

Ìnsights into Illegitimate Customer Complaining

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A quantitative research on the types of illegitimate complainants and their drivers, neutralization techniques, and relationship with the company.



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Preface

I proudly present to you my thesis entitled: “*Insights into Illegitimate Customer Complaining*”. It is a quantitative research focused on different types of illegitimate complainants with their own set of drivers, neutralization techniques, degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior, and perceived customer-company relationship, as proposed in the typology of Joosten (2020). This study was carried out to obtain my master’s degree in Business Administration with a specialization in Marketing at the Radboud University. It was written in the period between December 2020 to June 2021.

The purpose of this study was to extend on the research of my supervisor, Dr. H.W.M. Joosten, as it empirically tests his typology of illegitimate customer complaining. I took on this challenge with three fellow master students, together making our contribution to the subject at hand. Even though we all wrote our own thesis, we were able to collaborate for the data collection. Therefore, I would like to thank my fellow students Lyn Bannink, Myrthe Eijkelkamp and Jan Peters for the pleasant cooperation. I would also like to take this opportunity to make a special thanks to Dr. H.W.M. Joosten for his great and enthusiastic guidance and support throughout this whole process. Moreover, I would like to thank all of the respondents for their honest input, as I would not have been able to conduct this study without them, and of course my family and friends for their never-ending support.

I hope you will enjoy reading this.

Matty Cooijmans

Nijmegen, June 6, 2021.

Abstract

A good service recovery for complaint handling is critical in today's competitive business environment. However, companies all around the world are facing problems with their service recovery as a result of illegitimate complaints. An illegitimate complaint is unjust and unfounded as it is not derived from a lack of quality in the product or service, but is either exaggerated, fabricated or incorrectly blamed on the company.

This study is an extension of the research of Joosten (2020), as it empirically tests his typology of illegitimate customer complaining. Therefore, the following research question was developed: *"To what extent can the typology of Joosten (2020) concerning illegitimate customer complaining be confirmed?"*. The typology of Joosten distinguishes four types of illegitimate complainants, namely the must-, need-, want-, and can-type, each with their own set of drivers, neutralization techniques, degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior, and perception of their relationship with the company. In order to test this typology, data was gathered through an online survey which was then analyzed with the use of a multivariate analysis of variance and a Post Hoc test afterwards. The results of this analysis confirmed most of the typology of Joosten (2020), nonetheless, some alterations were still suggested. The existence of the four types of illegitimate complainants were confirmed, but there does not seem to be a difference between all the types of illegitimate complainants on all the dimensions of illegitimate customer complaining behavior and some neutralization techniques were incorrectly theorized.

In order to prevent customers from complaining illegitimately in the future, managers and employees working in the service recovery process should counteract the drivers and neutralization techniques of each of the types of illegitimate complainants. The main take-aways for managers and employees are to have good, open communication in order to set the right expectations and make the customers feel heard, and a more detailed formulation of the terms and conditions of the liberal redress policy.

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1. Introduction

Product and service failures are unavoidable even in the best organizations (Kim, Wang & Matilla, 2010; DeWitt & Brady, 2003). Nonetheless, these failures can lead to customer complaints and negative word of mouth, which in turn can have a negative impact on the brand image, customer attitudes, purchasing intentions, and many other aspects (Balaji, Khong & Chong, 2016; Knox & Van Oest, 2014). It is therefore of the utmost importance that the complaints are handled well within service recovery, as this is a critical issue in today's competitive business environment (Akbar, Som, Wadood & Alzaidiyeen, 2010). However, how does one handle a complaint that is not genuine? Companies from all around the world are facing this problem (Reynolds & Harris, 2009), especially since these complaints can have “serious implications for the long-term profitability of organizations” (Harris & Reynolds, 2003, p.156). In order to solve this problem regarding the service recovery of illegitimate complaints, it is important to first acquire a better understanding of the concept.

1.1 Service recovery

The customer and company attain some kind of a relationship from the moment the customer purchases a product or service from the company (Hennig-Thurau & Hansen, 2000). A strong customer-company relationship is important for the company, as it can create a competitive advantage (Chalmers, 2006). Gemme (1997) confirms this, stating that retaining customers is essential for companies as it can result in increased revenues and a larger market share. In order to retain customers, service recovery is of the essence considering that, despite the company's effort to deliver a satisfying service or product the first time, there is always a chance of it not matching the customer's expectations. If this is the case, service recovery starts, which involves “those actions designed to resolve problems, alter negative attitudes of dissatisfied consumers and to ultimately retain these customers” (Miller, Craighead & Karwan, 2000, p. 388). According to Gelbrich and Roschk (2011) one way to overcome customer dissatisfaction is by offering them compensation, which is a technique that is often utilized by companies. The information that is gathered during the service recovery can also be used to improve the quality of the product or service (Stauss & Schoeler, 2004), which is not only beneficial for current customers but also for acquiring new customers.

To conclude, the purpose of service recovery is maintaining and enhancing profitability by overcoming customer dissatisfaction and building towards loyal customers (Homburg & Fürst, 2005). Service recovery is consequently very important for a company. Several

researchers even consider it to be of such a value that they advise companies to encourage complaints (DeWitt & Brady, 2003). This is also the reason why there is a significant amount of research about complaints and how to deal with them. However, most of these studies are focused on complaints that are caused by a genuine dissatisfaction with the product or service (e.g., Andreassen, 1999; Davidow, 2003; Knox & Van Oest, 2014), also called legitimate complaints.

1.2 Illegitimate complaining

Some researchers state that certain customers might complain without a feeling of dissatisfaction, but for more opportunistic reasons (e.g., Reynolds & Harris, 2005; Baker, 2013; Wirtz & McColl-Kennedy, 2010). These complaints are considered as illegitimate complaints and can not only have serious consequences for the profitability of the firm (Harris & Reynolds, 2003), but also for the employees' job satisfaction and the service quality (Berry & Seiders, 2008). In order to stop and prevent this deviant complaining behavior, illegitimate complainants need to be understood. However, as stated by Ro and Wong (2012), clear evidence regarding these types of complaints is hard to find, which is why there is only a limited amount of research on this topic. The reason for this is the deviant nature of illegitimate complaints, as it violates social norms and rules (Agboola & Salawu, 2011) and is thus considered as illegal by society, which makes it a difficult subject to investigate since people are reluctant to answer questions regarding these sensitive subjects (Fisk et al., 2010).

Nonetheless, two master theses (Van Laar, 2018; Van Bokhoven, 2018) have investigated the possible drivers of illegitimate customer complaining behavior through quantitative research. Van Laar (2018) and Van Bokhoven (2018) were not alone, as other authors developed typologies concerning illegitimate customer complaining as well, some of which were Reynolds and Harris (2005), Daunt and Harris (2012), and Huang, Zhao, Miao, and Fu (2014). However, these typologies are not complete and consequently fall short. That is why Joosten (2020) developed a typology of illegitimate customer complaining as well, which distinguishes between four types of illegitimate complainants: the must-type, need-type, want-type and can-type. This typology, however, has not been empirically tested yet, which is why this study is so important.

1.3 Research aim

The purpose of this study is to extend the research of Joosten (2020) on illegitimate complaints by empirically testing his typology of illegitimate customer complaining, consequently leading to the following research question: *“To what extent can the typology of Joosten (2020) concerning illegitimate customer complaining be confirmed?”*. In order to answer this question, a quantitative research will be conducted to confirm the four types of illegitimate complainants proposed by Joosten (2020).

1.4 Theoretical relevance

As stated above, some research concerning illegitimate customer complaining and its drivers already exists (e.g., Reynolds & Harris, 2005; Baker, 2013; Wirtz & McColl-Kennedy, 2010; Daunt & Harris, 2012, Huang et al., 2014), however the research regarding this topic can still be considered as limited as there is no valid and empirically tested typology of illegitimate customer complaining yet. This study will add to the existing literature by empirically testing the typology of illegitimate customer complaining developed by Joosten (2020). By doing so, it will provide a more complete picture of the subject at hand and provide extra power and validation to the manuscript of Joosten (2020).

1.5 Practical relevance

One important aspect of the customer-company relationship is mutual trust (Hennig-Thurau & Hansen, 2000). This is also the foundation of the service recovery. However, illegitimate complaints violate this trust and take advantage of the service recovery of the company. This not only affects the customer-company relationship, but can also have some serious implications for the profitability of the company, as stated before (Harris & Reynolds, 2003).

This study will aid in tackling this problem regarding illegitimate complaints by providing a better understanding of the subject. By doing so, different types of illegitimate complainants can be recognized and appropriate actions can be undertaken by the company to prevent these complainants from filing an illegitimate complaint, or to provide an appropriate response to an illegitimate complaint. All in all, with the information provided by this study the illegitimate complaints can be managed in a more effective and less time-consuming and costly way. The service recovery of the company can be organized in a new manner in which customers will not be able to, unrightfully, take advantage of the service recovery elements that are offered by the firm. The information can also be utilized for strengthening the customer-

company relationship, consequently positively affecting the competitive advantage of the firm (Chalmers, 2006).

To conclude, the information provided by this study will give insight into the different types of illegitimate complainants. This information, in turn, can be deployed to effectively tackle illegitimate complaints and increase the profitability and competitive advantage of the company.

1.6 Thesis outline

In the following chapter the theoretical background of the typology of Joosten (2020) regarding illegitimate customer complaining will be discussed. Thereafter, in chapter 3, an overview and argumentation of the methodology conducted in this study will be provided. Chapter 4 will contain the analysis of the results of the conducted research. Finally, in chapter 5, the conclusion and discussion will be provided, including the theoretical and managerial implications and the limitations of this study with multiple suggestions for further research.

2. Theoretical background

In this second chapter, the theory behind the typology of illegitimate customer complaining is discussed. First, a definition of illegitimate customer complaining will be introduced, whereafter an overview of different types of illegitimate complainants found by multiple researchers will be analyzed. Following will be multiple drivers for illegitimate customer complaining, neutralization techniques used by these complainants and the relationship variables that determine the customer-company relationship. Ultimately, this will lead to the typology of illegitimate customer complaining developed by Joosten (2020) that this study is going to test empirically.

2.1 *Illegitimate customer complaining*

Several definitions of illegitimate customer complaining can be discovered in the academic literature. One of the first literatures that recognized that customers did not always complain genuinely was by Day, Grabicke, Schaetzle and Staubach in 1981. They stated that some marketers felt like some complaints were not legitimate as a result of the existence of ““professional complainers” who complain about everything, and “freeloaders” who fake complaints just to get free supplies of the product” (Day et al., 1981, p. 91). Day et al. (1981) talked about “faked complaints”, but with new literature came new definitions. Example given, Reynolds and Harris (2005) described illegitimate customer complaining as customers that “knowingly and incorrectly report service failures” (p. 321). Another definition that is often used to state illegitimate customer complaining is ‘opportunistic complaining’, which is defined as “the behavior in which a customer complains in order to receive material gain by exaggerating, altering, or lying about the fact or situation, or abusing service guarantees” by Ro and Wong (2012, p. 420). However, this definition states that the illegitimate complainant always wants to gain something out of it, while Huang et al. (2014) define illegitimate customer complaining as “any customer complaining behavior that is illegitimate, dishonest or unreasonable” (p. 546).

In this study, the definition of Joosten (2020) of illegitimate customer complaining will be used. According to Joosten (2020) illegitimate complaints are complaints that are not derived from a lack of quality in the product or service, but which are unjust and unfounded. These illegitimate complaints can either be exaggerated, fabricated or incorrectly blamed on the company.

2.2 Types of illegitimate complainants

The academic literature has discovered several types of illegitimate complainants. Some of which were distinguished by Reynolds and Harris (2005), presenting four types of illegitimate complainants: the opportunistic, conditioned, professional, and one-off complainants. Starting with the one-off complainants, which are the people who only illegitimately complained once but felt so guilty afterwards that they (allegedly) never did it again. Secondly, the opportunistic complainants, “who complain in an unjustified manner when, and only when, a potentially lucrative opportune occasion arises” (Reynold & Harris, 2005, p. 326). These complainants do not plan to complain illegitimately beforehand, however, they will take advantage of any opportunity to do so and are consequently often stimulated by the type of service recovery policy used by the company. Third, the conditioned complainants, which are a result of the domino effect. These complainants took notice of the benefits that others received when making an illegitimate complaint and therefore tried to copy these complaints in order to receive the same result. They know how to effectively complain illegitimately and do this on a regular basis. Lastly, the professional complainants purposely seek out opportunities to complain illegitimately on a frequent basis. They are different from opportunistic complainants in that professional complainants pre-plan to illegitimately complain. Reynold and Harris (2005) distinguished six motives for illegitimate complaining which sometimes overlap between the different types of illegitimate complainants, example given, the motives ‘freeloaders’ and ‘solitary ego gains’. The types of illegitimate complainants consequently are not mutually exclusive. Moreover, the authors do not provide a complete picture of the phenomenon as they do not bring forth any information concerning the consequences of this behavior regarding, for example, the relationship between the customer and the company.

Another study, conducted by Daunt and Harris (2012), also distinguished multiple illegitimate complainants based on different motives and combined this with service-scape, situation-specific and demographic variables. A distinction was made between (1) the financial egotists that misbehave on the basis of financial and egotistical reasons, (2) the money grabbers with only financial motives, and (3) the ego revengers which misbehave solely on egocentric and revenge based motives. These different types of illegitimate complainants all significantly differ based on service-scape variables (e.g. atmospherics, fellow customers, employee service), situation-specific variables (e.g. loyalty intentions, perceived opportunity) and demographic variables. By adding these variables, an attempt has been made to provide a more complete picture. However, these types of illegitimate complainants also do not seem to be

mutually exclusive and still only provide a limited amount of information. Moreover, they are mostly based on financial, egocentric and revenge based drivers without considering other incentives.

Huang et al. (2014) also distinguished different types of illegitimate customer complaining behaviors used by different types of illegitimate complainants, namely ignoring, exhorting, whining, backtracking, dictating, fabricating, and scheming. Scheming is considered as the most illegitimate customer complaining behavior, as it refers to incidents when “customers deliberately abuse properties or products and then use the forged damages to complain for financial compensations” (p. 556). However, these different types of illegitimate customer complaining behaviors are specifically for the hospitality industry and the authors only speak of the behavior and the situation itself, but do not mention the drivers of the complainant for this behavior.

Considering all this literature and its shortcomings regarding its ability to provide a complete picture of illegitimate customer complaining, Joosten (2020) distinguished four types of illegitimate complainants: the must-, need-, want- and can-type. In this typology of illegitimate customer complaining, not only the drivers are considered, but also the different neutralization techniques used by each type of illegitimate complainant, their degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior, and their perception of the customer-company relationship. By adding these variables, a more complete picture regarding illegitimate customer complaining is provided.

2.3 Drivers of illegitimate customer complaining

While trying to explain and understand illegitimate customer complaining, some research has been done to uncover possible drivers or motives. Many of the previous researches mainly focused on the financial aspect of the illegitimate complaints. It was claimed that customers always want to get something out of it (e.g., Reynolds & Harris, 2005; Baker, 2013) and that this motive is stimulated by certain service recovery policies. However, besides these financially oriented individual and organizational drivers, there are many other drivers that can be distinguished (Huang et al., 2014). Likewise, after conducting multiple researches, Joosten (2020) identified fourteen drivers for customers to complain illegitimately, which will be discussed below.

2.3.1 Lack of morality

Customers can perceive the company as lacking morality when they believe that the company intentionally failed to provide good products or services for the customer in order for the company to gain personal advantage (Wooten, 2009). Since the customer would then believe that the company wronged them for their own benefit, they perceive it as greed. Perceived greed is defined as “the judgment that the perpetrator is causing damage to others in order to obtain a personal advantage” (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016, p. 432) and is one of the main drivers for revenge (Grégoire, Laufer & Tripp, 2010). One way to express this revenge is through illegitimate complaining.

2.3.2. Loss of control

Control can be 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). People believe that they have control over their own behavior and consequently influence their (in)direct environment (Poon, 2003). When people perceive a loss of control, it overwhelms them with an unpleasant feeling that encourages them to try to acquire control again (Hui & Toffoli, 2002). This assumption is also confirmed by the reactance theory of Brehm (in Miron & Brehm, 2006), which states that when a person feels like their behavioral freedom is threatened, they become motivated to restore it again. In a way to re-establish control, a customer can illegitimately complain by, for example, exaggerating their complaint in order to regain influence over the expected behavior of the company as a response to the customer's complaint.

2.3.3. Perceived injustice

Perceived justice can be defined as the “individual subjective assessments of organizational responses” (Gelbrich & Roschk, 2011, p. 26). Perceived justice is a multidimensional construct according to the justice theory which distinguishes three dimensions of justice (Tax, Brown & Chandrashekar, 1998). The first dimension of justice is distributive justice, which concerns the judgment of the outcomes and whether these outcomes were perceived as deserved, met the customer's needs and/or was fair. Second is the procedural justice, which concerns the judgment of the means by which the outcomes were accomplished (Lind & Tyler, 1988). Lastly, the interactional justice, which concerns the interaction between the customer and the company, meaning the way the customer is treated throughout the whole process (Sparks & McColl-Kennedy, 2001). Whenever a customer perceives that they have been treated unfairly

in one of the aforementioned dimensions and consequently perceive it as injustice, they experience feelings of revenge which could ultimately lead to customer's misbehavior (Fullerton & Punj, 2004). In the line of this study, this customer's misbehavior could be expressed in illegitimate customer complaining behavior. This is also confirmed by Wirtz and McColl-Kennedy (2010), who state that perceived injustice can enhance opportunistic complaining behavior.

2.3.4. Internal attribution

According to Folkes (1984), attribution plays an important role in determining the response of a customer towards product and service failure. The attribution theory concerns the causality of explanations (Kelley, 1973), which means that people try to attribute the causes of an event to someone or something. This attribution can be done in two ways: internal or external. Internal attribution means that the customer attributes the cause of the event to him- or herself. According to Bitner, Booms and Mohr (1994), people are more inclined to attribute a cause internally whenever the event was a success, as a consequence of the self-enhancing bias. All in all, this means that customers who score high on internal attribution are less likely to voice a complaint towards the company and are more likely to look for solutions together with the company (Folkes, 1984).

2.3.5. External attribution

The other side of the attribution theory concerns the external attribution. This is the case when the customer attributes the cause of an event to someone or something other than him- or herself. According to Bitner et al. (1994), just like people are more likely to attribute success towards themselves, they are also more prompt to attribute failures towards others. Since Folkes (1984) states that as a consequence of this external attribution of failure, anger and a desire for revenge come into play, it can be assumed that these customers are more likely to complain illegitimately.

2.3.6. Contrast

The post-purchase satisfaction can be affected by the expectation prior to the purchase (Hu & Li, 2011). When the expectations of a product or service are high and the purchase does not meet up to these expectations, the customer evaluation of the product or service will be disproportionately negative (Anderson, 1973). This is also confirmed by Tang, Jia, Zhou and Yin (2010), which state that when there is a discrepancy between the expectation and the

reality, customers might exaggerate this difference, making the contrast even bigger which will result in a stronger disappointment. Eventually, this disproportionate contrast could generate illegitimate customer complaining via exaggerated complaints.

2.3.7. Disappointment

A customer will experience disappointment when the expectation of the product or service was not matched (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 1999). According to Holloway, Wang and Beatty (2009), the greater the disappointment, the less likely the customer is to be forgiving. Zeelenberg and Pieters (2004) also state that there is a direct relation between disappointment and complaining behavior. Consequently, when the customer feels disappointed and therefore unforgiving, he or she might be more inclined to complain illegitimately as well, for example, by exaggerating their complaint.

2.3.8. Anger

Just like disappointment, anger is also considered a negative feeling. Anger is an emotion that, according to Bougie, Pieters and Zeelenberg (2003, p. 379), is “associated with appraising an event as harmful and frustrating” and can be directed towards a person, institution, or one self. Both Holloway et al. (2009) and Bougie et al. (2003) claim that negative responses towards a failed service encounter are often expressed through anger. Zeelenberg and Pieters (2004) also state that feelings of anger often lead to complaining behavior and attempts to hurt the person or institution that their anger is directed to.

2.3.9. Financial greed

Whenever a customer’s complaint is solely based on financial greed it means that the customer attempts to “obtain free goods and service without experiencing any genuine dissatisfactory incidences” (Reynolds & Harris, 2005, p. 327). It basically entails that the customer wants to gain something based on nothing and that the customer causes damage to the company in order to obtain a personal, financial advantage (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016). According to Daunt and Harris (2012), financial greed plays a motivating role in deviant behavior, and consequently also in illegitimate customer complaining behavior. Baker, Magnini and Perdue (2012) also confirmed this theory as they studied opportunistic customer complaining and found that financial greed is most often the driver of opportunistic behavior. Opportunistic complainers are customers that “voice fictitious complaints to service providers with the goal of receiving compensation for their make-believe service failures” (Baker et al., 2012, p. 295).

Opportunistic customer complaining behavior is also part of illegitimate customer complaining, and it can therefore be assumed that financial greed is a possible driver for illegitimate customer complaining as well.

2.3.10. Pre-planned

Reynolds and Harris (2005) distinguished ‘fraudulent returners’, which are customers that planned beforehand that they were going to make intentional product failures and return the product. Meaning that such customers pre-planned in advance that they would file a complaint, and are consequently complaining illegitimately.

2.3.11. Opportunism

According to Singh and Sirdeshmukh (2000), opportunism occurs when “partners in an exchange are motivated by self-interest and are likely to exploit the situation, if they can, to further their self-interest” (p. 151). The intention of opportunism is to enhance one’s personalized welfare at the expense of others (Kelley, Skinner & Ferrell, 1989). Wirtz and McColl-Kennedy (2010) claim that when a customer spots an opportunity to complain in an illegitimate manner, he or she will take advantage of it and claim as much as he or she can. This is in line with Mazar, Amir and Ariely (2008), who claim that customers will take advantage of an opportunity to behave opportunistically, however, only when the act of opportunism still allows them to have a positive view of themselves regarding their honesty. This would mean that the customers would take the opportunity to complain illegitimately in terms of, example given, exaggeration, as they can still consider themselves as relatively honest while engaging in opportunistic behavior at the expense of the company.

2.3.12. Liberal redress policy

By providing a liberal redress policy, customer satisfaction and loyalty can be increased (Baker et al., 2012). However, it also possibly encourages illegitimate customer complaining, especially when the benefits (the financial compensation) outweighs the costs (making an illegitimate complaint) (Harris & Reynolds, 2003). Consequently, on one hand, these liberal redress policies try to optimize the experience of the customer and increase customer satisfaction and loyalty (DeWitt & Brady, 2003), but on the other hand also creates opportunity and encourages illegitimate customer complaining, even tempting customers who would normally never engage in such behavior (Reynolds & Harris, 2005; Baker et al., 2012).

2.3.13. Social norm towards illegitimate complaining

The social norm is part of the Theory of Reasoned Action that is constructed by Fischbein and Azjen in 1975 (in Hale, Householder & Greene, 2002). This theory states that the behavioral intention of an individual is partly based on the individual's attitude towards something, as well as on the social norm regarding that behavior. The social norm entails what is accepted by society. According to Kowalski (1996) this social norm has an impact on whether or not customers will (illegitimately) complain, since customers are scared of undesired social consequences, for example, to be perceived as whiney. Consequently, it can be assumed that this social norm also has an influence on whether or not customers will complain illegitimately.

2.3.14. Attitude towards illegitimate complaining

As mentioned above, according to the Theory of Reasoned Action, a part of the behavioral intention is based on the social norms regarding certain behavior, while the other part is based on the individual's attitude towards that behavior (Hale et al., 2002). According to Blodgett, Granbois and Walter (1993), a customer can either have a positive or a negative attitude towards complaining. In case a customer has a favorable attitude towards complaining, he or she is more likely to complain than a customer who has a negative attitude towards complaining, as the customers with a positive attitude feel more comfortable doing it and perceive it as more successful (Richins, 1982). It can consequently be assumed that this distinction between attitudes can also be made towards illegitimate complaining and that customers who have a more positive attitude towards illegitimate complaining are more likely to engage in such behavior than customers with a negative attitude towards it.

2.4 Neutralization techniques

Since illegitimate customer complaining violates social norms and rules, it can be considered as deviant behavior (Agboola & Salawu, 2011). In an attempt to justify this deviant behavior, complainants apply neutralization techniques, which are basically excuses that justify or rationalize bad behavior in order to not experience feelings of guilt. Sykes and Matza (1957) were the first to introduce five neutralization techniques, starting with the 'denial of responsibility'. The 'denial of responsibility' is when the complainant deflects the blame that is attached to his or her deviant behavior to someone or something else that is beyond the complainant's control. The second technique is the 'denial of injury', which is focused on whether or not harm was done to someone or something as a consequence of the complainants'

actions. Complainants can downplay the consequences of their illegitimate complaint when they, for example, claim that, given the profit of the company, no real harm was done as a result to their complaint since the company has enough money. The third technique is the ‘denial of the victim’, which claims that the deviant behavior “is not wrong in the light of the circumstances” (Sykes & Matza, 1957, p. 668). The complainant can perceive the illegitimate complaint as a “rightful retaliation or punishment” (p. 668) and consequently not regard the company as the victim but as deserving of the injury. The following technique is the ‘condemnation of the condemners’. This technique relies on the idea that the company also behaves in a deviant manner, which distracts the attention from the complainants own deviant behavior. The final neutralization technique distinguished by Sykes and Matza (1957) is the ‘appeal to higher loyalties’, in which the deviant behavior is justified for the reason that it achieves the higher-order goal of a smaller group to which the complainant belongs. An example of this technique is when a complainant justifies illegitimately complaining because he or she needed the financial compensation that was received for the illegitimate complaint to take care of his or her sick mother. In this example, the complainant puts the needs of his or her mother (the smaller group) above those of the company (the larger society).

Expanding on the research of Sykes and Matza (1957), other academics identified several additional neutralization techniques. One of these techniques is the ‘defense of necessity’ by Minor (1981) which states that “if an act is perceived as necessary, then one need not feel guilty about its commission, even if it is considered morally wrong in the abstract” (p. 298). This means that there is some kind of urgency in the situation that justifies the illegitimate complaint as there was no other way to operate. Klockars (in Minor, 1981) also identified another neutralization technique, namely the ‘metaphor of the ledger’, which believes that the deviant behavior of the illegitimate complainant can be compensated by an excess of good behavior. Following was the neutralization technique called ‘claim of normalcy’ (Henry, in Harris & Dumas, 2009), which is when the complainant states that the deviant behavior, in this case illegitimate complaining, is normal because everybody engages in such behavior once in a while and it, consequently, cannot be condemned as wrong. Henry (in Harris & Dumas, 2009) also distinguished the ‘denial of negative intent’ neutralization technique, which is the case when the deviant behavior is justified as it was not the intention to cause any harm. An additional technique discovered by Henry (in Harris & Dumas, 2009) is the ‘claim of relative acceptability’, also called the ‘justification by comparison’. This is the case when the deviant behavior of illegitimately complaining is justified as a result of being compared to even worse deviant behavior, example given, robbing a bank. Compared to robbing a bank, illegitimately

complaining does not look as deviant anymore and it is thus justified by comparison. Another manner in which deviant behavior is justified is by ‘claim of entitlement’, which means that “people are claiming both that they have a right to engage in the behavior in question *and* that they have the right to gain or benefit from any actions they take” (McGregor, 2008, p. 271). This neutralization technique is twofold, as the complainant does not only feel that he or she has the right to illegitimately complain, but also to benefit from it. Lastly is the neutralization technique called ‘justification by postponement’, in which “the offender suppresses his or her guilt feelings - momentarily putting them out of mind to be dealt with at a later time” (Cromwell & Thurman, 2003, p. 546), similar to the expression “out of sight, out of mind”.

2.5 Relationship variables

Starting from the moment that there is a transaction between the customer and the company, a relationship is formed (Hennig-Thurau & Hansen, 2013). Managing this customer-company relationship is now more important than ever as a consequence of the modern world in which the customers, the marketplaces and the marketing functions change all the time (Kumar, 2010). In order to establish a good relationship, “every touchpoint between the company and the individual is important” (Kumar, 2010, p. 4). One of those touchpoints is the service recovery of the company, to which customers can voice their complaints. Since complaint recovery seems to be an important factor in the customer-company relationship (Morgeson, Hult, Mithas, Keiningham & Fornell, 2020), it can also be assumed that illegitimate customer complaining behavior has an effect on the customer-company relationship. In order to understand the customer-company relationship, the following relationship variables are considered in this research: customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, word-of-mouth, trust and commitment.

Customer satisfaction can be defined as the “post-purchase evaluation of product quality given pre-purchase expectation” (Cengiz, 2010, p. 78). However, as Cengiz (2010) also states, customer satisfaction does not only concern the quality of the product or service itself, but it also concerns other aspects of the transaction, for example the reputation of the firm and the service recovery (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993). A good service recovery can even lead to more customer satisfaction than if everything would have gone smoothly the first time. This effect is also called the service recovery paradox (Hart, Heskett & Sasser, 1990). Customer satisfaction also seems to have an impact on some consequences of the customer-company

relationship, such as customer loyalty and word-of-mouth (Haumann, Quaizer, Wieseke & Rese, 2014; Palmatier, Dant, Grewal & Evans, 2006).

Customer loyalty is a multidimensional construct as it can be both behavioral and attitudinal (Jacoby & Kyner, 1973). Behavioral loyalty is conceptualized as the repurchase intentions, switching intentions and exclusive purchasing (Jones & Taylor, 2007), so it can be converted into purchasing behavior (Cheng, 2011). Attitudinal loyalty, as conceptualized by Heere and Dickson (2008), is the willingness of the individual to maintain their commitment to someone or something. This kind of loyalty often leads to positive word-of-mouth (Haumann et al., 2014; Cheng, 2011). It is possible for someone to have attitudinal loyalty without behavioral loyalty and the other way around. The overall definition of customer loyalty given by Palmatier et al. (2006), without separation into attitudinal and behavioral loyalty, is the “multidimensional construct that includes groupings of intentions, attitudes, and seller performance indicator” (p. 140).

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is very powerful regarding its influence on buying behavior and is consequently very important for the company (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler 2002). WOM is the informal communication regarding the evaluations of a product or service from one person to another (Palmatier et al., 2006; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002). Since it is an informal means of communication, it is perceived as non-commercial and therefore more credible and trustworthy, which in turn influences the buying behavior of the receiver (Bone, 1995; Allsop, Bassett & Hoskins, 2007; Huete-Alcocer, 2017). WOM can be either positive or negative, depending on the (dis)satisfaction level of the customer (Balaji et al., 2016; Palmatier et al., 2006; Anderson, 1998; Martin, 2017).

Trust can be defined as the “confidence in an exchange partner’s reliability and integrity” (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 23). It is conceived as both competence trust and benevolence trust (Martínez & Del Bosque, 2013), meaning not only trusting the skills of the company but also trusting the sincerity and decency of the company. Many studies have stressed the importance of trust in a relationship and even called it the building block and the cornerstone of a long-term relationship (Palmatier et al., 2006; Spekman, 1988). One of the reasons for its importance is its mediating effect between the company’s activities and the customer’s loyalty (Palmatier et al., 2006; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Martínez & Del Bosque, 2013).

Lastly, *commitment* which is conceptualized as the “enduring desire to maintain a valued customer-company relationship” (Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpande, 1992, p. 316). Similarly as customer trust, commitment is also essential for a long-term customer-company

relationship, as it concerns the ambition to continue the relationship (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Consequently, without commitment a relationship will soon find its end. To ensure commitment, short-term sacrifices at times need to be made in order to maintain a long-term relationship (Anderson & Weitz, 1992). Someone will only be willing to make these sacrifices if he or she believes the long-term benefits are worth it. Even though commitment and loyalty seem somewhat similar, they are different from each other, as commitment is actually a mediator between the company's activities and customer loyalty (Palmatier et al., 2006).

2.6 Typology of illegitimate customer complainants

Based on the previously described drivers of illegitimate customer complaining, the neutralization techniques, and the relationship variables, four types of illegitimate complainants were distinguished based on explorative research by Joosten (2020): the must-type, the need-type, the want-type and the can-type.

Starting with the must-type, which scores the lowest on the degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior, meaning it does not engage in illegitimate customer complaining much. The drivers to illegitimately complain for the must-type are a lack of morality, loss of control, and perceived injustice. The must-type experienced injustice as they believed the company took advantage of them, which also results in a perceived lack of morality. Moreover, a loss of control was experienced by the must-type, as they felt like complaining illegitimately was their last resource in order to be heard by the company. These complainants try to justify their behavior by claiming that they had no other choice, that this was the only way for them to be heard, and that the company was at fault and therefore deservant of the deviant behavior of the complainant. It also was not planned beforehand, but the circumstances justified the deviant behavior, as there was a defense of necessity. Since these complainants perceive the company as wrong and deservant of their deviant behavior, the customer-company relationship is damaged which results in a low score on the relationship variables.

The following hypotheses were constructed regarding the must-type:

H1a: The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the must-type score higher on the neutralization technique 'denial of responsibility' compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.

H1b: The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the must-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘denial of victim’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.

H1c: The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the must-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘condemnation of the condemners’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.

H1d: The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the must-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘appeal to higher loyalties’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.

H1e: The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the must-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘denial of negative intent’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.

H1f: The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the must-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘defense of necessity’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.

H2: The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the must-type score lowest on the degree of the illegitimate customer complaining behavior compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.

H3: The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the must-type score lowest on the relationship variables compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.

Secondly, the need-type, which scores second to lowest on the degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior. This type of illegitimate complainant is motivated by the drivers: external attribution, contrast, disappointment and anger. Feelings of disappointment and anger are experienced as a result of the substantial contrast between their expectations of the product or service and the reality, for which the company is blamed for. Since the cause of the failure is attributed to the company, the need-type illegitimate complainants do not perceive themselves as the one to blame and therefore do not feel responsible. Their behavior is justified by a denial of injury, as they believe that the (financial) compensation that they have acquired as a result of the illegitimate complaint they filed is close to nothing for a company. The effect on the customer-company relationship is still damaging, but it is not as negatively affected as the must-type.

The following hypotheses were constructed regarding the need-type:

H4a: The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the need-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘denial of injury’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.

H4b: The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the need-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘denial of responsibility’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.

H5: The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the need-type score second to lowest on the degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.

H6: The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the need-type score second to lowest on the relationship variables compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.

To clarify, hypotheses 1a and 4b state that *both* the must- and need-type of illegitimate complainants score highest on the neutralization technique ‘denial of responsibility’ compared to the other two types of complainants.

Following is the want-type, which are the customers that pre-planned to complain illegitimately in order to gain financial compensation. Consequently, the drivers for complaining illegitimately are pre-planned, financial greed and internal attribution. Since the want-type deliberately and knowingly complains illegitimately, the company is not blamed for the cause of the event. This is also why, from the customer’s perception, the customer-company relationship is not harmed. This type of illegitimate complainant scores highest on the degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior. Their deviant behavior is justified by stating that they also deserve a windfall once in a while, using the neutralization technique ‘claim of entitlement’.

The following hypotheses were constructed regarding the want-type:

H7: The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the want-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘claim of entitlement’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.

H8: The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the want-type score highest on the degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants

H9: The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the want-type score highest on the relationship variables compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.

The final illegitimate complainant type distinguished by Joosten (2020) is the can-type. The can-type is driven by opportunism, the liberal redress policy and the social norm and attitude towards illegitimate complaining. As the name of this type of illegitimate complainant already suggests, the can-type only complains illegitimately as a result of an opportunity that was provided by the liberal redress policy. It was not pre-planned and, according to this type, it still conformed to the social norm and their own attitude towards illegitimate customer complaining. The can-type scores second to highest on the degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior, and justifies his or her behavior via the neutralization techniques: claim of relative acceptability, claim of normalcy, metaphor of the ledger and justification by postponement. In other words, they claim that their behavior is not that bad compared to other people, that everyone engages in such behavior once in a while, and that since they normally do obey the rules and act accordingly, it is not that deviant of them. Since these types of illegitimate complainants are aware that they are taking advantage of the liberal redress policy and know that the company is not the one to blame, the customer-company relationship is hardly damaged.

The following hypotheses were constructed regarding the can-type:

H10a: The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the can-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘claim of normalcy’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.

H10b: The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the can-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘claim of relative acceptability’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.

H10c: The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the can-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘metaphor of the ledger’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.

H11: The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the can-type score second to highest on the degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants

H12: The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the can-type score second to highest on the relationship variables compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.

Note that the neutralization technique ‘justification by postponement’ was not hypothesized for any of the types of illegitimate complainants. Even though it is mentioned as a neutralization technique by Cromwell and Thurman (2003), it is not theorized that one of the above-mentioned types of illegitimate complainants exploits this neutralization technique more than others.

2.7 Conceptual model

The above mentioned hypotheses can be integrated into the following conceptual model:

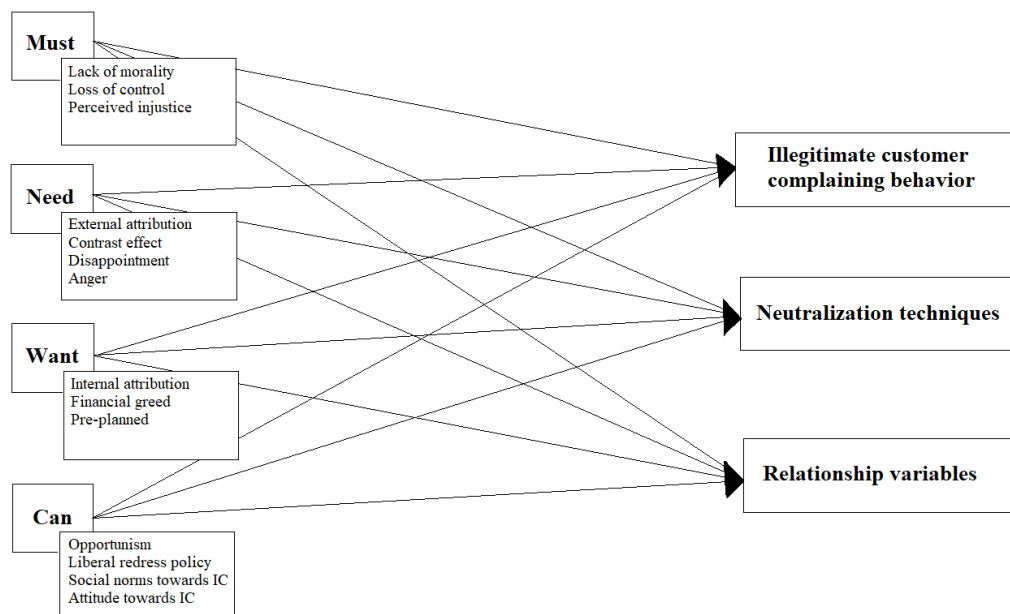


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

3. Methodology

In this third chapter, the methodology of this research will be explained, starting with an introduction of the research design which will be followed by the research procedure. Hereafter the sampling method will be discussed, followed by the measurement of the constructs. Lastly, the data analysis is described and the research ethics considered.

3.1 Research design

In order to empirically test the typology of illegitimate customer complaining mentioned in the previous chapter, a quantitative research has been conducted with the use of an online survey. For the subject of this research, it is important to retrieve self-reported data in order to discover what happened from the customers' perspective and what motivated them to complain illegitimately. This way the drivers for illegitimately complaining, the neutralization techniques used, the degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior and the customers' perception of their relationship with the company will come forward. However, gathering this information is difficult since illegitimate customer complaining can be considered as deviant behavior and is consequently a sensitive subject to discuss (Agboola & Salawu, 2011). Considering that respondents can be reluctant to answer questions regarding a sensitive subject (Fisk et al., 2010), ensuring anonymity was of great importance. This can most convincingly be ensured via a survey (Krohn, Waldo & Chiricos, 1974), which is why this method was chosen.

Other advantages of an online survey are the speed, the low costs and the access to a wide audience (Wright, 2005). The speed and low costs were important considering the context of this study, as only limited time and resources were available. Access to a wide audience was important considering the sensitive nature of the subject at hand. As stated above, since illegitimate customer complaining is a sensitive subject, respondents could be reluctant to answer questions regarding this behavior which results in a low response rate. In order to still get the desired amount of respondents for a reliable study, it is beneficial to reach as many customers as possible. Another risk that comes with studying a sensitive subject is the social desirability bias, which is "the tendency of individuals to underestimate (overestimate) the likelihood they would perform an undesirable (desirable) action" (Chung & Monroe, 2003, p. 291) as the respondents believe that they are ethically compared to others and therefore answer desirably instead of truthfully. In an attempt to minimize the social desirability bias, the survey has been written in a 'forgiving language' by using the 'everybody-does-it approach' (Charles

& Dattalo, 2018). More techniques regarding the minimalization of the social desirability bias are discussed in section 3.2.

The reason for not conducting an experiment is that it might not encompass all the aspects that drove the customer to complain illegitimately, as some customers might only have engaged in illegitimate customer complaining behavior when directed at a specific company or as a result of events that happened in the past. It might consequently not represent real illegitimate customer complaining behavior. Another research strategy would have been content analysis of third party complaint case files. However, this research strategy would not allow for the measurement of the relationship variables and neutralization techniques used. The reason for this being that only the complainant can provide answers regarding these aspects. Consequently, with this research strategy, it is not possible to measure every aspect that is needed to provide a complete picture regarding the phenomenon of illegitimate customer complaining.

3.2 Procedure

Before the distribution of the survey, it was pre-tested among a diverse group of ten people. The reason for this being that there could potentially have been problems, misunderstandings and/or misformulations regarding certain questions, which the respondents would have still answered out of politeness (Collins, 2003). However, this would have led to misleading data, as the questions would not have measured what they are supposed to measure. By pre-testing the survey, it could be optimized before the distribution to the respondents, which enhanced the validity of the research as the misunderstandings have been minimized. The method that was used for the pre-test is the ‘thinking-aloud’ method. The ‘thinking-aloud’ method entails asking the group to verbalize whatever crosses their mind while going through the survey (Jääskeläinen, 2010). The advantage of this method is that the thought-process of the respondent could be examined in detail. The interpretations of the questions stated by the group were compared to the intentions of the questions, which consequently led to the discussion whether the questions were adequately formulated and would not provide misleading data. The group also voiced their thoughts regarding other aspects of the survey, like the length and layout. All their notes have been taken into consideration and discussed among Joosten and the master thesis students researching this subject, which led to some minimal adjustments.

As stated above, due to the sensitivity of the subject, there was a risk of the social desirability bias, in which the respondents answer what they perceive as socially desirable

instead of answering with the truth (Chung & Monroe, 2003). In order to minimize the social desirability bias, a few techniques have been conducted in the survey: transparency, normalizing and 'gentle assumption' (McBride, 2012). It is important to be transparent to the respondent regarding the goal of the survey and to clarify that there is no hidden-agenda. In order to be as transparent as possible, a small introduction was given at the start of the survey that explained that the survey is part of a master's thesis researching illegitimate customer complaining. To provide some comfort to the respondents and convey to them that we, the students conducting the survey, have nothing to hide, pictures of us were shown as well. Furthermore, the normalizing technique was utilized in the survey, which is similar to the 'forgiving language' (Charles & Dattalo, 2018) mentioned earlier. The normalizing technique mentions universal statements (McBride, 2012) by conveying that, example given, everybody engages in similar deviant behavior once in a while (Charles & Dattalo, 2018). As a result of this type of language, the respondent should have felt like it is not unusual to behave this way and would therefore be more inclined to answer truthfully instead of giving a socially desirable answer. Lastly, the 'gentle assumption' technique focuses on the wording of a question by applying a formulation that assumes that the respondent already engaged in certain behavior at least once (McBride, 2012). This, again, shows the respondent that this behavior is not unusual and prompts him or her to answer truthfully. Personal examples have been added to the introduction text at the beginning of the survey in order to provide a sense of normality around the subject of illegitimate complaining. By providing examples at the start of the survey, an attempt was made to stimulate the memory of the respondents regarding their own experiences with this behavior, so that they were able to recall the drivers, neutralization techniques and relationship with the company more easily when questions regarding these concepts were asked.

After reading the introduction, the respondent should have been made aware of the subject of the survey, who the students conducting the survey are, and of a memory regarding personal illegitimate customer complaining behavior. The survey then continued with questions regarding a specific situation in which the respondent engaged in illegitimate customer complaining behavior. The questions covered the product or service the illegitimate complaint was in reference to, the company, the problem and how it was solved. Hereafter, different scenarios were presented per illegitimate complainant type consisting of sentences that represent the drivers of illegitimate customer complaining as theorized before. Next, statements and questions regarding the neutralization techniques and relationship variables were provided. The respondents were asked to assess each of the statements and answer on a

scale of 1 to 5 how applicable it was to their illegitimate customer complaining situation. The last few questions of the survey concerned some factual information regarding the illegitimate complaining situation and some demographic questions. After finishing all of the questions and statements, the respondent was thanked for his or her participation.

The survey was written in Dutch as this study focuses on the Dutch population. Dutch formulation made it more applicable and accessible for this population, which increases the willingness to respond. It also diminished the chance that a respondent would misinterpret the questions and statements as a result of translation errors.

The final survey, which is presented in Appendix I, has been distributed through the social media channels of all the master thesis students conducting the survey at hand. The social media channels that were used are: Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and WhatsApp.

3.3 Sample

The sampling method that was conducted for this study is the convenience sampling method. The convenience sampling method is a nonprobability sampling technique, which means that not everyone has the same chances of being included (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). This is one of the limitations of this study, as it can lead to potential biases. Nonetheless, one of the main reasons for choosing this technique is the speed with which respondents can be reached with only limited to none costs (Särndal, Swensson & Wretman, 2003). This is important as the students conducting the survey only had a limited amount of resources and time available considering this survey is part of a master's thesis.

Some practical criteria of the convenience sampling method that were important for this study concern the easy accessibility and willingness to participate (Etikan et al., 2016). As previously mentioned, as a result of the sensitive nature of the subject, gathering the desired number of respondents for adequate research is difficult. Therefore, every person who is willing to participate is indispensable. Since “[t]he main objective of convenience sampling is to collect information from participants who are easily accessible to the researcher” (Etikan et al., 2016, p. 2), the survey was distributed through the social media channels of the students conducting the survey. Consequently, this means that the respondents have been gathered from the social circle of the students and therefore might potentially be biased which could go at the expense of the generalizability of this research.

3.4 Measures

The survey consists of scenarios, questions and statements. Each scenario described a certain type of illegitimate complainant with the use of the theorized drivers. The respondent was then asked which scenario *best* fits with their illegitimate complaining situation. Hereafter, questions and statements were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from ‘completely disagree’ to ‘completely agree’ for the measurement of neutralization techniques, and from ‘much smaller’ to ‘much larger’ for the relationship variables.

As a consequence of the amount of drivers, neutralization techniques and relationship variables that needed to be investigated, the length of the survey needed to be kept in mind so that it would not become too long. The consequence of a long survey is a lower response rate, as respondents might be discouraged by the time it would take to finish the survey and therefore not participate or stop midway. With the sensitive nature of the subject at hand, the chances of a lower response rate were already significant. Therefore, in order to not discourage even more possible respondents, the decision was made to make the survey as short as possible. This resulted in the construction of the four scenarios that were included to investigate the drivers per illegitimate complainant type, instead of using multiple-item or even single-item measurements for each driver as this would thoroughly increase the length of the survey and, consequently, the possible negative consequences that would come with it.

3.4.1. Measures of the drivers of illegitimate customer complaining

Every sentence in the scenarios discussed below was used to measure a specific driver of one of the types of illegitimate complainants. The sentences that were used to measure the construct are based on the measures conducted in the master thesis of Van Laar (2018), Van Pinxteren (2019), and Rouwhorst (2020).

Illegitimate complaining - The definition of this construct is threefold: 1) a customer completely made up the complaint, 2) a customer experienced some dissatisfaction but exaggerated, altered or lied about the exact situation, and 3) a customer wrongfully accused the company (Joosten, 2020). Consequently, this construct was measured on a three-item scale, asking to what extent the respondent made up the complaint, exaggerated the complaint, and wrongfully accused the company. These items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from ‘not at all’ to ‘completely’.

Must-type - As explained in a previous chapter, the must-type is driven by a lack of morality, loss of control and perceived injustice.

Lack of morality - This construct is perceived as “the judgment that the perpetrator is causing damage to others in order to obtain a personal advantage” (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016, p. 432). In the scenario, this driver was measured through the sentence “The company deliberately tried to take advantage of me, for example by deliberately providing a bad product or disservice”.

Loss of control - Loss of control is the opposite of experiencing control. Therefore, the opposite of the definition of control constructed by Wallston et al. (1987) was used in this study. Consequently, this means that loss of control is when someone believes that he or she cannot determine his or her own internal state and behavior, influence his or her environment, and/or generate the desired outcomes. This construct was measured by the sentence: “I complained and did everything I could to hold them accountable, but the company did not hold up to their agreements or cared about anything”.

Perceived injustice - Perceived injustice is defined as the negative “individual subjective assessments of organizational responses” (Gelbrich & Roschk, 2011, p. 26). The definition of this construct is three-fold, namely: 1) distributive, 2) procedural and 3) interactional. However, perceptions of injustice were measured by one comprehensive sentence, namely: “That felt very unfair”.

Consequently, these drivers constructed the following scenario for the must-type:

“The company deliberately tried to take advantage of me, for example by deliberately providing a bad product or disservice. That felt very unfair. I complained and did everything I could to hold them accountable, but the company did not hold up to their agreements or cared about anything.”

Need-type - This type is motivated to complain illegitimately by the drivers external attribution, contrast, disappointment and anger.

External attribution - Whenever the customer ascribes the cause of an event to someone or something other than him- or herself, the customer engages in external attribution (Kelley, 1973). It is the opposite of internal attribution and was measured by “The company did not perform as well as it should have” and “They are responsible for their poor product or service”.

Contrast - Contrast occurs when the customers perceive a negative disproportionate discrepancy between the expectation and the reality (Tang et al., 2010). This construct was therefore measured with the following sentence: “Their product or service was way below my expectations”.

Disappointment - Disappointment is a measurement of emotion and occurs when the expectation of the product or service was not matched (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 1999). It was measured via a sentence that combines this driver and the following driver, namely “I was disappointed/angry with the company”.

Anger - Anger is also a measurement of emotion and is “associated with appraising an event as harmful and frustrating” (Bougie et al., 2003, p. 379). As stated above, this construct was measured in combination with disappointment by stating: “I was disappointed/angry with the company”.

Consequently, these drivers constructed the following scenario for the need-type:

“The company did not perform as well as they should have. Their product or service was way below my expectations, so I was disappointed/angry with the company. It may not have been intentional on their part, but they are responsible for their poor product or service.”

Want-type - This type consists of the drivers pre-planned, financial greed and internal attribution.

Pre-planned - When the customer already planned that he or she is going to file a complaint before purchasing the product or service, it is pre-planned behavior (Reynolds & Harris, 2005). This construct was measured by the statement that the customer deliberately illegitimately complained: “I myself deliberately exaggerated or made up the matter...”.

Internal attribution - Internal attribution can be defined as the customer ascribing the cause of the event to him- or herself (Kelley, 1973). This construct was measured with the statement “The company has not really done anything wrong. On the contrary, I myself deliberately exaggerated or made up the matter...”.

Financial greed - Financial greed basically means gaining something for nothing. This construct was measured by straightforwardly stating: “I myself deliberately exaggerated or made up the matter in order to obtain an (financial) advantage, such as a fee or a new product or voucher”.

Consequently, these drivers constructed the following scenario for the want-type:

“The company has not really done anything wrong. On the contrary, I myself deliberately exaggerated or made up the matter in order to obtain a (financial) advantage, such as a fee or a new product or voucher.”

Can-type - Lastly, the can-type is driven by opportunism, the liberal redress policy and the social norm and attitude towards illegitimate complaining.

Opportunism - Opportunism occurs when someone spots and uses an opportunity to enhance one's own welfare and self-interest at the expense of others (Kelley et al., 1989). This construct was measured on a single-item scale, namely "I saw a great opportunity to gain an advantage".

Liberal redress policy - As part of the service recovery, companies will give a generous compensation to make amends for a complaint, giving people the benefit of the doubt and assuming that they speak the truth (Wirtz & McColl-Kennedy, 2010). This phenomenon is called the liberal redress policy and was measured with the sentence: "The company has a very flexible warranty policy or a very friendly customer service. Something like 'not satisfied, money back'. That is why I exaggerated or made up the matter."

Social norm towards illegitimate customer complaining - The social norm is part of the Theory of Reasoned Action, constructed by Fischbein and Ajzen in 1975 (in Hale et al., 2002). This theory claims that people's actions are partly affected by what is perceived as acceptable behavior according to society. The construct of social norms was measured by: "I think others would have made use of the opportunity as well".

Attitude towards illegitimate customer complaining - The other part of the Theory of Reasoned Action is the individual's own attitude towards certain behavior (Fischbein & Ajzen, in Hale et al., 2002). When the individual has a favorable attitude towards illegitimate customer complaining, he or she is more likely to engage in this behavior than someone who has a negative attitude. This construct was measured with the statement: "I do not mind".

Consequently, these drivers constructed the following scenario for the can-type:

"The company has a very flexible warranty policy or a very friendly customer service. Something like 'not satisfied, money back'. So I saw a great opportunity to gain an advantage. That is why I exaggerated or made up the matter. It was not pre-planned on my part. I think others would have made use of the opportunity as well. I do not mind."

3.4.2. Measures of the neutralization techniques

The measures that were used for the neutralization techniques are derived from the master thesis of Rouwhorst (2020) and Van Pinxteren (2019).

Denial of responsibility - According to Sykes and Matza (1957), the denial of responsibility is when the illegitimate complainant deflects the blame that is attached to his or her behavior to someone or something other than him- or herself, so that it is out of the complainant's control. Consequently, this was measured by the single-item scale "It was not my fault".

Denial of injury - When it is believed that no real harm was done towards the company as a consequence of the behavior of the illegitimate complainant, they deny the injury (Sykes & Matza, 1957). This construct was measured by the single-item scale "The company will not suffer from any real damage".

Denial of victim - Denial of victim is the case when the illegitimate complainants believe that the company is deserving of the injury. They believe that their behavior is a rightful retaliation in the light of the circumstances (Sykes & Matza, 1957). Denial of victim was measured on a single-item scale, namely "The company deserves it as a consequence of their own wrongdoing".

Condemnation of the condemners - Condemnation of the condemners is the case when the illegitimate complainant believes that the wrongdoing of the complainant is deflected by the wrongdoings of the company (Sykes & Matza, 1957). This was measured by the single-item scale "The company is not always fair to the customers either".

Appeal to higher loyalties - The illegitimate complainants believe that their deviant behavior is justified as it achieves the higher-order goal of a smaller group (Sykes & Matza, 1957). This neutralization technique was also measured on a single-item scale, namely "I did not do it for myself (but out of principles or for others)".

Defense of necessity - According to Minor (1981), defense of necessity is when the illegitimate complainant deems his or her behavior necessary as a result of some kind of urgency in the situation which therefore justifies their behavior. This construct was measured on a single-item scale, namely "Otherwise I would not have been taken seriously by the company".

Metaphor of the ledger - According to Klockars (in Minor, 1981), the metaphor of the ledger justifies deviant behavior by stating this behavior can be compensated by an excess of good behavior. This construct was measured by the single-item scale "Normally, I do stick to the rules".

Claim of normalcy - The claim of normalcy states that everybody complains illegitimately once in a while and therefore it cannot be condemned as wrong (Henry, in Harris

& Dumas, 2009). It was measured on the single-item scale “Everyone exaggerates once in a while”.

Denial of negative intent - According to Henry (in Harris & Dumas, 2009) denial of negative intent can be used to justify deviant behavior by claiming that it was not the intention to cause any harm. Accordingly, since the complainant did not do it on purpose, it is not condemned as wrong. This construct was also measured on a single-item scale, namely “I did not plan beforehand to exaggerate my complaint”.

Claims of relative acceptability - When comparing their behavior with even worse deviant behavior, the deviant behavior of the illegitimate complainants will seem less bad, which will therefore justify it (Henry, in Harris & Dumas, 2009). This is called the claim of relative acceptability, or justification by comparison. It was measured on a single-item scale, namely “Other people have done much worse”.

Claim of entitlement - According to McGregor (2008), when people claim entitlement, “people are claiming both that they have a right to engage in the behavior in question *and* that they have the right to gain or benefit from any actions they take” (p. 271). This construct was measured on a single-scale, namely “I deserve a windfall once in a while as well”.

Justification by postponement - Postponement can be compared with “out of sight, out of mind”. This neutralization technique is the case when “the offender suppresses his or her guilt feelings—momentarily putting them out of mind to be dealt with at a later time” (Cromwell & Thurman, 2003, p. 546). This construct was also measured on a single-item scale, namely “At that moment, I did not think about the consequences (the feelings came later)”.

3.4.3. Measures of the relationship variables

The measures that were used for the relationship variables are derived from the master thesis of Rouwhorst (2020) and Van Pinxteren (2019).

Customer satisfaction - The customer is satisfied when the post-purchase evaluation of the product or service exceeds the pre-purchase expectation (Cengiz, 2010). Besides the product or service itself, satisfaction also concerns other aspects of the transaction with the company (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993). Therefore, these aspects were measured using the single-item scale “After this situation with the company, my satisfaction...”.

Customer loyalty - According to Palmatier et al. (2006), customer loyalty is a “multidimensional construct that includes groupings of intentions, attitudes, and seller performance indicator” (p. 140). Accordingly, it can be viewed and measured in many different ways. In this study behavioral loyalty was measured, which, according to Bolton and Mattila

(2015), can best be measured via the repurchase intentions. Therefore, customer loyalty was measured on the single-item scale “The chance that I will make another purchase at this company is...”

Word-of-mouth - WOM is the informal communication regarding the evaluations of a product or service from one person to another (Palmatier et al., 2006; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002). This construct was also measured on a single-item scale, namely “The chance that I will recommend this company to others (friend/family/etc.) after this situation is...”

Trust - In this study trust is defined as the “confidence in an exchange partner’s reliability and integrity” (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 23). It was measured on the single-item scale: “The trust I have in this company after this situation is...”

Commitment - Commitment is the “enduring desire to maintain a valued customer-company relationship” (Moorman et al., 1992, p. 316). When the relationship is good, the desire to maintain it, and consequently the commitment to the company, will be higher. Therefore this construct was measured on the single-item scale “My relationship with the company after this situation is ...”

3.5 Data analysis

In order to answer the hypotheses, the data gathered from the survey have been analyzed with the use of the analysis program SPSS. First, the dataset needed to be cleaned by conducting a missing data analysis and correcting errors. Hereafter, in order to test whether the different types of illegitimate complainants differentiate in terms of their degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior, the neutralization techniques used and their perceived relationship with the company, the multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA-analysis) has been performed, followed by a Post Hoc test. According to Field (2013), the MANOVA-analysis compares the group differences between the multiple independent categorical groups on the multiple dependent variables. In this study, this means that the group differences between the different types of illegitimate complainants were compared on the dimensions of illegitimate customer complaining behavior, the use of neutralization techniques and the outcomes of the relationship variables. To be able to state that the proposed typology is confirmed, there need to be significant differences between the group means of the different types of illegitimate complainants on the degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior, on each neutralization technique, and on the relationship variables, in the direction proposed by Joosten’s (2020) typology.

3.6 Research ethics

According to Goodwin, Pope, Mort and Smith (2003), ethics are fundamental in every aspect of the research process. This is especially the case for this study, as the subject concerns deviant behavior. In order to guide ethical questions in a research, the Ethics Code was constructed by the American Psychological Association (APA), including the following general principles: beneficence and nonmaleficence, fidelity and responsibility, integrity, justice, and respect for people's rights and dignity (n.d.). These general principles will be discussed below.

Starting with the principles of beneficence and nonmaleficence, which states that the researcher must take care of his or her respondents and do them no harm. In this study, the respondents are in no way harmed and throughout the whole survey they have had the option to withdraw at any moment, making it completely voluntary.

Secondly, the fidelity and responsibility, which concerns the establishment of trustworthy relationships and the scientific and professional responsibility of the researcher. The purpose of this study is solely based on gaining information regarding the subject at hand, no compensation or personal advantage is gained from it. Time and effort has also been invested in providing a trustworthy relationship with the fellow students doing a master thesis regarding the topic of illegitimate customer complaining.

Thirdly, integrity concerns the accuracy, honesty and truthfulness of the research. This can be assured through the appropriate citing of the literature used, which rightfully gives the credits to the original authors. Throughout this whole research and in the reference list is cited according to the APA-guidelines.

Fourth is justice, which states that everybody can get access to and benefit from the outcomes of the research, and that reasonable judgments and precautions are taken to limit potential biases. In this study, questions have been formulated in an objective manner that was solely focused on acquiring the truth out of the respondents, they were in no way subjective or pushing the respondents towards a 'desired' answer. However, a potential bias in this study where caution needed to be taken is the overstatement of students in the group of respondents as a result of the social circle of the students distributing the survey.

The last general principle concerns the respect for people's rights and dignity. This aspect is especially important when researching a sensitive subject like illegitimate customer complaining. In order to respect people's privacy, anonymity has been ensured throughout this

whole study. The information gained from the survey was only to be used for research purposes and was therefore solely made available to people directly involved in this study.

4. Results

In this chapter, the results of the data analyses are discussed, starting with the missing data. Hereafter, the data is tested against the assumptions of the MANOVA-analysis. Lastly, the results of the MANOVA-analysis and Post Hoc test are discussed based on the aforementioned hypotheses following the sequence of the conceptual model.

4.1 Missing data

Out of the 719 responses that were gathered, only 275 were applicable, as most of the respondents did not answer enough of the questions to be considered in this study. Out of the 275 respondents, there was almost no missing data. Since the missing data was less than 10% of the total data, it is negligible (Field, 2013). However, before the continuation of the analysis, the missing values were replaced with the mean-value of the variable. By inserting the mean-value of the variable, it ensured that all data was taken into account while conducting the MANOVA-analysis without creating a distorted image of the data.

4.2 Assumptions

Before conducting a MANOVA-analysis, the data needs to be tested against a few assumptions. Violating these assumptions can have consequences for the generalizability, reliability and validity of the results, which will be discussed in the last chapter of this study.

The first assumption concerns the measurement level of the independent and dependent variables. The independent variable is required to be of a categorical measurement level (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2019), which is the case for the types of illegitimate complainants. The dependent variables are required to be of a metrical measurement level, which is the case for this study as the dependent variables are all measured with the use of a 5-point Likert-scale and are therefore automatically on an interval measurement level.

The sample size of 275 respondents is not evenly distributed across the type of complainants, with the smallest group belonging to the must-type ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 1.279$, $N = 24$), and the biggest group belonging to the need-type ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.103$, $N = 152$). However, according to Pallant (2001) the minimum number of respondents per category is the number of dependent variables in the research. Consequently, since there are a total of 20 dependent variables and the smallest group consists of 24 respondents, this assumption has been met. Out of the 275 respondents, 182 were female (66.2%) and 91 were male (33.1%). The age varied between 14 and 70 years old, with most being 23 (16.7%). Most of the

respondents are highly educated with a total of 76.4% either having a higher professional education (32.4%) or a university education (44.0%).

The assumption of normality was tested both univariate and multivariate. In order to test the univariate normality, both the Z-values of the skewness and kurtosis, and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test have been conducted (Appendix II, Table 1). The results show that multiple variables are not normally distributed, however, according to Pallant (2001) this does not have to be problematic as “a sample size of at least twenty in each cell should ensure ‘robustness’” (p. 219), which is the case for this study ($N_{min} = 24$). The multivariate normality was tested with use of the Mahalanobis distances (Appendix II, Table 2). In total, 13 respondents exceeded the critical value that is set for a study with 20 dependent variables, namely 37.57 (Field, 2013, p. 898). Since the MANOVA-analysis is robust against violations of normality (Pallant, 2001), the decision has been made not to delete nor transform these respondents in order to not decrease the power of the test or make too many changes in the dataset.

Following is the assumption of linearity, which was tested with the use of the ‘Test of Linearity’ (Appendix II, Table 3), as this provided more objective data as opposed to scatterplots. Half of the variables meet the assumption of linearity, and half of the variables do not, which could have consequences regarding the power of the study.

Box’s M test of equality of covariance matrices was significant, $F(630,23644)=1.535$, $p < .05$, which would indicate heterogeneity of variances. To determine where exactly the problem lies, the Levene’s Test was also carried out, displaying the 11 variables that violated this assumption (Appendix II, Table 4). The violation of this assumption indicates that the use of a smaller alpha is wise (Pallant, 2001).

With the use of Pearson’s Correlation, the assumption of multicollinearity was tested (Appendix II, Tables 5 - 10). A correlation bigger than .8 or .9 can be considered as problematic (Pallant, 2001), which only seems to be the case for the correlation between the relationship variables, the rest is only moderately correlated, which is ideal. Considering that the relationship variables are supposed to measure somewhat the same effect, the multicollinearity was to be expected. Therefore the decision has been made to continue with these variables.

4.3 Multivariate analysis of variance

After running the MANOVA-analysis with all the seven possible covariates (time of complaint, fit with type, gender, education, age, number of complaints, company size), it was discovered

that only the covariates ‘time of complaint’ ($F(20,245) = 1.735, p < .05$; Pillai’s Trace: .124 , partial $\eta^2 = .124$) and ‘company size’ ($F(20,245) = 2.456, p < .05$; Pillai’s Trace: .167 , partial $\eta^2 = .167$) have a significant effect. Hereafter, the MANOVA-analysis was run again, once without any covariates and once with only the two covariates ‘time of complaint’ and ‘company size’. After comparing the results, the choice was made to continue with the inclusion of the two covariates, as this provided an extra significant effect and stronger values for the partial η^2 . The multivariate results of the MANOVA-analysis with the two covariates were still significant for both covariates, as well as for the type of illegitimate complainants, $F(60,756) = 4.563, p < .05$; Pillai’s Trace: .798, partial $\eta^2 = .266$, indicating that there is a difference among the types of illegitimate complainants on a linear combination of the dependent variables and therefore providing an indication to continue with the analysis.

The differences were further investigated per dependent variable against multiple alpha levels, as it is wise to use a higher alpha level in order to reduce the chance of a Type I error (Pallant, 2001). That is why, in addition to the alpha levels of .05 and .001, the Bonferroni adjustment was used in which the alpha level of .05 is divided by the amount of dependent variables (20), which leads to an alpha level of .0025.

Before running the MANOVA-analysis, the validity of the different types of illegitimate complainants was tested with the use of one question in the survey. This question gave insight into the level of fit between the situation of the respondent and the chosen scenario, and therefore also with the type of illegitimate complainant. The results show that a total of 54.9% experienced either perfect fit (12.4%) or a large fit (42.5%). Hereafter, 23.3% experienced it to be somewhat fitting, and 19.3% thought it fitted a little bit, with only 2.5% finding no fit between the chosen scenario and the situation. As most of the respondents seem to experience at least somewhat of a fit, it seems that the types of illegitimate complainants and their drivers are rather valid.

A Post Hoc test was conducted after running the MANOVA-analysis in order to further specify what initiates a (non-)significant value. It shows which type of illegitimate complainant significantly differs from another type of illegitimate complainant on a certain dependent variable. Considering the unequal group sizes and heterogeneity of variances, Games-Howell was used for the Post Hoc test.

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	F	Sig.	Partial Eta sq.	Effect
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(a) Illegitimate complaints ~ completely fabricated	Must-type	$M=1.712$; $SD=.216$	***	.261	Large
	Need-type	$M=1.478$; $SD=.085$			
	Want-type	$M=3.030$; $SD=.135$			
	Can-type	$M=2.176$; $SD=.175$ $F(3,271)= 31.702$			
<hr/>					
Covariates					
	Time of complaint	$F(1,273)=.316$	(ns)		
	Company size	$F(1,273)=.285$	(ns)		
(b) Illegitimate complaints ~ exaggerated, altered or lied about the situation	Must-type	$M=2.341$; $SD=.236$	*	.035	Small
	Need-type	$M=2.431$; $SD=.093$			
	Want-type	$M=2.921$; $SD=.147$			
	Can-type	$M=2.786$; $SD=.191$ $F(3,271)= 3.235$			
<hr/>					
Covariates					
	Time of complaint	$F(1,273)= 4.616$	*	.017	Small
	Company size	$F(1,273)=.168$	(ns)		
(c) Illegitimate complaints ~ falsely blaming the company	Must-type	$M=1.771$; $SD=.249$	***	.064	Medium
	Need-type	$M=1.658$; $SD=.098$			
	Want-type	$M=2.343$; $SD=.156$			
	Can-type	$M=2.331$; $SD=.202$ $F(3,271)= 6.115$			
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Covariates					
	Time of complaint	$F(1,273)=8.958$	**	.032	Small
	Company size	$F(1,273)=.030$	(ns)		

* = $p < .05$ ** = $p < .01$ *** = $P < .0025$ (ns) = non-significant

Fig. 1: Results MANOVA - illegitimate customer complaining behavior

As displayed in Figure 1, the illegitimate complainants belonging to the want-type score highest on all the different dimensions of illegitimate customer complaining behavior, soon followed by the can-type, as was hypothesized. However, contrary to the hypotheses, the must-type only scores lowest on the illegitimate complaints that are exaggerated, as opposed to the need-type that scores lowest on the other two dimensions of illegitimate complaints. When considering the results of the Post Hoc test, there seem to be no significant values against any of the types of illegitimate complainants for the dependent variable exaggerated illegitimate complaints (Appendix III, Table 1). For fabricated illegitimate complaints, there do seem to be significant differences between some of the types of illegitimate complainants. Lastly, for the falsely blamed illegitimate complaints, there is only a significant difference between the want- and need-type. These results would indicate that, even though the variables were significant according to the MANOVA-analysis, there do not seem to be many significant differences

between the types of illegitimate complainants on the degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior. Considering that the want-type scores significantly higher against all the types of illegitimate complainants on the fabricated illegitimate complaint, and against the need-type on the falsely blamed illegitimate complaint, **hypothesis 8** is partly accepted. The can-type scores second to highest on all the dimensions of illegitimate customer complaining behavior, however, with only two significant values. Therefore, **hypothesis 11** is also partly accepted. Accordingly, when looking at the significant results, the need-type seems to score lowest more often than the must-type, therefore resulting in the rejection of both **hypotheses 2** and **5**.

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	F	Sig.	Partial Eta sq.	Effect
(a) Neutralization technique ~ Denial of responsibility	Must-type	$M=4.463$; $SD=.216$	***	.364	Large
	Need-type	$M=4.311$; $SD=.085$			
	Want-type	$M=2.467$; $SD=.135$			
	Can-type	$M=3.062$; $SD=.174$ $F(3,271)= 51.424$			
	Covariates				
	Time of complaint	$F(1,273)=2.777$	(ns)		
	Company size	$F(1,273)= 4.006$	*	.015	Small
(b) Neutralization technique ~ Denial of victim	Must-type	$M=4.219$; $SD=.215$	***	.335	Large
	Need-type	$M=3.324$; $SD=.085$			
	Want-type	$M=1.884$; $SD=.134$			
	Can-type	$M=2.077$; $SD=.174$ $F(3,271)= 45.245$			
	Covariates				
	Time of complaint	$F(1,273)= 1.649$	(ns)		
	Company size	$F(1,273)= 1.673$	(ns)		
(c) Neutralization technique ~ Condemnation of the condemners	Must-type	$M=4.028$; $SD=.225$	***	.098	Medium
	Need-type	$M=3.197$; $SD=.089$			
	Want-type	$M=2.707$; $SD=.140$			
	Can-type	$M=2.717$; $SD=.182$ $F(3,271)= 9.738$			
	Covariates				
	Time of complaint	$F(1,273)= .313$	(ns)		
	Company size	$F(1,273)= 3.982$	*	.015	Small

(d) Neutralization technique ~ Appeal to higher loyalties	Must-type	$M=2.282$; $SD=.232$	(ns)		
	Need-type	$M=2.090$; $SD=.091$			
	Want-type	$M=1.993$; $SD=.145$			
	Can-type	$M=2.137$; $SD=.188$ $F(3,271)= .391$			
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	Covariates				
	Time of complaint	$F(1,273)=.055$	(ns)		
	Company size	$F(1,273)= 8.624$	**	.031	Small
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(e) Neutralization Technique ~ Denial of Negative Intent	Must-type	$M=4.368$; $SD=.230$	***	.065	Medium
	Need-type	$M=3.788$; $SD=.091$			
	Want-type	$M=3.252$; $SD=.144$			
	Can-type	$M=3.543$; $SD=.186$ $F(3,271) = 6.261$			
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	Covariates				
	Time of complaint	$F(1,273)= 6.030$	*	.022	Small
	Company size	$F(1,273)= .348$	(ns)		
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(f)Neutralization technique ~ Defense of necessity	Must-type	$M=3.784$; $SD=.232$	**	.044	Small
	Need-type	$M=3.302$; $SD=.091$			
	Want-type	$M=2.903$; $SD=.145$			
	Can-type	$M=2.981$; $SD=.188$ $F(3,271)= 4.173$			
<hr/>					
	Covariates				
	Time of complaint	$F(1,273)= 6.570$	**	.024	Small
	Company size	$F(1,273)= 6.778$	**	.025	Small
<hr/>					
* = $p<.05$ ** = $p<.01$ *** = $P<.0025$ (ns) = non-significant					

* = $p<.05$ ** = $p<.01$ *** = $P<.0025$ (ns) = non-significant

Fig. 2: Results MANOVA - Neutralization techniques must-type

Figure 2 contains the results of the neutralization techniques that were hypothesized to belong to the illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the must-type. First of all, it shows that the neutralization technique ‘appeal to higher loyalties’ is not significant, which means that there is not a statistical difference between the illegitimate complainants on this neutralization technique and consequently results in the rejection of **hypothesis 1d**. Even though it is not statistically different, it does show a slightly higher mean-value for the must-type compared to the other types.

The remaining neutralization techniques do significantly differ among the illegitimate complainants, with the highest mean-value belonging to the must-type. Consequently, this would entail that these neutralization techniques are utilized by the must-type the most compared to the other illegitimate complainant types and therefore lead to the acceptance of hypotheses 1a, 1b, 1c, 1e and 1f. Taking a closer look at the significant variables, the Post Hoc

test shows that the must-type does not score significantly higher than the need-type on both the neutralization techniques ‘denial of responsibility’ and ‘defense of necessity’ (Appendix III, Table 2). However, as both the must- and need-type are hypothesized to score high on the ‘denial of responsibility’, it would still result in the acceptance of **hypothesis 1a**. **Hypothesis 1f**, however, is only partly accepted. The remainder of the previous statement were confirmed by the Post Hoc test, resulting in the rejection of **hypothesis 1d**, and the acceptance of **hypotheses 1b, 1c and 1e**.

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	F	Sig.	Partial Eta sq.	Effect
(a) Neutralization technique ~ Denial of injury	Must-type	<i>M</i> =4.104; <i>SD</i> =.181	(ns)		
	Need-type	<i>M</i> =4.373; <i>SD</i> =.071			
	Want-type	<i>M</i> =4.290; <i>SD</i> =.113			
	Can-type	<i>M</i> =4.212; <i>SD</i> =.146 F(3,271)= .866			
	Covariates				
	Time of complaint	F(1,273)=1.961	(ns)		
	Company size	F(1,273)= .005	(ns)		
(b) Neutralization technique ~ Claim of entitlement	Must-type	<i>M</i> =3.280; <i>SD</i> =.166	***	.069	Medium
	Need-type	<i>M</i> =3.435; <i>SD</i> =.065			
	Want-type	<i>M</i> =3.937; <i>SD</i> =.103			
	Can-type	<i>M</i> =3.422; <i>SD</i> =.134 F(3,271)= 6.639			
	Covariates				
	Time of complaint	F(1,273)= 9.624	***	.035	Small
	Company size	F(1,273)= 5.060	*	.018	Small

* = $p < .05$ ** = $p < .01$ *** = $P < .0025$ (ns) = non-significant

Fig. 3: Results MANOVA - Neutralization techniques need- and want-type

Figure 3 contains the results of the neutralization techniques that were hypothesized to belong to the illegitimate complainants that affiliate with either the need- or the want-type, minus the neutralization technique ‘denial of responsibility’ as it was already displayed in Figure 2. Hypothesis 4a stated that illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the need-type score highest on the neutralization technique ‘denial of injury’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants. However, the results for this neutralization technique do not show a significant effect. Therefore, **hypothesis 4a** is rejected despite the need-type having the highest mean-value for this neutralization technique. For the neutralization technique ‘denial of responsibility’, which is presented in Figure 2, there was a significant effect of $p < .0025$ with

a high partial η^2 of .364. With $M=4.311$ and $SD=.085$, the need-type has the second highest mean-value. The Post Hoc test shows that there is no significant difference between the mean-values of the must- and need-type (Appendix III, Table 2), meaning that **hypothesis 4b** is accepted as both seem to score significantly higher on this neutralization technique than the other two types of illegitimate complainants.

The only neutralization technique that was hypothesized for the want-type, is the technique called ‘claim of entitlement’. Considering that $p < .0025$, partial $\eta^2 = .069$, $M=3.937$ and $SD=.103$, and a significantly higher value against all the other types of illegitimate complainants according to the Post Hoc test (Appendix III, Table 3), **hypothesis 7** is accepted as well. Moreover, both of the covariates have a significant effect on this neutralization technique ($p < .0025$; $p < .05$).

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	F	Sig.	Partial Eta sq.	Effect
(a) Neutralization technique ~ Claim of normalcy	Must-type	$M=3.475$; $SD=.175$	*	.034	Small
	Need-type	$M=3.762$; $SD=.069$			
	Want-type	$M=4.069$; $SD=.109$			
	Can-type	$M=3.872$; $SD=.142$			
		$F(3,271)= 3.134$			
(b) Neutralization technique ~ Claim of Relative Acceptability	Covariates				
	Time of complaint	$F(1,273)= .936$	(ns)		
	Company size	$F(1,273)= .160$	(ns)		
	Must-type	$M=3.926$; $SD=.202$	(ns)		
	Need-type	$M=3.801$; $SD=.079$			
(c) Neutralization technique ~ Metaphor of the ledger	Want-type	$M=3.964$; $SD=.126$			
	Can-type	$M=3.870$; $SD=.163$			
		$F(3,271)= .450$			
	Covariates				
	Time of complaint	$F(1,273)= .777$	(ns)		
(c) Neutralization technique ~ Metaphor of the ledger	Company size	$F(1,273)= 5.003$	*	.018	Small
	Must-type	$M=4.138$; $SD=.155$	(ns)		
	Need-type	$M=3.974$; $SD=.061$			
	Want-type	$M=4.242$; $SD=.097$			
	Can-type	$M=4.095$; $SD=.126$			
(c) Neutralization technique ~ Metaphor of the ledger		$F(3,271)= 1.930$			
	Covariates				
	Time of complaint	$F(1,273)= 1.519$	(ns)		
	Company size	$F(1,273)= 5.340$	*	.019	Small

(d) Neutralization technique ~ Justification by postponement	Must-type	$M=2.289$; $SD=.230$	*	.040	Small
	Need-type	$M=2.449$; $SD=.091$			
	Want-type	$M=2.588$; $SD=.143$			
	Can-type	$M=3.102$; $SD=.186$			
		$F(3,271)= 3.745$			
<hr/>					
	Covariates				
	Time of complaint	$F(1,273)= .117$	(ns)		
	Company size	$F(1,273)= 2.972$	(ns)		

* = $p<.05$ ** = $p<.01$ *** = $P<.0025$ (ns) = non-significant

Fig. 4: Results MANOVA - Neutralization techniques can-type

Figure 4 contains not only the results for the neutralization techniques that were hypothesized to belong to the illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the can-type, but also the neutralization technique ‘justification by postponement’, which was not hypothesized to belong to any of the types of illegitimate complainants. Since neither of the neutralization techniques ‘claim of relative acceptability’ and ‘metaphor of the ledger’ are significant, there is no statistical difference between the types of illegitimate complainants on these neutralization techniques, and therefore both **hypothesis 10b** and **hypothesis 10c** are rejected. When looking at the mean-values of the types of illegitimate complainants on these neutralization techniques, the can-type even had the second lowest mean-values in both cases ($M=3.870$; $M=4.095$). The neutralization technique ‘claim of normalcy’ does have a significant effect ($p<.05$; partial $\eta^2=.034$), however, not in favor of the can-type as it only has the second to highest mean-value ($M=3.872 < M=4.069$) with the want-type scoring the highest. Moreover, when considering the results of the Post Hoc test (Appendix III, Table 4), there does not seem to be a significant difference between the can-type and any of the other types of illegitimate complainants. Therefore, **hypothesis 10a** is also rejected.

The neutralization technique ‘justification by postponement’ was not hypothesized for any of the types of illegitimate complainants. However, Figure 4 shows a significant result ($p<.05$; partial $\eta^2=.04$), meaning that the types of illegitimate complainants do differ regarding the use of this neutralization technique, with the highest mean belonging to the can-type ($M=3.102, SD=.186$). This entails that this neutralization technique is mostly applied by the can-type and therefore should have been hypothesized and added to the typology. Moreover, when considering the results of the Post Hoc test (Appendix III, Table 4), the can-type has a significantly higher value than the need-type.

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	F	Sig.	Partial Eta sq.	Effect
(a) Relationship variable ~ Loyalty	Must-type	$M=1.681$; $SD=.179$	***	.180	Large
	Need-type	$M=2.562$; $SD=.071$			
	Want-type	$M=3.132$; $SD=.112$			
	Can-type	$M=3.166$; $SD=.145$			
		$F(3,271)= 19.639$			
	Covariates				
	Time of complaint	$F(1,273)= .011$	(ns)		
	Company size	$F(1,273)= .279$	(ns)		
(b) Relationship variable ~ WOM	Must-type	$M=1.704$; $SD=.181$	***	.181	Large
	Need-type	$M=2.493$; $SD=.072$			
	Want-type	$M=3.113$; $SD=.113$			
	Can-type	$M=3.194$; $SD=.147$			
		$F(3,271)= 19.871$			
	Covariates				
	Time of complaint	$F(1,273)= .036$	(ns)		
	Company size	$F(1,273)= 2.193$	(ns)		
(c) Relationship variable ~ Trust	Must-type	$M=1.590$; $SD=.187$	***	.189	Large
	Need-type	$M=2.566$; $SD=.074$			
	Want-type	$M=3.118$; $SD=.116$			
	Can-type	$M=3.258$; $SD=.151$			
		$F(3,271)= 20.886$			
	Covariates				
	Time of complaint	$F(1,273)= 2.489$	(ns)		
	Company size	$F(1,273)= .773$	(ns)		
(d) Relationship variable ~ Commitment	Must-type	$M=1.761$; $SD=.171$	***	.172	Large
	Need-type	$M=2.571$; $SD=.068$			
	Want-type	$M=3.116$; $SD=.107$			
	Can-type	$M=3.130$; $SD=.139$			
		$F(3,271)= 18.622$			
	Covariates				
	Time of complaint	$F(1,273)= .836$	(ns)		
	Company size	$F(1,273)= 3.012$	(ns)		
(e) Relationship variable ~ Satisfaction	Must-type	$M=1.757$; $SD=.199$	***	.200	Large
	Need-type	$M=2.618$; $SD=.078$			
	Want-type	$M=3.325$; $SD=.124$			
	Can-type	$M=3.511$; $SD=.161$			
		$F(3,271)= 22.365$			
	Covariates				
	Time of complaint	$F(1,273)= 1.657$	(ns)		

Company size	F(1,273)= .954	(ns)
* = p<.05 ** = p<.01 *** = P<.0025 (ns) = non-significant		

Fig. 5: Results MANOVA - Relationship variables

Figure 5 contains the results of the relationship variables, all of which show a significant effect ($p < .0025$) with a high partial η^2 . It was hypothesized that the want-type scores highest on the relationship variables (**H9**), with the second to highest being the can-type (**H12**), followed by the need-type (**H6**), and with the lowest score being the must-type (**H3**). According to both Figure 5 and the results of the Post Hoc test (Appendix III, Table 5), the must-type has a significantly lower mean-value compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants on all of the relationship variables, resulting in the acceptance of **hypothesis 3**.

The need-type has significantly lower mean-values than both the want- and can-type, and significantly higher mean-values than the must-type, meaning that the need-type scores second to lowest on all of the relationship variables compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants, resulting in the acceptance of **hypothesis 6**.

According to the results in Figure 5 and the results of the Post Hoc test (Appendix III, Table 5), the can-type has a higher mean-value than the want-type on most of the relationship variables (namely loyalty, WOM, trust, and satisfaction). However, since these mean-values do not significantly differ, this difference can be neglected. Since both the want- and can-type do score significantly higher on the relationships variables compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants, both **hypothesis 9** and **hypothesis 12** are partly accepted.

An overview of all the hypotheses and their outcomes are presented in Appendix IV.

5. Conclusion and discussion

This chapter will first of all provide a conclusion that elaborates on the results of this study. Following will be the theoretical and managerial implications that this study brought forward. Lastly, the limitations regarding this study will be discussed, accompanied by some suggestions for future research.

5.1 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to extend the research of Joosten (2020) on illegitimate complaints by empirically testing his typology of illegitimate customer complaining and consequently providing an answer on the following research question: *“To what extent can the typology of Joosten (2020) concerning illegitimate customer complaining be confirmed?”*. According to this typology established by Joosten (2020), there are supposed to be four types of illegitimate complainants, namely the must-, need-, want- and can-type, each with an own set of drivers, neutralization techniques, degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior, and customer-company relationship. In order to test the accuracy of this, multiple hypotheses were constructed and tested through a survey. With the use of a MANOVA-analysis followed by a Post Hoc test, the data gathered from the survey was analyzed, which resulted in either the acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses (Appendix IV) and consequently to the conclusion that the typology of Joosten (2020) regarding illegitimate customer complaining can be partly confirmed, with a few suggestions for alterations.

In order to test the drivers of the types of illegitimate complainants without adding too much to the length of the survey, scenarios were constructed in which the drivers were incorporated. Since most of the respondents experienced at least somewhat of a fit between their situation and the constructed scenarios, it can be assumed that the drivers at least somewhat fit with each of the types of illegitimate complainants, as was theorized in the typology by Joosten (2020).

According to the results of this study, there were no significant differences between the types of illegitimate complainants on the exaggeration of the complaint, resulting in the belief that all the types of illegitimate complainants exaggerate a complaint as much as the others. However, there does seem to be a significant difference between the types of illegitimate complainants on one of the dimensions of illegitimate complaining, namely the fabrication of a complaint, with the want-type scoring highest, followed by the can-type, the must-type and lastly the need-type. This is not exactly in line with the typology of Joosten (2020), which

stated not only that the types of illegitimate complainants should have scored differently on *all* the dimensions of illegitimate customer complaining behavior, but also that the must-type should have scored lowest and the need-type second to lowest. Since this does not seem to be the case according to the results of the survey, it provides a reason to critically revise the typology.

All but one of the neutralization techniques that were theorized to be used by the illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the must-type were (partly) correct according to the results of the study. Accordingly, the neutralization techniques ‘denial of responsibility’, ‘denial of victim’, ‘condemnation of the condemners’, ‘denial of negative intent’, and ‘defense of necessity’ are all employed by the must-type. For the neutralization technique ‘defense of necessity’, there was not a significant difference between the must- and need-type. Therefore, it is believed that this neutralization technique should be attributed to both the must- and need-type, similar to the neutralization technique ‘denial of responsibility’. Moreover, the neutralization technique ‘appeal to higher loyalties’ did not provide a significant effect, meaning that there is no statistical evidence for the inclusion of this neutralization technique into the typology. The mean-values of this neutralization technique were all fairly low, suggesting that it is not employed much by any of the types of illegitimate complainants.

In addition to the must-type, the neutralization technique ‘denial of responsibility’ was also utilized by the need-type, compatible with the typology of Joosten (2020). The neutralization technique ‘denial of injury’ did not provide a significant effect and therefore also no statistical evidence for the inclusion of this neutralization technique into the typology. However, the mean-values of the types of illegitimate complainants for this neutralization technique were all high, meaning that all the types of illegitimate complainants seem to employ this neutralization technique. The same is true for the neutralization techniques ‘claim of relative acceptability’ and ‘metaphor of the ledger’, which were hypothesized to belong to the can-type. Therefore it is suggested that these three neutralization techniques, despite not conforming to the typology of Joosten (2020), are still to be included in the typology, however, attributed to all the types of illegitimate complainants instead of one type.

The neutralization technique ‘claim of entitlement’ was theorized and confirmed for the want-type, as opposed to all the neutralization techniques that were theorized for the can-type, which were all rejected. The neutralization technique ‘claim of normalcy’ did provide a significant effect, however, not in line with the typology. Considering the highest mean-value was a result of the want-type, this neutralization technique should be attributed to the want-type instead of the can-type. Moreover, the neutralization technique ‘justification by

postponement’ was left out of the typology, however, it should be included and attributed to the can-type.

Lastly, in line with the typology, the need-type scored second to lowest on the relationship variables and the must-type the lowest, meaning that their customer-company relationship was negatively affected the most. There seemed to be no significant differences between the want- and can-type on the relationship variables, both having a positive customer-company relationship. This was partly in line with the typology, as it stated that, since the want- and can-type are more aware of their illegitimate complaining behavior and therefore blame themselves more than they blame the company, their customer-company relationship is not affected negatively. Accordingly, since the need- and must-type felt like the company was to blame for their illegitimate complaining behavior, their relationship was affected the most.

All in all, this leads to the conclusion that the typology of Joosten (2020) can only partly be confirmed as a few alterations should be made. First of all, the different types of illegitimate complainants did not differ on all the dimensions of illegitimate customer complaining behavior. It should be stated that all the types seem to exaggerate a complaint, that there is a difference between the want- and need-type concerning the falsely blamed complaint, and that mainly the want- and can-type seem to engage in the fabrication of the complaint. Secondly, the neutralization technique ‘appeal to higher loyalties’ should be excluded from the typology, while ‘justification by postponement’ should be included and attributed to the can-type. Third, the neutralization technique ‘defense of necessity’ should be attributed to both the need- and must-type, as both types felt like they had no choice but to complain illegitimately. Fourth, the neutralization techniques ‘denial of injury’, ‘claim of relative acceptability’ and ‘metaphor of the ledger’ should be attributed to all the types of illegitimate complainants, as they were all equally used by the types of illegitimate complainants. Moreover, the neutralization technique ‘claim of normalcy’ should be attributed to the want-type instead of the can-type. Lastly, the can- and want-type score equally high on the relationship variables, meaning that they should have a shared first place in the typology instead of the want-type scoring highest followed by the can-type. For the remainder of the typology, statistical evidence was found in favor of the typology, meaning that it is confirmed and no other changes need to be made.

5.2 Theoretical implications

By empirically testing the typology of Joosten (2020) regarding illegitimate customer complaining, this study has not only provided extra power and validation to the manuscript of

Joosten, but also added to the existing literature by providing a more complete picture of illegitimate customer complaining. It enhanced the academic knowledge regarding the subject of illegitimate complainants as it confirmed that there are different types of illegitimate complainants, with different illegitimate customer complaining behavior, different customer-company relationships, and employing different neutralization techniques. By implementing all of these aspects into the study, multiple insights and linkages were discovered, starting with the types of illegitimate complainants itself. As was discussed in the second chapter of this study, many researchers have distinguished multiple types of illegitimate complainants, without coming to an agreement. The types that were distinguished in this study envelop the diverse types that were previously distinguished by other researchers, meaning that the can-, want-, need-, and must-types all have some elements of the types distinguished by Reynolds and Harris (2005), Daunt and Harris (2012) and Huang et al. (2014), conforming them into one typology. However, the previously mentioned studies mostly focused on drivers with financial or revenge initiatives, but this study showed that there is more to it than that.

When regarding the typology of Joosten (2020) more specifically, the first theoretical implication concerns the dimensions of illegitimate customer complaining behavior. The results of this study show a difference between the types of illegitimate complainants regarding the fabrication of a complaint, however, no difference is present between the types of illegitimate complainants regarding the exaggeration of a complaint. Moreover, only the need- and want-type differ concerning a falsely blamed complaint. According to the typology of Joosten (2020), the types of illegitimate complainants should have differentiated on all the dimensions of illegitimate complaints, however this does not seem to be the case. A possible explanation for this, is that the different dimensions of illegitimate customer complaining behavior are actually three levels, meaning that there is a hierarchy in the dimensions. The first level would be the dimension that is perceived as least deviant and therefore applied by all the types of illegitimate complainants. However, the higher the level, the more deviant the behavior is perceived, resulting in only a limited number of people, and consequently also a limited number of types of illegitimate complainants, engaging in this behavior. It is therefore believed that the first level would be the exaggeration of a complaint, in which all of the types of illegitimate complainants engage in just as much. The second level is falsely blaming the company, which is where the first significant difference is present between the types. The last level is the fabrication of the complaint, in which mainly the want- and can-type engage in, meaning there is no significant difference between the need- and must-type on this dimension of illegitimate complaining as both types hardly participate in this level of illegitimate

complaining. This would also be in line with the theory behind the typology of Joosten (2020), since the need- and must-type believe that their complaint is legit and therefore can only exaggerate it and will not fabricate one. Moreover, this would still mean that the want- and can-type are the worst in their illegitimate customer complaining behavior.

Most of the hypotheses concerning the neutralization techniques were confirmed, therefore contributing to the academic literature regarding these techniques and providing more evidence for the use of neutralization techniques to rationalize deviant behavior, such as illegitimate customer complaining behavior. However, a few alterations are suggested in terms of the attribution of the neutralization techniques to the types of illegitimate complainants. ‘Defense of necessity’ should have been attributed to both the must- and need-type. This can be explained by assessing the drivers of both types, as both the must- and need-type believe that they are not the one to blame since they are practically forced by the company to complain illegitimately in order to be heard. The three neutralization techniques ‘denial of injury’, ‘claim of relative acceptability’ and ‘metaphor of the ledger’ should have been attributed to all the types of illegitimate complainants, as all the types seem to employ these techniques. This contributes to the theories of Henry (in Harris & Dumas, 2009), Sykes and Matza (1957), and Klockars (in Minor, 1981), as it shows that these techniques are all commonly used neutralization techniques. However, the opposite is true for the neutralization technique ‘appeal to higher loyalties’, which was distinguished by Sykes and Matza (1957), since the results show that almost none of the types of illegitimate complainants seem to employ this neutralization technique, therefore challenging this neutralization technique as it might not be applicable for all kinds of deviant behavior. Another theoretical implication regarding the neutralization techniques is the inclusion of ‘justification by postponement’, attributed to the can-type. This neutralization technique was not included in the typology of Joosten (2020), so it is not only a contribution to this typology but it also enhances the power of this neutralization technique for the theory distinguished by Cromwell and Thurman (2003).

When considering the entire concept, it was theorized that the want- and can-type would score highest on the degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior, and therefore also score highest on the relationship variables, with the opposite being true for the need- and must-type. This study has contributed to this logic, as the theory behind it is still considered true since the overall sequence is still somewhat the same. However, it is striking that the need- and must-type do not significantly differ on the degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior, and the want- and can-type do not significantly differ on the relationship variables. This could possibly entail that the customer-company relationship is negatively affected up

until a certain degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior. Moreover, the results concerning the relationship variables challenge the service recovery paradox that was spoken of by Hart et al. (1990). According to this paradox, a service recovery could lead to a better customer-company relationship. However, only the perceived customer-company relationships of the want- and can-type were positively influenced by the service recovery, which was only the case because they perceive themselves as the one to blame, therefore, anything the company's service recovery would do would be beneficial for the relationship. This was not the same for the must- and need-type, as they perceived the company as the one to blame, which resulted in a more negative perception of the customer-company relationship, despite the service recovery.

5.3 Managerial implications

A strong customer-company relationship can create a competitive advantage for a company, as it increases revenues and leads to larger market shares (Chalmers, 2006; Gemme, 1997). Consequently, the retention of customers is essential for companies and therefore also the service recovery, which focuses on overcoming customer dissatisfaction and building towards loyal customers (Homburg & Fürst, 2005). However, according to this and multiple other studies, the filed complaints are not always legitimate (e.g., Reynolds & Harris, 2005; Baker, 2013; Wirtz & McColl-Kennedy, 2010), which can result in negative consequences for the companies (Harris & Reynolds, 2003; Berry & Seiders, 2008). Therefore, insights into the types of illegitimate complainants, their drivers, how they justify their behavior, and how the customer-company relationship is affected, are especially relevant for managers and employees working in the service recovery process, so that they can spot the types of illegitimate complainants and act accordingly to prevent illegitimate complaints. The most effective way to prevent illegitimate complaints is to counteract the drivers and neutralization techniques of the types of illegitimate complainants.

According to the results of this study, the illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the must-type are driven by a lack of morality, loss of control and perceived injustice. They experienced injustice as a result of their belief that the company took advantage of them, therefore resulting in a perceived lack of morality. To prevent this, it is important to understand the reason that these customers felt like the company was taking advantage of them and rectify this. To do so, good communication is essential. By making the customers feel heard, they will experience a gain of control, consequently making them less likely to file an illegitimate

complaint as they do not experience this as their last resource anymore. Consequently, this also counteracts the neutralization technique ‘defense of necessity’. Moreover, managers and employees need to convey to the customers that they are kind and that they take care of their customers, so that goodwill is created, making them less likely to perceive the company as lacking morality and consequently also less like to justify their deviant behavior with the use of the neutralization technique ‘condemnation of the condemners’.

The drivers of the illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the need-type are external attribution, contrast, disappointment and anger. The feelings of disappointment and anger are a result of the substantial contrast between their expectations of the product or service and the reality, of which the company is blamed for. Therefore, it is important for this type to set realistic expectations and only make promises that can be actualized, meaning that the company should be open about the possibilities, but also the restrictions that come with it. Again, open communication is key, also in counteracting the associated neutralization techniques.

Preventing the want-type from filing an illegitimate complaint can be difficult, as they are driven by financial greed and pre-plan their deviant behavior, therefore also internally attributing it. The main driver seems to be financial greed, therefore it is advised to stop offering financial compensation or at least reassess the liberal redress policy to make it more difficult to gain financial compensation. Another tactic is to focus on the neutralization technique ‘claim of normalcy’ by making it clear that this behavior is not considered as normal but as deviant. This can be done by making a statement saying that the company understands that this behavior is not the norm, but still sets strict rules regarding the service recovery policy as it does not tolerate such deviant behavior.

Lastly, the illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the can-type are driven by opportunism, liberal redress policy, and the social norm and attitude towards illegitimate complaining. These illegitimate complainants engage in such deviant behavior as a result of the opportunity that was provided by the liberal redress policy. Therefore, the formulation of more detailed terms and conditions in the liberal redress policy will make it harder for this type to spot and exploit an opportunity to gain something, and consequently will result in less illegitimate complaints. The neutralization technique ‘justification by postponement’ can only be counteracted by immediately addressing the issue of illegitimate complaining and the consequences of this deviant behavior. Make sure to address it in every step of the complaining process, so that the complainant cannot ignore and postpone it.

The neutralization techniques that are employed by all the types are also especially important to focus on. ‘Denial of injury’ and ‘claim of relative acceptability’ can both be

counteracted by explaining what consequences result from an illegitimate complaint, so that the illegitimate complainants are aware of its effect and proportion of the injury, therefore also making it harder to downplay their deviant behavior in comparison to something worse.

5.4 Limitations and further research

Even though this study was carefully set-up and executed, some limitations are still present, resulting in multiple suggestions for future research. As a consequence of these limitations, the results of this study should be treated with caution.

The first limitation concerns the sample size of this study. Despite it being moderately large, it is not large enough to be representative for the entire population. Moreover, with a bigger sample size comes more power, meaning smaller differences between types of illegitimate complainants would come forward as well. It would also have been beneficial for the acceptance of some of the assumptions of the MANOVA-analysis. Another limitation regarding the generalizability of this study is a result of the sampling method that was used. The convenience sampling method is prone to be subject to a sampling bias. In this study this was expressed in a sample consisting of mostly highly educated people aged 23, therefore not representative for the entire population and consequently threatening the external validity of this research. It would therefore be interesting for future research to repeat this study, but with a bigger sample size and a different sampling method.

Another limitation of this study is a result of the online survey. Despite the many advantages that an online survey brings, example given, the anonymity and the speed of distribution, some limitations are associated with it as well, specifically concerning the description of the population and overrepresentation of certain types of respondents (Andrade, 2020). Even though an attempt has been made to describe the population with the use of the demographic questions, it is still solely based on trust and only tackles a few aspects. Moreover, a bias is present as only people who are literate and have access to the internet are able to respond. Furthermore, another possible bias concerns the overrepresentation of a certain type in the sample, as mostly people who want to be heard shall answer, meaning they have experienced a problem regarding the subject at hand. In this study, most respondents affiliated with the need-type, which could possibly be an overrepresentation of this type as they are the people who have experienced a problem and therefore would want to be heard and consequently are more likely to respond to this survey.

The variables in this study were measured with a single-item, which results in limitations regarding the validity and reliability of this study. The drivers of the types were measured with the use of scenarios, however, this does not provide much insight into the fit of each of the drivers and the types. The use of scenarios and single-item measurements was chosen with the length of the survey in mind, however it is possible that the measurements used for the variables do not actually effectively measure the desired variable. By asking the respondents about the fit between the scenario and their situation, and by pre-testing the survey, an attempt has been made to restrain this limitation.

A suggestion for future research is to adopt the alterations suggested in this study regarding the typology of Joosten (2020) and then test it again, preferably with the above mentioned limitations in mind. Another suggestion for future research concerns the degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior. This research has focused on three dimensions of illegitimate complaints to measure the degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior. According to Huang et al. (2014), however, illegitimate customer complaining behavior is expressed by ignoring, exhorting, whining, backtracking, dictating, fabricating, and/or scheming. It might be interesting to include these behaviors in future research and see whether/how they correspond with the different types of illegitimate complainants instead of just the three dimensions of illegitimate customer complaining behavior. It might also be interesting to focus on differences between the public and private sector when testing the typology, since researchers often separate these sectors when researching, meaning it is highly likely that the complaints are different per sector. People might file different illegitimate complaints in different sectors for different reasons, so one type might be more prominent in one sector than in another. This type of research would also add to the generalizability of the typology. The same goes for different countries, as it would be interesting to see if this typology can withstand different cultures and beliefs, and to see whether the types of illegitimate complainants would still express themselves similarly. Wong (2004) already stated that cultural orientation has an effect on the perception of the service recovery since people from different cultures respond differently to certain service factors. It is therefore very likely that a similar difference is present among the types of illegitimate complainants when researched in different cultures. Another interesting subject for further research would be to test the success of the managerial implications that were suggested, so whether counteracting the drivers and neutralization techniques belonging to the types actually results in less illegitimate complaints. This could be executed in the form of an experiment or a longitudinal study.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Survey

Beste meneer/mevrouw,

Hartelijk dank voor uw deelname aan dit onderzoek! Wij zijn Myrthe, Jan, Lyn en Matty, masterstudenten van de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen. Voor onze thesis 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 wel toegeven dat hun klacht soms niet helemaal eerlijk (namelijk 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 daarbij een schadevergoeding die helemaal of deels onterecht is.

Dit onderzoek richt zich op de omstandigheden waarin klanten klachten overdrijven of verzinnen. Wij begrijpen dat dit onderwerp wellicht gevoelig ligt, daarom is deze enquête volledig anoniem. Daarnaast gebruiken wij de gegevens uitsluitend voor dit onderzoek en is deelname geheel vrijwillig. 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!

Myrthe Eijkelkamp

Jan Peters

Lyn Bannink

Matty Cooijmans

Dr. Herm Joosten



Uit onderzoek blijkt dat veel mensen wel eens een klacht hebben overdreven of verzonnen. Heeft u ook wel eens een klacht overdreven of verzonnen? Denk dan terug aan die situatie bij het beantwoorden van de vragen.

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

Matty: “Mijn koffer is de heenreis van vakantie eens kwijtgeraakt. Waar ik de eerste vijf dagen aan het lijntje werd gehouden met de belofte dat mijn koffer ‘de dag er na zou aankomen’ hoorde ik vanaf dag vijf niks meer over mijn koffer. Uiteindelijk bij de vliegmaatschappij een hoger bedrag opgegeven over de waarde van de inhoud dan dat er daadwerkelijk in zat. Ik verwachtte niet het gehele bedrag te krijgen, en dit bleek waar.”

Lyn: “Ik heb wel eens een nieuwe blouse op een te warme temperatuur gestreken (zonder te kijken of ik die blouse wel kon strijken) waardoor het materiaal smolt. Op het label stond echter dat je het kledingstuk op een lage temperatuur kon strijken. Ik heb het bedrijf daarom verteld dat ik niet te warm gestreken heb en mijn klacht dus overdreven om zo een nieuwe blouse te krijgen.”

Myrthe: "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, en bleef de schade voor mij beperkt.

Jan: Mijn provider had eens storing waardoor ik een half uur lang geen tv kon kijken. Ik heb vervolgens de provider gebeld en gezegd dat ik een voor mij heel belangrijke voetbalwedstrijd niet heb kunnen kijken omdat de storing ‘de hele middag’ duurde. Door deze overdreven klacht heeft de provider mij een maand lang alle voetbalkanalen gratis aangeboden.

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.”

Neem de tijd om goed na te denken over een situatie waarin u een klacht (deels) heeft overdreven of verzonnen. Mocht u nog nooit een klacht overdreven of verzonnen hebben, wilt u dan de vragenlijst invullen voor een niet verzonnen of overdreven klacht die u te binnen schiet?

1. Heeft u al ooit een klacht overdreven of verzonnen (of een claim ingediend) over een product of dienst?

☐ Ja

☐ Nee

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

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

4. Wat is de naam van het bedrijf/de instantie waar u heeft geklaagd?

5. 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)

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

7. In hoeverre heeft u de klacht **overdreven** (dus **erger** voorgesteld dan het daadwerkelijk was)?

	Helemaal niet overdreven	Een klein beetje overdreven	Half overdreven	Grotendeels overdreven	Geheel overdreven
Probleem overdrijven (illegitimate complaints 1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. In hoeverre heeft u de klacht **verzonnen** (ofwel **anders** voorgesteld dan het daadwerkelijk was)?

	Helemaal niet verzonnen	Een klein beetje verzonnen	Half verzonnen	Grotendeels verzonnen	Geheel verzonnen
Probleem verzonnen (illegitimate complaints 2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. In hoeverre heeft u **ten onrechte** de ondernemer **de schuld gegeven** van de klacht (terwijl hij er in werkelijkheid geen schuld aan had)?

	Helemaal niet onrecht de schuld gegeven	Een klein beetje onrecht de schuld gegeven	Half onrecht de schuld gegeven	Grotendeels onrecht de schuld gegeven	Geheel onrecht de schuld gegeven
Onterecht de schuld geven (illegitimate complaints 3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. Wanneer speelde uw beschreven situatie?

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

11. Welke beschrijving hieronder past het best bij wat u is overkomen? Toelichting: misschien past geen enkele beschrijving **helemaal**, maar we vragen u om de **best passende** te kiezen.

a. Het bedrijf heeft geprobeerd misbruik van mij te maken, door bv opzettelijk een slecht product of slechte dienst te leveren. Dat voelde erg onrechtvaardig. Ik heb geklaagd en alles gedaan wat ik kon om ze ter verantwoording te roepen, maar ze hielden zich niet aan afspraken en trokken zich nergens wat van aan. (must-type)

b. Het bedrijf heeft niet gepresteerd zoals ze zouden moeten presteren. Hun product of dienst was ver beneden mijn verwachtingen, hierdoor was ik teleurgesteld/boos op het bedrijf. Het was misschien geen opzet van hun kant, maar ze zijn wel verantwoordelijk voor hun slechte product of dienst. (need-type)

c. Het bedrijf heeft niet echt iets verkeerd gedaan. Integendeel. Ik heb zélf opzettelijk de zaak overdreven of verzonnen om een (financieel) voordeeltje te behalen zoals een vergoeding of een nieuw product of een tegoedbon. (want-type)

d. Het bedrijf heeft een erg soepele garantieregeling of erg vriendelijke klantenservice. Zoiets als “niet goed, geld terug”. Dus ik zag een mooie kans om een voordeeltje te behalen. Daarom heb ik de zaak overdreven of verzonnen. Het was niet vooraf gepland van mijn kant. Ik denk dat anderen ook hun kans gegrepen zouden hebben. Ik zit er niet mee. (can-type)

12. Hoe goed past die beschrijving bij wat u is overkomen?

	Past helemaal niet	Past een klein beetje	Past half	Past grotendeels	Past helemaal
Past beschrijving?	<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 betreffende uw klacht?

	Helemaal mee oneens	Mee oneens	Niet mee eens/niet mee oneens	Mee eens	Helemaal mee eens
13. Het was niet mijn schuld (denial of responsibility)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. Het bedrijf zal er heus geen ernstige schade door lijden (denial of injury)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. Het bedrijf verdient het door wat ze gedaan hebben (denial of victim)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. Het bedrijf is ook niet altijd eerlijk tegenover klanten (condemnation of the condemners)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17. Ik deed het niet voor mezelf (maar uit principe of voor anderen) (Appeal to higher loyalties)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18. Iedereen overdrijft wel eens (claim of normalcy)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19. Ik was niet op voorhand van plan om overdreven te klagen (denial of negative intent)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20. Andere mensen doen veel ergere dingen (claim of relative acceptability)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
21. Normaal gesproken houd ik me wel aan de regels (metaphor of the ledger)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
22. Ik mag ook wel eens een meevallertje hebben (claim of entitlement)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
23. Anders werd ik niet serieus genomen door het bedrijf (defense of necessity)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
24. Op dat moment dacht ik niet echt na over de consequenties (gevoelens kwamen later pas) (justification by postponement)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

We zijn bijna aan het einde van de vragenlijst!

25. In hoeverre is uw houding ten opzichte van het bedrijf veranderd na het indienen van uw klacht?

	Veel kleiner	Kleiner	Onveranderd	Groter	Veel groter
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26. De kans dat ik nogmaals aan aankoop doe bij het bedrijf in kwestie is na deze situatie: (loyalty)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
27. De kans dat ik anderen (familie/vrienden/etc.) het bedrijf in kwestie aanraad is na deze situatie(WOM)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
28. Het vertrouwen dat ik in het bedrijf in kwestie heb na deze situatie: (trust)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
29. Mijn band met het bedrijf is na deze situatie: (commitment)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
30. Mijn tevredenheid over het bedrijf is na deze situatie: (satisfaction)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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

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

32. Wat is uw leeftijd?

33. Wat is uw geslacht?

- ☐ Man
- ☐ Vrouw
- ☐ Anders/ wil niet zeggen

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

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

Dit waren de vragen. We willen nogmaals benadrukken dat de gegevens uitsluitend voor dit onderzoek gebruikt zullen worden en anonimiteit verzekerd is.

Nogmaals hartelijk dank voor uw medewerking! Indien u geïnteresseerd bent in de resultaten van het onderzoek kunt u een mail sturen naar

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Appendix II: Assumptions

Table 1: Univariate normality

	Shape descriptors				Test of Normality	
Variable	Skewness	Z-value	Kurtosis	Z-value	Statistic	Sig.
Illegitimate Complaints Exaggerated	.283	1.925	-.800	-2.730**	.194	.000
Illegitimate Complaints Fabricated	1.041	7.082**	-.145	-.495	.309	.000
Illegitimate Complaints Falsely Blamed	1.134	7.714**	.013	.044	.332	.000
Denial of Responsibility	-.725	-4.932**	-.671	-2.290*	.227	.000
Denial of Injury	-1.375	-9.354**	1.674	5.713**	.295	.000
Denial of Victim	.036	.245	-1.005	-3.430**	.154	.000
Condemnation of the Condemners	-.127	-.864	-.622	-2.123*	.187	.000
Appeal to Higher Loyalties	.877	5.966**	-.182	-.621	.252	.000
Claim of Normalcy	-1.132	-7.701**	1.893	6.461**	.343	.000
Denial of Negative Intent	-.773	-5.259**	-.279	-.952	.288	.000
Claim of Relative Acceptability	-.659	-4.483**	.296	1.010	.205	.000
Metaphor of the Ledger	-.910	-6.190**	1.414	4.826**	.313	.000
Claim of Entitlement	-.662	-4.503**	.854	2.915**	.275	.000
Defense of Necessity	-.429	-2.918**	-.709	-2.420*	.228	.000
Justification by Postponement	.334	2.272*	-.690	-2.355*	.204	.000
Loyalty	-.264	-1.796	.116	.396	.331	.000
WOM	-.214	-1.456	-.157	-.536	.309	.000
Trust	-.170	-1.156	-.424	-1.447	.272	.000
Commitment	-.343	-2.333*	.057	.195	.326	.000
Satisfaction	-.240	-1.633	-.777	-2.652**	.223	.000

* Non-normal distribution at .05 significance level (> 1.96)

** Non-normal distribution at .01 significance level (> 2.58)

Note 1: the z-values were derived by dividing the standard error of .147 (Skewness) and .293 (Kurtosis).

Note 2: for the Test of Normality, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was conducted.

Table 2: Multivariate normality

Case number	Value
1	58.111
25	58.366
240	51.076
26	47.556
177	46.373

* Mahalanobis Distance Critical Value: 37.57 at $p < .01$.

Table 3: Test of Linearity

Variable	F-value	Sig.
Illegitimate Complaints Exaggerated	$F(2,271) = 1.373$	.255
Illegitimate Complaints Fabricated	$F(2,271) = 30.800$	.000**
Illegitimate Complaints Falsely Blamed	$F(2,271) = 2.448$	.088
Denial of Responsibility	$F(2,271) = 27.016$	.000**
Denial of Injury	$F(2,271) = 1.291$	.277
Denial of Victim	$F(2,271) = 12.403$	.000**
Condemnation of the Condemners	$F(2,271) = 2.477$	.086
Appeal to Higher Loyalties	$F(2,271) = 1.092$	.337
Claim of Normalcy	$F(2,271) = 2.002$	.137
Denial of Negative Intent	$F(2,271) = 3.678$	.027*
Claim of Relative Acceptability	$F(2,271) = .464$	.629
Metaphor of the Ledger	$F(2,271) = 2.203$	.112
Claim of Entitlement	$F(2,271) = 5.789$	.003**
Defense of Necessity	$F(2,271) = 2.649$	.073
Justification by Postponement	$F(2,271) = 1.077$	.342
Loyalty	$F(2,271) = 5.557$	.004**
WOM	$F(2,271) = 4.426$	.013*
Trust	$F(2,271) = 5.310$	.005**
Commitment	$F(2,271) = 6.122$	.003**
Satisfaction	$F(2,271) = 3.412$	.034*

*Non-linear at significance level ($p < .05$)

** Non-linear at significance level ($p < .01$)

Table 4: Levene's Test

Variable	F-value	Sig.
Illegitimate Complaints Exaggerated	$F(3,271) = 1.884$	.132
Illegitimate Complaints Fabricated	$F(3,271) = 14.273$	.000**
Illegitimate Complaints Falsely Blamed	$F(3,271) = 11.727$	.000**
Denial of Responsibility	$F(3,271) = 5.553$	.001**
Denial of Injury	$F(3,271) = .952$	.416
Denial of Victim	$F(3,271) = .761$	.517
Condemnation of the Condemners	$F(3,271) = .405$	.749
Appeal to Higher Loyalties	$F(3,271) = 1.396$	.244
Claim of Normalcy	$F(3,271) = 2.719$	.045*
Denial of Negative Intent	$F(3,271) = 2.889$	.036*
Claim of Relative Acceptability	$F(3,271) = 1.290$	.278
Metaphor of the Ledger	$F(3,271) = .701$	.552
Claim of Entitlement	$F(3,271) = 1.910$	.128
Defense of Necessity	$F(3,271) = 1.671$	.173
Justification by Postponement	$F(3,271) = 4.338$	.005**
Loyalty	$F(3,271) = 9.310$	.000**
WOM	$F(3,271) = 9.145$	.000**
Trust	$F(3,271) = 15.031$	.000**
Commitment	$F(3,271) = 12.977$	.000**
Satisfaction	$F(3,271) = 11.748$	.000**

* Violated the assumption of equality of variance at significant level ($p < .05$).

** Violated the assumption of equality of variance at significant level ($p < .01$).

Table 5: Correlation matrix illegitimate customer complaining behavior

Measures	1	2	3
(1) Illegitimate Complaints Exaggerated		.423**	.303**

(2)Illegitimate Complaints Fabricated	.423**		.274**
(3)Illegitimate Complaints Falsely Blamed	.303**	.274**	

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 6: Correlation matrix neutralization techniques x illegitimate customer complaining behavior

Measures	Illegitimate Complaints Exaggerated	Illegitimate Complaints Fabricated	Illegitimate Complaints Falsely Blamed
Denial of Responsibility	-.161**	-.442**	-.242**
Denial of Injury	.128*	-.008	.082
Denial of Victim	-.021	-.288**	-.119*
Condemnation of the Condemners	.000	-.136*	-.015
Appeal to Higher Loyalties	-.035	-.044	.049
Claim of Normalcy	.334**	.191**	.122*
Denial of Negative Intent	-.028	-.067	.042
Claim of Relative Acceptability	.041	.006	.011
Metaphor of the Ledger	-.035	.043	.033
Claim of Entitlement	.142*	.159**	.066
Defense of Necessity	.142*	-.163**	.107
Justification by Postponement	.091	.083	.109

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 7: Correlation matrix neutralization techniques

Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
(1)Denial of Responsibility		.133 *	.542 **	.247 **	.091	- .138 *	.142 *	-.001	-.116	- .143 *	.132 *	- .127 *
(2)Denial of Injury	.133 *		.201 **	.000	-.065	.191 **	.003	.159 **	.074	.123 *	.202 **	-.022
(3)Denial of	.542	.201		.363	.098.	.008	.158	.109	-.035	.042	.345	-

Victim	**	**		**			**				**	.119*
(4)Condemnation of the Condemners	.247**	.000	.363**		.084	.164**	.101	.101	.141*	.081	.374**	.005
(5)Appeal to Higher Loyalties	.091	-.065	.098	.084		-.028	.030	.186**	.090	.122*	.103	.106
(6)Claim of Normalcy	-.138*	.191**	.008	.164**	-.028		-.095	.236**	.158**	.313**	.102	.023
(7)Denial of Negative Intent	.142*	.003	.158**	.101	.030	-.095		.051	.045	-.139*	.044	-.022
(8)Claim of Relative Acceptability	-.001	.159**	.109	.101	.186**	.236**	.051		.248**	.501**	.213**	.104
(9)Metaphor of the Ledger	-.116	.074	-.035	.141*	.090	.158**	.045	.248**		.163**	.066	.034
(10)Claim of Entitlement	-.143*	.123*	.042	.081	.122*	.313**	-.139*	.501**	.163**		.286**	.173**
(11)Defense of Necessity	-.132*	.202**	.345**	.374**	.103	.102	.044	.213**	.066	.286**		.210**
(12)Justification by Postponement	-.127*	-.022	-.119*	.005	.106	.023	-.022	.104	.034	.173**	.210**	

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 8: Correlation matrix neutralization techniques x relationship variables

Measures	Loyalty	WOM	Trust	Commitment	Satisfaction
Denial of Responsibility	-.285**	-.275**	-.288**	-.279**	-.320**
Denial of Injury	.092	.082	.052	.062	.081
Denial of Victim	-.376**	-.376**	-.416**	-.435**	-.453**
Condemnation of the Condemners	-.444**	-.470**	-.422**	-.432**	-.459**
Appeal to Higher	-.062	-.090	-.055	.002	-.078

Loyalties					
Claim of Normalcy	-.018	.014	-.041	-.018	-.019
Denial of Negative Intent	-.161**	-.190**	-.132*	-.138*	-.182**
Claim of Relative Acceptability	-.062	-.074	-.073	-.048	-.058
Metaphor of the Ledger	-.023	-.034	-.064	-.034	.036
Claim of Entitlement	.050	.041	-.007	.040	.009
Defense of Necessity	-.273**	-.288**	-.245**	-.256**	-.226**
Justification by Postponement	.137*	.112	.146*	.139*	.161**

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 9: Correlation matrix relationship variables x illegitimate customer complaining behavior

Measures	Illegitimate Complaints Exaggerated	Illegitimate Complaints Fabricated	Illegitimate Complaints Falsely Blamed
Loyalty	.112	.190**	.063
WOM	.060	.163**	.062
Trust	.122*	.170**	.106
Commitment	.155*	.187**	.120*
Satisfaction	.129*	.180**	.139*

* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

Table 10: Correlation matrix relationship variables

Measures	1	2	3	4	5
(1)Loyalty		.899**	.819**	.788**	.769**
(2)WOM	.899**		.841**	.815**	.804**
(3)Trust	.819**	.841**		.856**	.844**
(4)Commitment	.788**	.815**	.856**		.850**

(5)Satisfaction	.769**	.804**	.844**	.850**	
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* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

Appendix III: Post Hoc test

Table 1: Post Hoc results - Illegitimate customer complaining behavior

<i>(a) Illegitimate complaints ~ completely fabricated</i>	Must-type	Need-type	Want-type	Can-type
Must-type		.23	-1.32***	-.46
Need-type	-.23		-1.55***	-.69*
Want-type	1.32***	1.55***		.87**
Can-type	.46	.69*	-.87**	
<i>(b) Illegitimate complaints ~ exaggerated, altered or lied about the situation</i>				
Must-type		-.07	-.51	-.37
Need-type	.07		-.44	-.30
Want-type	.51	.44		.14
Can-type	.37	.30	-.14	
<i>(c) Illegitimate complaints ~ falsely blaming the company</i>				
Must-type		.15	-.45	-.44
Need-type	-.15		-.60*	-.59
Want-type	.45	.60*		.01
Can-type	.44	.59	-.01	

* = p<.05 ** = p<.01 *** = P<.0025 (ns) = non-significant

Table 2: Post Hoc results - Neutralization techniques must-type

<i>(a) Neutralization technique ~ Denial of responsibility</i>	Must-type	Need-type	Want-type	Can-type
Must-type		.09	1.84***	1.29***
Need-type	-.09		1.75***	1.21***
Want-type	-1.84***	-1.75***		-.54
Can-type	-1.29***	-1.21***	.54	
<i>(b) Neutralization technique ~ Denial of victim</i>				
Must-type		.88**	2.32***	2.15***
Need-type	-.88**		1.44***	1.27***
Want-type	-2.32***	-1.44***		-.17

Can-type	-2.15***	-1.27***	.17	
<i>(c) Neutralization technique ~ Condemnation of the condemners</i>				
Must-type		.77**	1.20***	1.24***
Need-type	-.77**		.42*	.46
Want-type	-1.20***	-.42*		.04
Can-type	-1.24***	-.46	-.04	
<i>(d) Neutralization technique ~ Appeal to higher loyalties</i>				
Must-type		.27	.45	.24
Need-type	-.27		.18	-.03
Want-type	-.45	-.18		-.22
Can-type	-.24	.03	.22	
<i>(e) Neutralization Technique ~ Denial of Negative Intent</i>				
Must-type		.56*	1.05***	.75*
Need-type	-.56*		.48*	.19
Want-type	-1.05***	-.48*		-.30
Can-type	-.75*	-.19	.30	
<i>(f) Neutralization technique ~ Defense of necessity</i>				
Must-type		.58	1.12***	.97**
Need-type	-.58		.54**	.39
Want-type	-1.12***	-.54**		-.15
Can-type	-.97**	-.39	.15	

* = p<.05 ** = p<.01 *** = P<.0025 (ns) = non-significant

Table 3: Post Hoc results - Neutralization techniques need- and want-type

<i>(a) Neutralization technique ~ Denial of injury</i>	Must-type	Need-type	Want-type	Can-type
Must-type		-.26	-.14	-.07
Need-type	.26		.11	.19

Want-type	.14	-.11		.08
Can-type	.07	-.19	-.08	
<i>(b) Neutralization technique ~ Claim of entitlement</i>				
Must-type		-.09	-.48*	-.01
Need-type	.09		-.40**	.07
Want-type	.48*	.40**		.47*
Can-type	.01	-.07	-.47*	

* = $p < .05$ ** = $p < .01$ *** = $P < .0025$ (ns) = non-significant

Table 4: Post Hoc results - Neutralization techniques can-type

<i>(a) Neutralization technique ~ Claim of normalcy</i>	Must-type	Need-type	Want-type	Can-type
Must-type		-.27	-.55	-.36
Need-type	.27		-.28	-.09
Want-type	.55	.28		.19
Can-type	.36	.09	-.19	
<i>(b) Neutralization technique ~ Claim of Relative Acceptability</i>				
Must-type		.18	.10	.14
Need-type	-.18		-.09	-.05
Want-type	-.10	.09		.04
Can-type	-.14	.05	-.04	
<i>(c) Neutralization technique ~ Metaphor of the ledger</i>				
Must-type		.19	-.06	.06
Need-type	-.19		-.25	-.14
Want-type	.06	.25		.11
Can-type	-.06	.14	-.11	
<i>(d) Neutralization technique ~ Justification by postponement</i>				
Must-type		-.12	-.22	-.78
Need-type	.12		-.10	-.66**
Want-type	.22	.10		-.56

Can-type	.78	.66**	.56	
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* = p<.05 ** = p<.01 *** = P<.0025 (ns) = non-significant

Table 5: Post Hoc results - Relationship variables

<i>(a) Relationship variable ~ Loyalty</i>	Must-type	Need-type	Want-type	Can-type
Must-type		-.89***	-1.48***	-1.50***
Need-type	.89***		-.58***	-.61***
Want-type	1.48***	.58***		-.02
Can-type	1.50***	.61***	.02	
<i>(b) Relationship variable ~ WOM</i>				
Must-type		-.82**	-1.48***	-1.53***
Need-type	.82**		-.66***	-.71***
Want-type	1.48***	.66***		-.05
Can-type	1.53***	.71***	.05	
<i>(c) Relationship variable ~ Trust</i>				
Must-type		-1.01***	-1.62***	-1.74***
Need-type	1.01***		-.61***	-.73***
Want-type	1.62***	.61***		-.12
Can-type	1.74***	.73***	.12	
<i>(d) Relationship variable ~ Commitment</i>				
Must-type		-.85**	-1.45***	-1.43***
Need-type	.85**		-.60***	-.58***
Want-type	1.45***	.60***		.02
Can-type	1.43***	.58***	-.02	
<i>(e) Relationship variable ~ Satisfaction</i>				
Must-type		-.90**	-1.66***	-1.82***
Need-type	.90**		-.76***	-.92***
Want-type	1.66***	.76***		-.16
Can-type	1.82***	.92***	.16	

* = p<.05 ** = p<.01 *** = P<.0025 (ns) = non-significant

Appendix IV: Hypotheses and their outcomes

H1a	The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the must-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘denial of responsibility’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.	Accepted
H1b	The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the must-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘denial of victim’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.	Accepted
H1c	The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the must-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘condemnation of the condemners’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.	Accepted
H1d	The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the must-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘appeal to higher loyalties’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.	Rejected
H1e	The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the must-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘denial of negative intent’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.	Accepted
H1f	The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the must-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘defense of necessity’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.	Partly accepted
H2	The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the must-type score lowest on the degree of the illegitimate customer complaining behavior compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.	Rejected
H3	The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the must-type score lowest on the relationship variables compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.	Accepted
H4a	The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the need-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘denial of injury’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.	Rejected
H4b	The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the need-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘denial of responsibility’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.	Accepted
H5	The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the need-type score second to lowest on the degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.	Rejected

H6	The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the need-type score second to lowest on the relationship variables compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.	Accepted
H7	The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the want-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘claim of entitlement’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.	Accepted
H8	The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the want-type score highest on the degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.	Partly accepted
H9	The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the want-type score highest on the relationship variables compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.	Partly accepted
H10a	The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the can-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘claim of normalcy’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.	Rejected
H10b	The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the can-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘claim of relative acceptability’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.	Rejected
H10c	The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the can-type score higher on the neutralization technique ‘metaphor of the ledger’ compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.	Rejected
H11	The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the can-type score second to highest on the degree of illegitimate customer complaining behavior compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.	Partly accepted
H12	The illegitimate complainants that affiliate with the can-type score second to highest on the relationship variables compared to the other types of illegitimate complainants.	Partly accepted