The Impact of Recession on Customer Unethical Behavior in Sharm El Sheikh Hotels: The Role of Rules and Regulation

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ARTICLE INFO	Abstract
	Given the harmful consequences of customer unethical behavior, the study aims to investigate the moderating role of rules and regulation on the relationship between recession and customer unethical behavior. **Research methodology design** – In this study, a quantitative research approach was used. in addition to semi structured interview with hotels managers and team members who witnessed the recession. The research data was analyzed using Smart PLS 3. **Findings** – It was revealed that hotels in question have experienced severe recession during the last decade that caused unethical behavior such as receiving an illegitimate complaint, problem fabrication, dictating the hotels and illegitimately fraudulent returning payment. Weak implication of the hotel rules and regulation in the sample hotels such as lack of rules and regulation which can deliberately confront the illegitimate customer complaints, not gaining the guest's approval and signature to acknowledge the complaining policy, lack of customer complaints policy in the travel agents' contracts, lack of the service recovery policy with the trained and empowered team to handle the illegitimate claims, lack of customer preferences. Nevertheless, rules and regulations showed significance between the recession on the hotels' customers' unethical behavior as hotels showed tendency to apply the rules and regulation and its proposed provisions. **Research value** – Findings of this study assist to better understanding of the tourist recession and the emerged customer unethical behavior. Hotels can benefit from this study by developing more effective inhibitors by comply to the rules and regulation.

Introduction

During the last decade, the hotels in Sharm El Sheikh witnessed an increase of unethical customer behavior, these behaviors negatively influenced the financial status of those hotels. The noticed unethical customer behaviors emerged from the recession which struck the demand on hotels rooms in the study destination.

The tourism recession is defined as a sudden and quick decrease in the number of tourists coming from outside the touristic destination due to several reasons, for example, terrorism attacks, wars and then the lack of security on which the hospitality industry is based. These events affect tourists during their stay in tourist areas and prevent them from visiting those areas, whether by personal decision by customers or by other sovereign bodies interacting with the crisis, especially if the crisis is human-made, consequently, the tourist recession puts those in charge of the tourism sector and those working in it under severe pressure to take the appropriate decision to restore the situation to its previous state, before it occurred (Hussein 2016). Additionally, the generally poor economic climate has significantly impacted business confidence, increasing uncertainty and volatility in the markets; anxiety and stressful situations have emerged as the new normal (Lacerda, 2019).

Looking at moral philosophical approaches, unethical customer behavior indicates a deviation away from moral norms, in the form of a range of ethically questionable behaviors. This research defines unethical customer behavior, by building on existing research, as a deviation from commonly accepted moral norms in the form of a customer-induced act within the hotels sector exchange dyad that is perceived as wrongful and that results in negative outcomes for hotels owner, hotels management, hotels service providers and other customers alike (Mayr et al., 2022).

This trend in customer behavior has highlighted the need for greater understanding of the impact of recession on the customer unethical, hotels trying to exert effort to prohibit such undesirable activities. Hence, this research tries to fill these research gaps by establishing a managerial framework to identify and address the unethical customer behavior in lodging industry by investigate the moderating role of rules and regulation on the relationship between recession and unethical behavior.

Literature Review

Tourist recession

When weak economic phases surpass typical bounds in terms of duration, depth, and diffusion, business-cycle analysts typically use the term "recession." This indicates that economic activity declines significantly during a recession, impacts a significant portion of the economy, and has some permanence as it could remain for consecutive months and ordinarily seen in real gross domestic profit, actual revenue, work force, manufacturing output, and wholesale sales (Abberger and Nierhaus, 2008).

Nearly every economy in the world developed and developing countries was impacted by the global recession to varying degrees. Compared to earlier global recessions, these effects were observed in more economies, at a higher volume due to the rise in global commerce

facilitated by the liberalized trade policies. Due to the economic downturn, there was a notable decline in the number of foreign visitors, which had negative effects on employment, sales of goods and services, investments, and income for households involved in this lucrative industry either directly or indirectly, Egypt's tourist and hotel industry was no different (Mir and Bhushan, 2014).

During the period of recession, low demand period on hotel rooms emerged unprecedented behavior by hotels' customers (unethical customer behavior). Which has a direct effect on the service provider's performance, stability and hotel financial status. Hence, the researcher sheds light on undesired (unethical customer behavior) acted by hotel guests.

Customer Unethical Behavior

Some of the numerous aspects of unethical consumer behavior include fraud, distortion, profiting, and employing in misleading conduct. Such behaviors demand attention because they harm businesses, endanger personnel, and prevent other guest from clear staying trial (Mayr et al., 2022).

Such behaviors pose extra financial risks for hotels during the difficult time and leading contexts (Ferraro et al., 2022; Raassens et al., 2021), since they interrupt processes, ruin sources, generate anxiety, and adversely influence the behavior of other hotel customers. In the context of the most recent recession, reports in the press suggest that consumers didn't frequently behave as expected, exhibiting examples of unwelcome conduct (Mishra et al., 2022). Therefore, despite the risky nature of unethical consumer behavior, it's one of the critically neglected areas of consumer behavior (Dootson et al., 2022).

As commonly noticed in the hotels, unethical customer behavior became somehow general practice for different reasons such as monetary refund and cheating. A pilot study was conducted and revealed that some hotels in the study destination placed policies and procedures for the sake of reducing such unfavorable behavior which is hotel rules and regulation by which hotel can adapt customer attitude and behavior.

Rules and regulation

There seems to be a lack of consensus around the concept of regulation. However, the question of what the meaning of regulation is, the concept central idea, remains unanswered. Koop and Lodge, (2017) defined regulation as the enactment of a legally binding set of regulations, supported by a system to ensure that these regulations are followed.

In the lodging industry, the researcher defined the rules and regulation as a contract among the customers and the properties. This agreement is placed in the customer registration card which is signed at the time of arrival or on the hotels' website so all visiting customers are aware of all house rules. Additionally, a printed version of the rules and regulations may be located in each guest room to enable the client to review and comprehend the management policies, which might additionally contain local authority legislation that the customer must follow.

Hypotheses and Conceptual Framework
Tourist recession and customer unethical behavior

A tourist recession is a form of crisis that can arise from either external or internal sources, and depending on its severity and length, it might endanger the existence of a hotel company. During the massive recession, business confidence has been severely hurt by the generally bad economic environment, which has also increased market volatility and unpredictability. Anxiety and stressful conditions have become the new normal (Lacerda, 2019).

There is still ample evidence that the recession had an impact on consumer behavior, ultimately leading to unethical activity on the part of the customers. Unethical buyer behavior is a general term for deviant, norm-breaking behavior presented in marketplace or within business organizations (Bossuyt et al., 2017).

H1: There is a significant positive effect of recession on customer unethical behavior in hotels in Sharm El-Sheikh.

Rules and regulation and customer unethical behavior

As one of the unethical customer behavior type, opportunistic behavior comprises in search of egotism with guile, misusing chances with little attention to ethics or their significances, opting the wrong ways rather than the ethical ways in certain situations, and winning benefits, often unethically, of any condition for possible benefit (Baker et al., 2012)

During the pilot study, the research was encouraged by the strong outcomes from the respondents' perception toward the positive role of rules and regulation on the connection between recession and unethical behavior. Therefore, it can be hypnotized that.

H2: Rules and regulation moderate the relationship between recession and customer unethical behavior in hotels in Sharm El-Sheikh.

Methodology

Additional information was gathered from publications and online sites, and relevant textbooks. A survey and semi structured interview were utilized to obtain initial information. Data was collected during the period of June 2022 until the end of August 2022. This study concentrated on four-star and five-star hotels and resorts in Sharm El Sheikh as it contains the largest hotel compounds in Egypt, in addition to the available guests from different nationalities accommodated in these hotels.

Measurement Instrument

The questionnaire distributed to hotel managers and team managers aimed to assess the difficulty of recession and its influence on guest unethical behavior considering rules and regulation. The questions of recession severity construct were adopted from the previous studies of (Abberger and Nierhaus, 2008; Mir and Bhushan, 2014; Wilkinson et al., 2020). The construct of the unethical behavior was adopted from the studies of (Hua et al., 2021; Raassens et al., 2021; Ferraro et al., 2022). While rules and regulation questions were adopted from the researcher's 25 years of experience in lodging industry. Besides, face to face interviews were conducted with managers to better investigate the research variables and figure out practices that hotels follow to cope with such circumstances in addition to the solution can be employed to fill the research gap.

Sample and Data Collection

A sum of 400 forms were distributed to managers and team members from 30 hotels located in Sharm El Sheikh; among them only 289 forms (72.25%) were valid and a sum of 425 forms were distributed to hotels customers, among them only 289 forms (68%) were valid.

Data Analysis

To evaluate the correlation amongst this work variables, the data from the questionnaires were analyzed utilizing the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) method with the Smart PLS 3.0 software. The research model was evaluated in two steps: a) the measurement model and b) the structural model. Generally, the goal of model confirmation is to conclude whether the measurement and structural model both match the excellence of standards for practical research (Urbach and Ahlemann, 2010).

Results

Measurement Model Assessment

Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability have been employed to analyze the variables' reliability. Furthermore, the applications of outer loading, cross loading, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were employed to guarantee validity. It was demonstrated that the data collection tool was fit. Because structural equation modeling (SEM) can measure the relationships amongst the demonstrated variables, it was chosen to investigate the relationships between the research variables (Byrne, 2013).

Regarding table (1) the scales reliability using Cronbach Alpha ranged from 0.862 to 0.950, this is satisfactory to fulfill internal consistency (Hair et al., 2021). As composite reliability (CR) of every construct reaches a threshold value of (0.7), a measurement model is regarded to have sufficient internal consistency reliability. Table (1) displays the (CR) for each construct in this study, which extends from 0.900 to 0.953.

The findings suggest that the elements employed to illustrate the constructs had acceptable internal consistency reliability (Alnakhli, 2019).

To achieve measurement model validity, the outer loading which defines the saturation value of manifest variables should be greater than 0.5. Considering table (1), it's clear that saturation performance values exceed 0.5 (P< 0.001) extending from the lowest level of (0.623) to the highest level of (0.916). These results indicate that the items used proved model validity.

The measurement model's convergent validity was validated by checking its average variance extracted value to confirm that the variables are theoretically and practically connected. When a construct's average variance extracted value (AVE) is close to or greater than 0.5, convergent validity is considered sufficient (Alnakhli, 2019). Table (1) explains that all constructs have an AVE ranging from (0.542) to (0.717). Indicating that there is adequate convergent validity in the measurement model.

Assessment of Measurement Model

Table (1): Assessment of the formative measurement model

Latent Variable	Indicator	Rules and regulation	Recession	Unethical behavior	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Rules and regulation	**IRR1**	**0.916**	0.034	0.214	0.950	0.953	0.717
	IRR2	**0.899**	0.010	0.125			
	IRR3	**0.831**	0.010	0.062			
	IRR4	**0.843**	0.028	0.025			
	IRR5	**0.808**	0.073	0.041			
	IRR6	**0.771**	0.064	0.027			
	IRR7	**0.868**	0.027	0.120			
	IRR8	**0.827**	-0.045	0.082			
Recession	**R1**	0.043	**0.797**	0.339	0.862	0.900	0.644
	R2	-0.003	**0.765**	0.351			
	R3	0.037	**0.780**	0.359			
	R4	0.000	**0.812**	0.386			
	R5	-0.011	**0.855**	0.472			
Unethical behavior	**UEB1**	0.004	0.471	**0.623**	0.906	0.922	0.542
	UEB2	0.117	0.278	**0.708**			
	UEB3	0.050	0.293	**0.740**			
	UEB4	0.175	0.403	**0.734**			
	UEB5	0.180	0.375	**0.789**			
	UEB6	0.095	0.279	**0.770**			
	UEB7	0.159	0.388	**0.786**			
	UEB8	0.064	0.278	**0.738**			
	UEB9	0.127	0.277	**0.712**			
	UEB10	0.031	0.377	**0.744**			

The discriminant validity of the measurement model is assessed employing couple criteria: 1) Fornell and Larcker's standard; and 2) cross loadings. When: 1) the square root of the AVE is above the interrelationship amongst the measure and all other measures; and 2) an indicator's loading is above for its particular construct than for other constructs, a measurement model has appropriate discriminant validity.

According to table (2), all square roots of AVE surpassed the off-diagonal components in the corresponding row and column. Table (2) highlighted components reflect the square roots of the AVE, whereas the non- highlighted values indicate the inter-correlation value amongst constructs. Table (2) shows that all off-diagonal components are less than the square roots of AVE, demonstrating that Fornell and Larker's condition is achieved (Hair et al., 2014). The second component of discriminant validity was accomplished by the study variables' cross loadings, as shown in table (1). The outer loading values for each variable (bold and underlined) were obviously greater than the cross-loading values, isolating every underlying variable as the theoretical framework theories. This leads to in discriminant validity.

In general, the measurement model's reliability and validity examinations have been positive, suggesting that the items used to measure constructs in this study are valid and fit to be used to estimate parameters in the structural model.

Table (2) Criterion Inter-construct correlations, the square root of AVE (Fornell-Larcker)

	AVE	Rules and regulation	Recession	Un ethical behavior
Rules and regulation	0.717	**0.846**		
Recession	0.644	0.014	**0.802**	
Unethical behavior	0.542	0.140	0.481	**0.736**

Assessment of Structural model

Structural equation analysis was used to test the hypotheses, and the model's explanatory power and predictive ability were examined. R^2 was also used to examine the model's explanatory capacity. Quinino et al., (2013) state that R^2 value of at least 0.10 is required.

As a result, the R^2 value of the study's variables is satisfactory (0.283), meaning that the independent variables explain the amount of variance in a dependent variable.

Furthermore, the Stone-Geisser Q^2 test, where the variables' values are greater than zero (Q^2 =0.132), was used to assess the model's predictive ability. According to Henseler et al. (2010), this provides appropriate predictive validity of the model, as shown in table (3). As a result, it was evident that the structural model possesses sufficient predictive validity.

Table (3) Coefficient of determination (R^2) and (Q^2) of the model

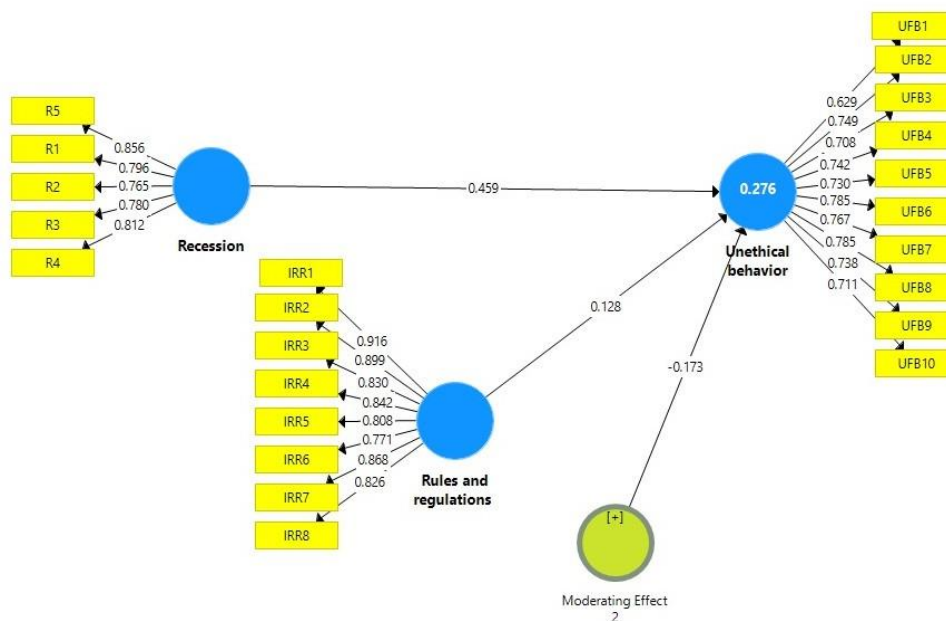| Endogenous latent construct	(R^2)	(Q^2)
Customer unethical behavior	0.283	0.132

Figure (1) the structural model

Results and analysis

The path coefficient and the t-value of the proposed correlation were examined using the bootstrapping technique. Path coefficients amongst hidden variables are accessed in order to test the structural model and the proposed hypotheses. As shown in table (٤) and figure (١), the impact of recession on customer unethical   behavior is significant (β= 0.458, P=0.000), therefore the hypothesis (1) is accepted. Regarding the moderation impact of rules and regulation on the relationship between the recession and customer unethical behavior, it was significant (β=-0.174, P=0.974), therefore hypotheses (2) is accepted.

Table (4) Path Coefficient of Research Hypotheses

Hypotheses		Beta β	T Value	P Values	Result
H1	Recession * Unethical behavior	0.458	8.862	0.000 **	Accepted
H2	Recession* Rules and Regulation *Unethical behavior	-0.174	2.100	0.036 *	Accepted

Discussion and implications

The findings demonstrate that the recession and decline in travel have put the hotels industry in the destination of the study in a precarious position. This copes with the point of view of Wilkinson et al., (2020) who mentioned that the uncertainty of recession times makes it difficult for people to plan and affects various aspects of their professional, financial and personal lives. The main reason for occupancy reduction in hotels is the recession; among of the primary concerns that emerge from decreased occupancy is the reduced earnings, higher financial responsibility, and personnel reductions. Consequently, the dramatic decrease in hotel prices strains the daily operations, although most hotels are in a distressed state, degrees of distress vary widely depending on property specific characteristics such as condition of the hotel, franchise, and capital structure (Biju, 2014).

According to Jayaraman et al., (2011) the recession also causes significant reduction in generosity and the customers' purchasing behavior declines, the layoff increases, liquidity becomes less, business competition is more intense to gain competitive advantages and investment portfolio shrink in value. Taking loans result into debt risk during recession which might lead to server change in customer behavior.

The results also indicate that the hotels experienced a noticeable change in customer behavior. These results are aligned with Huang et al., (2014) who posit that unlawful claimer frequently make complaints although they are delighted with the service. For instance, a consumer comes back to a service firm to claim the quality of the offered services he/she previously consumed and requests compensation. The results matched with Biju (2014) who posits that the economic crisis leads to changes in tourist behavior and preferences. Such changes include short distance travel, short vacations, and even short precautionary expenditures during a trip and Bossuyt et al., (2017) also referred that the idea that normal (i.e., non-criminal) consumers engage in unfair behavior because they are temporarily in a mindset that facilitates such behavior is consistent. Many otherwise normal customers commit unfair behavior occasionally.

Customers, according to Huang et al., (2014), are more inclined to claim or misconduct towards hotels which utilize comprehensive compensation policy or service-guarantee procedures. Organizations with a strong compensation system or guarantee are going to get a greater number of claims involving service malfunctions than those with strict rules and regulations. Furthermore, some consumers are driven to exploit a hotel's recovery attempts to unfairly maximize advantages from service failure circumstances.

Ro and Wong (2012) also recognize that not all complaints originated from dissatisfaction, some complaints occur without experiencing service failure or dissatisfaction and such complaints are essentially illegitimate and fraudulent in nature. Customers observe and recognize the benefits that their fellow receive from making unjustified complaints, therefore causing them to indulge in fraudulent complaining behaviors to gain the same benefits.

As a result, hotels need to come up with a strategy to deal with unethical customer behavior since they cannot afford to ignore it. A hotel company's overall service quality can be weakened, and employee job satisfaction can be severely impacted by unethical customer behavior. To be ready for unethical customers, hotels should work to lower the frequency of unethical customer episodes and handle individual incidents with effectiveness. Planning is necessary for this. Given the nature of the business, hotels managers must identify the circumstances that are most likely to result in unethical customer behavior (Berry and Seiders, 2008).

Amongst strategies hotels can apply to control unethical customer behavior, hotels rules and regulation, these rules are management policy or agreement between the customer and the hotel. Usually, these policies are stated on the customer registration card which is signed by the customer at the time of check-in or on the hotels' website so all visiting customers are aware of all house rules. Additionally, a copy of rules and regulation might be kept in all customer rooms for customer to read and understand the management policies, this can also include the local government policies which have to be followed by the guest.

According to table (4) and figure (1) the results show that rules and regulation had a moderation effect on alleviating the unethical behavior caused by the recession. These rules might include and not limited to 1) Room and meals tariff which must be confirmed with the reception upon arrival; 2) Customer data as Customers provide their consent to process their personal information, for the purposes of checking in; 3) Settlement of bills as full accommodation cost must be settled upon arrival; 4) Room use as any damage caused to the furniture and electrical equipment owned by the hotel, will be the responsibility of the customer; 5) It is prohibited to bring and store hazardous goods, It is also prohibited to carry any type of weapon or illegal substance that endanger the customers and / or employees of the hotel and 6) Any theft or harm to a firm assets must be compensated by the customer.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results showed the power of rules and regulation in controlling the customer behaviors (unethical behavior), these rules and regulation can be adapted during the customer stays at hotels.

In the light of the results reached, the study recommends hotels to comply with the proposed rules and regulation as an inhibitor to solve the problem of the study (customer unethical behavior).

Hotels can tailor some of the rules and regulation according to the applied internal standard operation procedures such as room tariff, check in and check out procedures, bill settlement, holding hazardous goods and carrying of weapons and complying with the governmental rules and application of laws.

Limitations and Future Research

Like all research, this study has limitations, the research design and destination limit the study's findings. Consequently, different forms of rules and regulation might be adapted in different regions.

As impact of various customer cultural settings differ from tourist destination to another and from stability time to recession time. It is recommended to examine the same research concept in different circumstances in terms of destination, time and customer. Due to the lack of literature review relating to hotels' rules and regulation, this research might have a conceptual contribution to future research.

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تأثير الركود على سلوك العملاء غير الأخلاقي في فنادق شرم الشيخ: دور القواعد واللوائح

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ملخص باللغة العربية

شهدت فنادق شرم الشيخ خلال العقد الماضي زيادة في السلوكيات غير الأخلاقية للعملاء، مما أثر سلباً على الوضع المالي لتلك الفنادق. وقد سلط هذا الاتجاه في سلوك العملاء الضوء على الحاجة إلى فهم أكبر لتأثير الركود فى التصرفات غير الأخلاقية للعملاء، حيث تحاول الفنادق بذل جهد لمنع مثل هذه الأنشطة غير المرغوب فيها. ولذلك يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة دور القواعد واللوائح في تعديل العلاقة بين الركود السياحى والسلوك غير الأخلاقي.

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى طرح بعض الأطروحات للحد من سلوكيات العملاء غير المرغوبة ومن ثم الحفاظ على حقوق الفنادق. لذا فقد تم اختبار القواعد واللوائح كمتغير معدل للسلوكيات غير المرغوبة أثناء فترات الركود. تم تجميع البيانات من خلال إستمارات الإستبيان التي تم توزيعها في شرم الشيخ، جنوب سيناء، مصر حيث تم توزيع إستمارة الإستبيان على المدراء والعاملين بالفنادق فضلاً عن عقد مقابلات شخصية مع المدراء لاستطلاع آرائهم فمدى إتباع القواعد واللوائح بالفنادق للحد من هذه السلوكيات.

كشف تحليل البيانات أن الفنادق في وجهة الدراسة قد شهدت ركوداً حاداً خلال العقد الماضي مقترناً بسلوك غير أخلاقي مثل تلقي الشكاوى غير المشروعة، وتلفيق المشكلات، وإعادة المدفوعات بشكل غير قانوني. وأظهرت النتائج قوة القواعد واللوئح في السيطرة على سلوكيات العملاء (السلوك غير الأخلاقي)، ويمكن تعميم هذه القواعد واللوائح مثل إجراءات تسجيل الوصول والمغادرة وتسوية الفواتير وإسطحاب المتعلقات الخطرة وحمل الأسلحة والامتثال للقواعد والقوانين الحكومية وذلك بما يتوافق مع إجراءات التشغيل القياسية لكل فندق على حده حيث يمكن أن تختلف تلك الإجراءات من فندق إلى اخر ومن وجهة سياحية إلى أخرى. وفي ضوء النتائج التي تم التوصل إليها توصي الدراسة الفنادق بالالتزام بالقواعد واللوائح المقترحة كمثبطات لحل مشكلة الدراسة (سلوك العملاء غير الأخلاقي). ونظرًا لنقص الدراسات المرجعية المتعلقة بقواعد ولوائح الفنادق، فقد يكون لهذا البحث مساهمات مفاهيمية للبحث والدراسات المستقبلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الركود السياحى، السلوك غير المرغوب، القواعد واللوائح، الشكاوى غير المشروعة.