results showed a negatively insignificant relationship between feelings of anger and illegitimate complaining behavior ( $\beta = -.045, p = .664$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 7 is rejected.

Hypothesis 8 covers the effect of prior experience with the firm and examines whether this effect is buffering (the more positive the prior experience, the less the customer will complain illegitimately) or magnifying (the more positive the prior experience, the more the customer will complain illegitimately). However, this variable was not tested in the final model. Therefore, hypothesis 8 could neither be rejected nor confirmed.

Hypothesis 9 covers the conflict framing style of which a distinction can be made between personal-based conflict framing style (H9a) and task-based conflict framing style

(H9b). H9a examines whether it is the case that the more customers adopt a personal-based conflict framing style, the more they complain illegitimately. H9b examines whether it is the case that the more customers adopt a task-based conflict framing style, the less they complain illegitimately. The results of the multiple regression analysis showed a positive significant relationship between personal-based conflict framing style ( $\beta = .170, p < .05$ ) and illegitimate complaining behavior and a negative significant relationship task-based conflict framing style ( $\beta = -.198, p < .01$ ). Therefore, H9a as well as H9b are confirmed.

Hypothesis 10 covers the contrast theory and examines whether it is the case that the more customers experience a discrepancy between expectations and actual performance, the more they will complain illegitimately. The results showed a negative insignificant relationship between contrast theory and illegitimate complaining behavior ( $\beta = -.108, p = .257$ ). Hence, hypothesis 10 is rejected.

Hypothesis 11 covers the negotiation tactic and examines whether it is the case that the more customers use a negotiation tactic, the more they will complain illegitimately. The results showed a negative insignificant relationship between contrast theory and illegitimate complaining behavior ( $\beta = -.073, p = .350$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 11 is rejected.

Hypothesis 12 covers neutralization techniques and examines whether it is the case that the more customers use a neutralization technique, the more they will complain illegitimately. This hypothesis is divided into hypothesis 12a until hypothesis 12e, each pointing at a different neutralization technique. The neutralization techniques ‘denial of injury’ (H12a), ‘metaphor of the ledger’ (H12b), ‘justification by comparison’ (H12c) and ‘defense of necessity’ (H12d) were not tested in the final model. Accordingly, those hypotheses could neither be rejected nor confirmed. However, the neutralization technique ‘regret’ was tested but the results showed an insignificant relationship between that neutralization technique and illegitimate complaining behavior ( $\beta = .096, p = .174$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 12e is rejected.

Of the remaining hypotheses, only hypothesis 14 is partly tested which covers the theory of reasoned action and makes a distinction between the attitude towards complaining (H14a) and the social norm towards illegitimate complaining (H14b). H14a examines whether it is the case that the more customers are reluctant to complain, the less they will complain illegitimately. H14b examines whether it is the case that the more a customer’s environment abhors illegitimate complaining, the less they will complain illegitimately. While H14a was not tested in the final model and therefore could neither be rejected nor confirmed, H14b was tested and the results showed an insignificant relationship ( $\beta = .006, p = .936$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis

14b is rejected. Hypothesis 13 and 15 until 17 (assimilation, halo effect, attribution theory and firm size) are not tested in the final model and, therefore, could neither be rejected nor confirmed.

To examine the importance of the predictors in a model, the  $\beta$ -coefficient can be assessed (Field, 2013). As mentioned before, four significant relationships exist, namely the impact of personal-based conflict framing style, task-based conflict framing style, opportunism and financial greed on illegitimate complaining behavior. The results show that opportunism is the most important predictor in explaining illegitimate complaining behavior ( $\beta = .289$ ) followed by a task-based conflict framing style ( $\beta = -.198$ ), personal-based conflict framing style ( $\beta = .170$ ) and financial greed ( $\beta = .167$ ). Noteworthy, as a task-based conflict framing style is negatively related to illegitimate complaining behavior, it does not lead to an increase in illegitimate complaining behavior. A summary of the results is shown in table 3.

*Table 3. Summary results final model*

|   | Unstandardized Coefficients |       | Standardized Coefficients |
|---|-----------------------------|-------|---------------------------|
|   | b                           | SE    | $\beta$                   |
| (Constant)                                | 1.382                       | 0.104 |                           |
| Loss of control                           | -0.027                      | 0.029 | -.113                     |
| Opportunism                               | 0.059                       | 0.018 | .289**                    |
| Financial greed                           | 0.040                       | 0.020 | .167*                     |
| Perceptions of injustice                  | -0.021                      | 0.027 | -.085                     |
| Lack of morality                          | 0.027                       | 0.030 | .098                      |
| Anger                                     | -0.010                      | 0.023 | -.045                     |
| Conflict framing style (personal)         | 0.037                       | 0.018 | .170*                     |
| Conflict framing style (task)             | -0.045                      | 0.016 | -.198**                   |
| Contrast effect                           | -0.023                      | 0.021 | -.108                     |
| Negotiation                               | -0.016                      | 0.017 | -.073                     |
| Neutralization                            | 0.027                       | 0.020 | .096                      |
| Social norm                               | 0.002                       | 0.022 | .006                      |
| R <sup>2</sup> (Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> ) | .275 (.222)                 |       |                           |

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; b = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error of the coefficient;  $\beta$  = standardized coefficient.

## 5. Discussion

In this chapter the current study is concluded and an elaboration of the results will be given by presenting it in the light of the existing literature and by addressing the managerial implications. The chapter closes with providing important notes regarding the limitations of the study and further topics of inquiry.

### 5.1 Conclusion

While the phrase ‘the customer is always right’ still holds in almost every company nowadays, several researchers have questioned it by studying whether customers are always genuine while complaining and they acknowledged customers may complain without any cause (e.g. Berry & Seiders, 2008; Reynolds & Harris, 2009; Daunt & Harris, 2012). However, as those studies are mostly conceptual, experimental or based on limited data, further research was needed regarding that issue. Last year, Joosten (unpublished) confirmed that most of the complaints are illegitimate (64%). Nevertheless, his data was not suitable to draw any strong conclusions about the drivers of complaining illegitimately. Therefore, the current study extended his research by answering the following research question: *What are drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior?* In addition, two related sub questions were formulated: 1) *What are illegitimate complaints?* and 2) *What are possible drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior?*

Based on a literature review, the sub questions were answered. The answer regarding the first sub question was: illegitimate complaints are complaints without experiencing dissatisfaction as well as complaints resulting from dissatisfaction but in which the complaint is exaggerated, altered, or lied about. In addition, a complaint can be illegitimate regarding the problem (e.g. a hole in a t-shirt) as well as regarding the claim (e.g. a new t-shirt for free in exchange) which results in three different forms of illegitimate complaints: an exaggerated problem, an exaggerated claim, and a made up problem.

The answer regarding the second sub question was: possible drivers of complaining illegitimately are loss of control, opportunism, desire for revenge, financial greed, perceptions of injustice, perceptions of lack of morality, anger, prior experience with the firm, a personal-based conflict framing style, a task-based conflict framing style, a discrepancy between expectations and actual performance (contrast effect), negotiation tactic, neutralization techniques, assimilation, attitude towards complaining, social norm towards illegitimate complaining, halo effect, external (versus internal) attribution and a large firm size.

While measuring this issue empirically was stated to be “nearly impossible” (Baker, Magnini & Perdue, 2012, p. 295) and “challenging and fraught with difficulties owing to its sensitive nature and potential for bias” (Fisk *et al.*, 2010, p. 423), the current study was a good endeavor at identifying the drivers for complaining illegitimately by means of conducting an online survey. The multiple regression analysis that was conducted, allows the researcher to answer the research question ‘*What are drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior?*’ in the following way: drivers of complaining illegitimately are opportunism, a personal-based conflict framing style, a task-based conflict framing style and financial greed. The drivers point respectively at the ‘when’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ of illegitimate complaining behavior: the results suggest that customers complain illegitimately when an opportunity to do so occurs (opportunism), by pressurizing the firm (personal-based conflict framing style) instead of being solution-oriented (task-based conflict framing style), because they want to earn money (financial greed).

Noteworthy, the model including all the variables was insignificant. Therefore, the researcher searched for the most optimal model in view of the circumstances by using forward and backward elimination. As a result, several variables were not included in the final model as they caused noise in the analysis, meaning odd results appeared when those variables were included. Consequently, some hypotheses could neither be denied nor confirmed. In order to clarify which hypotheses are accepted, rejected or not tested, an overview of the results of this study is given in table 4. An elaboration of the results is provided in the upcoming paragraphs.

*Table 4. Overview of hypotheses and results*

| <b>Hypothesis</b>  | <b>Result</b> |
|--|---------------|
| H1 The more customers experience a loss of control, the more they will complain illegitimately.                          | Rejected      |
| H2 The more customers experience an opportunity to complain illegitimately, the more they will complain illegitimately.  | Confirmed     |
| H3 The more customers experience a desire for revenge, the more they will complain illegitimately.                       | Not tested    |
| H4 The more customers are driven by financial greed, the more they will complain illegitimately.                         | Confirmed     |
| H5 The more customers experience injustice, the more they will complain illegitimately.                                  | Rejected      |
| H6 The more customers experience a lack of morality of the service provider, the more they will complain illegitimately. | Rejected      |
| H7 The more customers experience a feeling of anger, the more they will complain illegitimately.                         | Rejected      |



|      |  |            |
|------|--|------------|
| H8a  | The more positive the prior experience with the firm has been, the less the customer will complain illegitimately (buffering).           | Not tested |
| H8b  | The more positive the prior experience with the firm has been, the more the customer will complain illegitimately (magnifying).          | Not tested |
| H9a  | The more customers adopt a personal-based conflict framing style, the more they will complain illegitimately.                            | Confirmed  |
| H9b  | The more customers adopt a task-based conflict framing style, the less they will complain illegitimately.                                | Confirmed  |
| H10  | The more customers experience a discrepancy between expectations and the actual performance, the more they will complain illegitimately. | Rejected   |
| H11  | The more customers use a negotiation tactic, the more they will complain illegitimately.   | Rejected   |
| H12a | The more customers use the technique of ‘denial of injury’, the more they will complain illegitimately.                                  | Not tested |
| H12b | The more customers use the technique of ‘metaphor of the ledger’, the more they will complain illegitimately.                            | Not tested |
| H12c | The more customers use the technique of ‘justification by comparison’, the more they will complain illegitimately.                       | Not tested |
| H12d | The more customers use the technique of ‘defense of necessity’, the more they will complain illegitimately.                              | Not tested |
| H12e | The more customers use the technique of ‘regret’, the more they will complain illegitimately.  | Rejected   |
| H13  | The more customers experience a need to assimilate through cognitive dissonance, the less they will complain illegitimately.             | Not tested |
| H14a | The more customers are reluctant to complain, the less they will complain illegitimately   | Not tested |
| H14b | The more a customer’s environment abhors illegitimate complaining behavior, the less they will complain illegitimately                   | Rejected   |
| H15  | The stronger the halo effect customers experience, the more they will complain illegitimately.   | Not tested |
| H16  | The more customers attribute the failure externally (compared to internally), the more they will complain illegitimately                 | Not tested |
| H17  | The larger customers experience the size of a firm, the more they will complain illegitimately.  | Not tested |

---

## 5.2 Theoretical contributions

While scientists acknowledge the “potential significant issue” and the need for research on drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior (Wirtz & McColl-Kennedy, 2010, p. 654), a lack of investigations exists concerning the issue in question. Furthermore, most studies remained conceptual, experimental or based on limited data (e.g. Berry & Seiders, 2008; Reynolds & Harris, 2009; Daunt & Harris, 2012). Accordingly, the overall theoretical contribution of the current study is initially caused by measuring situations that actually happened using a large sample rather than experimental situations based on limited data. Therefore, the current study

provides insights in understanding the drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior which increases the theoretical knowledge regarding this issue.

Second, the hypothesized effects of opportunism, financial greed, a personal-based conflict framing style and a task-based conflict framing style are confirmed and in line with theoretical expectations. Hence, these results contribute to the existing literature by finding additional support for those constructs as drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior in which a task-based conflict framing style inhibits rather than reinforces illegitimate complaining. Comparing the findings with existing academic literature, the findings seem to question the explanation of Beverland *et al.* (2010) for the effect of a personal-based conflict framing style. Initially, it was expected that customers with a personal-based conflict framing style are not interested in a practical solution like an economic compensation, but rather perceive the actions of the service provider as unjustified and are out for revenge (Beverland *et al.*, 2010). However, as the results of constructs like perceptions of injustice and lack of morality are not significant and the construct of financial greed is, it seems like the results of the current study contradict that explanation. Another explanation could be that customers hold the perception of using a personal-based conflict framing style and therefore pressurizing the service provider will lead to the desired outcomes like getting the monetary compensation they want.

Third, the hypothesized effects of perceptions of injustice, lack of morality, neutralization, social norm towards illegitimate complaining, loss of control, anger, discrepancy between expectations and actual performance (contrast effect) and negotiation tactic on illegitimate complaining behavior appeared to be insignificant which is not in line with the theoretical expectations. An explanation for these findings might be that it was due to a design flaw or methodological issues. Such limitations will be discussed further in section 5.4. Another possible reason could be that these effects simply do not exist. As the study of Joosten (unpublished) also showed that perceptions of injustice do not help explain illegitimate complaints, it is reasonable to assume that the latter reason holds for that construct. That specific outcome contributes significantly to academic literature as justice theory is an important and commonly used theory in explaining legitimate complaining behavior and it was expected that it would play a big role in explaining illegitimate complaining behavior as well (Voorhees & Brady, 2005; Fullerton & Punj, 2004; Wirtz & McColl-Kennedy, 2010).

In addition, the effect of perceptions of injustice on illegitimate complaining was in the contradicting direction of what was expected which was also the case for the insignificant effects of anger, loss of control, contrast effect and negotiation tactic. Hence, it is important to speculate about possible explanations for that as that could contribute to the theoretical insights.

Regarding perceptions of injustice and anger, it is possible that customers do not want to deal with the organization anymore or put effort in it as they are very angry and treated unjustified which results in them not complaining more illegitimately. Regarding loss of control, it could be assumed that when customers feel more in control, they dare to complain more illegitimately as they experience a feeling of being more in charge. Regarding the contrast effect, it is possible that the cognitive dissonance theory explains the negative relationship as it assumes that a dissonance, in this case a discrepancy between expectations and actual performance, makes customers feel uncomfortable resulting in an urge to eliminate that dissonance (Anderson, 1973; Oliver & DeSarbo, 1988). Eliminating that dissonance could implicate that customers alter their cognitions by adjusting their expectations to a lower level leading to a limited discrepancy and, therefore, less illegitimate complaining behavior. Finally, it is assumed that the contradicting direction of the effect of negotiation tactic is a result of methodological issues as no alternative explanation can be found.

Lastly, as the current study aimed to extend the research of Joosten (unpublished), it is of importance to compare the findings with the insights of his research. Overall, the results of the current study are not in accordance with the suggestions of Joosten (unpublished) as his findings suggested a tendency towards unconscious and external attribution while the findings of the current study indicate an internal attribution meaning individuals consciously complain illegitimately. It is possible that the discrepancy in findings is caused by the different research methods which will be discussed next.

Joosten (unpublished) investigated illegitimate complaining by means of files of the Dutch “Geschillencommissie”, a foundation which aims to solve complaints and disputes objectively and neutrally (De Geschillencommissie, n.d.). Noteworthy, a customer can only win a lawsuit regarding a complaint when guilt can be attributed to the company resulting in customers not admitting they were wrong (Joosten, unpublished). Furthermore, the foundation works with experts who find out whether the complaint is legitimate or not (De Geschillencommissie, n.d.). Results showed that in most complaints the defect “is an acceptable feature or property of the product, the materials used or the service provided”, meaning the customer was not aware of the complaint being illegitimate (Joosten, unpublished, p. 10). In contrast, the current study used an online survey which is based on self-reported data and in which anonymity is assured. The self-reported data leads to the inability of measuring unconscious behavior while the assured anonymity could lead to individuals being honest and willing to admit they consciously complained illegitimately. Concluding, the dataset of Joosten (unpublished) made it possible to detect unconscious drivers but not internal attribution while

the dataset of the current study made it possible to detect internal attribution but not unconscious drivers. Hence, the discrepancy in findings is perhaps caused by the different research methods. This insight results in an important theoretical contribution because it shows the research method must be taken in consideration when measuring drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior since it can affect the outcomes.

### **5.3 Managerial implications**

As mentioned before, a lot of businesses hold on to the principle of “the customer is always right”. However, studies have proven the customer is not always right and that business are overspending in complaint handling which leads to high financial costs (Joosten, unpublished; Reynolds & Harris, 2005). Therefore, more insights in the drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior could help practitioners in deciding whether to continue overinvesting time, money, and effort in complaint handling, and whether the firm itself can do something about it. Hence, the findings of the current study are relevant for business practitioners and several managerial implications can be deduced from the results which are discussed next.

First, the outcomes showed that opportunism is an important predictor of illegitimate complaining behavior indicating that the more customers experience an opportunity to complain illegitimately and take advantage, the more they will do so. Therefore, managers are advised to limit the opportunities for customers to complain illegitimately. For example, caution must be taken with regard to lengthening the service guarantees as it can give customers an extra opportunity to take advantage of (Wirtz & Kum, 2004).

Second, as financial greed turned out to be a driver of illegitimate complaining behavior, managers are advised not to give all money back immediately. Complaining customers who are driven by financial greed “attempt to obtain free goods and services without experiencing any genuine dissatisfactory incidences” (Reynolds & Harris, 2005, p. 327). Accordingly, a good rule of thumb would be to first let an expert judge the complaint in order to detect illegitimate complaints and to prevent overspending in compensating illegitimate complaints.

Third, regarding the conflict framing style, it is recommended to stimulate a task-based conflict framing style rather than a personal-based conflict framing style as a task-based framing style turned out to obstruct illegitimate complaining behavior. It could be questioned whether the firm itself can influence this framing style as it is rather a characteristic of the customer. Still, business practitioners could give it a try by setting priority to consultation (task-based conflict framing style) instead of a more offensive approach (personal-based conflict

framing style) in the complaint handling procedure. It is a possibility that the customer adopts this style of negotiation which could lead to a decrease in illegitimate complaining behavior.

Fourth, as constructs like the perceptions of injustice, lack of morality and loss of control are insignificant in explaining illegitimate complaining behavior, business practitioners do not necessarily have to worry about the way they treat the customer in the complaint handling process as this does not lead to more illegitimate complaining behavior. However, while other academics did find an effect of variables like injustice (Wirtz & McColl-Kennedy, 2010), it is, of course, also not recommended to treat the customer unjustifiably. Hence, businesses must treat customers right but are, at the same time, in a position to reprove.

Lastly, although the current study was not able to draw strong conclusions about the effect of firm size on illegitimate complaining behavior, the data showed a tendency towards the vast majority of illegitimate complaints being voiced in a big firm (75.7%). Therefore, managers of a big firm must be aware of the possibility that the aforementioned implications might be of special importance to them. Nonetheless, further research is deemed to be necessary in order to confirm that tendency. Additionally, all businesses are advised to interpret the implications in light of the limitations of the current study. Those limitations will be discussed in the following section along with the opportunities for further inquiry.

## **5.4 Limitations and further research**

As with every study of this nature, the results and contributions of the current study are constrained by several shortcomings. Those limitations are required to be outlined. In turn, the limitations provide fruitful avenues for further research. This section focuses on those limitations and suggestions for future inquiry.

First, the method that has been chosen needs to be addressed. Although the decision to use an online survey was thought-out, it was also associated with several drawbacks. First, online surveys can result in inaccurate information regarding sample validity as the respondents are necessarily selected from a population of online users which means there is no equal chance for every member of the whole population to be selected (Duda & Nobile, 2010). Second, there is no control over sample selection for the researcher (Duda & Nobile, 2010). Third, as anonymity is assured, the researcher does not have the knowledge whether every submission is unique (Duda & Nobile, 2010). Hence, future research should take these drawbacks into account and future scholars are advised to measure the relationships by means of a different method in order to find additional evidence for the results. An alternative approach for studying

the relationships could be by means of qualitative research as conducting interviews is appropriate in attaining perceptions which are more deeply rooted as could be the case regarding complaining illegitimately (Bleijenbergh, 2013). Additionally, academics in this field of research have studied related subjects using surveys (e.g. Daunt & Harris, 2012; Harris, 2008; Albers-Miller, 1999; Akers *et al.*, 1983). Therefore, a qualitative perspective would be an original approach and could lead to findings from another point of view. Noteworthy, caution must be taken regarding the willingness of individuals to participate in such a qualitative study as it contains a sensitive issue while anonymity cannot be assured.

Second, the current study contains various statistical shortcomings which are discussed next. First of all, the discriminant validity is lacking as the factor analysis showed several items which measure a different construct loaded on the same factor. Second, since the current study aimed to provide an overview of possible drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior and, therefore, had an exploring purpose, several variables were measured as one-item constructs which limits the reliability and validity of the constructs (Wanous, Reichers & Hudy, 1997). In addition, the reliability and validity of the dependent variable were also lacking. Third, the assumption of homoscedasticity has been violated which influenced the confidence intervals and significance tests (Field, 2013). As the decision was made to continue the analysis with heteroscedasticity, caution must be taken with interpreting the results. Although the researcher tried her best in limiting the consequences of the shortcomings, there is a chance that the methodological limitations have influenced the outcomes. Subsequently, future inquiry is advised to replicate the study with a homoscedastic dataset including measurement scales consisting of three or more items with an acceptable (discriminant) validity and reliability in order to contribute to the validation of the results.

Third, the decision was made to use pairwise deletion which results in an unequal amount of cases among the variables. Although there were only seven incomplete cases, there is a chance that it influenced the comparability of the constructs (Peugh & Enders, 2004). Moreover, although they exceeded the minimum level, several variables did not exceed the desired level regarding the sample size for a regression analysis as a consequence of the pairwise deletion (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Future research should consider the option of forced response in a survey leading to no differences in cases among the variables or should increase the sample size. Researchers could also consider the use of maximum likelihood estimation and multiple imputation for dealing with missing data (Schafer & Graham, 2002, p. 147; Peugh & Enders, 2004).

Fourth, as in many nonexperimental studies, the researcher does not have access to all the requisite constructs, so-called omitted variables, which may lead to a biased estimation of the model parameters (Kim & Frees, 2006). Still, there is a chance that those variables have an explained variance in illegitimate complaining behavior. Therefore, future research should include them and study the effects. Noteworthy, although the current study was not able to include the construct of firm size in the final model, the frequencies of the dataset showed a tendency towards the vast majority of illegitimate complaints being voiced in a big firm (75.7%) which would support the theoretical expectations (Wirtz & McColl-Kennedy, 2010; Baker *et al*, 2012). Nevertheless, further inquiry is deemed to be necessary in order to confirm this tendency.

Fifth, while the researcher has tried her best in limiting the chance of social desirable answers as described in chapter 3, the possibility exists that participants have felt constrained in their response since the study contains a sensitive issue. Future research should try to statistically control for this.

Lastly, regarding the sample, several limitations leading to a lack in generalizability should be considered. The sample did not appear to be homogeneous, it was rather overrepresented by young female individuals who were highly educated. Accordingly, the results of the study are generalizable to a population regarding those characteristics. Future research should utilize more representative samples to increase the external validity as studies have shown that age, gender and education might influence the results (e.g. McColl-Kennedy, Daus & Sparks, 2003; Reynolds & Harris, 2005; Babin & Griffin, 1995).

In addition to the factors influencing the generalizability, the fact that the current study was conducted in the Netherlands limits the generalizability across borders. Future research should replicate the study in different countries to find out whether results differ regarding different countries and cultures. This could be the case since studies have shown differences in complaint behaviors and intentions across cultures (e.g. Liu & McClure, 2001; Hernandez, Strahle, Garcia & Sorensen, 1991; Yuksel, Kilinc & Yuksel, 2006).

There is chance that aforementioned limitations caused the insignificance of the model including all variables. As a consequence, as has been argued, a lot of possible drivers of illegitimate complaining behavior remain unexamined. Hence, the researcher sincerely hopes academics will extend and build on the current study in order to further improve the theoretical knowledge concerning this fascinating, under-researched topic.

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# Appendices

## Appendix I: Survey

(Deze enquête is ontwikkeld in samenwerking met Van Bokhoven (unpublished))

Beste meneer/mevrouw,

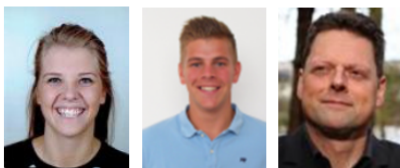
Hartelijk dank voor uw deelname aan dit onderzoek! Wij zijn John van Bokhoven en Esther van Laar, masterstudenten Marketing. Voor onze masterthesis doen wij - onder begeleiding van onze docent Dr. Herm Joosten - onderzoek naar het klaaggedrag van consumenten.

Iedereen heeft wel eens geklaagd over een product of dienst. Veel mensen willen ook toegeven dat hun klacht soms niet helemaal eerlijk (overdreven of verzonnen) is. U claimt bijvoorbeeld schade aan uw mobiele telefoon die u zelf veroorzaakt heeft of u klaagt over het eten in een restaurant, terwijl er niets mis mee is. Het kan ook zijn dat u klaagt bij uw kabelmaatschappij dat u al weken zonder internet zit, terwijl u maar een dag zonder zat of u eist een schadevergoeding die helemaal of deels onterecht is.

Dit onderzoek richt zich op de motivatie van consumenten om klachten te overdrijven of te verzinnen. Wij begrijpen dat dit onderwerp wellicht gevoelig ligt, daarom is deze enquête **volledig anoniem** wat betekent dat niemand kan achterhalen wie de antwoorden heeft ingevuld. Daarnaast gebruiken wij de gegevens uitsluitend voor dit onderzoek en is deelname geheel vrijwillig; u kunt op elk gewenst moment stoppen. Tot slot zijn er geen goede of foute antwoorden, omdat het gaat over hoe u de situatie heeft beleefd. De enquête zal ongeveer 10 minuten duren.

Nogmaals hartelijk dank voor uw deelname! U helpt ons en de wetenschap een stap verder!

Esther van Laar,  
John van Bokhoven,  
Dr. Herm Joosten



**Radboud Universiteit**



Uit onderzoek blijkt dat veel mensen wel eens een klacht hebben overdreven of verzonnen. Heeft u ook wel eens een klacht overdreven of verzonnen?

**Toelichting:** Mocht u niet onmiddellijk een eigen overdreven of verzonnen klacht te binnen schieten, dan helpen misschien voorbeelden uit ons eigen leven:

*John:* "Voor mijn komende zomervakantie is plotseling mijn heenvlucht gewijzigd naar een andere luchthaven waardoor ik extra lang moet reizen om er te komen. Dit vond ik nergens op slaan en daarom heb ik van de situatie gebruik gemaakt en een schadevergoeding geëist die een beetje overdreven was."

*Herm:* "De touroperator vertelde dat ze mij om moesten boeken naar een ander hotel in Spanje. Ik heb gedaan alsof ik dit heel erg vond en daardoor kreeg ik uiteindelijk voor elkaar dat ik een veel betere hotelkamer kreeg, met uitzicht op zee."

*Esther:* "Mijn mobiele telefoon was buitenshuis gevallen en hierdoor kapotgegaan. Vervolgens heb ik aan de verzekering doorgegeven dat dit in huis was gebeurd. Daardoor heb ik geld terug kunnen krijgen via mijn inboedelverzekering, zodat mijn portemonnee toch nog enigszins bespaard bleef." (In dit geval staat de claim gelijk aan een klacht en wordt de instantie gezien als het bedrijf).

Neem de tijd om goed na te denken over een situatie waarin u een klacht (deels) heeft overdreven of verzonnen.



1. Over welk product of welke dienst heeft u geklaagd (of een claim ingediend)?

---

2. Wat was de waarde van het product/de dienst ongeveer?

---

3. Waar heeft u geklaagd (bij welk bedrijf of welke instantie)?

---

4. Hoe groot was het bedrijf waar u heeft geklaagd?

- ☐ Klein bedrijf (bijv. eenmanszaak)
- ☐ Middelgroot bedrijf (bijv. 2 of 3 vestigingen)
- ☐ Groot bedrijf (bijv. winkelketen of grote producent)

5. Wat was (volgens u) het probleem met het betreffende product of de dienst?

---

6. In hoeverre heeft u het probleem overdreven (dus erger voorgesteld dan het daadwerkelijk was)?

|                        | Helemaal niet<br>overdreven | Een klein<br>beetje<br>overdreven | Half<br>overdreven    | Grotendeels<br>overdreven | Geheel<br>overdreven  |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Probleem<br>overdreven | <input type="radio"/>       | <input type="radio"/>             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> |

7. In hoeverre heeft u het probleem verzonnen (ofwel anders voorgesteld dan het daadwerkelijk was)?

|                    | Helemaal niet verzonnen | Een klein beetje verzonnen | Half verzonnen        | Grotendeels verzonnen | Geheel verzonnen      |
|--------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Probleem verzonnen | <input type="radio"/>   | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

8. Wat stelde u voor als oplossing voor het probleem?

---

9. In hoeverre heeft u de voorgestelde oplossing overdreven (dus meer geëist dan eigenlijk redelijk was)?

|                      | Helemaal niet overdreven | Een klein beetje overdreven | Half overdreven       | Grotendeels overdreven | Geheel overdreven     |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Oplossing overdreven | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/>       | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> |

10. Wat stelde het bedrijf voor als oplossing?

---

11. Wanneer speelde uw beschreven situatie?

- ☐ Het afgelopen jaar
- ☐ Langer dan een jaar geleden
- ☐ Langer dan twee jaar geleden

In hoeverre bent u het eens met de volgende stellingen?

|   | Helemaal<br>mee<br>oneens | Mee oneens            | Niet mee<br>eens/niet mee<br>oneens | Mee eens              | Helemaal mee<br>eens  |
|---|---------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 12. Het voorstel van het bedrijf om de klacht op te lossen was oneerlijk naar mij toe   | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 13. De manier waarop het bedrijf mij behandelde tijdens de klacht was onbeleefd   | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 14. De klachtprocedure van het bedrijf was traag en moeizaam  | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 15. Het bedrijf wilde van mij profiteren  | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 16. Het bedrijf probeerde misbruik van mij te maken   | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 17. Het bedrijf had verkeerde bedoelingen   | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 18. Het bedrijf reageerde niet meer op mijn verzoeken   | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 19. Het bedrijf hield zich niet aan de afspraken  | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 20. Het voelde alsof ik geen controle meer had over het proces  | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 21. De oorzaak van het probleem lag bij het bedrijf   | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 22. De oorzaak van het probleem lag aan de omstandigheden waar zowel ik als het bedrijf niks aan konden doen (bijv. het weer) | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

|  |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 23. De oorzaak van het probleem was mijn eigen schuld                      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 24. Ik had hoge verwachtingen van het product/de dienst                    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 25. Mijn ervaring met het product/de dienst was veel slechter dan verwacht | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 26. Aan mijn verwachtingen van het product/de dienst werd niet voldaan     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 27. Ik wilde het bedrijf op een bepaalde manier straffen                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 28. Ik wilde overlast veroorzaken bij het bedrijf                          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 29. Ik wilde het bedrijf het betaald zetten                                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 30. Ik was boos op het bedrijf   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 31. Ik was woedend op het bedrijf  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

---

In hoeverre bent u het eens met de volgende stellingen?

|  | Helemaal<br>mee oneens | Mee oneens            | Niet mee<br>eens/niet<br>mee oneens | Mee eens              | Helemaal<br>mee eens  |
|--|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 32. Ik heb het van tevoren gepland om mij op deze manier te gedragen   | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 33. Het gedrag dat ik vertoonde was impulsief  | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 34. De garantieregeling van het bedrijf verleidde mij om de klacht te overdrijven/verzinnen                            | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 35. Ik reageerde op een mogelijkheid die zich voordeed om mijn klacht te overdrijven/verzinnen                         | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 36. Ik heb de klacht overdreven/verzonnen om geld te verdienen   | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 37. Ik heb de klacht overdreven/verzonnen om iets gratis te krijgen  | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 38. Ik heb geld verdiend door de klacht te overdrijven/verzinnen   | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 39. Tijdens het klachtproces heb ik geprobeerd het bedrijf zoveel mogelijk onder druk te zetten om mijn zin te krijgen | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 40. Tijdens het klachtproces heb ik geprobeerd in overleg en samenwerking tot een oplossing te komen                   | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 41. Ik ben iemand die niet snel klaagt   | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 42. Ik vind dat veel mensen te snel klagen   | <input type="radio"/>  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

|  |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 43. Als ik mijn vrienden en kennissen zou vertellen dat ik een klacht overdreven of verzonnen had, zouden ze daar niet van schrikken                     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 44. Ik denk dat mijn vrienden en kennissen in dezelfde situatie de klacht ook overdreven of verzonnen zouden hebben                                      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 45. Ik heb de klacht overdreven/verzonnen omdat ik weet dat je altijd hoger moet inzetten tijdens onderhandelingen om uiteindelijk te krijgen wat je wil | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 46. Ik denk dat het bedrijf geen grote schade ondervindt van mijn overdreven/verzonnen klacht  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 47. Ik ben normaal gesproken eerlijk als consument, dus ik mag best een keertje overdrijven/verzinnen  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 48. Vergeleken met bijv. diefstal en oplichting is het overdrijven/verzinnen van een klacht niet ernstig   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 49. Het overdrijven/verzinnen van de klacht was de enige manier om iets gedaan te krijgen van het bedrijf  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 50. Ik heb er later wel spijt van gehad dat ik mijn klacht heb overdreven/verzonnen  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

|   |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 51. Ik beschouw mezelf als “vaste klant” van dit bedrijf                              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 52. Ik ben boos op het bedrijf dat ze een (vaste) klant zo behandelen                 | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 53. Ondanks de beschreven ervaring met het bedrijf blijf ik positief over het bedrijf | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

In hoeverre bent u het eens met de volgende stellingen?  
**(Let erop dat er bij onderstaande stellingen een 'niet van toepassing' optie is toegevoegd)**

|  | Helemaal<br>mee<br>oneens | Mee<br>oneens         | Niet mee<br>eens/niet<br>mee<br>oneens | Mee<br>eens           | Helemaal<br>mee eens  | Niet van<br>toepassing |
|--|---------------------------|-----------------------|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 54. Mijn eerdere ervaringen met het bedrijf zijn positief  | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |
| 55. Nadat ik een fout ontdekte in het product/de dienst, ontdekte ik nog meer gebreken           | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |
| 56. Toen ik een fout had ontdekt ging ik verder kijken en bleken er nog meer fouten in te zitten | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |
| 57. Het product/de dienst had nog meer gebreken, maar daarover heb ik niet geklaagd              | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |
| 58. Ondanks dat het product/de dienst nog meer gebreken had, nam ik die voor lief                | <input type="radio"/>     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>  |

-----

Als laatste volgen er een aantal feitelijke vragen over uw situatie evenals uw leeftijd, geslacht en opleiding.

-----

59. Wat is de totale tijd dat uw beschreven situatie (tot dusver) heeft gespeeld?

\_\_\_\_\_

-----

60. Heeft u al vaker een klacht overdreven/verzonnen?

- ☐ Dit was de enige keer
  - ☐ 2 keer
  - ☐ 3 keer
  - ☐ Vaker dan 3 keer
- 

61. Wat is uw leeftijd?

☐ Leeftijd in jaren \_\_\_\_\_

-----

62. Wat is uw geslacht?

- ☐ Man
  - ☐ Vrouw
-



63. Wat is uw hoogst genoten opleiding (met of zonder diploma)?

- ☐ Lagere school/basisonderwijs
- ☐ Voortgezet onderwijs
- ☐ MBO (MAVO)
- ☐ HBO
- ☐ Universiteit

---

Dit waren de vragen. **Nogmaals hartelijk dank voor uw medewerking.** Indien u geïnteresseerd bent in de resultaten van het onderzoek kunt u een mail sturen naar [johnvanbokhoven10@hotmail.com](mailto:johnvanbokhoven10@hotmail.com) of [e.vanlaar@outlook.com](mailto:e.vanlaar@outlook.com).

---

## Appendix II: Operationalization

Table 5. Operationalization

| Construct                             | Item(s)  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Illegitimate complaining behavior     | In hoeverre heeft u het probleem overdreven (dus erger voorgesteld dan het daadwerkelijk was)?<br>In hoeverre heeft u het probleem verzonnen (ofwel anders voorgesteld dan het daadwerkelijk was)?<br>In hoeverre heeft u de voorgestelde oplossing overdreven (dus meer geëist dan eigenlijk redelijk was)?         |
| Loss of control                       | Het bedrijf reageerde niet meer op mijn verzoeken.<br>Het bedrijf hield zich niet aan de afspraken.<br>Het voelde alsof ik geen controle meer had over het proces.   |
| Opportunism                           | Ik heb het van tevoren gepland om mij op deze manier te gedragen.<br>Het gedrag dat ik vertoonde was impulsief.<br>De garantieregeling van het bedrijf verleidde mij om de klacht te verzinnen/overdrijven.<br>Ik reageerde op een mogelijkheid die zich voordeed om mijn klacht te overdrijven/verzinnen.           |
| Desire for revenge                    | Ik wilde het bedrijf op een bepaalde manier straffen.<br>Ik wilde overlast veroorzaken bij het bedrijf.<br>Ik wilde het bedrijf het betaald zetten.  |
| Financial greed                       | Ik heb de klacht verzonnen/overdreven om geld te verdienen.<br>Ik heb de klacht verzonnen/overdreven om iets gratis te krijgen.<br>Ik heb geld verdiend door de klacht te verzinnen/overdrijven.   |
| Perceptions of injustice              | Het voorstel van het bedrijf om de klacht op te lossen was oneerlijk naar mij toe.<br>De manier waarop het bedrijf mij behandelde tijdens de klacht was onbeleefd.<br>De klachtprocedure van het bedrijf was traag en moeizaam.  |
| Lack of morality                      | Het bedrijf wilde van mij profiteren.<br>Het bedrijf probeerde misbruik van mij te maken.<br>Het bedrijf had verkeerde bedoelingen.  |
| Anger                                 | Ik was boos op het bedrijf.<br>Ik was woedend op het bedrijf.  |
| Prior experience with the firm        | Ik beschouw mezelf als “vaste klant” van dit bedrijf.<br>Ik ben boos op het bedrijf dat ze een (vaste) klant zo behandelen ( <i>versterkend</i> ).<br>Ondanks de beschreven ervaring met het bedrijf blijf ik positief over het bedrijf ( <i>buffer</i> ).<br>Mijn eerdere ervaringen met het bedrijf zijn positief. |
| Personal-based conflict framing style | Tijdens het klachtproces heb ik geprobeerd het bedrijf zoveel mogelijk onder druk te zetten om mijn zin te krijgen.  |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Task-based conflict framing style            | Tijdens het klachtenproces heb ik geprobeerd in overleg en samenwerking tot een oplossing te komen.   |
| Contrast effect                              | Ik had hoge verwachtingen van het product/de dienst.<br>Mijn ervaring met het product/de dienst was veel slechter dan verwacht.<br>Aan mijn verwachtingen van het product/de dienst werd niet voldaan.  |
| Negotiation tactic                           | Ik heb de klacht overdreven/verzonnen omdat ik weet dat je altijd hoger moet inzetten tijdens onderhandelingen om uiteindelijk te krijgen wat je wil.   |
| Denial of injury (neutralization)            | Ik denk dat het bedrijf geen grote schade ondervindt van mijn overdreven/verzonnen klacht.  |
| Metaphor of the ledger (neutralization)      | Ik ben normaal gesproken eerlijk als consument, dus ik mag best een keertje overdrijven/verzinnen.  |
| Justification by comparison (neutralization) | Vergeleken met bijv. diefstal en oplichting is het overdrijven/verzinnen van een klacht niet ernstig.   |
| Defense of necessity (neutralization)        | Het overdrijven/verzinnen van de klacht was de enige manier om iets gedaan te krijgen van het bedrijf.  |
| Regret (neutralization)                      | Ik heb er later wel spijt van gehad dat ik mijn klacht heb overdreven/verzonnen.  |
| Assimilation theory                          | Het product/de dienst had nog meer gebreken, maar daarover heb ik niet geklaagd.<br>Ondanks dat het product/de dienst nog meer gebreken had, nam ik die voor lief.  |
| Attitude towards complaining                 | Ik ben iemand die niet snel klaagt.<br>Ik vind dat veel mensen te snel klagen.  |
| Social norm towards illegitimate complaining | Als ik mijn vrienden en kennissen zou vertellen dat ik een klacht verzonnen of overdreven had, zouden ze daar niet van schrikken.<br>Ik denk dat mijn vrienden en kennissen in dezelfde situatie de klacht ook verzonnen of overdreven zouden hebben. |
| Halo effect                                  | Nadat ik een fout ontdekte in het product/de dienst, ontdekte ik nog meer gebreken.<br>Toen ik een fout had ontdekt ging ik verder kijken en bleken er nog meer fouten in te zitten.  |
| External attribution                         | De oorzaak van het probleem lag bij het bedrijf.  |
| Attribution to circumstances                 | De oorzaak van het probleem lag aan de omstandigheden waar zowel ik als het bedrijf niks aan konden doen (bijv. het weer).  |
| Internal attribution                         | De oorzaak van het probleem was mijn eigen schuld.  |
| Firm size                                    | Hoe groot was het bedrijf waar u heeft geklaagd? (klein, middelgroot, groot)  |

### Appendix III: SPSS output – Factor analysis (first attempt)

*Table 6. KMO an Bartlett's Test of Sphericity*

| <b>KMO and Bartlett's Test</b>                   |                    |          |
|--|--------------------|----------|
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy. |                    | 0.872    |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity                    | Approx. Chi-Square | 1951.429 |
|  | df                 | 231      |
|  | Sig.               | .000     |

*Table 7. Factor correlation matrix*

| <b>Factor Correlation Matrix</b> |        |        |        |        |        |
|----------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Factor                           | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4      | 5      |
| 1                                | 1      | -0.17  | -0.091 | 0.499  | -0.207 |
| 2                                | -0.17  | 1      | -0.162 | -0.014 | 0.385  |
| 3                                | -0.091 | -0.162 | 1      | 0.08   | 0.007  |
| 4                                | 0.499  | -0.014 | 0.08   | 1      | -0.041 |
| 5                                | -0.207 | 0.385  | 0.007  | -0.041 | 1      |

*Table 8. Communalities*

| <b>Communalities</b> |         |            |
|----------------------|---------|------------|
|                      | Initial | Extraction |
| IllegitimateComp11   | 0.166   | 0.165      |
| IllegitimateComp12   | 0.350   | 0.426      |
| IllegitimateComp13   | 0.304   | 0.433      |
| Injustice1           | 0.434   | 0.382      |
| Injustice2           | 0.653   | 0.674      |
| Injustice3           | 0.502   | 0.465      |
| LackMoral1           | 0.670   | 0.622      |
| LackMoral2           | 0.788   | 0.725      |
| LackMoral3           | 0.741   | 0.686      |
| LossControl1         | 0.529   | 0.529      |
| LossControl2         | 0.594   | 0.599      |
| LossControl3         | 0.602   | 0.602      |
| Anger1               | 0.751   | 0.739      |
| Anger2               | 0.681   | 0.582      |
| Finance1             | 0.535   | 0.749      |
| Finance2             | 0.306   | 0.326      |
| Finance3             | 0.491   | 0.599      |
| SocialNorm1          | 0.373   | 0.741      |
| SocialNorm2          | 0.309   | 0.339      |
| Contrast1            | 0.177   | 0.134      |
| Contrast2            | 0.668   | 0.680      |
| Contrast3            | 0.674   | 0.673      |

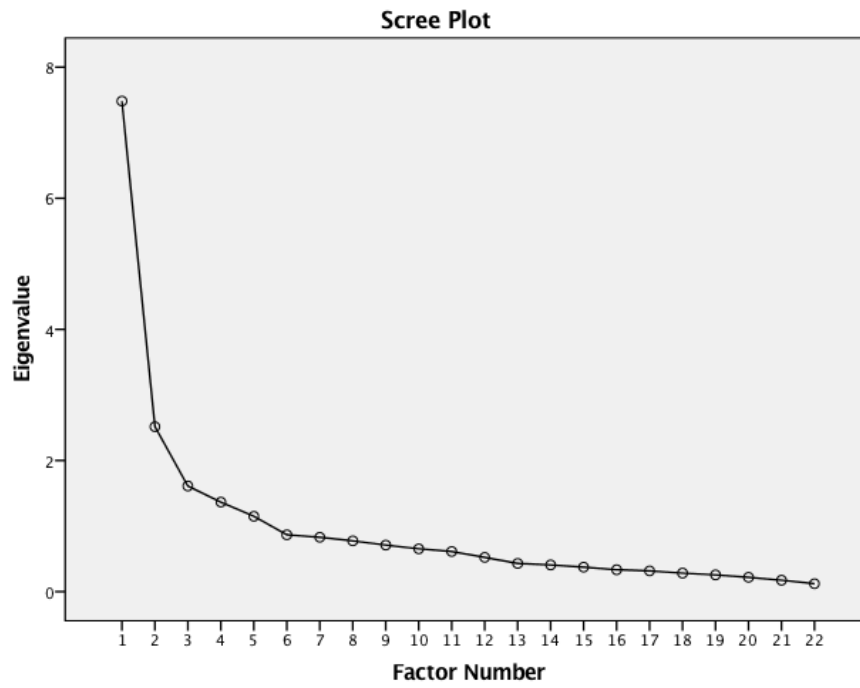
Table 9. Pattern matrix\*

| Pattern Matrix     |        |       |        |       |       |
|--------------------|--------|-------|--------|-------|-------|
|                    | Factor |       |        |       |       |
|                    | 1      | 2     | 3      | 4     | 5     |
| IllegitimateCompl1 |        |       |        |       | 0.430 |
| IllegitimateCompl2 |        |       |        |       | 0.538 |
| IllegitimateCompl3 |        |       |        |       | 0.593 |
| Injustice1         | 0.481  |       |        |       |       |
| Injustice2         | 0.827  |       |        |       |       |
| Injustice3         | 0.614  |       |        |       |       |
| LackMoral1         | 0.784  |       |        |       |       |
| LackMoral2         | 0.892  |       |        |       |       |
| LackMoral3         | 0.830  |       |        |       |       |
| LossControl1       | 0.746  |       |        |       |       |
| LossControl2       | 0.721  |       |        |       |       |
| LossControl3       | 0.600  |       |        |       |       |
| Anger1             | 0.323  |       |        | 0.635 |       |
| Anger2             | 0.352  |       |        | 0.529 |       |
| Finance1           |        | 0.860 |        |       |       |
| Finance2           |        | 0.428 |        |       |       |
| Finance3           |        | 0.803 |        |       |       |
| SocialNorm1        |        |       | -0.868 |       |       |
| SocialNorm2        |        |       | -0.552 |       |       |
| Contrast1          |        |       |        | 0.356 |       |
| Contrast2          |        |       |        | 0.717 |       |
| Contrast3          |        |       |        | 0,707 |       |

Note. \*Factorloadings below .30 were suppressed.

Table 10. Total Variance Explained

| Total Variance Explained |                     |               |              |                                     |               |              |   |
|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|---|
| Factor                   | Initial Eigenvalues |               |              | Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings |               |              | Rotation<br>Sums of<br>Squared<br>Loadings <sup>a</sup> |
|                          | Total               | % of Variance | Cumulative % | Total                               | % of Variance | Cumulative % | Total   |
| 1                        | 7.482               | 34.008        | 34.008       | 7.097                               | 32.258        | 32.258       | 6.620   |
| 2                        | 2.516               | 11.435        | 45.443       | 2.074                               | 9.427         | 41.685       | 2.144   |
| 3                        | 1.611               | 7.322         | 52.765       | 1.132                               | 5.146         | 46.830       | 1.239   |
| 4                        | 1.365               | 6.205         | 58.970       | 0.958                               | 4.355         | 51.185       | 4.047   |
| 5                        | 1.149               | 5.222         | 64.192       | 0.609                               | 2.767         | 53.952       | 1.630   |
| 6                        | 0.867               | 3.939         | 68.131       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 7                        | 0.829               | 3.769         | 71.900       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 8                        | 0.774               | 3.516         | 75.416       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 9                        | 0.710               | 3.228         | 78.644       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 10                       | 0.653               | 2.969         | 81.613       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 11                       | 0.612               | 2.783         | 84.396       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 12                       | 0.522               | 2.374         | 86.770       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 13                       | 0.430               | 1.953         | 88.723       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 14                       | 0.407               | 1.851         | 90.574       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 15                       | 0.374               | 1.698         | 92.272       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 16                       | 0.334               | 1.518         | 93.790       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 17                       | 0.317               | 1.439         | 95.230       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 18                       | 0.282               | 1.282         | 96.512       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 19                       | 0.255               | 1.158         | 97.670       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 20                       | 0.218               | 0.990         | 98.661       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 21                       | 0.174               | 0.789         | 99.450       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 22                       | 0.121               | 0.550         | 100.000      |                                     |               |              |   |



*Figure 4. Scree plot*



## Appendix IV: SPSS output – Factor analysis (second attempt)

*Table 11. KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity*

| <b>KMO and Bartlett's Test</b>                   |                    |           |
|--|--------------------|-----------|
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy. |                    | 0.876     |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity                    | Approx. Chi-Square | 1.922.540 |
|  | df                 | 210       |
|  | Sig.               | .000      |

*Table 12. Factor Correlation Matrix*

| <b>Factor Correlation Matrix</b> |        |        |        |        |        |
|----------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Factor                           | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4      | 5      |
| 1                                | 1      | -0.136 | 0.035  | 0.606  | -0.157 |
| 2                                | -0.136 | 1      | 0.211  | -0.073 | 0.367  |
| 3                                | 0.035  | 0.211  | 1      | -0.032 | 0.047  |
| 4                                | 0.606  | -0.073 | -0.032 | 1      | -0.118 |
| 5                                | -0.157 | 0.367  | 0.047  | -0.118 | 1      |

Table 13. Communalities

| Communalities      |         |            |
|--------------------|---------|------------|
|                    | Initial | Extraction |
| IllegitimateComp11 | 0.165   | 0.173      |
| IllegitimateComp12 | 0.350   | 0.429      |
| IllegitimateComp13 | 0.290   | 0.401      |
| Injustice1         | 0.431   | 0.382      |
| Injustice2         | 0.652   | 0.677      |
| Injustice3         | 0.498   | 0.468      |
| LackMoral1         | 0.662   | 0.619      |
| LackMoral2         | 0.784   | 0.725      |
| LackMoral3         | 0.740   | 0.685      |
| LossControl1       | 0.529   | 0.528      |
| LossControl2       | 0.593   | 0.598      |
| LossControl3       | 0.601   | 0.605      |
| Anger1             | 0.746   | 0.733      |
| Anger2             | 0.680   | 0.585      |
| Finance1           | 0.533   | 0.749      |
| Finance2           | 0.306   | 0.328      |
| Finance3           | 0.490   | 0.600      |
| SocialNorm1        | 0.370   | 0.676      |
| SocialNorm2        | 0.308   | 0.373      |
| Contrast2          | 0.656   | 0.666      |
| Contrast3          | 0.670   | 0.699      |

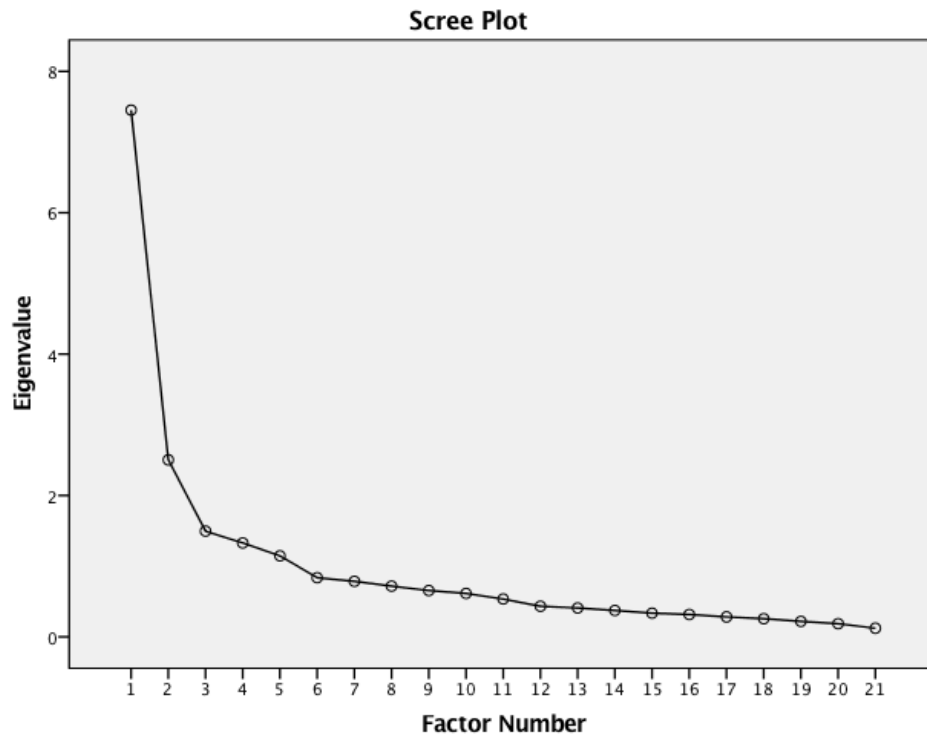
Table 14. Pattern matrix\*

| Pattern Matrix     |        |       |       |       |       |
|--------------------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|                    | Factor |       |       |       |       |
|                    | 1      | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     |
| IllegitimateCompl1 |        |       |       |       | 0.437 |
| IllegitimateCompl2 |        |       |       |       | 0.513 |
| IllegitimateCompl3 |        |       |       |       | 0.573 |
| Injustice1         | 0.464  |       |       |       |       |
| Injustice2         | 0.830  |       |       |       |       |
| Injustice3         | 0.608  |       |       |       |       |
| LackMoral1         | 0.760  |       |       |       |       |
| LackMoral2         | 0.883  |       |       |       |       |
| LackMoral3         | 0.809  |       |       |       |       |
| LossControl1       | 0.735  |       |       |       |       |
| LossControl2       | 0.698  |       |       |       |       |
| LossControl3       | 0.578  |       |       |       |       |
| Anger1             |        |       |       | 0.688 |       |
| Anger2             |        |       |       | 0.574 |       |
| Finance1           |        | 0.849 |       |       |       |
| Finance2           |        | 0.438 |       |       |       |
| Finance3           |        | 0.796 |       |       |       |
| SocialNorm1        |        |       | 0.824 |       |       |
| SocialNorm2        |        |       | 0.591 |       |       |
| Contrast2          |        |       |       | 0.767 |       |
| Contrast3          |        |       |       | 0.804 |       |

Note. \*Factorloadings below .30 were suppressed.

Table 15. Total Variance Explained

| Total Variance Explained |                     |               |              |                                     |               |              |   |
|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|---|
| Factor                   | Initial Eigenvalues |               |              | Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings |               |              | Rotation<br>Sums of<br>Squared<br>Loadings <sup>a</sup> |
|                          | Total               | % of Variance | Cumulative % | Total                               | % of Variance | Cumulative % | Total   |
| 1                        | 7.453               | 35.490        | 35.490       | 7.07                                | 33.669        | 33.669       | 6.557   |
| 2                        | 2.504               | 11.923        | 47.413       | 2.062                               | 9.818         | 43.487       | 2.060   |
| 3                        | 1.495               | 7.121         | 54.533       | 1.030                               | 4.903         | 48.390       | 1.205   |
| 4                        | 1.328               | 6.324         | 60.858       | 0.938                               | 4.465         | 52.855       | 4.888   |
| 5                        | 1.145               | 5.453         | 66.311       | 0.601                               | 2.863         | 55.718       | 1.464   |
| 6                        | 0.837               | 3.984         | 70.295       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 7                        | 0.786               | 3.741         | 74.036       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 8                        | 0.717               | 3.415         | 77.451       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 9                        | 0.654               | 3.116         | 80.567       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 10                       | 0.614               | 2.923         | 83.491       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 11                       | 0.535               | 2.548         | 86.039       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 12                       | 0.432               | 2.059         | 88.098       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 13                       | 0.409               | 1.946         | 90.044       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 14                       | 0.374               | 1.779         | 91.823       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 15                       | 0.334               | 1.592         | 93.415       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 16                       | 0.317               | 1.508         | 94.923       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 17                       | 0.282               | 1.344         | 96.267       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 18                       | 0.257               | 1.223         | 97.490       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 19                       | 0.219               | 1.043         | 98.532       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 20                       | 0.186               | 0.886         | 99.419       |                                     |               |              |   |
| 21                       | 0.122               | 0.581         | 100.000      |                                     |               |              |   |



*Figure 5. Scree plot*

## Appendix V: SPSS output – Reliability analyses

Table 16. Reliability Analyses

| Construct                         | N of items | Cronbach's Alpha |
|-----------------------------------|------------|------------------|
| Illegitimate complaining behavior | 3          | .534             |
| Perceptions of injustice          | 3          | .777             |
| Lack of Morality                  | 3          | .893             |
| Loss of Control                   | 3          | .804             |
| Anger                             | 2          | .862             |
| Financial greed                   | 3          | .738             |
| Social Norm                       | 2          | .653             |
| Contrast                          | 2          | .868             |

Table 17. Item-Total Statistics: Illegitimate complaining behavior

| Item-Total Statistics |                               |                                   |                                     |                                     |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                       | Scale Mean if<br>Item Deleted | Scale Variance if<br>Item Deleted | Corrected Item-Total<br>Correlation | Cronbach's Alpha if<br>Item Deleted |
| IllegitimateComp11    | 3.96                          | 3.654                             | 0.273                               | 0.537                               |
| IllegitimateComp12    | 4.50                          | 2.640                             | 0.380                               | 0.377                               |
| IllegitimateComp13    | 4.59                          | 2.943                             | 0.394                               | 0.353                               |

Table 18. Item-Total Statistics: Perceptions of injustice

| Item-Total Statistics |                               |                                   |                                     |                                     |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                       | Scale Mean if<br>Item Deleted | Scale Variance if<br>Item Deleted | Corrected Item-Total<br>Correlation | Cronbach's Alpha if<br>Item Deleted |
| Injustice1            | 4.69                          | 4.670                             | 0.573                               | 0.746                               |
| Injustice2            | 5.02                          | 4.766                             | 0.685                               | 0.630                               |
| Injustice3            | 4.52                          | 4.629                             | 0.592                               | 0.724                               |

Table 19. Item-Total Statistics: Lack of Morality

| Item-Total Statistics |                               |                                   |                                     |                                     |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                       | Scale Mean if<br>Item Deleted | Scale Variance if<br>Item Deleted | Corrected Item-Total<br>Correlation | Cronbach's Alpha if<br>Item Deleted |
| LackMoral1            | 3.68                          | 3.275                             | 0.752                               | 0.894                               |
| LackMoral2            | 3.96                          | 3.448                             | 0.858                               | 0.787                               |
| LackMoral3            | 4.05                          | 4.014                             | 0.783                               | 0.861                               |

Table 20. Item-Total Statistics: Loss of Control

| Item-Total Statistics |                               |                                   |                                     |                                     |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                       | Scale Mean if<br>Item Deleted | Scale Variance if<br>Item Deleted | Corrected Item-Total<br>Correlation | Cronbach's Alpha if<br>Item Deleted |
| LossControl1          | 4.65                          | 5.228                             | 0.607                               | 0.777                               |
| LossControl2          | 4.43                          | 4.690                             | 0.706                               | 0.674                               |
| LossControl3          | 4.17                          | 4.643                             | 0.644                               | 0.742                               |

Table 21. Item-Total Statistics: Contrast

| Item-Total Statistics |                               |                                   |                                     |                                     |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                       | Scale Mean if<br>Item Deleted | Scale Variance if<br>Item Deleted | Corrected Item-Total<br>Correlation | Cronbach's Alpha if<br>Item Deleted |
| Contrast2             | 2.98                          | 1.583                             | 0.767                               | .                                   |
| Contrast3             | 2.88                          | 1.514                             | 0.767                               | .                                   |

Table 22. Item-Total Statistics: Anger

| Item-Total Statistics |                               |                                   |                                     |                                     |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                       | Scale Mean if<br>Item Deleted | Scale Variance if<br>Item Deleted | Corrected Item-Total<br>Correlation | Cronbach's Alpha if<br>Item Deleted |
| Anger1                | 2.05                          | 1.221                             | 0.773                               | .                                   |
| Anger2                | 2.67                          | 1.831                             | 0.773                               | .                                   |

Table 23. Item-Total Statistics: Finance

| Item-Total Statistics |                               |                                   |                                     |                                     |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                       | Scale Mean if<br>Item Deleted | Scale Variance if<br>Item Deleted | Corrected Item-Total<br>Correlation | Cronbach's Alpha if<br>Item Deleted |
| Finance1              | 4.71                          | 4.729                             | 0.645                               | 0.552                               |
| Finance2              | 4.59                          | 5.630                             | 0.434                               | 0.798                               |
| Finance3              | 4.86                          | 4.917                             | 0.621                               | 0.583                               |

Table 24. Item-Total Statistics: Social Norm

| Item-Total Statistics |                               |                                   |                                     |                                     |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                       | Scale Mean if<br>Item Deleted | Scale Variance if<br>Item Deleted | Corrected Item-Total<br>Correlation | Cronbach's Alpha if<br>Item Deleted |
| SocialNorm1           | 3.60                          | 1.013                             | 0.487                               | .                                   |
| SocialNorm2           | 2.92                          | 1.176                             | 0.487                               | .                                   |

## Appendix VI: SPSS output – Assumptions

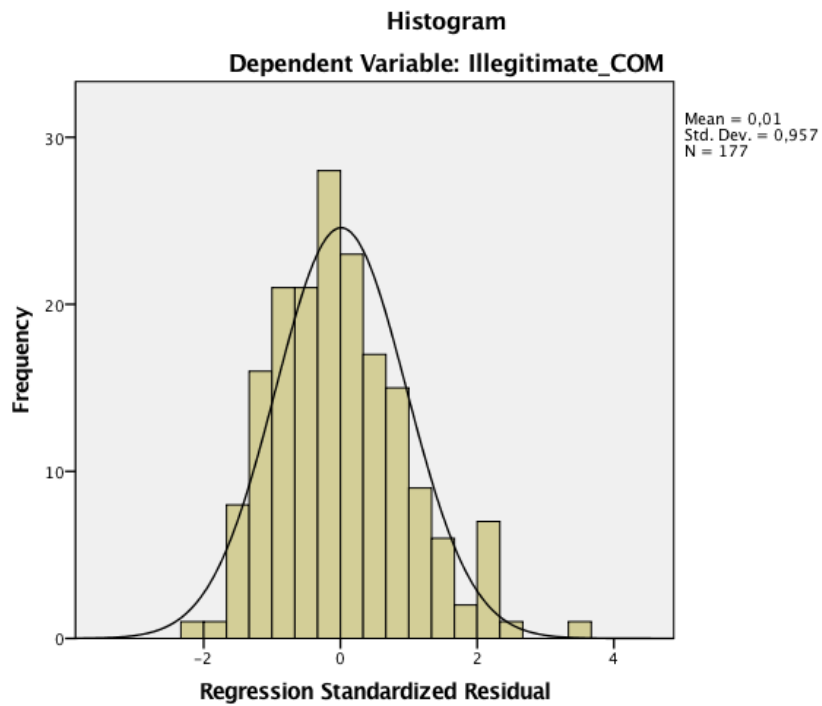


Figure 6. Histogram for assessing normality

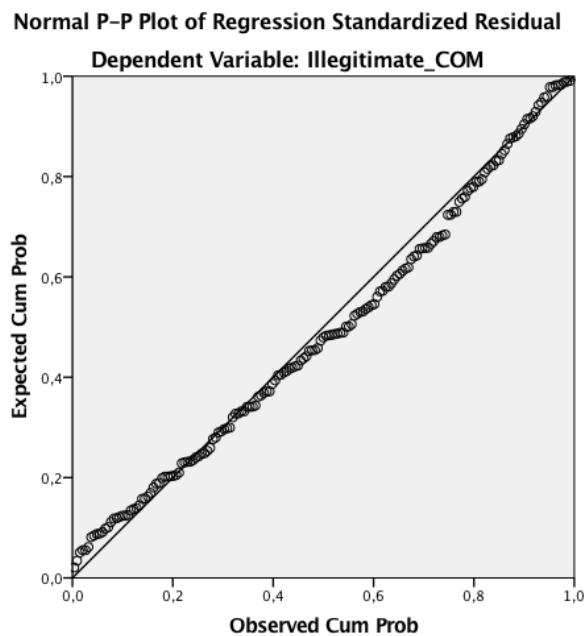


Figure 7. Normal P-P plot for assessing normality



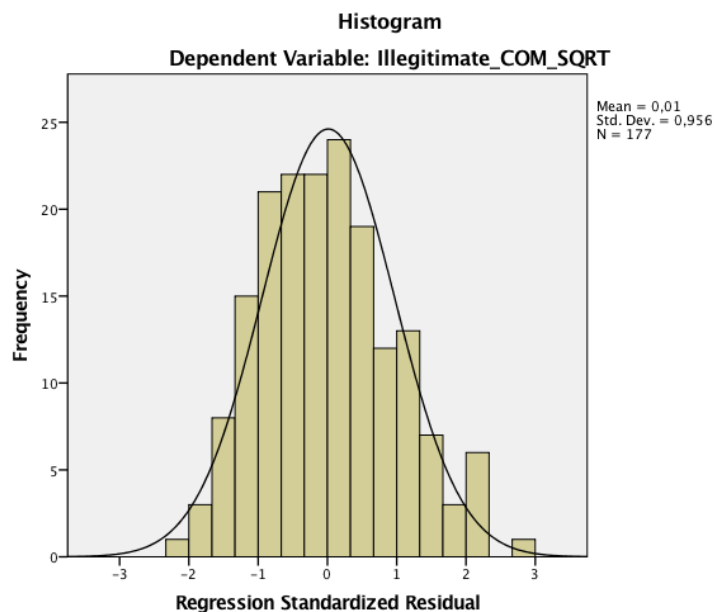


Figure 8. Histogram of transformed dependent variable for assessing normality improvement

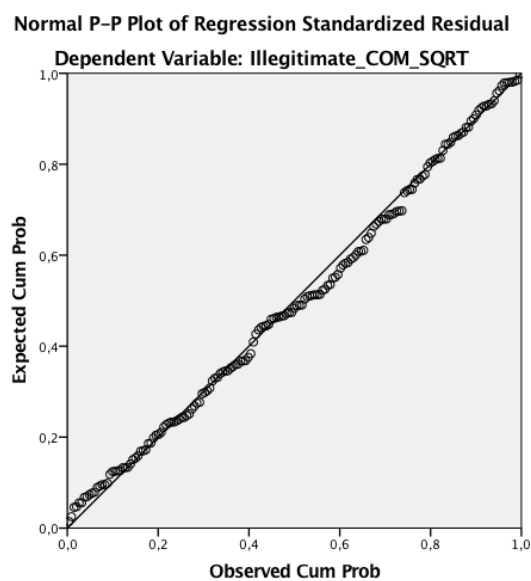


Figure 9. Normal P-P plot of transformed dependent variable for assessing normality improvement

Table 25. Skewness and kurtosis dependent variable for assessing normality

| Descriptive Statistics     |     |         |         |        |                |           |            |           |            |
|----------------------------|-----|---------|---------|--------|----------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
|                            | N   | Minimum | Maximum | Mean   | Std. Deviation | Skewness  |            | Kurtosis  |            |
|                            |     |         |         |        |                | Statistic | Std. Error | Statistic | Std. Error |
| Illegitimate               | 181 | 1.33    | 5       | 2.1750 | 0.79004        | 1.104     | 0.181      | 0.764     | 0.359      |
| Illegitimate (square root) | 181 | 1.15    | 2.24    | 1.4529 | 0.25361        | 0.783     | 0.181      | -0.116    | 0.359      |

Table 26. Coefficients table for assessing multicollinearity

| Coefficients <sup>a</sup>         |                         |       |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
|                                   | Collinearity Statistics |       |
|                                   | Tolerance               | VIF   |
| (Constant)                        |                         |       |
| Perceptions of injustice          | 0.369                   | 2.713 |
| Lack of Morality                  | 0.380                   | 2.629 |
| Loss of Control                   | 0.310                   | 3.228 |
| Contrast                          | 0.493                   | 2.027 |
| Anger                             | 0.410                   | 2.437 |
| Financial greed                   | 0.644                   | 1.554 |
| Social Norm                       | 0.705                   | 1.418 |
| Opportunism                       | 0.606                   | 1.650 |
| Neutralization                    | 0.903                   | 1.108 |
| Negotiation                       | 0.727                   | 1.375 |
| Conflict framing style (personal) | 0.653                   | 1.532 |
| Conflict framing style (task)     | 0.868                   | 1.151 |

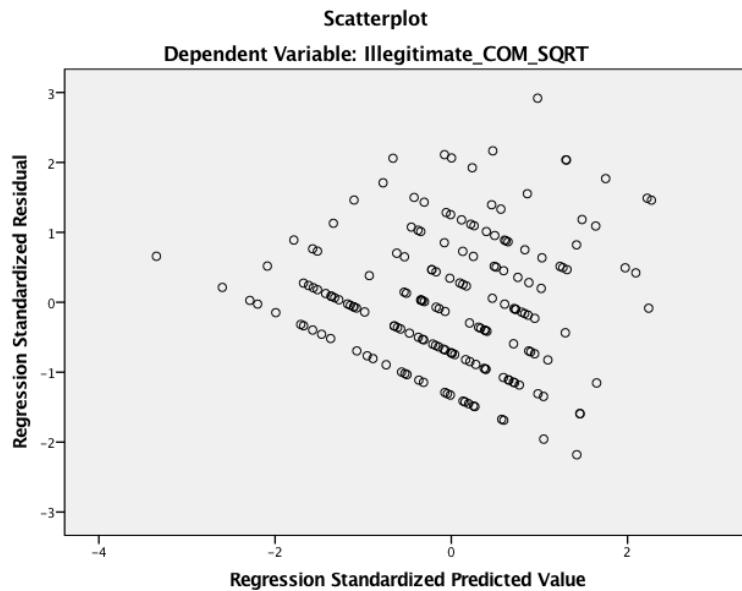


Figure 10. Scatterplot for assessing linearity and homoscedasticity

## Appendix VII: SPSS output – Regression analysis

Table 27. Model summary

| Model Summary |                   |          |                   |                            |                   |          |     |     |               |               |
|---------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|---------------|---------------|
| Model         | R                 | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics |          |     |     |               | Durbin-Watson |
|               |                   |          |                   |                            | R Square Change   | F Change | df1 | df2 | Sig. F Change |               |
| 1             | .525 <sup>a</sup> | 0.275    | 0.222             | 0.22366                    | 0,275             | 5.191    | 12  | 164 | .000          | 2.098         |

Table 28. ANOVA table

| ANOVA |            |                |     |             |       |                   |
|-------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|-------------------|
| Model |            | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F     | Sig.              |
| 1     | Regression | 3.116          | 12  | 0.26        | 5.191 | .000 <sup>b</sup> |
|       | Residual   | 8.204          | 164 | 0.05        |       |                   |
|       | Total      | 11.32          | 176 |             |       |                   |

Table 29. Coefficients table

| Coefficients                      |                             |            |                           |        |       |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|-------|
| Model                             | Unstandardized Coefficients |            | Standardized Coefficients | t      | Sig.  |
|                                   | B                           | Std. Error | Beta                      |        |       |
| 1 (Constant)                      | 1.382                       | 0.104      |                           | 13.248 | .000  |
| Perceptions of injustice          | -0.021                      | 0.027      | -0.085                    | -0.779 | 0.437 |
| Loss of Control                   | -0.027                      | 0.029      | -0.113                    | -0.95  | 0.343 |
| Lack of Morality                  | 0.027                       | 0.030      | 0.098                     | 0.909  | 0.365 |
| Anger                             | -0.010                      | 0.023      | -0.045                    | -0.436 | 0.664 |
| Conflict framing style (personal) | 0.037                       | 0.018      | 0.170                     | 2.072  | 0.04  |
| Conflict framing style (task)     | -0.045                      | 0.016      | -0.198                    | -2.78  | 0.006 |
| Opportunism                       | 0.059                       | 0.018      | 0.289                     | 3.382  | 0.001 |
| Financial greed                   | 0.040                       | 0.020      | 0.167                     | 2.019  | 0.045 |
| Negotiation                       | -0.016                      | 0.017      | -0.073                    | -0.937 | 0.350 |
| Neutralization                    | 0.027                       | 0.020      | 0.096                     | 1.366  | 0.174 |
| Contrast                          | -0.023                      | 0.021      | -0.108                    | -1.138 | 0.257 |
| Social Norm                       | 0.002                       | 0.022      | 0.006                     | 0.081  | 0.936 |