



THE IMPACT OF DYSFUNCTIONAL GUEST BEHAVIOR ON HOTEL BUSINESS EFFICIENCY: A CASE STUDY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

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Abstract:

This research investigates the influence of dysfunctional guest behaviour on the operational efficiency of hotels, with a specific focus on the Republic of Serbia. Dysfunctional guest behaviour refers to disruptive actions and conduct exhibited by guests during their stay, which can adversely affect hotel staff, other guests, and the overall hotel experience. This case study explores various forms of dysfunctional behaviour and its implications for hotel operations and profitability. By analyzing data from hotels in the Republic of Serbia, this study aims to provide valuable insights and practical recommendations for managing and mitigating the effects of such behaviour to enhance business efficiency and guest satisfaction. The results show that verbal aggression, illegitimate complaints and behaviour causing material and immaterial damages to hotels have a negative impact on the efficiency of hotel operations in the Republic of Serbia.

Keywords:

dysfunctional behavior, hotel business efficiency, verbal aggression, illegitimate complaints, material and immaterial damages.

INTRODUCTION

The findings from prior investigations (Grandey *et al.*, 2007; Yue *et al.*, 2017; Kang and Gong, 2019; Shams *et al.*, 2020a) indicate that the costs arising from dysfunctional guest behaviour significantly contribute to the overall business expenses of hotels. Additionally, over 82% of hotel employees face some form of dysfunctional guest behaviour, leading to burnout in their job roles (Yue *et al.*, 2017) and absenteeism (Grandey *et al.*, 2004). These findings highlight the substantial impact of such consumer behaviour on the efficiency of hotel operations. This impact is particularly crucial for hotel businesses due to the nature of services, where maintaining constant service quality is challenging (Zrnic *et al.*, 2023; Knezevic *et al.*, 2017), resulting in inevitable fluctuations in service quality and service delivery errors. Furthermore, service delivery errors can significantly affect a hotel's rating through electronic word of mouth. The lack of a standardized rating process allows comments and reviews on social media to strongly influence consumer attitudes (Josimovic *et al.*, 2023). Critiques shape consumers' beliefs, expectations, and perceptions of the value offered by hotels for their money (Rajaguru and Hassanli, 2017).

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The significance of word of mouth and comments on social media left by hotel guests is underscored by the findings of Levy *et al.* (2013), which indicate that consumers view critiques and comments as the most sincere source of information. Moreover, Proserpio and Zervas (2017) suggest that negative comments on social media are the most critical signal of a hotel's reputation, influencing hotel selection. It is crucial to acknowledge that unfavorable remarks expressed on social media platforms can swiftly transform into the dominant viewpoint held by users of a particular service (Litvin *et al.*, 2008).

Unlike discretionary consumer behaviour, which represents voluntary and positive actions contributing to the improvement of the guest-hotel relationship and, therefore, having a significant positive impact on hotel business outcomes, dysfunctional behaviour encompasses undesirable, negative, and unethical actions by customers, such as verbal aggression, unjustified complaints, and more (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara *et al.*, 2014). This behaviour manifests in intentional acts of damaging hotel property, excessive energy consumption, food wastage, and the like. Such consumer behaviour often arises from negative experiences with the hotel (Bagherzadeh *et al.*, 2020). According to Folger's theory (2001), people behave in a manner they believe to be correct. As a result of negative experiences with the hotel, consumers may engage in dysfunctional behaviour as they perceive it to be the appropriate response to inadequate or poor hotel activities. A lack of emotional attachment to the hotel may intensify the display of dysfunctional behaviour, leading to stronger negative impacts on hotel business efficiency. In the absence of emotional attachment (loyalty) to the hotel, guests may not feel a moral obligation to assist the hotel and may not find valid cognitive arguments to justify such behaviour, instead resorting to dysfunctional behaviour to protect their personal interests. In the literature, three common forms of dysfunctional behaviour by hotel guests are often cited: verbal aggression, unjustified complaints, and behaviour that causes material and immaterial damage to the hotel. Importantly, all three forms of dysfunctional behaviour, either directly or indirectly, influence costs and thereby impact the hotel's efficiency. For instance, engaging in verbal aggression affects the hotel's efficiency indirectly by causing employee burnout or frequent absences from work, while damaging hotel property directly affects the hotel's operating costs. Additionally, since writing negative reviews on social media also constitutes dysfunctional behaviour, it affects potential guests' attitudes and, ultimately, the hotel's revenues, thus influencing business efficiency. For this reason, it is essential to examine the simultaneous impact of all three forms of dysfunctional behaviour, which is the main objective of this study. Specifically, the primary goal of the study is to explore the impact of these three dominant forms of dysfunctional guest behaviour on the efficiency of hotel operations in the Republic of Serbia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In professional literature, consumer dysfunctional behaviour can be found under various names, such as deviant customer behaviour (customer misbehaviour, jay-customer behaviour problem customers, inappropriate customer behaviour (Strutton *et al.*, 1994), and customer badness behaviour (Yi and Gong, 2006; Harris and Daunt, 2011; Daunt and Greer, 2015; Lovelock and Wirtz, 2016).

The first researchers to examine the impact of such behaviour on business success were Strutton *et al.*, (1994). They investigated the influence of theft on business performance. Theft remains the most commonly studied form of consumer dysfunctional behaviour. In one particular study conducted by Lin *et al.* in 1994, it was discovered that retailers experience a sense of exasperation when they are compelled to increase prices for consumers as a result of shoplifting incidents. Additionally, Wirtz and McColl-Kennedy (2010) highlight various forms of customer theft such as fraudulent claims, which encompass inflated and false insurance claims, coupon misuse, and violations of service guarantees.

However, although theft has been extensively studied, three forms of consumer dysfunctional behaviour dominate academic and professional circles today: verbal aggression by customers, illegitimate complaints and behaviour causing material and immaterial damages to hotels. Theft and various other frauds can be classified as forms of behaviour resulting in material and immaterial damages to hotels. Additionally, vandalism also falls within this category of dysfunctional behaviour exhibited by hotel guests. According to Harris and Reynolds (2004), individuals partake in acts of vandalism towards organizational assets for various reasons, spanning from seeking monetary benefits to indulging in personal excitement. Verbal abuse is characterized



by customers expressing anger through verbal means that violate social norms, such as using profanity, yelling, making threats, making condescending remarks, and employing sarcasm (Karatepe *et al.*, 2009, p. 714). The act entails inducing unease and anguish in an employee through the utilization of discourteous, belittling, impatient, and impolite verbal utterances (Li and Zhou, 2013). Illegitimate complaints refer to situations where hotel guests make complaints about hotel services without valid reasons. These customers tend to complain regardless of the circumstances, using complaints as a bargaining tool to achieve their desired outcomes. Unfounded complaints can have various repercussions, impacting employees' ability to handle both valid and invalid grievances. It can diminish their patience and understanding towards complaints in general. Moreover, it can create a ripple effect, where customers engage in a competition of baseless complaints, aiming to garner greater sympathy and compensation from the service provider. This contagious phenomenon can lead to an unhealthy environment where groundless complaints become the norm. Moreover, adhering to the conventional belief that 'the customer is always right' can generate imbalanced power dynamics during customer-employee interactions in service environments (Grandey *et al.*, 2004). Additionally, this approach may incentivize customers to make unreasonable requests that employees cannot fulfill (Yagil, 2008). As a result, it is crucial to take this type of dysfunctional behaviour seriously. Following the existing literature, we define dysfunctional customer behaviour based on three key dimensions: verbal abuse, illegitimate complaint and behaviour causing material and immaterial damages to hotels. In accordance with the aforementioned, the paper starts from the following hypothesis: H1: verbal aggression by guests of the hotel has a negative impact on the efficiency of hotel operations in the Republic of Serbia; H2: Illegitimate complaints by guests of the hotel has a negative impact on the efficiency of hotel operations in the Republic of Serbia and H3: behaviour causing material and immaterial damages to hotels has a negative impact on the efficiency of hotel operations in the Republic of Serbia.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH VARIABLES

The study was conducted on a sample of 26 hotels, with a capacity ranging from 20 to 450 accommodation units, categorized from 1 to 5 stars, operating in the Republic of Serbia. The data was collected during 2023. based on a structured questionnaire, which was compiled based on appropriate claims proposed in the literature. More precisely, the items from the questionnaire were defined taking into account theoretical and empirical research related to dysfunctional behaviour of consumers, i.e. hotel guests (Lara *et al.*, 2014; Kang and Gong, 2019). More precisely, the items related to verbal aggression and Illegitimate complaint by customers were taken from Kang and Gong (2019). The items related to behaviour causing material and immaterial damage to hotels were taken from Lara *et al.*, (2014). Since a high Cronbach alpha value does not necessarily indicate high reliability as it may simply be the result of a large number of items included in the analysis, the validity of the questionnaire was tested using principal component analysis (PCA). Sample adequacy was tested using the Kaiser-Meier-Okin test of sample adequacy (test value = 0.831). Also, Bartlett's test of sphericity was performed ($\chi^2(91) = 1802.6$). The results of the questionnaire's validity test are shown in Table 1, noting that the Promax rotation curve was used. The respondents assessed the statements from the questionnaire using the 5-point Likert scale, with ratings from (1), "completely disagree", to (5), "completely agree". It is important to point out that business efficiency is expressed through technical efficiency which represents a comprehensive measure of hotel business success as it takes into account all inputs and outputs (Assaf *et al.*, 2015), and mathematically it can be expressed as follows:

$$\delta_i = \max\{\delta > 0 | \delta_i, y_i \leq \sum_{i=1} y_i \lambda; x_i \geq \sum_{i=1} x_i \lambda; \sum_{i=1} \lambda = 1; \lambda \geq 0\} \quad (1)$$

where δ_i is the technical efficiency indicator of the i th hotel, y_i the output vector of the i th hotel, x_i the input vector of the i th hotel and λ is the $n \times 1$ vector of model constants.

The research utilized a technique called data envelopment analysis (DEA) to determine the parameter values of the model. In particular, the study employed the DEA double bootstrapping procedure introduced by Simar and Wilson (2007). This method, as suggested by Pimic *et al.* (2023b), involved substituting the bootstrap estimators from the regression phase to calculate the standard errors of the estimates. By considering the potential bias in the parameter estimates, this procedure produced more dependable estimates in the second phase of the regression analysis.



To summarize, the algorithm encompasses the following steps:

Once the efficiency scores have been derived using Equation (1), we utilize the maximum likelihood method to estimate the truncated regression of δi on z_i . This estimation process allows us to obtain the values β and $\hat{\sigma}\varepsilon$;

To obtain a set of bootstrap estimates $\{\delta i, b, b = 1, \dots, B\}$, the following four steps (a-d) need to be repeated multiple times for each hotel $i = 1, \dots, n$:

Derive εi from the $N(0, \hat{\sigma}\varepsilon)$ distribution with left truncation at $(1 - \beta z_i)$; Derive εi from the $N(0, \hat{\sigma}\varepsilon)$ distribution with left truncation at $(1 - \beta z_i)$; Compute $\delta i = \beta z_i + \varepsilon i$

Construct a pseudo data set (x^*, y^*) , where $x_i = x_i$ and $y^* = yidd^*$; Compute a new DEA estimate d^* on the set of pseudo data (x_i, y_i) .

For each hotel, compute the bias-corrected estimate $d_i = d_i - (B \sum_{b=1} \delta i, b - \delta i)$;

Use the maximum likelihood method to estimate the truncated regression $\hat{i}$ on z_i , providing estimates $(\hat{\beta}, \hat{\sigma})$ of $(\beta, \sigma\varepsilon)$;

Repeat the next three steps (a-c) a number of times to obtain a set of bootstrap estimates $\{(\beta b, \sigma b, 1, \dots, B2)\}$: For $i = 1, \dots, n$, εi is drawn from $N(0, \hat{\sigma})$, with left truncation at $(1 - \beta z_i)$;

For $i = 1, \dots, n$, compute $\delta^{**} = \beta z_i + \varepsilon i$;

The maximum likelihood method is again used to estimate the truncated regression of δ^{**} on z_i providing estimates (β^*, σ^*) .

Utilize the bootstrap outcomes to construct confidence intervals.

Table 1. The questionnaire.

Item	Factor loadings		
	VA	IC	BD
Verbal abuse (VA)			
Customers yelled at me	0.762		
Customers threatened me	0.673		
Customers insulted me	0.701		
Customers got into arguments with me	0.779		
Illegitimate complaint (IC)			
Customers blamed me for a problem I did not cause		0.649	
Customers got angry at me even over minor matters		0.543	
Customers complained without reason		0.743	
Customers continued to complain despite my efforts to assist them		0.349	
Customers complained to me about the value of goods and services		0.522	
Behaviour causing material and immaterial damage to hotels (BD)			
I recognize that I have misused some of the hotel's services			0.852
I have refused to follow instructions from the hotel staff Sometimes, I have broken the rules of the hotel			0.905
I tend to dirty the hotel more than I should			0.761
I put little effort into my duties as a customer in this hotel			0.638
I recognize that I consume more resources than acceptable at this hotel			0.742

Note: VA - Verbal abuse, IC - Illegitimate complaint, BD - Behaviour causing material and immaterial damage to hotels.

Source: Author's.



The results of the PCA analysis indicate that the questions are grouped according to expectations, respectively, so that the questionnaire can be confidently used in further analysis. The analysis involved processing the gathered data using the statistical software package called Gretl for statistical analysis, and the statistical software AMOS for constructing structural equation models (SEM).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE OBTAINED RESULTS

Before the AMOS model parameters were assessed, a correlation analysis of the indicators was conducted. The first condition for the valid application of factor and structural analysis is that indicators are highly correlated and mutually replaceable (Čavić *et al.*, 2023). Table 2 shows the correlation matrix of indicators (variables that are measured in the model), the average variance extracted (AVE), Cronbach's alpha for estimating the reliability of the multi-item sections, and the goodness-of-fit indices for the SEM model.

Table 2. Shows the correlation matrix of indicators.

	VA	IC	BD
VA	1		
IC	0.491	1	
BD	0.448	0.599	1
AVE	0.613	0.502	0.603
Reliability	0.713	0.728	0.791
RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation)			0.047
RMSR (root mean square residual)			0.055
NNFI (non-normed fit index)			0.993
AGFI (adjusted GFI)			0.986

All correlations are significant at $p < .05$.

Source: Author's.

Table 3 indicates that the variables are highly correlated with each other. AVE for each construct surpassed the square of the correlation coefficient between the corresponding inter-constructs. This finding solidifies the evidence supporting discriminant validity. Additionally, the outcomes of the measures also contribute to the overall convergent validity. These insights were reported by Radivojevic *et al.* (2023) and Pimic *et al.* (2023a). Values of Cronbach's alpha in all cases are above 0.7, expressing a satisfactory degree of dependability for every component. Furthermore, the reliability of the construct was additionally reinforced by the fact that all average variance extracted (AVE) values surpassed the threshold of 0.50. The findings obtained from the goodness-of-fit indices indicated that the proposed structural model fit the data excellently.

The results of the confirmatory factor analysis are shown below.



Figure 1. Structural model testing.

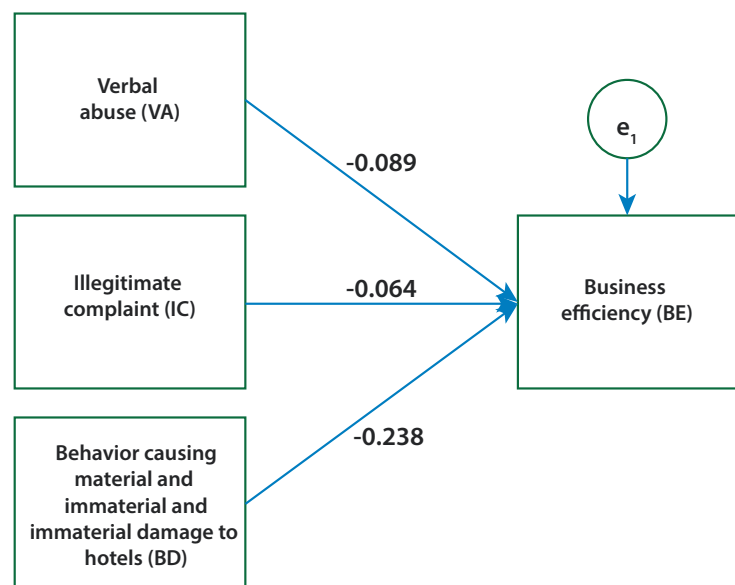


Table 3. Results of hypothesis testing.

Variables	Coeff.	Stand. error	Critical value	P value	Results
BE $\leftarrow$ VA	-0.089	0.013	-6.85	0.003	H1 accept
BE $\leftarrow$ IC	-0.064	0.018	-3.56	0.018	H2 accept
BE $\leftarrow$ BD	-0.238	0.016	-14.88	0.000	H3 accept

Source: Author's.

From the perspective of econometric analysis, the results presented in Fig. 1 indicate that the stated hypotheses can be accepted as confirmed, as all regression coefficients are statistically significant at a confidence level of 0.05. From Figure 1, it is clear that the greatest influence has behaviour causing material and immaterial damage to hotels. This outcome was expected, considering that the impact of this type of dysfunctional behaviour is easily observable, measurable, and stands out prominently. Next, the impact of verbal aggression emerges, and it exerts the most significant influence on the burnout of hotel employees. The frequent absences from work due to emotional exhaustion have a dual effect on the hotel's business efficiency. On one hand, it incurs additional costs for hiring and training new personnel, who may not match the efficiency of experienced staff. On the other hand, the hotel often bears the cost of employee absences. Given the shortage of adequately skilled personnel in the hotel industry, this issue represents a substantial challenge.

The impact of illegitimate complaints has the least impact on the efficiency of hotel operations. This finding suggests that the presence of unfounded complaints has a relatively minor influence on the efficiency of hotel operations. In other words, these complaints, which lack a valid basis or justification, do not significantly disrupt the overall functioning and productivity of the hotel. Such complaints may be either infrequent or have minimal consequences on the hotel's ability to deliver services effectively. Other factors, such as verbal aggression and behaviour causing material and immaterial damage, may have more substantial effects on the hotel's efficiency, overshadowing the impact of unfounded complaints in the overall analysis.

Further investigation and exploration of the reasons behind this observation could provide valuable insights into improving hotel operations and customer satisfaction.



CONCLUSION

The research findings indicate that dysfunctional guest behaviour, encompassing verbal aggression, illegitimate complaints, and behaviour causing material and immaterial damages to hotels, negatively impacts the operational efficiency of hotels in the Republic of Serbia. These disruptive actions can lead to adverse effects on hotel staff, other guests, and the overall hotel experience, potentially affecting guest satisfaction and profitability. As a result, managing and mitigating dysfunctional guest behaviour becomes essential for enhancing business efficiency and ensuring a positive guest experience. The study provides valuable insights and practical recommendations to help hoteliers in the Republic of Serbia address and minimize the negative effects of such behaviour, thereby improving overall operational performance and guest satisfaction levels.

The findings of this study show that behaviour that causes material and non-material damage to hotels has the greatest impact on business efficiency. Then follows verbal aggression and then unfounded complaints from hotel guests. The study findings indicate that behaviour causing material and non-material damage to hotels has the greatest impact on business efficiency. This could be due to several reasons: Direct Costs: Actions that cause material and non-material damage to hotels can lead to direct costs, such as repairs, replacements, or compensations, which directly affect the hotel's financial performance and operational efficiency. Negative Guest Experience: Guests who experience damage or witness such behaviour are likely to have a significantly negative experience, leading to reduced satisfaction and potential negative word-of-mouth, impacting the hotel's reputation and future business. Employee Productivity: Dealing with the aftermath of damage or addressing such behaviour may consume a considerable amount of staff time and resources, diverting them from core tasks, thus affecting overall employee productivity and efficiency. Safety Concerns: Behavior causing material damage may also pose safety risks to guests and staff, requiring immediate attention and further impacting the hotel's efficiency and reputation.

On the other hand, verbal aggression, though significant, may have a lesser impact on business efficiency compared to material and non-material damage due to its potential to be managed more effectively through staff training and guest communication protocols. Lastly, unfounded complaints from hotel guests, though still relevant, may have a lower impact on business efficiency as they are less likely to result in direct costs or safety concerns. While they may affect staff morale and require attention, their effects are comparatively milder compared to the other forms of dysfunctional behaviour.

Overall, the order of impact observed in the study suggests that addressing behaviour causing material and non-material damage to hotels should be a priority for hotel management in their efforts to enhance business efficiency and ensure a positive guest experience.

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