

# Preventing illegitimate complaining

*By fitting neutralization techniques with stages of moral development*

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## **Preface**

In August 2015, I started my education at Radboud University with a pre-master in Business Administration. I specifically chose this university because I could enroll in the Business Administration program, and specialize in Marketing. It is, up until this point in my life, the best decision I made. I really enjoyed my time at this University and in Nijmegen and I have absolutely no regrets.

This master thesis highlights the end of my student career at the Radboud University. I could not have done it on my own. I wish to thank my supervisor, dr. Herm Joosten, for his guidance throughout this project. It was a very interesting project and, even though no significant results were found, I truly enjoyed the time working on it. I also want to thank dr. Bas Hillebrand for his time as second examiner on this project. Finally, I want to thank my friends for the support throughout this project.

I hope you enjoy reading this master thesis paper as much as I have enjoyed working on it.

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## Abstract

Considering some customers complain without solid reasons, this research aims to investigate how to prevent customers from complaining illegitimately. It does so by combining Sykes and Matza their neutralization theory with Kohlberg his moral development theory. The combination of neutralization techniques and stages of moral development is expected to prevent illegitimate customer complaining behavior, if there is a fit between the technique used and the stage in which an individual resides. For this research, the denial of victim technique is combined with the social-contract legalistic stage, and the claim of normalcy technique is combined with the law and order orientation stage.

The fit is tested via an experiment, in which participants read a case and then received the question whether they wish to complain (illegitimately). If they chose to do so, they either saw a warning concerning the terms and conditions (denial of victim technique) or concerning the law (claim of normalcy technique). They then had to choose whether to continue with their illegitimate complaint or to withdraw from complaining. The stage of moral development is measured using Kohlberg his famous Heinz dilemma. The results are interpreted using chi-square analyses.

The results show that 14.4% of all participants decided not to complain illegitimately upon seeing one out of two warnings. However, the results also show that there is no connection between the denial of victim technique and the social-contract legalistic orientation stage, nor between the claim of normalcy technique and the law and order orientation stage. The results also show that there is no difference between men and women, and no difference between the individuals with different levels of education.

The lack of significant results might be due to several limitations, such as the wrong combination of technique and stage, the use of a full student sample, a low reliability of the questions, or simply because there is no connection between the neutralization theory and the moral development theory.

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# 1 | Introduction

This chapter marks the beginning of the research paper and starts with a prologue in which the different concepts will be briefly explained. Next, it contains the problem statement, research questions and research method. Furthermore, both the theoretical and managerial relevance of this paper will be discussed, before concluding with the structure of the paper.

## 1.1 | Prologue

The other day I walked into a store in Nijmegen. I heard two guys talking to each other, where one person said to his friend he is about to return a HDMI-cable which he recently bought. He used it one time, but is not going to use it anymore, and is therefore returning it. When they walked up to the counter, however, I heard the same person saying to the clerk that the cable did not fit with his television. As the shop assistant was disappointed to hear so, he offered to look for a solution by providing a different type of cable. He was amazed to learn that the customer had no interest in a different cable, but rather wanted a refund. Since this store acts on a 100% money-back guarantee, the store assistant had no other choice than to hand the customer his money back. As the customer and his friend left the store, I talked to the clerk and asked him if this happens more often. “All the time, but hey”, he says, finishing his sentence with those five magical words, “the customer is always right”.

This expression is part of this firm its service policy and is even stressed on their website, where it states that customers have 30 days to return their product and get a refund. By doing so, the company is trying to retain their customers by providing them a safety guarantee. In other words, the firm is trying to tell its customers that buying at their store comes with no risk. If you are not satisfied, your money is returned. Post-sale services, such as these money-back guarantees, are an extremely important aspect in retaining current customers (Chen & Chen, 2016). Since keeping current customers is often easier (Hart, Heskett & Sasser 1990; Fornell and Wernerfelt, 1988; Dekimpe, Steenkamp, Mellens & Van Den Abeele, 1997) and less expensive (Gillen, 2005) than attracting new customers, this is an important goal.

However, is the expression even *correct*? Can we, for a fact, state that the customer is always right? The example above shows that customers sometimes are not always honest in their complaints. Customer complaints may be opportunistic, downright false or even fraudulent. If companies always settled complaints at face value, they would be subjected to inevitable losses (Joosten, 2017).

Currently, academics disagree about the actual reasons of customer complaints. Some authors state that complaints are motivated by dissatisfaction, caused by genuine organization's service failures, thus saying that customers only complain when they actually have something to complain about (Bearden and Teel, 1983; Woodruff, Cadotte & Jenkins, 1983; Alicke, Braun, Glor, Klotz, Magee, Sederholm & Siegel, 1992; Prim & Pras, 1998; Reynolds and Harris, 2005; Singh, 1988). Others state, however, that customers willingly complain about products or services, without service failure or actual dissatisfaction. (Russo, 1979; Jacoby & Jaccard, 1981; Berry & Seiders, 2008; Reynolds & Harris, 2009; Daunt & Harris, 2012).

These complaints are not truthful and are therefore called *illegitimate complaints*. Academics have yet to explain why customers complain illegitimately. There are several reasons why customers might engage in illegitimate complaining, such as perceptions of injustice, loss of control, halo effect, previous experience with the firm, the value of the object, opportunism, product/service type, assimilation, and duration of the dispute (Joosten, 2017).

Since it is not truthfully, complaining illegitimately can be perceived as an act of misbehavior. In other contexts, misbehavior was already investigated. Sykes and Matza (1957) looked at deviant behavior in the context of juvenile delinquency and established five reasons which delinquents used to justify this behavior. They call these the *techniques of neutralization*. These techniques are part of the neutralization theory, one of the main constructs in this research.

### 1.1.1 | Neutralization theory and neutralization techniques

The neutralization is a theory, first established by Sykes and Matza in 1957. The theory is about juvenile delinquents who use different reasons to justify their misbehavior. The justifications can be used after the misbehavior was conducted, but could also be used before the misbehavior was conducted to explain why they are going to misbehave (Sykes & Matza, 1957). In their research, Sykes and Matza (1957) list five different techniques delinquencies often use to justify their misbehavior: denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of victim, condemning the condemners, and appealing to higher loyalties.

*Denial of responsibility* is about not feeling responsible for the misbehavior. *Denial of injury* is about feeling you are not hurting others with your misbehavior. *Denial of victim* is the justification that the other party is at fault for your misbehavior. *Condemning the condemners* is about justifying your misbehavior by stating that others do it as well. *Appeal to higher loyalties* is used when the individual acting in misbehavior does as such since (s)he wants to achieve a higher goal (Sykes and Matza, 1957; Vitell & Grove, 1987).

Harris and Dumas (2009) investigated Sykes and Matza their techniques, but in a different domain. Their focus was on the use of these techniques in an online environment where customers downloaded illegally. Next to the techniques of Sykes and Matza (1957), the authors also list several techniques that are identified by other academics, such as: necessity of the law, metaphor of the ledger, claim of normalcy, denial of negative intent, claims of relative acceptability, and postponement (Harris & Dumas, 2009).

*Defense of necessity* is the feeling that it was necessary to misbehave. *Metaphor of the ledger* is used when the good is balanced with the evil. *Claim of normalcy* is the justification that you can misbehave since everyone is doing it; it is considered normal behavior and not misbehavior (as is the case with *condemning the condemners*). *Denial of negative intent* is used when an individual does not mean to cause any harm; *claims of relative acceptability* is used when an individual compares his or her own misbehavior with the misbehavior of someone else, to show that the misbehavior of others is far worse. *Postponement* is simply not thinking about the consequences of the misbehavior, thus not feeling guilty (Harris & Dumas, 2009).

### 1.1.2 | Stages of moral development

In 1958, Kohlberg developed the theory of moral development which proposes that children and adults base their responses on the stage of moral development in which they reside. Individuals who are in the same stage will respond in similar ways (Kohlberg, 1958; Kohlberg, 1971; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). As an individual matures, (s)he will go through the different stages of moral development in a sequential order: first through stage one, then stage two, possibly all the way up to stage six. Not everyone will move up until the sixth and last stage; some people do not go further than stage four or five. Each stage takes the insights of the previous stage and builds further on it (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977; Colby et al., 1983). The six stages of moral development are:

*Stage 1: Punishment and obedience orientation:* individuals in this stage focus on the negative consequences of their behavior/actions.

*Stage 2: Instrumental relativist orientation:* individuals in this stage think about what others can do for him/her, instead of what (s)he could do for others.

*Stage 3: Interpersonal concordance orientation:* individuals in this stage tend to behave according social norms and values to be perceived as a good girl/boy.

*Stage 4: Law and order orientation:* individuals in this stage focus on the law and order, and behave as these regulations prescribe.



*Stage 5: Social-contract legalistic orientation:* individuals in this stage feel that the beliefs, rights, and reasoning of everyone should be respected.

*Stage 6: Universal ethical-principle orientation:* individuals in this stage perceive everyone as being equal, and individuals do not need to respect the law if this is perceived as unjust (Kohlberg, 1971; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977).

### 1.1.3 | Fit between neutralization theory and theory of moral development

This thesis aims to test the effect of neutralization techniques in a service recovery. The goal of the research is to test whether the use of neutralization techniques as a means of prevention could prevent customers complaining illegitimately in service recovery. This will be done by testing the effect of different warnings (accompanying a service guarantee) on illegitimate complaining. These warnings will address the different justifications customers use for illegitimate complaining, according to the neutralization theory, and aim at testing whether these warnings make people comply (and not complain illegitimately).

It is expected that the compliance of individuals is subject to a fit between the neutralization technique being used and the stage of moral development in which an individual resides. When there is a fit between the neutralization technique a firm uses and the stage of moral development in which an individual resides, the neutralization technique that is used is more effective compared to an individual residing in another stage with which that neutralization technique has no fit. Thus, if there is a fit between the neutralization technique a firm uses in service recovery, and the stage of moral development in which an individual resides, the individual is less likely to complain illegitimately than when there is no fit.

## 1.2 | Problem statement

Previous research shows that customers misbehave by complaining illegitimately. Is it, however, an issue that customers show such behavior? Joosten (2017) researched illegitimate complaining in a service context. More specifically, Joosten (2017) investigated case files of the *Geschillencommissie*, an instance that rules over legal matters in which people find no consensus, and found an average case value of € 6,400 per case file, showing the financial impact of complaints. It shows the importance of dealing with illegitimate complaining, instead of discarding it. He demonstrated that more than half of complaints were completely or partially illegitimate.

Therefore, it is very interesting to understand why customers complain illegitimately. The research by Joosten (2017), as well as the research done by Sykes and Matza (1957), and Harris

and Dumas (2009), suggest some motives for illegitimate complaining. Since we now know that neutralization techniques can be used as a form of justification for misbehavior, it is interesting to figure out whether these techniques can be used as a means of prevention in a service recovery context. Furthermore, the purpose of this research is to find out whether warnings based on specific neutralization techniques are more effective for customers in a specific stage of moral development, and can prevent illegitimate complaining.

### **1.3 | Research questions**

Following the problem statement, the research questions are as followed:

***“How does using neutralization techniques as a means of prevention affect illegitimate customer complaining?”***

***and***

***“How does the moral stage of the complaining customer moderate these effects?”***

To answer these research questions, additional information must be obtained. We first need to know what illegitimate customer complaining is, what is meant by the neutralization techniques, and how these techniques affect illegitimate customer complaining. We then need to gather more information about Kohlberg his theory of moral development to analyze whether the successful use of neutralization techniques by firms depend on the moral stage of the customer.

### **1.4 | Research method**

In conducting research, there are two major approaches: qualitative or quantitative. Qualitative research is about in-depth understanding of reasons behind certain behavior. It is often used when no clear ideas exist behind particular behavior. Quantitative research, however, is most common when the researcher does have a certain idea or theory about behavior and wants to test this through statistical procedures (Hoy, 2010). Since the goal of this research is to investigate if using neutralization techniques as a means of prevention would affect illegitimate customer complaining more when an individual is in the stage of moral development that fits the technique, and some research already talks about the *why* people use neutralization techniques, this research will follow a quantitative research approach. Specifically, an experiment will be conducted.

## **1.5 | Theoretical relevance**

There is currently limited research about the claiming behavior of customers (Macintosh & Stevens, 2013). However, there is currently ongoing research whether customers use neutralization techniques as a form of rationalizing their illegitimate complaining behavior.

This research takes it one step further and investigates whether firms can prevent illegitimate customer complaining behavior with the use of neutralization techniques. This research would be a good addition to the growing literature knowledge about illegitimate complaining. It is especially relevant since Wirtz and McColl-Kennedy (2010) state that illegitimate complaining, opportunistic customer claiming in particular, received little to no attention.

Additionally, the neutralization theory and its techniques have already proven its value in different research fields, such as (white-collar) criminology (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Piquero, Tibbetts & Blankenship, 2005), online (Harris & Dumas, 2009), marketing (Vitell & Grove, 1987), and the automobile setting (Whyte, 2016). Therefore, the breadth of this theory is enlarged by applying it to the service recovery context.

Finally, there is no previous research where the fit between the neutralization theory and the theory of moral development is investigated. By matching the theory of moral development with the neutralization theory, the breadth of both the neutralization theory research and the theory of moral development research enlarges.

## **1.6 | Managerial relevance**

Complaining customers are not necessarily a bad thing. It gives the firm feedback about the service they provided. Organizations should thus stimulate customer complaints.

However, illegitimate complaining is both time and money consuming for a firm, which they therefore cannot use on something else. This is lost and gone forever, while the customer was not honest to the firm. By understanding the use of neutralization techniques as a means of prevention, managers can use this research to tackle illegitimate customer complaining and to make sure it does not happen (so often) anymore. If this research shows that the use of neutralization techniques prevents illegitimate customer complaining, managers can act on that.

## **1.7 | Structure of the paper**

The next chapter will go further into detail about the theories at hand, with an emphasis on the theories that are the center of this report: the neutralization theory, and the moral development theory. Chapter two will, alongside these theories, contain a conceptual model and the hypotheses that are used to answer the research questions. In chapter three, the methodology used will be discussed, while chapter four covers the results of the analyses. This research paper will conclude with a discussion and conclusions chapter, in which the conclusion, implications, limitations, future research, and quality of the research will be addressed.

## 2 | Theoretical background

This chapter provides theoretical background to the research. It starts with an explanation on illegitimate complaining, before moving on to the neutralization theory and its techniques, and to the moral development theory and its stages. Next, the behavioral effect (compliance) will be explained. Finally, the conceptual model is shown, as are the focus, hypotheses, and experimental model of this research.

### 2.1 | Illegitimate complaining

It is not unusual that firms make mistakes. It happens all the time, but is not really a problem. It gives companies a chance to do it better the second time around; it gives them the opportunity to recover the service. That is why we speak of service recovery. However, when things go wrong, people could complain about it. That makes sense, because a service failure could lead to customers being unhappy, and thus complaining about the service provided. Nowadays companies actively try to stimulate customers in complaining when something goes wrong (Snellman & Vihtkari, 2003). Some companies even offer a 100% money-back guarantee to stimulate complaining behavior.

But sometimes, as written in the first chapter, the complaints by customers are not based on actual service failure. Many authors found that customers also complain about service or products, without there being a service failure or actual dissatisfaction (Russo, 1979; Jacoby & Jaccard, 1981; Berry & Seiders, 2008; Reynolds & Harris, 2009; Daunt & Harris, 2012). Complaints that are not founded are called illegitimate complaints. Illegitimate complaints can either be false, fraudulent or opportunistic (Joosten, 2017). In this research, all three types of complaints are considered illegitimate and no distinction is made between the different types.

### 2.2 | Neutralization theory: techniques of neutralization

In 1957, Sykes and Matza published their article about the neutralization theory. This theory states that juvenile delinquents use different techniques to justify their misbehavior. These techniques are called the techniques of neutralization.

No research was done about the drivers or antecedents of why customers tend to complain illegitimately. However, research in other domains could help us in trying to find an explanation. The neutralization theory explains different reasons why individuals misbehave. The first chapter contained a small amount of information about the neutralization theory, and this paragraph aims at giving a deep insight into the theory. It has been tested in different

domains using different techniques (e.g., Vitell & Grove, 1987; Levin, Dato-On & Rhee, 2004; Harris & Dumas, 2009; Whyte, 2016). In this chapter, those techniques will be discussed thoroughly. That is necessary because we first need to know what these techniques are and how they could be used in a service recovery context before they can be used as a means of prevention.

According to Sykes and Matza (1957), who first introduced the techniques of neutralization, these techniques are used to justify misbehavior. They introduced five techniques of neutralization: (1) denial of responsibility, (2) denial of injury, (3) denial of the victim, (4) condemnation of the condemners, and (5) appeal to higher loyalties. They proposed these five techniques in a juvenile delinquency setting. Vitell and Grove (1987) and Harris and Dumas (2009) also investigated these techniques, but in different settings; Vitell and Grove (1987) in the domain of 'marketing ethics' and Harris and Dumas (2009) in an online setting. These five techniques will be explained in this paragraph.

Furthermore, Harris and Dumas (2009) also list some techniques of neutralization that are identified by other researchers: (1) defense of necessity, (2) metaphor of the ledger, (3) claim of normalcy, (4) denial of negative intent, (5) claims of relative acceptability, and (6) postponement (Harris & Dumas, 2009). Together with the five techniques proposed by Sykes and Matza (1957), there are 11 neutralization techniques that might be of interest for this research. Therefore, these 11 techniques need to be further investigated.

### 2.2.1 | Denial of responsibility

Sykes and Matza (1957) claim a denial of responsibility when the delinquent feels (s)he is not responsible for the misbehavior. This can have number of reasons, such as the misbehavior being an accident or because of third-party reasons (e.g., bad influence of the people in your personal environment). Pushing away responsibility can be valid when it is indeed not the delinquent his or her fault, but is invalid when it is his or her fault, even though (s)he does not accept blame. Especially then, when no responsibility is taken when misbehavior is shown, is the denial of responsibility worrisome (Sykes & Matza, 1957).

When in state of denial, customers claim they are not guilty because they could not control the circumstances (Vitell & Grove, 1987). Vitell and Grove (1987) confirm this notion in their research, stating that marketing managers felt that uncontrollable factors (e.g., high inflation, other cultures) almost forced them to behave unethical. One respondent claimed "(payoffs) would seem almost necessary to do business abroad" (Vitell & Grove, 1987: 435).

Harris and Dumas (2009) found that the denial of responsibility as neutralization technique is used in 30% of the cases. The respondents that used this technique claim to do so because of the availability and accessibility of peer-to-peer networks (Harris & Dumas, 2009). Ease of use is therefore an example of why individuals feel they are not responsible. This example, mentioned by Harris and Dumas (2009), is also mentioned by Sherman (2000). Sherman (2000) was concerned about the ease-of-use of the internet when it comes to possible copyright infringement. Harris and Dumas (2009) talked to a respondent who claimed he downloaded because of the ease of use of the internet, confirming the concern of Sherman (2000).

Individuals might claim that they complained illegitimately because it was very easy to do so, and it is therefore not their fault they complained illegitimately, thus denying responsibility for their behavior. For example, when ordering a product online, some companies include a return form in case you are not satisfied with the product. This lowers the bar for returning the product after you are done using it, even though you might be completely satisfied. If it is made too easy for people to complain, they might do it even if it is not legitimate. In the service recovery context, a customer might state it is not his or her fault (s)he complaint, but (s)he only complaint because the company made it (too) easy for the customer.

### 2.2.2 | Denial of injury

Denial of injury is happening when the complaining customer feels (s)he will not hurt the firm or its employee(s) by complaining illegitimately (Vitell & Grove, 1987).

Sykes and Matza (1957) interpret the denial of injury in the same way: a delinquent uses the denial of injury as a technique when reasoning that his crime does not harm the victim. Vandalizing the property of a millionaire, for example, would not be perceived as an act of mischief by a delinquent since the owner of the property has enough capital to restore the property, without it having a big impact on the wealth of the victim (Sykes & Matza, 1957).

Denial of injury is, according to Harris and Dumas (2009), the most common neutralization technique used by their informants. Their respondents stressed, for example, the fact that multinational companies have plenty of capital and that the increasing sharing of music, movies, and so forth does not have an impact on the profit of multinationals. The respondents of Harris and Dumas (2009) their research also respond by indicating that the multinationals in the entertainment industry do not seem to perform that bad, even though there is a lot of media sharing happening (Harris and Dumas, 2009). The negative attitude these respondents have is consistent with the findings of Fullerton and Punj (1993), who investigated the attitudes of consumers towards large enterprises.

Consequently, denial of injury is likely to have an influence in a service recovery context as well. Let us, for example, say that a customer has a telephone subscription with a fully-covered smartphone insurance, which states that the customer would get a brand-new smartphone if his or her telephone were to be broken by someone else than the customer. Then, by a simple mistake, the customer breaks the smartphone. Using the denial of injury as a neutralization technique, the customer could figure that “one telephone replacement” does not affect the service provider (e.g., telephone company) that much. By then filing a complaint about the telephone (e.g., claiming that the telephone was already broken when (s)he ordered it) the customer would willingly act in fraudulent behavior, using the denial of injury as a neutralization technique.

### 2.2.3 | Denial of victim

Customers use denial of victim as a technique when they feel that the firm is at fault for the misbehavior, for example when a firm asks an unreasonably high price for a product. The customer then feels that the service provider is at fault and does not accept any blame (Vitell & Grove, 1987). This is different from the denial of responsibility technique in a sense that, with the denial of victim, the customer does not shift the responsibility towards the service provider. They take full responsibility for their action, but feel the injury done by their action is “a form of rightful retaliation or punishment” (Sykes & Matza, 1957: 668).

Harris and Dumas (2009) tested the denial of victim technique in an online setting and found that it was common for customers to shift the responsibility from themselves to other parties, such as companies. These findings are consistent with the findings by Levin et al. (2004). One of the reasons why the respondents in this study downloaded music was because the CDs were sold against a perceived too high price, thus claiming it is the firm its fault they downloaded the music illegally (Levin et al., 2004). Harris and Dumas (2009) confirm this result, indicating the denial of victim technique was used by individuals before.

Applying this to a service recovery context, a customer could argue that the company is at fault when they find the same product at a different store, or in a webshop, at a lower price than the price they paid at the store of purchase. They could then return the product claiming they are not satisfied with the product, while they in fact found the product somewhere else for a lower price. Their complaint is then illegitimate and is based upon the notion that it is the company its own fault since they ask a relatively high price.



#### 2.2.4 | Condemnation of the condemners

The fourth technique, condemnation of the condemners (or condemning the condemners), is about neutralizing your guilt by stating that an individual is not the only one that shows this kind of illegitimate behavior, therefore claiming that it is not a big deal (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Vitell & Grove, 1987).

Whyte (2016) found evidence of this technique in the automobile industry and Vitell & Grove (1987) list a few examples of this technique used in practice. This technique can therefore not be excluded, even though it is not mentioned by Harris and Dumas (2009). It might also be applicable to the service recovery context. A customer could, for instance, illegitimately complain about the service when the service provider offers a 100% satisfaction guarantee because “I know it is wrong, but my friend also did it, so why should I not?”.

#### 2.2.5 | Appeal to higher loyalties

The final technique that is mentioned by Sykes and Matza (1957) is the appeal to higher loyalties technique. In other words, they mean to say that delinquents show a form of misbehavior to achieve a greater good, a greater goal (Sykes & Matza, 1957). Customers or marketers using this neutralization technique seem to neutralize their guilt by claiming they showed deviant behavior since it was better for everyone that they did (Vitell & Grove, 1987).

Harris and Dumas (2009) also find this technique as a commonly used approach to neutralization. Their respondents used this technique before downloading, claiming they found new kinds of music because of their illegal downloading activities. They also show comments from respondents that claim they downloaded illegally because they wanted to download one or two songs, instead of the entire CD (because they might not find the other songs interesting). Furthermore, the informants also thought it was a way to ‘fight’ against the big entertainment industry because they perceived it as not being fair that they are not allowed to download a movie or television series that already was broadcasted. Achieving justice is then the ‘greater good’ (Harris & Dumas, 2009).

In a service recovery context, customers could argue they disagree with the fact that they have to buy a product, even though they only need it just one time. Think of a network cable. If you want to create your own network cable, you must use a crimping tool specially designed to attach the connectors to the cable. It is most likely a customer will not use the crimping tool that often, and such a tool is rather expensive. Illegitimately complaining about the tool, after using it, and thus returning it as a moral stand against the price of the crimping tool, would be an example of an appeal to higher loyalties.

### 2.2.6 | Defense of necessity

A person could use the defense of necessity technique when that person felt like (s)he had no other choice than to conduct the misbehavior; it was considered necessary (Minor, 1981). Minor lists some examples, like keeping up with standard business practices, and therefore a need to perform illegal activities is considered necessary.

In a service recovery context, a customer could feel it is necessary to illegitimately complain to get a refund, which (s)he needs to use the money for something else. If that other need is perceived as more important, and getting a refund is the only viable option to get the funds required, the complaint could be perceived as necessary. However, this technique is not very likely to be used. Harris and Dumas (2009) found no evidence for this neutralization technique.

### 2.2.7 | Metaphor of the ledger

The metaphor of the ledger technique is a neutralization technique that is used to balance the good with the evil (Minor, 1981). In other words, the misbehavior is compensated by the good, decent behavior. Harris and Dumas (2009) found no evidence for this technique, but it is mentioned as one of the neutralization techniques that was identified by other authors.

In a service recovery context, a customer could use this technique to justify an illegitimate complain by thinking (s)he usually never complains, not even when (s)he would be 'allowed' to complain.

### 2.2.8 | Claim of normalcy

The claim of normalcy technique looks a lot like the condemning the condemners technique, but differs in the reasoning of the individual. With the claim of normalcy, customers truly believe they are not doing anything wrong. Since everyone is doing it, it is perceived as normal behavior (Coleman, 1994). In the case of using the condemning the condemners technique, people are well aware they are conducting misbehavior. However, since everyone is doing it, they justify their behavior (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Vitell & Grove, 1987).

Harris and Dumas (2009) found evidence among their informants that they use this neutralization technique because they feel like they are not doing anything wrong. As a matter of fact, they actually believe that by not participating in these illegal activities (i.e., illegally downloading), they derogate themselves.

### 2.2.9 | Denial of negative intent

With the denial of negative intent technique, a person tries to point out that (s)he did not mean to cause any harm. The action or behavior was supposed to be a joke or happened by accident (Hinduja, 2007; Harris & Dumas, 2009).

Hinduja (2007) found in his research evidence for the denial of negative intent technique. He tested, among others, this technique in an online software piracy domain. Harris and Dumas (2009) found no evidence of this technique in their research.

When it comes to a service recovery setting, it might be hard to imagine this technique being used as a neutralization technique. However, it might be possible that a customer illegitimately complains about a service, with large consequences following that complaint. For example, complaining about a service, even though that service was actually pretty good, and the company deciding to fire the service employee. The customer could then argue they had no intention of getting the employee fired, thus denying any negative intent.

### 2.2.10 | Claims of relative acceptability

People using the claims of relative acceptability as a neutralization technique do so by comparing their own misbehavior with the misbehavior of someone else. They usually claim that (the) other person(s) acted in much worse behavior than they did (Hinduja, 2007; Harris & Dumas, 2009). Harris and Dumas (2009) also call this technique ‘justification by comparison’, and was first identified by Cromwell and Thurman (2003). The comparison does not need to be with the same kind of misbehavior; it can be completely different, e.g., downloading a movie and vandalizing a bus stop (Hinduja, 2007; Harris & Dumas, 2009).

Both Hinduja (2007) and Harris and Dumas (2009) found evidence for this technique in their research. Informants in Harris and Dumas (2009) their research admit, for instance, that they illegally download stuff, but also claim that that is not an important issue for the government, since there are rapists out there. In other words, even though they conduct in misbehavior, they perceive that behavior less bad than the misbehavior of other people.

This neutralization technique could also be relevant in a service recovery context. Specifically, people could illegitimately complain about a small item (e.g., by claiming a refund on a small digital cable, worth only € 7), and compare this with the illegitimately complain of a large item (e.g., claiming a refund on a television, worth € 800). They could even compare their illegitimate complaint with the destruction of nature or other large misconducts.

### 2.2.11 | Postponement

Last, but not least, the postponement technique. A person would use this neutralization technique by not thinking about the consequences of his or her behavior (Cromwell & Thurman, 2003). It is the second technique Cromwell and Thurman (2003) identified in their research.

Cromwell and Thurman (2003) did a research about two neutralization techniques in the shoplifting scene. Their respondents state that they do not worry about their actions. They state that they might feel bad about that later, or that they will think about it later. Nevertheless, when performing the action, no thoughts are given about the possibly negative consequences (Cromwell & Thurman, 2003). Harris and Dumas (2009) listed this technique as one of possible neutralization techniques, but found no evidence that this technique is used in an online setting.

In the service recovery context, the postponement technique could be relevant when it comes to illegitimate complaining. As written, it is often used when people do not want to feel guilty about their actions (Cromwell & Thurman, 2003). In case of illegitimately complaining, feelings of guilt could arise to the surface. A customer could, for instance, claim a refund on a product (s)he is aware of is nothing wrong with, but just chooses to ignore this feeling to not feel guilty.

## 2.3 | Moral development theory: stages of moral development

Previous research (e.g., Vitell & Grove, 1987; Levin et al., 2004; Harris & Dumas, 2009; Whyte, 2016) indicated that neutralization techniques have been used by people to justify misbehavior. This study argues that the effectiveness of these techniques in preventing misbehavior depends on the stage of moral development of the customer. If there is fit between the stage of moral development in which a person resides and the neutralization technique being used, it is expected that customers comply with the neutralization technique and not complain illegitimately. The compliance effect will be discussed in the next paragraph. In this paragraph, the theory of moral development will be elaborated upon.

In 1958, Kohlberg first introduced the theory of moral development, and divided six stages into three levels (Kohlberg, 1958). The three levels are: pre-conventional level, conventional level, and post-conventional level. The theory states that children and adults go through different stages of moral development when they grow older, in a sequential order. An individual makes his or her decisions based on the stage in which (s)he resides (Kohlberg, 1958; Kohlberg, 1971; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Over time, an individual his or her reasoning will develop and an (s)he will move up the stages. Each stage takes the insights of the preceding

stage and builds further on it, expanding its perspective. Specifically, the concept of stages is based on the following characteristics (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977; Colby et al., 1983):

1. Stages are perceived as *structured ways of reasoning*, meaning that people in the same stage reason in the same way.
2. Stages follow each other in *sequential order*, meaning that an individual always moves forward in the stages, and never skip a stage. Only in the event of extreme trauma, an individual could move backwards.
3. Stages are *hierarchically integrated*, meaning that if an individual resides in the third stage, (s)he also has the insights gathered at the first two stages. An individual will mostly react according to the highest available stage.

Each of the levels and stages will be discussed in the following subparagraphs.

### 2.3.1 | Pre-conventional level

At this level, a person is subject to cultural behavioral norms which indicate whether an action or behavior is considered good or bad, right or wrong, etc. The person acts based on the consequences of his or her actions (Kohlberg, 1971). The stages in this level are as followed.

*Stage 1: Punishment and Obedience orientation.* People residing in this stage of moral development act based on a punishment and obedience orientation, meaning that someone will look at the negative consequences of their action(s). When residing in this stage, a person will try to avoid punishment and base their action(s) upon it (Kohlberg, 1971; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Specifically to this research, if a customer is aware that complaining illegitimately will lead to a punishment (e.g., a fine or community service), the customer will not act in this behavior, and thus will not complain illegitimately.

*Stage 2: Instrumental relativist orientation.* People residing in this stage develop a sense of ‘you scratch my back and I will scratch yours’. Individuals in this stage do not think about what they can do for the other, but rather what the other can do for him/her. Individuals will only act in ways that benefit themselves (Kohlberg, 1971; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Specifically, a customer will only choose not to complain illegitimately if (s)he has something to gain by not complaining illegitimately.

### 2.3.2 | Conventional level

At this level, the person is occupied with maintaining an image that his or her family, friends, or other relations have of him or her. (S)he does not so much look at the consequences

of his or her actions, but rather on how these actions are perceived by others (Kohlberg, 1971). The stages are as followed.

*Stage 3: Interpersonal concordance or 'good boy-nice girl' orientation.* People in this stage tend to behave according to social norms to be perceived as a good boy or nice girl. Their actions are based on what others might feel about said actions (Kohlberg, 1971; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Specifically, a customer might not engage in complaining illegitimately if the firm would warn them about how others feel about people who complain illegitimately.

*Stage 4: Law and order orientation.* People who are in this stage behave in certain ways to follow the law and order that is stated. One does not choose to comply to the law because they otherwise will be punished; they choose to comply because the law is the law, and they feel everyone should follow the law. It also implies showing respect for authority (Kohlberg, 1971; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Specifically, following this reasoning, firms could stop people from complaining illegitimately when they make clear that complaining illegitimately is illegal, which it is according to the Dutch civil law (6:162 section 1 from the *Burgerlijk Wetboek*), stating an illegitimate act is against the law.

### 2.3.3 | Post-conventional level

This level is also called the *autonomous* or the *principled* level. In this level, a person has moral values and principles that exist outside the group or environment in which the individual resides. These values and principles are perceived as more important than the values and principles held by the group (Kohlberg, 1971). Like the two preceding levels, this level consists of two stages:

*Stage 5: Social-contract legalistic orientation.* In this stage, it is believed that every unique person has his or her own beliefs and way of reasoning, and this should be respected by everyone. Something is considered 'right' when an action is based on personal values and beliefs, and if it is also legally and socially acceptable. However, human rights are more important than law and order. Individuals should balance human rights with what is allowed according to law and regulations (Kohlberg, 1971; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Specifically, individuals should not complain illegitimately since every firm or business has the right to fair compensation, or individuals should complain illegitimately if the benefit (e.g., saving a human life) outweigh the law and regulations.

*Stage 6: Universal ethical-principle orientation.* The sixth stage is based on universal ethical principles. In this stage, everyone must see each other as being equal and must be able to see perspectives from their point of view. Even though laws should be respected, it is believed

that if laws are perceived as unjust, complying to the law is not necessary (Kohlberg, 1971; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Kohlberg believes the sixth stage theoretically exist, but was never able to find prove for it (Colby et al., 1983). Specifically, individuals in this stage balance the benefits of an (illegal) act (i.e., complaining illegitimately), and consider all benefits before deciding, choosing the most valued benefit (e.g., saving a human life is considered as more important than the right to a fair compensation).

## **2.4 | Behavioral effect on illegitimate customer complaining**

The goal of this research is to examine what the effect on illegitimate complaining is when firms use neutralization techniques as warnings to prevent this complaining behavior. It is expected that people are more likely to comply to the warning if there is a fit between the neutralization technique used and the stage of moral development the individual is in.

In medical science, compliance is defined as the degree in which patients follow the recommendations of the medical doctor (Horne et al., 2005; Cramer et al., 2008). Translating this to a service recovery context, compliance can be defined as the degree to which consumers follow the desired behavior. For this research specific, the desired effect is stopping individuals from complaining illegitimately. In other words, when customers complain illegitimately after seeing the warning, they are not complying.

With the compliance effect is meant that customers comply because of the actions by the firm. In other words: because the firm warns the customers they should not complain illegitimately, directly or indirectly, customers comply and thus do not complain illegitimately. Such warnings could include telling the customers that complaining illegitimately would have negative consequences for the firm. If these warnings lead to the individual not complaining illegitimately, we can speak of a compliance effect.

With the use of Kohlberg (1958; 1971) his theory of moral development, individuals will be warned about the consequences of their action. Warnings will trigger individuals to rethink their complaint before filing it. If there is a fit between the stage of moral development and the neutralization technique at hand, a compliance effect is most likely to occur.

## 2.5 | Conceptual model

The theories presented in the previous paragraphs lead to the following conceptual model.

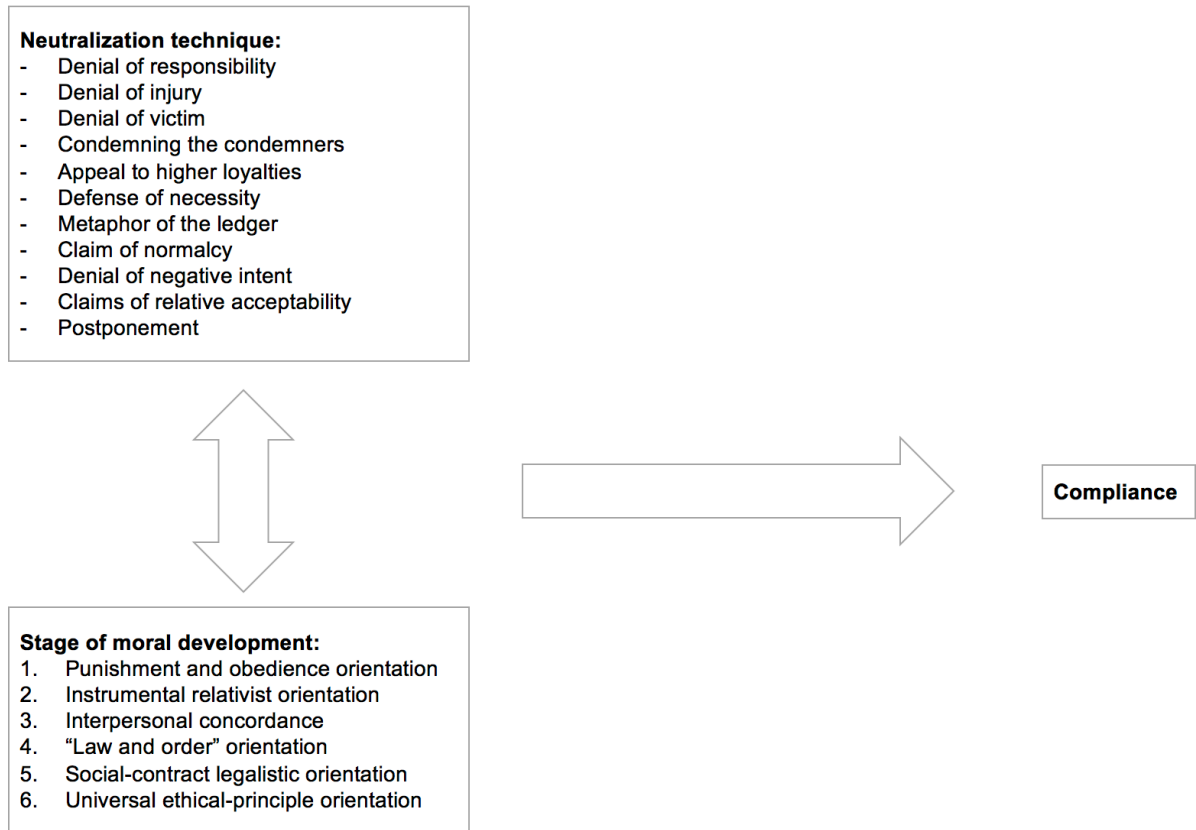


Figure 1: Conceptual model

## 2.6 | Focus, hypotheses and experimental model

### 2.6.1 | Focus

The focus of this research lies on two neutralization techniques mentioned in this chapter: denial of victim and claim of normalcy. In a service recovery context, these two seem both highly plausible. Also, since in this research an experiment will be conducted, it is not possible to focus on all eleven neutralization techniques.

Since this research is new, it is not clear whether the use of neutralization techniques as a means of prevention will lead to compliance of the customer. However, the theory of moral development by Kohlberg (1958; 1971) gives us the opportunity to make predictions about whether the use of a certain neutralization technique will lead to compliance. It all comes down to fit between the neutralization technique at hand and the stage of moral development in which the individual resides. Between the neutralization techniques and the stages of moral development, there are two fits this research will focus on.



## 2.6.2 | Fits and hypotheses

The first fit is between the *denial of victim neutralization technique* and the *fifth moral development stage: social-contract legalistic orientation*. People who use the denial of victim technique indicate that they are not the one at fault for the shown behavior. Those consumers feel that the firm had it coming (Vitell & Grove, 1987; Sykes & Matza, 1957). A firm could use the denial of victim technique to warn people in this stage, because individuals residing in this stage are sensitive to do the right thing. If firms warn by telling consumers that they are in fact to blame for their behavior, that it is not the fault of the firm, consumers in the fifth stage of moral development will change their behavior according to this warning. An individual in this stage wants to do the right thing. (S)he was satisfied with the service, so the firm deserves the compensation it gets for the service. The consumer was aware of the costs of the service, so (s)he knew in advance what to expect and what to pay. Thus, if an individual resides in the fifth stage (the social-contract legalistic orientation stage), a firm could successfully prevent illegitimate complaining by using the denial of victim neutralization technique. Following this, the hypothesis is:

**H1: Using the denial of victim neutralization technique as a means of prevention is more effective if an individual resides in the social-contract legalistic orientation stage as compared to if an individual resides in the law and order orientation stage.**

The second fit is between the *claim of normalcy neutralization technique* and the *fourth moral development stage: law and order orientation*. Individuals who use the claim of normalcy technique truly believe they are not doing something wrong (Coleman, 1994; Harris & Dumas, 2009). However, complaining illegitimately about a product or service is labeled as illegal. It is an illegitimate act and is therefore not allowed according to the Dutch civil law (6:162 section 1 from the *Burgerlijk Wetboek*). If consumers reside in the law and order orientation stage, they are sensitive to warnings that tell them the illegitimate complaint is an illegal act. Therefore, if firms use the claim of normalcy technique to warn consumers that are in the fourth stage of moral development, individuals will comply to this warning and decide not to complain illegitimately after all.

Following this, the hypothesis is:

**H2: Using the claim of normalcy neutralization technique as a means of prevention is more effective if an individual resides in the law and order orientation stage as compared to if an individual resides in the social-contract legalistic orientation stage.**

### 2.6.3 | Experimental model

Since the conceptual model is too broad for this experiment, it needs to be narrowed down. By narrowing down the conceptual model, we create an experimental model. This model is the subject of the final experiment. The methodology for this experiment will be discussed in the next chapter. Following the focus and hypotheses described in the previous paragraphs, the following experimental model can be presented:

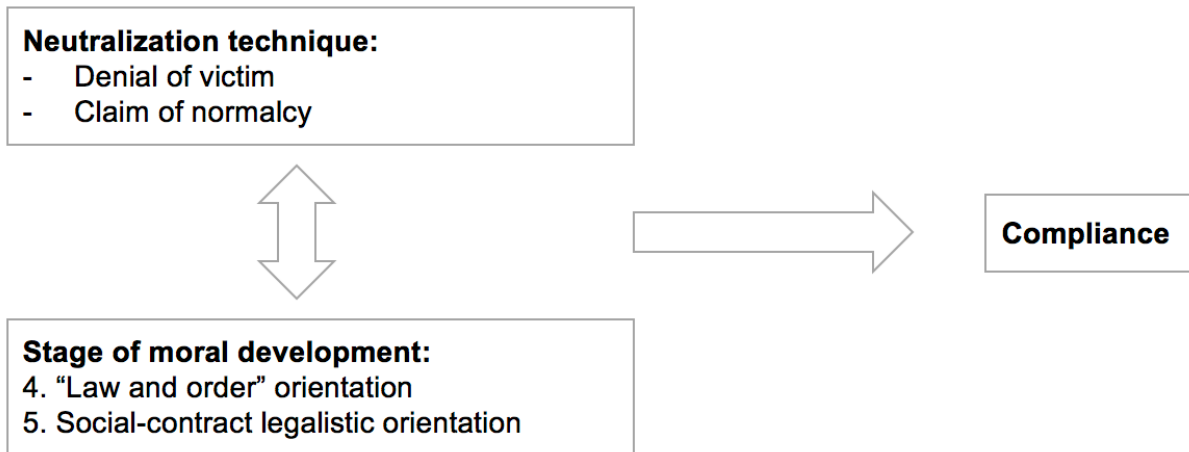


Figure 2: Experimental model

## 3 | Methodology

This chapter contains the methodology used for this research. It starts with a description of the research design, followed by the control variables. Next, it will be explained how priming takes place. Furthermore, in this chapter will be explained how the data needs to be prepared for conducting the analysis. Finally, there is a brief explanation on how the data will be analyzed.

### 3.1 | Research Design

To test the hypotheses, a scenario-based, between-subjects experimental design is conducted. In the past, written experiments have proven its value in service research on satisfaction (e.g., Hui & Bateson, 1991; Bendapudi & Leone, 2003; Kolos & Kenesei, 2008). Since this experiment also takes place in services, a written experiment is sufficient. The experiment consists of three parts: a scenario with the neutralization technique warning (to measure if people comply to the warning), a dilemma case to measure the stage of moral development, and some questions regarding personal information.

#### 3.1.1 | Scenario with neutralization technique warning

Each participant will start the experiment by reading a short scenario. The scenario is about a Dutch student who bought a smartphone. She insured the smartphone against every damage, under one condition: the insurance does not cover damage if she damages the smartphone herself. However, she did damage the smartphone herself, and is now put before the choice whether she should tell the truth, which means the smartphone repair costs are not covered by the insurance, or lie about it and complain illegitimately, which means the smartphone repair costs are covered under the insurance. Only when the participant chooses the option to complain illegitimately, can (s)he proceed with the experiment. Participants who choose to tell the truth are immediately finished with the experiment.

Participants who choose to complain illegitimately will then face a warning. Each participant gets one out of two warnings. This is determined at random. The first warning matches the fourth stage of moral development (law and order orientation). The second warning matches the fifth stage of moral development (social-contract legalistic orientation).

The first warning, matching the law and order orientation stage, is: *“Weet u zeker dat u alle gegevens eerlijk en volledig heeft ingevuld? Het bewust onjuist invullen van dit formulier is verboden volgens de Nederlandse wet. Mocht uw klacht gebaseerd zijn op onwaarheden, dan is dit illegaal.”* In English, this translates to: “Are you sure you filled in your information

honestly and completely? Willingly filling in false information in this form is prohibited according to the Dutch law. If your claim is based on falsehoods, this is illegal.”

The second warning, matching the social-contract legalistic orientation stage, is: “*Weet u zeker dat u alle gegevens eerlijk en volledig heeft ingevuld? Wij zouden het betreuren als u een claim indient die in strijd is met onze algemene voorwaarden, die u bij het tekenen van uw contract gelezen en ondertekend heeft.*” In English, this translates to: “Are you sure you filled in your information honestly and completely? We would feel sorry if you file a claim that is against our terms and conditions, which you agreed upon when you read and signed your contract.”

After seeing one of two warnings, the participant needs to determine whether (s)he chooses to withdraw the complaint (which is the compliance effect) or whether to proceed with the illegitimate complaint. If someone decides to continue with the claim, (s)he receives a score of 0. If an individual decides not to complain after all, (s)he receives a score of 1. After the participant makes a choice between either two, (s)he moves on to the second part of the experiment, which is meant to determine their stage of moral development.

This full first part of the experiment can be found in the first appendix.

### 3.1.2 | Measuring the stage of moral development

There are different ways to determine the stage of moral development of an individual. The two most common ways of measuring the stage of moral development are (1) moral judgement interview, and (2) defining issues test. The first technique is developed by Kohlberg; the latter by Rest (Elm & Weber, 1994).

The two techniques are alike in the sense that they can be used to test the same theory and to measure the same thing: the stage of moral development. However, there are some differences between the testing techniques. The defining issues test is created by Rest and is based on Kohlberg his theory, but with Rest his own adjustments. These adjustments create some differences between both the theories and the techniques. The first difference is the way the technique is used. Both techniques are interviewing techniques. The moral judgement interview, MJI, is an open-ended interview which requires a trained interviewer. It lasts approximately 45 minutes and has been applied in a business context before. The defining issues test, DIT, is close-ended, requires no interviewer skills and has not been applied in a business context yet (Elm & Weber, 1994).

The second difference between the techniques is how ‘justice’ is conceptualized. According to Kohlberg, justice exists within the individual; it is perceived as fairness. In the

DIT technique, however, justice does not exist within the individual but rather is a concept of morality (Elm & Weber, 1994).

Another difference between MJI and DIT is the definition of the stages. Kohlberg splits stages into so-called ‘sub-stages’. An individual can, for example, reside in stage 2 and more specifically in stage 2A. An individual in stage 2A resides in a lower stage than an individual that is in stage 2C. Rest does not make such a distinction and treats everyone in stage 2 equally (Elm & Weber, 1994).

The last difference worth being mentioned is the way both authors treat the stages in their techniques. Rest uses ‘soft stages’, with which he indicates that an individual never really joins or leaves a certain stage. Therefore, you cannot predict how individuals will respond based on their stage of moral development, or that their responses are the same if they are in the same stage. Kohlberg, however, suggests that these ‘hard stages’ do exist and that individuals respond consistently according to their stage. According to Kohlberg, an individual who is in the third stage will respond the same way to a moral dilemma as another individual that is in the third stage (Elm & Weber, 1994).

Based on these differences, the theory and technique of Kohlberg are chosen. This is done because the theory of hard stages makes it easier to divide participants of the experiment in different groups. Furthermore, Kohlberg developed a case in his research with which he tested the stages of moral development. By sticking with the theory and measurement of Kohlberg, this made it possible to re-use his Heinz dilemma, which had already proven its value. However, some adjustments to the moral judgement interview technique were made so it could be used in this specific experiment, which brings us back to how the stage of moral development was measured.

One of Kohlberg's most famous dilemmas was used: the Heinz dilemma (Crain, 1985). This dilemma consists of three scenarios and is about a husband named Heinz (in my case Peter, which sounds more Dutch) who should or should not break into a laboratory to steal a drug that saves his wife from dying. The case is presented to the participant and (s)he must decide whether Peter should steal the drug. After deciding, the participant is asked to explain his or her answer. Then, the participant needs to answer a statement, based upon his or her initial decision whether Peter should steal the drug. The statement “Peter should (not) steal the drug, because” must be answered by rating the answers on a 7-point likert scale, with on the left a motivation consistent with the fourth of moral development (law and order orientation stage),

and on the right a motivation consistently with the fifth stage (social-contract legalistic orientation stage).

This method repeats itself for the two following scenarios. The second scenario about Erik (a friend of Peter), who is a police officer, and saw Peter acting suspicious around the laboratory at the time of the break-in. The question here is whether Erik should report what he saw. Then, the same questions as in the first scenario are presented. The third and last scenario is about whether the judge needs to sentence Peter for his crime, of which he is found guilty of. The participants receive the same kind of questions as written above.

All three scenarios of this dilemma can be found in the second appendix, together with the statements and questions asked of the participant.

### 3.1.3 | Personal information

Even though the experiment was a hundred percent anonymously, some personal information was asked. The experiment ended by asking the participants for their age, level of education, and sex.

## 3.2 | Control variables

In an experimental study, you must control for different variables so you measure what you want to measure. You want to make sure, in an experimental study, that the effect that occurs happens because of the different scenarios, and not because of other factors. For that reason, it is important to control for brand favorability or awareness, lay-out, bias, and for participants itself.

Brand favorability or brand awareness is controlled for by not mentioning the brand of the insurance. By doing so, there are no feelings or attitudes toward a brand. This is important because a customer reacts differently towards a brand (s)he is committed to than towards a brand which (s)he has no commitment to (Zemack-Rugar, Moore & Fitzsimons, 2017). In this case, this might also have an influence on customer complaining behavior when assertive “you should not complain” messages are shown. Therefore, the name of the brand is not mentioned.

Lay-out (of the experiment) is an important element that needs to be controlled for. Every participant of the experiment gets the same easy readable font and pleasant background.

Bias is also one of the most important control variables. If participants are aware of the goal of the research, this might influence their responds. Prior knowledge could trigger them to answer the way they think is the correct way to answer, but that will not provide us with valid results. Therefore, only participants who have no prior knowledge of this research are selected.

The participant type is the final, but also very important, element that needs to be controlled for. This research will use a student sample because of its convenience, and because the situation of the experiment (the smartphone insurance) might be very relevant to students.

### **3.3 | Priming**

To realize a successful experiment, participants need to complain illegitimately. Because most participants will most likely not do this if you simply ask them “would you complain illegitimately”, a scenario must be created in which they feel a desire to complain illegitimately. Therefore, participants need to be primed.

Priming starts by presenting the participants with a case description. The case will be created with the use of neutralization techniques and will be based on previous research (e.g., Harris & Dumas, 2009; Vitell & Grove, 1987, Levin et al., 2004). By doing so, we attempt to create a desire for people to complain illegitimately. The case description is discussed in subparagraph 3.1.1 and can be found in the first appendix.

### **3.4 | Data preparation**

Before the analysis described above can be performed, the data needs to be prepared. Several proceedings need to take place. The first thing that needs to be done, after exporting the data from Qualtrics (the program with which the experiment was created) to SPSS (the analytics program), is clean the data. Qualtrics exports several variables which are of no use to this research, and does not always add the appropriate labels to the variables.

Next, the individuals that did not complete the experiment and the individuals that decided not to complain illegitimately in the first place, need to be filtered out.

After doing so, different variables need to be created so the chi-square analyses can be performed. First, since individuals can get different questions (depending on the yes/no responses), this needs to be recoded so every individual receives a score from 1 – 7, regardless of their yes/no response. A score of 1 indicates someone leaning towards the law and order orientation stage (stage 4). A score of 7 indicates the participant leaning towards social-contract legalistic orientation stage (stage 5).

After completion, the three variables (questions about the stage of moral development) will be computed into one variable, giving everyone an average score between 1 and 7. This score is used to determine the stage in which an individual resides. For each question in the second part of the experiment, regarding the dilemma, a score is assigned between 1 and 7. These scores have been added and divided by three to come up with an average score. An individual

with an average score of 3.67 or lower is considered as someone who resides in the fourth stage. An individual with an average score of 4.33 or higher is considered as someone who resides in the fifth stage. Individuals who scored between 3.67 and 4.33 are at first considered as neither in stage four nor five for this research, since it is not clear to which stage they belong. The open responses of these participants will be analyzed to check if they can be divided in one of two stages.

Finally, based on the response of the participant whether to complain illegitimately after seeing the warning, a compliance variable needs to be created. If an individual decides to complain illegitimately, (s)he will receive a score of 0. If (s)he decides not to complain, a score of 1 is assigned.

After this is completed, the analysis will take place.

### **3.5 | Data analysis**

Before the experiment and accompanying questionnaire will be conducted among participants, a pre-test will take place to check if the priming was successful and if there are no mistakes in the experiment. The pre-test will take place among students, since the actual experiment will also be conducted among students. One pre-test seems to be sufficient, but if necessary multiple pre-tests will take place.

If the pre-test is successful and the experiment will take place, the gathered data must be analyzed. First, whether the priming was successful needs to be checked. This will be done by comparing the results of the illegitimate complaints. Assuming it was successful, the differences between the scenarios need to be checked. There is one independent variable (the stage of moral development), and one dependent variable (compliance), both of binominal measurement level (Hair, Babin & Anderson, 2014; Field, 2014). Since both variables are of binominal measurement level, a chi-square analysis will be performed.



## 4 | Results

In this chapter, the results of the experiment will be described and explained. First, the descriptives of the sample will be provided. Then, the priming results and the reliability of the experiment will be described and analyzed. Next, the assumptions for performing a chi-square test will be checked. Finally, the experimental results will be described and explained.

### 4.1 | Descriptives

The sample consisted of 226 participants, of whom 213 decided to complain illegitimately upon reading the case study. Of those 213 participants, 201 completed the full experiment. There were 80 (39.8%) males and 121 (60.2%) females in the sample.

The 201 participants that completed the experiment were also asked for their level of education. Two (1%) individuals were still in high school, 12 (6%) individuals are following vocational education (in Dutch: MBO), and 49 (24.4%) students are enlisted at a university of applied sciences (in Dutch: HBO). The remaining 138 (68.7%) participants are college students (in Dutch: WO-studenten).

As for age, most participants (134 individuals) are between the age of 20 and 23. This accounts for 66.7% of the total sample, with the ages 19 (22 individuals, 10.9%) and 24 (20 individuals, 10%) following. The remaining participants are 18 (8 individuals, 4%), 25 (7 individuals, 3.5%) or 26 (5 individuals, 2.5%). Only 5 (2.5%) people are 27 years old or older.

Of the 201 participants, 106 participants (52.7%) received the warning that complaining illegitimately is against Dutch legislation and is therefore considered illegal (claim of normalcy technique). 37 (34.9%) of them are male, 69 (65.1%) are female. The remaining 95 participants (47.3%) saw the warning that Sanne, our case subject, agreed with the terms and conditions of her insurance policy and complaining illegitimately would break those terms and conditions (denial of victim technique). Of these participants, 43 (45.3%) are male and 52 are female (54.7%).

Of those 201 participants, 172 (85.6%) individuals decided, after viewing the warning, to stick with their complaint. 70 (40.7%) of them are male; the remaining 102 (59.3%) individuals are female. 29 individuals (14.4%) decided not to complain after all upon viewing the warning, of whom 10 (34.5%) are male and 19 (65.5%) are female.

A total of 166 participants (82.6%) are considered as individuals in the law and order orientation stage (stage 4). 25 participants (12.4%) are considered as being in the social-contract legalistic orientation stage (stage 5). The remaining 10 participants (5.0%) are not in a clear

stage. For those individuals, the open responses were analyzed to see if some of them could be considered in either of the two stages. This was not possible since the responses of these 10 individuals matched both stages.

An overview of the sample descriptives can be found in the third appendix.

#### **4.2 | Priming results**

A frequency table was used to determine if priming was successful. This frequency table shows how many people chose to complain illegitimately. Of the total 226 legitimate participants, 213 participants chose to complain illegitimately. With a total percentage of 94.3%, priming can be considered successful. Since the warning had a prominent place on the screen, a manipulation check whether participants viewed the warning was not used.

#### **4.3 | Reliability**

A reliability analysis was conducted to verify whether the questions measured the stage of moral development. Before dividing the individuals into separate stages, the Cronbach's alpha was .529. This is lower than the recommended .8 (Hair et al., 2014; Field, 2014). Field (2014) recommends a minimum Cronbach's alpha of .8, but reports that .6 would be acceptable. Everything between .5 and .6 is critical and everything below .5 is unacceptable. The Cronbach's alpha of .529 is therefore considered critical, meaning that this measurement cannot be considered reliable.

#### **4.4 | Assumptions**

Before the results from a chi-square test for independence can be used, there are several assumptions that should be met (Pallant, 2001).

The first assumption is that the sample needs to be chosen at random. This was not the case since only people from my own personal (social) network have been chosen. This was needed due to the sensitivity of the subject of the research.

The second assumption is that observations need to be independent. That means that everyone can only be counted once and is not allowed to appear in multiple groups. This is not the case in this research, which means that this assumption is met.

The third and last assumption is the minimum expected cell frequency. 80% or more of the cells should have an expected count bigger than 5, with a minimum expected account of 1. If this assumption is met, we can use the Pearson chi-square statistic (Pallant, 2001; Field, 2014). If this assumption is not met, we need to use the Fisher's Exact Test (Kim, 2017).

For both hypotheses, there is one cell with an expected count less than 5. This is 25%, which means that the threshold of 80% is not achieved. Therefore, the third assumption is not met. That means that for the analysis of the results, the Fisher's Exact Test statistic must be used. According to some researchers, this statistic is preferred over the Pearson chi-square statistic (Hess & Hess, 2017) since the Fisher's statistic is exact, while the Pearson statistic is based on approximates and that is considered inadequate (Kim, 2017).

#### 4.5 | Experimental results

Since only the second assumption has been met, the Fisher's Exact Test statistic will be used. This paragraph contains the results following the analysis of both hypotheses. Since the expectation, for either hypothesis, is that one stage has more effect over the other stage for the different neutralization techniques, the hypotheses will be tested one-sided. It will be tested with a 95% confidence interval. That means that, for one-sided testing, an alpha of .050 will be used. For a test to be significant, the significance value that Fisher's Exact Test provides, needs to be lower than .050.

##### 4.5.1 | First hypothesis: denial of victim neutralization technique and social-contract legalistic orientation stage fit

The first hypothesis is:

**H1: Using the denial of victim neutralization technique as a means of prevention is more effective if an individual resides in the social-contract legalistic orientation stage as compared to if an individual resides in the law and order orientation stage.**

To test this hypothesis, only the participants that received the warning about illegitimately complaining being against the terms and conditions need to be selected. This is a total of 88 participants, of which 75 (85.2%) reside in the law and order orientation stage, and 13 (14.8%) reside in the social-contract legalistic orientation stage. 11 participants decided not to complain illegitimately after seeing the warning, of whom 10 belong to the law and order orientation stage. A chi-square test was conducted to analyze whether the difference in these groups can be considered a significant difference. Fisher's Exact Test shows us if there is a difference between the two stages, as far as the denial of victim neutralization technique is concerned. The Fisher's Exact statistic reports a significance level of .490, which is higher than the alpha of .050. Thus, it is not significant.

Since no significant difference is found, the first hypothesis needs to be rejected. We can therefore conclude that using the denial of victim neutralization technique as a means of

prevention is not more effective for individuals in the social-contract legalistic orientation stage, as compared to individuals residing in the law and order orientation stage.

#### 4.5.2 | Second hypothesis: claim of normalcy neutralization technique and law and order orientation stage fit

The second hypothesis is:

**H2: Using the claim of normalcy neutralization technique as a means of prevention is more effective if an individual resides in the law and order orientation stage as compared to if an individual resides in the social-contract legalistic orientation stage.**

As was the case with the first hypothesis, only several participants need to be selected. Only those receiving the illegitimately complaining being illegal warning are selected. 103 participants saw this warning. Of those participants, 91 (88.3%) reside in the law and order orientation stage, and 12 (11.7%) participants in the social-contract legalistic orientation. Of those 12 participants, 2 participants decided to complain illegitimately. For the law and order orientation stage, 13 participants out of 91 complained illegitimately. Like with the first hypothesis, a chi-square test was conducted to analyze whether the difference in these groups can be considered a significant difference. Fisher's Exact Test shows us if there is a difference between the two stages, as far as the claim of normalcy neutralization technique is concerned. The Fisher's Exact statistic reports a significance level of .552, which is higher than the alpha of .050. Thus, it is not significant.

Since no significant difference is found, the second hypothesis also needs to be rejected. We can therefore conclude that using the claim of normalcy neutralization technique as a means of prevention is not more effective for individuals in the law and order stage, compared to individuals residing in the social-contract legalistic orientation stage.

#### 4.5.3 | Summary of the hypothesis tests

In summary, the hypotheses cannot be accepted and need to be rejected. Thus, for these neutralization techniques (claim of normalcy and denial of victim), it does not matter whether an individual resides in stage four (law and order orientation) or stage five (social-contract legalistic orientation). The following table provides a brief overview of the results.

Hypothesis	Stage	Descriptives	Result
<b>H1: Denial of victim neutralization technique</b>		<i>N</i> = 75 (85.2%)	n.s.
	4. Law and order orientation	CI = 10 (13.3%)	
		DCI = 65 (86.7%)	
		<i>N</i> = 13 (14.8%)	
	5. Social-contract legalistic	CI = 1 (7.7%)	
		DCI = 12 (92.3%)	
<b>H2: Claim of normalcy neutralization technique</b>		<i>N</i> = 91 (88.3%)	n.s.
	4. Law and order orientation	CI = 13 (14.3%)	
		DCI = 78 (85.7%)	
		<i>N</i> = 12 (11.7%)	
	5. Social-contract legalistic	CI = 1 (8.3%)	
		DCI = 11 (91.7%)	
<i>N</i> = sample in group (hypothesis) with percentage of group total; CI = complained illegitimately with percentage of group (hypothesis-stage combination); DCI = did not complain illegitimately with percentage of group (hypothesis-stage combination).			

Table 1: Results following the hypothesis tests.

#### 4.5.4 | Additional results

The same analyses as for the hypotheses was conducted among men and women separately. For men, the Fisher's Exact Test shows a significance level of .423 for the claim of normalcy technique, and a significance level of .456 for the denial of victim technique. Again, both tests are not significant which means that for men, there is also no difference.

For women, the Fisher's Exact Test shows a significance level of .634 for the claim of normalcy technique, and a significance level of .670 for the denial of victim technique. Also, like with men, there are no differences between women for either hypothesis.

Perhaps there is a difference between men and women. For this analysis, the stage in which people reside was not considered; just the sex they have. For both the claim of normalcy neutralization technique as for the denial of victim technique, no significant differences were found. Fisher's Exact Test shows a significance level of .480 for the denial of victim technique and a significance level of .216 for the claim of normalcy technique.

Finally, it was checked if there is a difference between college students, and the other students (university of applied sciences, vocational education, and high school students). There are no significant differences between these groups. For the claim of normalcy neutralization technique, the Fisher's Exact statistic shows a significance level of .5577; for the denial of victim technique a significance level of .564 is presented.

## 5 | Discussion and conclusions

This chapter marks the end of the research paper. It will start with a conclusion, followed by the theoretical and managerial implications. Furthermore, the limitations and suggestions for future research will be described, before concluding with an assessment of the quality of the research.

### 5.1 | Conclusion

This research focused on two research questions:

*“How does using neutralization techniques as a means of prevention affect illegitimate customer complaining?”*

*and*

*“How does the moral stage of the complaining customer moderate these effects?”*

In analyzing the results of the experiment, it is found that using neutralization techniques as means of prevention affects illegitimate customer complaining. 29 out of 201 individuals (14.4%) decided not to complain illegitimately after seeing the warning on their screen. The warnings, based on the neutralization techniques ‘denial of victim’ and ‘claim of normalcy’, thus influenced whether people complained illegitimately.

Furthermore, this research sets out a connection between the neutralization theory by Sykes and Matza (1957) and the moral development theory by Kohlberg (1971). A fit between the fourth stage of moral development (law and orientation stage) and the claim of normalcy neutralization technique, and a fit between the fifth stage of moral development (social-contract legalistic orientation stage) and the denial of victim neutralization technique was expected.

However, since the hypotheses needed to be rejected, we need to conclude that there is no connection between the fourth stage of moral development (law and order orientation stage) and the claim of normalcy neutralization technique, nor between the fifth stage of moral development (social-contract legalistic orientation stage) and the denial of victim neutralization technique. Additional analyses also showed that there are no differences between men and women, or between groups with different educational backgrounds.

### 5.2 | Implications

#### 5.2.1 | Theoretical implications

Since no connection between the stages of moral development and neutralization techniques written above was found, future researchers should not focus on these fits. Instead,

the focus would have to lie on different combinations of neutralization techniques and stages of moral development. Even though in this research no significant results were found between the neutralization techniques and stages of moral development that were under investigation, that does not mean the connection between the neutralization theory and theory of moral development should be discarded.

Another theoretical implication is how the stage of moral development should be measured. In this research, the method of Kohlberg was followed but there were some slight adjustments made for the sake of the experiment. These adjustments were made so the experiment would not take too much time of the participant. However, since many people were in the law and order orientation stage, the scenarios might not have been correct, even though the scenarios came from Kohlberg his own research (Crain, 1985). Adjustments to the scenarios should be made.

Finally, the fifth stage of moral development (social-contract legalistic orientation stage) differs a lot for individuals with opposite decisions. People who thought Peter should steal the drug might have felt that way since an individual his or her right to live is more important than the law. However, when you put the law opposite from the druggist right to compensation (which was the case for individuals who said Peter should *not* steal the drug), the participants were more inclined to choose the law. The fifth stage of moral development is about both the right to live as the right to a fair compensation (Kohlberg, 1971). However, these items are quite different from each other. If everyone would have gotten the choice between life and law, perhaps there were more individuals that reside in the fifth stage of moral development. Since there are some differences *within* the stages of moral development, these stages need to be critically assessed.

### 5.2.2 | Managerial implications

Unfortunately, since there are no significant results in this research, this makes it hard for managers to draw conclusions. However, there are some small things that managers could take away from this research.

Even though only a few people decided not to complain after all after the warning, the warnings did work for some people. 29 out of 201 individuals (14.4%) decided not to complain illegitimately upon viewing the warning. This indicates that, for some people, warning them about potential consequences of an illegitimate complaint means that they do not want to complain after all. It does not hurt a firm when they implement a warning, and even though it



works for only a select amount of people, this still works for some. The costs for implementing a warning are low (i.e., a small adjustment on the current form), but it will prevent some people from complaining illegitimately. Imagine that a firm receives for over € 100 million in claims each year, and about half of them are illegitimate. Even preventing only 14.4% of those claims can save a firm a lot of money. Firms should therefore consider implementing a warning on their complaints form.

Since the additional analysis showed that there was no difference between the complaining behavior of men and women, firms do not need to make a distinction between these two groups. Based on this research, firms should treat men and women equally in handling complaints. The same thing goes for individuals with different educational backgrounds.

### **5.3 | Limitations and future research**

#### **5.3.1 | Limitations before results**

Like with any other experiment, there is one common limitation: an experiment takes place in an artificial environment. This might not represent real-life situations. However, in this experiment that does not matter since everyone gets the same case description with, in each scenario, a different warning after they chose to complain illegitimately, and the experiment is about the different responses between the participants.

Another limitation of this research is that it not yet was proven that customers of service organization use neutralization techniques to illegitimate complain or to justify their illegitimate complaining. This research is simultaneously being conducted by my colleague students. For this research, it is assumed that this is indeed the case. Therefore, the focus lies on preventing illegitimate complaining with the use of neutralization techniques.

Since illegitimate complaining is a sensitive topic, it is important that the anonymity of participants is assured. By assuring anonymity, it is expected that people are more likely to respond truthfully. However, because this topic is sensitive, the odds are that individuals will not respond truthfully.

#### **5.3.2 | Limitations after results and future research**

With this experimental design, participants received one out of two warnings before they had to make the choice if they wanted to continue with their complaint. In hindsight, there should have also been a group that received no warning, but simply received the question “are you sure you want to continue?”. If that was done, there could have been made a comparison

between individuals who received a warning, and individuals who received no warning. That would have made the answer to the first research question stronger.

As can be read in the fourth chapter, there are no significant results for the hypotheses. This means that the connection between Kohlberg his theory of moral development and the effectiveness of using neutralization techniques as a means of prevention cannot be proven. There are a few possibilities as to why there was no connection found between the both.

The first possibility is the lack of fit between the chosen techniques and stages. There is a possibility that there is indeed no fit between the denial of victim neutralization technique and the law and order orientation stage, or between the claim of normalcy neutralization technique and the social-contract legalistic stage. Perhaps the wrong stages with the wrong neutralization techniques were matched. Future research could explore fits between different stages of moral development and neutralization techniques than the ones that were used in this research.

Another possibility could be the way the sample was selected. The sample consisted almost entirely out of students. 91.5% of my sample consisted out of individuals within the range of 18 and 24 years old. Kohlberg (1958) mentioned in his research that when people age and gain more life experience, they move up in the stages of moral development. It could be a possibility that most of the students in the sample have not yet made it to the fifth stage of moral development. Future research should focus on a different sample, for example a sample that is representative for the entire population in The Netherlands or the respective country of research.

The reason there were no significant results could also be because of how the stage of moral development was measured. Kohlberg his earlier research (Crain, 1985) was used for the case descriptions, but own scales were used to measure the exact stage. Perhaps the likert scales that were used were not good enough to accurately measure the stage of moral development. This notion struck to mind during the analysis, where we saw that the Cronbach's alpha was very much below the threshold of .8. A low Cronbach's alpha indicates a low reliability and tells us that the scales are not internally consistent, meaning that they probably do not measure the same construct. Future researchers are therefore recommended to measure the stage of moral development differently, perhaps by letting participants answer multiple questions that would indicate in which stage they belong best to, compared to letting them choose between one or two stages as was the case for this research.

The last possibility of why there would be no connection is that, for a fact, there is no connection between the stage of moral development and the neutralization techniques. This means that it does not matter in which stage of moral development you are for neutralization

techniques to have effect. That would also mean that the different neutralization techniques influencing individuals depend on other factors than the stage of moral development. Since there were no tests for other factors, this notion cannot be confirmed nor denied. Future research should focus on conforming or ruling out the connection between neutralization techniques and stage of moral development.

#### **5.4 | Quality of research**

To assess the quality of the research, The National Research Council, among others, described a few standards to measure the quality of the research (NCDDR, 2005). Based on these standards, the quality of this research will be assessed.

First, there needs to be a significant, important question which can be investigated empirically and that contributes to the scientific literature. Since this research aims at investigating the relationship between the neutralization theory and the stages of moral development theory, which was never done before, an important question was formulated at the beginning of this research. This criterion is met.

Next, the test questions need to be linked to relevant theory. For this research, the questions in the experiment are based on the theory and scenarios of Kohlberg (Crain, 1985). The warnings that are shown and the questions that followed, are based on the neutralization theory. Therefore, this criterion is also met.

The researcher needs to apply methods that are best for the research questions of interest. In this research, this guideline was followed by using the chi-square tests. Research also needs to be based on relevant literature that is covered extensively, which was done in the second chapter of this research. Both criteria are met.

There needs to be a possibility that the research can be reproduced or replicated. Based on the information in this research, and the appendices that show the design of the experiment, there is sufficient material for future researchers to reproduce or replicate this study. The study design, methods, and procedures also need to be clear enough and need to show that the research had an independent, balanced, and objective approach. Since there are no personal benefits from the results of this research, nor are there personal feelings towards the outcomes, this research can be described as having an independent, balanced, and objective approach. Furthermore, everything that was done on behalf of this research was described extensively, which makes the research very transparent. Also, the sample and its characteristics need to be described thoroughly, which is done in the results section of this thesis.

The conceptualization and measurement of variables need to be reliable. The Cronbach's alpha of .529, presented in the results section, shows that for the measurement of the stage of moral development, the reliability is low. Therefore, this criterion is not met.

Furthermore, a researcher should think about alternative explanations for the findings. In subparagraph 5.3.2 several explanations for the findings are listed, which makes this criterion met.

The last criteria for the quality of the search are the assessment of possible impact of systematic bias, the submission of the research to a peer-review process, and that the research needs to stick to quality standards for reporting. Systematic bias was not assessed in this research, but since the researcher was independent and objective, there is no systematic bias. This research will, upon completion, be submitted to two doctors who will judge whether this research is sufficient according to university guidelines. The doctors are not my peers, but are above it in terms of knowledge and experience, which makes this criterion met. Finally, this research follows the official university guidelines for the structure of a master thesis report.

In summary, most criteria for the quality of the research are met. The only criterion that is not met is the reliable conceptualization and measurement of the variables. Even though all other criteria are met, I consider this criterion as one of the most important ones. The low reliability and its consequences is already discussed in the previous subparagraph.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Case study

Ontmoet Sanne. Sanne is een tweedejaars studente die drie maanden geleden, na lang sparen, een nieuwe smartphone heeft gekocht in combinatie met een verzekering. De nieuwprijs van het toestel is 600 euro. De verzekering houdt in dat Sanne, in het geval van schade aan haar telefoon, de schade kan indienen waarna de schade door de verzekeringsmaatschappij vergoed wordt. Als de schade te hoog uitvalt (hoger dan 300 euro) ontvangt Sanne een nieuw toestel. Voor dit alles betaalt ze een premie van 20 euro per maand. Bij schade betaalt ze 45 euro eigen risico. De enige voorwaarde aan de verzekering is dat Sanne de schade niet zelf mag veroorzaken. Als de telefoon door haar toedoen valt, is dit dus niet gedekt onder de voorwaarden.



Op een dag loopt Sanne door de binnenstad van Nijmegen en laat ze haar telefoon per ongeluk op de grond vallen, met een grote barst in het scherm als gevolg. Ze gaat naar de dichtstbijzijnde telefoonwinkel en komt tot de ontdekking dat een nieuw scherm 180 euro kost. Daarnaast is echter ook het moederbord bij de val beschadigt, waardoor de totale reparatiekosten op 410 euro uitkomen.

Sannes moeder geeft Sanne het advies om de telefoon op te geven aan haar verzekering. “Daar is een verzekering ten slotte voor”, zegt ze. Dan moet Sanne echter wel zeggen dat de telefoon is gevallen doordat iemand tegen haar aanliep. “Daarnaast betaal je maandelijks 20 euro premie en dat de telefoon na één valpartij al stuk is, is niet normaal”, sluit haar moeder haar argument af.

Sanne gaat erover in beraad en bedenkt dat ze twee opties heeft.

### **Stel dat jij Sanne was: wat zou je doen?**

- De telefoon laten repareren door de winkel. Je bent de telefoon dan twee weken kwijt en betaalt de reparatiekosten van 410 euro.
- De telefoon opgeven aan de verzekering. Je ontvangt binnen 24 uur een nieuw toestel en betaalt slechts het eigen risico van 45 euro.

*Routing: if the second option is selected, one of two warnings appear. If the first option is selected, the experiment ends.*

#### **First warning**

Sanne besluit, net zoals jij zou doen, om haar telefoon op te geven aan de verzekering. Ze komt erachter dat er een klachtenformulier is dat ze dient in te vullen. Ze vult het formulier in en geeft aan dat de schade aan haar telefoon is veroorzaakt door iemand anders. Nadat ze alles had ingevuld en het formulier had verzonden, wordt haar gevraagd te bevestigen of alle gegevens eerlijk en correct ingevuld zijn. Daarbij verschijnt onderstaande mededeling:

**Weet u zeker dat u alle gegevens eerlijk en volledig heeft ingevuld? Het bewust onjuist invullen van dit formulier is verboden volgens de Nederlandse wet. Mocht uw klacht gebaseerd zijn op onwaarheden, dan is dit illegaal.**

Na het zien van deze melding begint Sanne te twijfelen. Ze realiseert zich dat liegen over deze klacht illegaal is en weet daarom niet zeker of ze wel echt deze klacht moet indienen.

#### **Als jij Sanne was, wat zou je doen na het zien van deze melding?**

- Ik besluit gewoon te klagen, ondanks dat ik weet dat het indienen van deze klacht illegaal is.
- Ik besluit niet te klagen, nu nogmaals duidelijk gemaakt is dat het indienen van deze klacht illegaal is.

*The second option is considered compliance.*

#### **Second warning**

Sanne besluit, net zoals jij zou doen, om haar telefoon op te geven aan de verzekering. Ze komt erachter dat er een klachtenformulier is dat ze dient in te vullen. Ze vult het formulier in en geeft aan dat de schade aan haar telefoon is veroorzaakt door iemand anders. Nadat ze alles had ingevuld en het formulier had verzonden, wordt haar gevraagd te bevestigen of alle gegevens eerlijk en correct ingevuld zijn. Daarbij verschijnt onderstaande mededeling:

**Weet u zeker dat u alle gegevens eerlijk en volledig heeft ingevuld? Wij zouden het betreuren als u een claim indient die in strijd is met onze algemene voorwaarden, die u bij het tekenen van uw contract gelezen en ondertekend heeft.**

Na het zien van deze melding begint Sanne te twijfelen. Ze realiseert zich dat liegen over deze klacht in strijd is met de algemene voorwaarden. Ze wist op voorhand dat haar telefoon niet gedekt zou zijn onder de verzekering indien zij zelf de telefoon liet vallen, en daar ging zij mee akkoord.

**Als jij Sanne was, wat zou je doen na het zien van deze melding?**

- Ik besluit gewoon te klagen, ondanks dat ik akkoord ben gegaan met de voorwaarden en deze klacht daarmee in strijd is.
- Ik besluit niet te klagen. Ik ben akkoord gegaan met het feit dat schade door eigen toedoen niet gedekt is en dat moet ik respecteren.

*The second option is considered compliance.*

## Appendix 2: Dilemma scenarios

### Scenario 1

Een vrouw ligt op sterven. Er is één medicijn waarvan de dokters denken dat dit haar kan redden. Het is een vorm van bestraling dat een drogist recentelijk ontdekt heeft. Het medicijn is erg duur om te maken, en de drogist vraagt er 10x de kostprijs voor. De drogist betaalt € 200 voor de bestraling, maar verkoopt het medicijn voor € 2.000. De echtgenoot van de zieke vrouw, Peter, is bij iedereen die hij kende langsgegaan om geld te lenen, maar hij heeft slechts € 1.000 (de helft van de vraagprijs) bij elkaar gesprokkeld. Hij vertelt de drogist dat zijn vrouw op sterven ligt en vraagt hem of hij het medicijn goedkoper wil verkopen of dat hij later mag betalen. De drogist zegt echter dat hij het medicijn ontdekt heeft en dat hij er geld aan wil verdienen. Peter is wanhopig en overweegt in het laboratorium in te breken om het medicijn te stelen.

**Moet Peter in het laboratorium inbreken om het medicijn te stelen?**

- Ja
- Nee

**Licht je antwoord toe.**

*Routing: if the first option was selected, question 2\_1\_A appeared. Else, question 2\_1\_B appeared.*

### Question 2 1 A

**Stelling: Peter moet het medicijn stelen ...**

... maar moet dan ook de gevolgen accepteren (gevangenisstraf) en de drogist later alsnog betalen wat hij hem toebehoort: je hoort niet te stelen.

*7 point likert scale*

... want iedereen heeft het recht op leven, ongeacht wat de wet hiervan vindt.

### Question 2 1 B

**Stelling: Peter moet het medicijn niet stelen ...**

... want de wet verbiedt het stelen van producten.

*7 point likert scale*

... want de drogist heeft het recht op eerlijke compensatie voor een medicijn dat hij ontdekt heeft.

*Then, the second scenario was presented.*

## Scenario 2

Peter besloot in het laboratorium in te breken en het medicijn te stelen. De volgende dag kwam de inbraak op het nieuws. Erik Jansen, een politieagent en vriend van Peter, herinnert zich dat hij Peter gisteravond had gezien bij het laboratorium en dat hij zich vreemd gedroeg. Later die avond zag hij Peter wegrennen vanuit het laboratorium.

**Moet Erik rapporteren wat hij heeft gezien?**

- Ja
- Nee

**Licht je antwoord toe.**

***Routing: if the first option was selected, question 2\_2\_A appeared. Else, question 2\_2\_B appeared.***

### Question 2\_2\_A

**Stelling: Erik moet rapporteren wat hij heeft gezien, want ...**

... Peter hoort niet te stelen omdat dit tegen de wet is. Erik is als politieagent verplicht dit te rapporteren.

*7 point likert scale*

... de drogist verdient het om te weten wie zijn medicijn gestolen heeft zodat hij de schade op hem kan verhalen.

### Question 2\_2\_B

**Stelling: Erik moet niet rapporteren wat hij heeft gezien ...**

... maar hij moet Peter wel aanspreken op het feit dat zijn actie illegaal is. Hij moet Peter tevens aansporen om zichzelf aan te geven bij de politie.

*7 point likert scale*

... want Peter probeert zijn vrouw te redden en het redden van iemands leven weegt zwaarder dan de wet.

***Finally, the third scenario was presented.***

### Scenario 3

Politieagent Erik Jansen rapporteerde wat hij heeft gezien. Peter werd gearresteerd en voorgeleid. Mocht hij veroordeeld worden, dan kan hij maximum twee jaar celstraf krijgen. Peter werd veroordeeld.

**Moet de rechter Peter een celstraf opleggen?**

- Ja
- Nee

**Licht je antwoord toe.**

**Routing: if the first option was selected, question 2\_3\_A appeared. Else, question 2\_3\_B appeared.**

#### Question 2 3 A

**Stelling: de rechter moet Peter een celstraf opleggen ...**

... want het stelen van een medicijn is illegaal volgens de wet. De rechter moet geen uitzondering maken, gebaseerd op het mogelijk overlijden van Peter zijn vrouw.

*7 point likert scale*

... want Peter heeft de drogist benadeeld door het stelen van het medicijn; hierdoor kreeg de drogist namelijk minder opbrengsten.

#### Question 2 3 B

**Stelling: de rechter moet Peter geen celstraf opleggen ...**

... maar het moet wel duidelijk gemaakt worden dat hij de wet overtreden heeft. Hij zal wel een strafblad krijgen, maar hoeft niet de gevangenis in.

*7 point likert scale*

... want het leven van Peter zijn vrouw weegt zwaarder dan het benadelen van de drogist.

### Appendix 3: Sample descriptives

Category	Descriptives
<b>Participants</b>	201 (100%)
<b>Sex</b>	Male: 80 (39.8%) Female: 121 (60.2%)
<b>Education</b>	High school: 2 ( 1.0%) Vocational: 12 ( 6.0%) Applied science: 49 (24.4%) College: 138 (68.7%)
<b>Age</b>	18: 8 ( 4.0%) 19: 22 (10.9%) 20-23: 134 (66.7%) 24: 20 (10.0%) 25: 7 ( 3.5%) 26: 5 ( 2.5%) 27+: 5 ( 2.5%)
<b>Warning received</b>	Denial of victim (terms and conditions): 106 (52.7%) Of whom 37 (34.9%) male and 69 (65.1%) female Claim of normalcy (illegal): 95 (47.3%) Of whom 43 (45.3%) male and 52 (54.7%) female
<b>Compliance</b>	Participants that stuck with the complaint: 172 (85.6%) Of whom 70 (40.7%) male and 102 (59.3%) female Participants that withdrew the complaint: 29 (14.4%) Of whom 10 (34.5%) male and 19 (65.5%) female
<b>Stage of moral development</b>	(4) Law and order orientation stage: 166 (82.6%) (5) Social-contract legalistic orientation stage: 25 (12.4%) No clear stage: 10 ( 5.0%)