

Wasn't it all inclusive? A qualitative study of hotel customers' stealing behaviors in all inclusive

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Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of this research is to reveal the underlying reasons for stealing behavior among customers staying at all-inclusive hotels and to identify prevention strategies from the perspectives of both staff members and department managers.*

Design/methodology/approach – *This paper adopted qualitative research methods. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with 20 managers and staff members at various levels in all-inclusive hotels in Mugla, Turkey. The collected data were analyzed using content analysis.*

Findings – *The analysis revealed four main motivations underlying customers' stealing behavior: psychological and emotional factors, perceptual and cognitive factors, economic and utilitarian factors and sociocultural and reactive factors. In addition, four main themes were identified for preventing stealing behavior.*

Originality/value – *This study examines the reasons for customer theft behavior from the perspectives of staff and managers within the all-inclusive hotel system, an area with limited literature. It contributes by categorizing theft into four themes and identifying prevention strategies developed in response.*

Keywords *Customer theft behavior, Unethical consumer behavior, All-inclusive hotels, Hospitality management, Content analysis*

Paper type *Research paper*

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1. Introduction

Unethical consumer behavior in the tourism industry, particularly within the hospitality sector, has become an increasingly critical issue that directly impacts the operational sustainability and financial security of tourism businesses (Harris and Reynolds, 2004; Spector *et al.*, 2006). One of the most understudied yet impactful forms of such behavior is theft committed by hotel guests, which not only causes material losses but also damages brand reputation and operational trust (Backman, 2005; Sufi *et al.*, 2023). While past research has often portrayed tourists as victims of crime during travel (Holcomb and Pizam, 2006), recent studies have begun to highlight tourists themselves as potential perpetrators of unethical actions, including theft of hotel property (Leasca, 2017). This paradoxical role of tourists as both consumers and violators calls for deeper academic scrutiny, especially within the context of all-inclusive hotel systems where customer entitlement is often misinterpreted as unrestricted access (Reynolds and Harris, 2009).

Accommodation businesses encounter theft incidents much more frequently than tourists (Holcomb and Pizam, 2006). The American Hotel & Lodging Association estimates that thefts in hotels could cost hotels \$100m annually (Leasca, 2017). A study on hotels operating in Europe categorized which items guests from certain countries were most likely to steal (E-hotelier, 2019). Numerous instances of theft in the hospitality industry cannot be

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overlooked. In Las Vegas, carpets were torn up and stolen from a hotel; in Berlin, faucets, toilet seats and even sinks were taken; in Dubrovnik, kitchen utensils disappeared; and in Madrid, entire beds were stolen. In France, a guest was apprehended attempting to steal a frozen animal head from a hotel. Similarly, in Antalya, a family was caught attempting to smuggle a suitcase filled with apples, oranges, numerous shampoos, towels, toilet paper, tea, mineral water and fruit juice. In addition, cutlery and glassware were discovered in a guest's bag in the same city (Hurriyet Daily News, 2017; New York Post, 2020). Although these examples could be further expanded, it can be stated that the issue of theft by guests in hotels has not been comprehensively studied in the existing literature (Pratt, 2022).

Research on tourists' inappropriate behaviors across various businesses, particularly in accommodation establishments, has garnered significant scholarly attention. More specifically, previous studies have explored behaviors such as physical violence, verbal abuse, sexual assault and vandalism (Fisk and Neville, 2011). Furthermore, research on theft within the tourism sector has predominantly focused on employee theft (Goh and Kong, 2018; Nguyen and Truong, 2021). However, studies addressing tourists' stealing behaviors from the perspectives of staff members and department managers have largely been overlooked (Sufi *et al.*, 2023). To address this gap, the present study aims to investigate guest theft in Turkish hotels by utilizing qualitative data collected from staff members and department managers, all of whom work at all-inclusive hotels in the province of Muğla, Turkey.

Drawing on Rational Choice Theory (Bouffard and Wolf, 2007) and Moral Disengagement Theory (Bandura, 2016), this study offers a theoretical framework to understand the decision-making processes and cognitive rationalizations behind such behaviors. In addition, it aims to identify effective strategies for preventing theft in all-inclusive hotels. By directly focusing on the experiences of hotel employees and department managers, this study differentiates itself from previous research. In doing so, it seeks to provide valuable contributions to both the academic literature and practical applications.

2. Literature review

In this section, a literature review was conducted to better understand the purpose of the study and identify gaps in the existing literature. The concepts of misbehavior and theft behaviors in tourism are also explained. In addition, the theories adopted in this study to explain these behaviors have been justified.

2.1 Misbehavior in tourism

The tourism sector has become a rapidly growing and developing industry with increasing travel motivations (Pearce and Lee, 2005; Yousaf *et al.*, 2018). The rise in travel trends enables individuals to reach different parts of the world and participate in various tourism activities (Bowen and Whalen, 2017). However, due to cultural differences and differences in social norms, unethical behavior may also occur in tourism businesses (Guven and Cay, 2020).

Although most tourists behave appropriately, a group of tourists sometimes exhibits misbehavior; these behaviors are defined as actions that violate social norms or harm service providers, other tourists or the property of the business (Harris and Reynolds, 2004). Misbehavior in tourism can manifest in various forms, such as verbal or physical assault, excessive alcohol consumption, environmental damage and especially theft in hotels (Reynolds and Harris, 2009).

From the perspective of accommodation businesses, thefts committed by guests primarily involve towels and bathrobes, followed by room keys, hair dryers and decorative items (Pratt, 2022). This situation creates significant costs for hotel businesses, damages brand

reputation and raises ethical issues for management. Some guests even justify this behavior as “included in the room rate” or “a souvenir” (Chun, 2020). In addition, small businesses are victimized more regularly and suffer significant damage compared to large businesses (Othman and Ameer, 2022).

As a result, it is evident that customer theft in accommodation businesses constitutes a significant subtopic within the literature on bad behavior in tourism (Hua *et al.*, 2020). Accommodation businesses must strengthen their control mechanisms, provide training to all employees about customers and develop a comprehensive strategy that includes ethical communication with guests and raising awareness about the moral consequences of property theft to resolve or completely eliminate this problem.

2.2 Theft by tourists

Theft incidents in hotels pose a serious problem for the accommodation sector. These incidents cause financial losses (Fullerton and Punj, 2004), disruptions in inventory management and difficulties in obtaining replacement parts (Sufi *et al.*, 2023). Spector *et al.* (2006) define theft as a type of attack carried out with the intent to deliberately harm an organization. Pratt (2022) defines theft in hotel businesses as a type of shoplifting. Theft occurring in these businesses is an unethical act that damages the property and financial resources of the businesses. Although such behaviors are usually hidden, they are common (Fullerton and Punj, 2004).

Theft can be committed by first-time hotel guests, random visitors and even wealthy individuals (Mawby and Vakhitova, 2022; Sufi *et al.*, 2023). It has been determined that hotel guests who engage in this behavior have personality disorders, mental illnesses, the desire to take souvenirs from the hotel, habit, seeing the products as part of the service they purchased and needing the stolen products at that moment, while employees commit theft due to envy, low wages, financial difficulties, need and psychological reasons (Yilmaz *et al.*, 2021). Guests who steal may even boast to their families and friends about stealing these items after committing the act (Harris and Reynolds, 2004). In addition, these tourists may take items from the hotel that are not permitted to show off to people at home, satisfy their egos and strengthen their self-image (Sufi *et al.*, 2023).

Anderson (2016) states that towels, bathrobes, tables, chairs and minibar items are popular items stolen by customers, while Gill *et al.* (2002) mention shampoo, coffee/tea, sugar packets, stationery, slippers, bathroom items, ashtrays, cutlery sets and crockery. Jones and Groenenboom (2002) state that, in addition to these items, hotel guests also steal chandeliers, tables, chairs, mirrors and even parts of a wall clock. However, because many items stolen by guests are small in size, it can be difficult for businesses to notice (Guven and Cay, 2020).

Proving guest theft is more difficult, and in some cases, penalties cannot always be imposed because the theft is only discovered after the guest has left the hotel (Ho *et al.*, 2017). Some hotels that do impose penalties contact the guest again to demand payment for the stolen items (Yilmaz *et al.*, 2021). Technology companies have begun to develop security systems based on radio frequency identification technology and detector-supported alarm mechanisms to prevent hotel theft (Joshi, 2022). It is important for hotels to invest in such systems in line with technological developments to increase their security and prevent theft (Sufi *et al.*, 2023). Some businesses implement practices such as using unbranded products, charging deposits for certain items (towels and bathrobes), securing items, closely monitoring guests and using item usage cards to prevent customer theft (Yilmaz *et al.*, 2021).

As highlighted in the literature above, some studies have examined theft behaviors in hotels. However, the literature reveals that research systematically addressing guest-related theft behaviors, particularly in hotels operating under an all-inclusive system, remains

limited. Most existing studies focus on general tourist behaviors or employee theft, failing to comprehensively explore the multidimensional motivations underlying customer theft and the corresponding prevention strategies. This research aims to fill this gap by providing an empirical, data-driven analysis of guest theft in all-inclusive hotels in Turkey, thematically identifying both the behavioral causes and managerial responses.

Specifically, the objective of this study is to offer original, application-oriented contributions to the literature on unethical customer behavior in the hospitality sector. Furthermore, existing studies on customer theft predominantly emphasize the financial implications (Sufi *et al.*, 2023) or are limited to case studies of isolated incidents (Pratt, 2022). Psychological and cultural factors related to guest theft have been addressed only in a limited number of examples in the current literature, suggesting that a theoretically deep framework has yet to be established in the field. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge this gap. It contributes to the literature by thematically analyzing the underlying causes of guest theft and prevention strategies based on qualitative data drawn from the experiences of staff working in all-inclusive hotels in Turkey.

2.3 Theoretical framework

This study draws on Rational Choice Theory and Moral Disengagement Theory to explain hotel customers' stealing behaviors in all-inclusive settings. Rational Choice Theory posits that individuals make decisions by weighing potential benefits against perceived risks (Bouffard and Wolf, 2007); for instance, a guest may choose to steal an item if they perceive the risk of being caught as low and the potential gain as high. Moral Disengagement Theory explains how individuals cognitively justify unethical behavior (Bandura, 2016), such as perceiving hotel items as "free" or included in the package, thereby rationalizing theft despite moral standards. Together, these theories provide a framework for understanding both the rational calculations and cognitive distortions that underlie customers' stealing behaviors.

In summary, up until this point, this paper has outlined previous studies and the theories adopted in this research. As seen, although past studies have addressed thefts in hotels, they have not sufficiently focused on the underlying causes of thefts in all-inclusive hotels and the corresponding prevention strategies, particularly by utilizing the experiences of hotel employees and department managers. However, the experiences of managers and employees, who have direct interactions with guests, are crucial for understanding the underlying reasons for such theft behaviors. This is due to the significant expertise they gain from encountering numerous incidents each year. In this regard, this study aims to further develop the existing literature, enriched by previous research, by proposing a thematic framework.

3. Methodology

This research was designed as a qualitative study. Qualitative research was adopted for this study because it allows for understanding participants' experiences and perceptions regarding a specific event or phenomenon (Miles *et al.*, 2019). In this context, this research aims to understand theft incidents occurring in hotels that have adopted an all-inclusive hotel concept through the experiences of hotel managers and employees.

A phenomenological design was used to achieve the research objective. Phenomenology is a qualitative research design that helps to understand the perceptions of individuals participating in the research regarding their experiences on a specific topic (Creswell *et al.*, 2007). This study is based on the experiences of hotel and department managers and employees working in an all-inclusive hotel system regarding customer-related theft incidents.

3.1 Research participants

The participants in the study were a total of 20 individuals, including both managers (e.g. front desk managers) and employees, all of whom worked at all-inclusive hotels in the

province of Muğla. The selection of Muğla as the research setting is due to its high density of all-inclusive resort hotels and its significance as a leading tourism destination in Turkey. The all-inclusive hotel concept was chosen as it presents unique guest entitlement dynamics that are particularly relevant for studying theft behaviors.

A total of 12 different hotels were included in the sample. Hotels were selected using maximum variation sampling within the purposive sampling method, ensuring diversity in terms of hotel size, brand status (chain vs independent) and location (urban vs coastal zones) (Mason *et al.*, 2010). Participants were selected based on their direct operational experience with guests and their involvement in handling guest-related incidents, including theft.

Some studies suggest that 10 interviews may be sufficient for qualitative research (Sandelowski, 1995), while others indicate that 20–30 interviews are typically needed to achieve data saturation (Creswell, 1998; Boddy, 2016). Saturation was reached when no new themes emerged from the additional interviews.

Prior to participation, all individuals were informed about the study's purpose and scope. Participation was voluntary, and all data were anonymized. No identifying personal or institutional information was recorded. The interviews were conducted between July 1 and August 15, 2025.

3.2 Data collection tools

Research data was collected using a semistructured interview form created by researchers. The form was developed based on a literature review of theft behaviors (Chomitz and Ali, 2022; Fong *et al.*, 2017; Harris and Reynolds, 2004; Nguyen and Truong, 2021; Reynolds and Harris, 2009; Sufi *et al.*, 2023) and expert opinions. The nine questions in the form were designed to be open-ended, allowing participants to convey their own experiences and observations. A pilot study was conducted by collecting data from two individuals to test the form's applicability. As a result of the pilot study, the interview questions were deemed appropriate. Sample interview questions are as follows:

- Q1. How often do you come across theft incidents committed by guests at your hotel?
- Q2. What types of belongings do you usually observe being stolen?
- Q3. What do you think are the underlying reasons for guests' theft behavior?
- Q4. What precautions are taken at your hotel to prevent such behavior?

3.3 Data analysis

The data were analyzed using content analysis, a method frequently used in the tourism body of knowledge (e.g. Atsiz *et al.*, 2023; Ciki *et al.*, 2025; Ogretmenoglu *et al.*, 2025; Tanriverdi *et al.*, 2025). Derek Layder's Adaptive Theory approach was adopted in the data analysis process. Within this framework, the analysis was conducted both by starting with a deductive approach and by inductively developing new themes and concepts based on data obtained from the field (Layder, 1998). The open coding method was preferred in the coding process. Using MAXQDA software, the data was read line by line, and meaningful units in the data were coded independently of the researcher's biases.

In content analysis, the data were first read and coded. The codes created were categorized based on content similarities, recurring meaning patterns and conceptual densities. The codes obtained were then divided into categories. Subsequently, the categories were divided into main themes, and the main themes obtained were interpreted. Intercooder reliability was ensured through a consensus-based approach, as suggested by Miles *et al.* (2019). The coding was performed independently by two researchers, and in cases of disagreement, consensus was reached with the contribution of a third expert

researcher. The main themes were then determined by consensus. In this context, reliability is ensured through systematic application in the coding process and intercoder agreement. In addition, direct quotes from participants were added under the main themes. In this way, the reliability of the research was ensured. Participant quotations are presented to support the credibility of the content analysis (Forman and Damschroder, 2007).

4. Results

4.1 Demographic characteristics and descriptive results

Table 1 contains both demographic findings about the participants and descriptive statistics related to theft incidents in hotels. Seventy percent of the participants were male and 30% were female, with the most common age group being 26–35 years old (35%). The education level was high, with 65% being university graduates. In terms of experience, 30% had 5 years or less experience, while 25% had 21 years or more experience. In terms of department distribution, receptionists accounted for the highest percentage at 40%, while operations managers were second at 35%. The most commonly stolen items are towels (70%), bedding (55%) and kitchenware (40%). Theft incidents occur monthly, mostly 2–3 times (45%) and pose a significant security problem.

4.2 Motivations behind guests' theft behavior in hotels

As a result of content analysis, the motivations underlying guests' theft behaviors in hotels, from the perspective of both employees and managers, have been categorized into four main themes (see Figure 1). The emerging themes were visualized using Coggle.

4.2.1 Psychological and emotional factors. This theme encompasses behaviors stemming from guests' internal psychological and emotional states. Subcategories include the desire to remember the hotel experience through tangible objects, uncontrollable or habitual behaviors such as kleptomania and the motivation to take items due to their aesthetic or functional appeal. The total frequency for this theme is 20. A participant's comment related to this theme is as follows: *"They can take an item as a memento to remember the hotel experience"* (P10).

4.2.2 Perceptual and cognitive factors This theme reflects guests' misconceptions or cognitive distortions regarding property and hotel services. Among the subcategories are misconceptions such as viewing hotel items as their own property and considering items to be free or part of a promotion. This theme has a total frequency of 15. One participant's view on this theme is as follows: *"Some guests may have the mindset that 'I paid a high price for this hotel service, so I have the right to take these items'. This perception is more common with portable items such as soap, shampoo, and slippers"* (P13).

4.2.3 Economic and utilitarian factors. This theme relates to guests' intentional behavior aimed at obtaining material gain or benefit. Subthemes include contributing to the household economy using stolen items at home, financial difficulties that limit access to basic needs, resorting to theft to avoid spending and the urge to possess more than necessary. The cumulative frequency of this theme is 11. One participant's view on this theme is as follows: *"They can steal to make up for shortages in the home, such as forks and knives"* (P7).

4.2.4 Sociocultural and reactive factors. This theme encompasses behaviors shaped by cultural norms or protest actions stemming from dissatisfaction. Subthemes include the acceptance of taking certain items as normative behavior in some societies and guests committing retaliatory theft in response to poor service. The cumulative frequency of this theme is 7. Some participant comments on this theme are as follows: *"A guest who thinks the hotel's service is inadequate may want to compensate for this materially and emotionally in their own way"* (P9). *"Some people punish the hotel in a way, thinking they have paid too much or that the service is not good"* (P19).

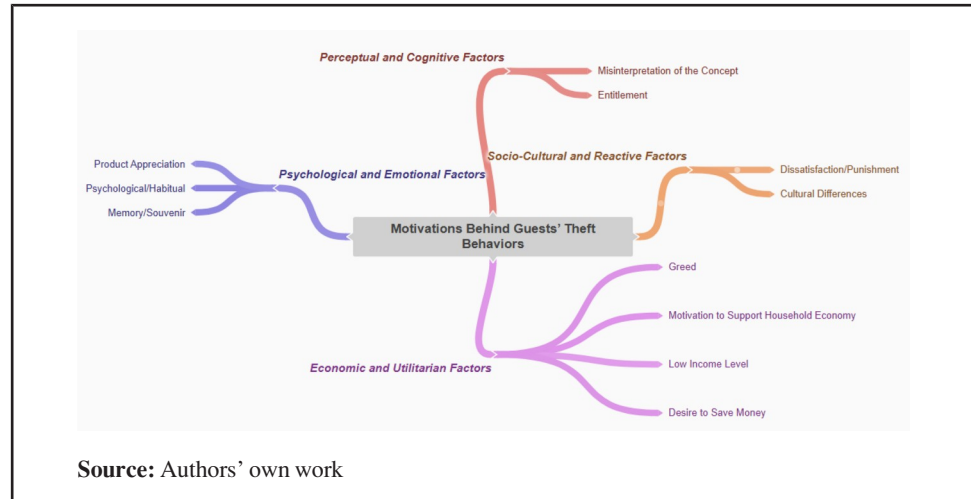
Table 1 Demographic characteristics and descriptive results

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	14	70
Female	6	30
<i>Age</i>		
20–25 years	5	25
26–35 years	7	35
36–45 years	5	25
46–55 years	2	10
Not specified	1	5
<i>Education</i>		
High school	6	30
College or bachelor's degree	13	65
Master's degree and PhD	1	5
<i>Marital status</i>		
Single	9	45
Married	9	45
Not specified	2	10
<i>Monthly income (Turkish Lira)</i>		
27,000 TL and below	8	40
27,001 TL to 47,000 TL	6	30
47,001 TL and above	6	30
<i>Frequency of theft (monthly)</i>		
1	4	20
2–3	9	45
4 and above	6	30
Not specified	1	5
<i>Professional experience</i>		
5 years and below	6	30
6–10 years	4	20
11–20 years	3	15
21 years and above	5	25
Not specified	2	10
<i>Department</i>		
Receptionist	8	40
Front office manager/supervisor	3	15
Operations manager	7	35
Not specified	2	10
<i>Most frequently stolen items</i>		
Towel	14	70
Blanket, quilt and pillow	11	55
Glass–cup	8	40
Fork–knife–salt shaker	8	40
Remote control (TV–air conditioner)	6	30
Food–beverage	5	25
Soap dish	3	15
Minibar supplies	3	15
Decorative items	3	15
Other guests' belongings	2	10
Kettle	2	10
Fire extinguisher	1	5
Frying pan	1	5
Table	1	5
Clock	1	5
Iron	1	5
Telephone	1	5
TV	1	5
Hair dryer	1	5
Cushion	1	5

Note(s): At the time the data was collected, the minimum wage in Turkey was 22,104 TL (US\$510); 27,000 TL was equivalent to US\$623, while 47,000 TL was equivalent to US\$1,086

Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 1 Themes related to motivations behind guests' theft behavior in hotels



In this study, the themes identified can be explained by several theories. The Psychological and Emotional Factors theme is linked to Moral Disengagement Theory (Bandura, 2016), as guests rationalize theft behaviors morally to meet their emotional needs. The Perceptual and Cognitive Factors theme aligns with Rational Choice Theory (Bouffard and Wolf, 2007), as guests view hotel items as their own property and engage in theft based on a perception of low risk and high benefit. The Economic and Utilitarian Factors theme overlaps with both theories; guests rationalize stealing for material gain by aligning their actions with economic needs and practical benefits, potentially justifying the behavior morally. Finally, the Sociocultural and Reactive Factors theme connects with Moral Disengagement Theory (Bandura, 2016), as guests rationalize theft as a form of protest or retaliation for unsatisfactory service.

4.3 Theft prevention strategies

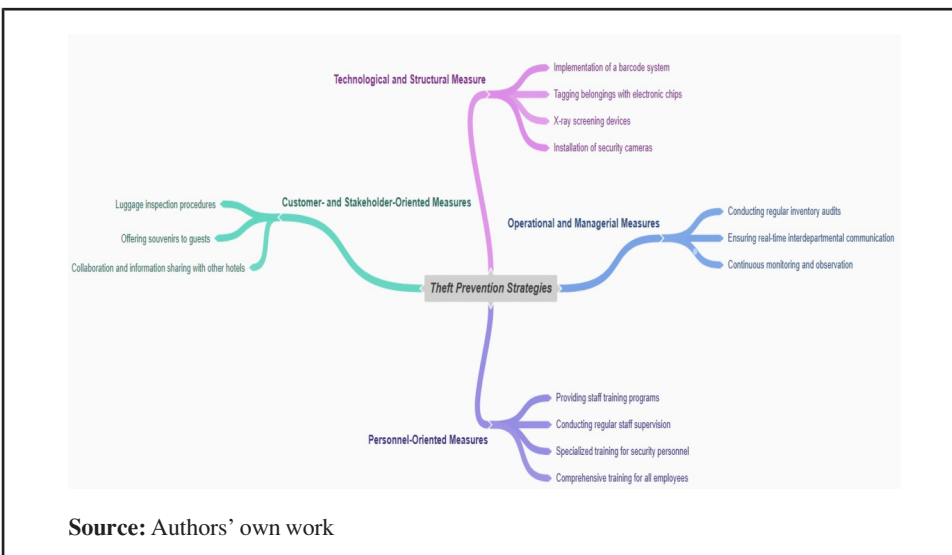
The content analysis revealed that the measures expressed by both employees and managers regarding theft behavior in hotels are categorized into four main themes (see Figure 2).

4.3.1 Technological and structural measures. This theme highlights the importance of technological and structural investments in preventing theft. Examples of such measures include the installation of security cameras, the use of X-ray screening devices, the tagging of items with electronic chips and the implementation of barcode systems. Such applications contribute to the prevention of losses by providing systematic control mechanisms. A participant's opinion on this theme is as follows: *"Security cameras located in the hotel's common areas and corridors are of great importance in terms of transparency and deterrence. Thanks to these cameras, real-time monitoring can be carried out, and possible incidents can be recorded and used as evidence when necessary"* (P14).

4.3.2 Personnel-oriented measures. The second theme highlights the importance of the human element in security management. Comprehensive staff training programs, specialized training for security personnel and continuous professional development opportunities for all staff are evaluated within this scope. These practices ensure that personnel remain attentive, competent and act in accordance with corporate security protocols at all times. A participant's view on this theme is as follows: *"Personnel in departments such as housekeeping, front office, and F&B receive training on personnel inventory tracking"* (P19).

4.3.3 Operational and managerial measures. The third theme reflects corporate strategies aimed at strengthening internal processes. Regular inventory counts, instant

Figure 2 Themes related to theft prevention strategies



communication between departments and continuous monitoring practices fall under this scope. Such measures help organizations establish a systematic control mechanism and minimize operational risks. A participant's view on this theme is as follows: *"When entering rooms for daily cleaning, the rooms are checked by floor attendants. In case of any shortage, the reception is informed"* (P6).

4.3.4 Customer and stakeholder-oriented measures. The final theme highlights the importance of interaction with external stakeholders in security management. This includes baggage checks, giving souvenirs to guests and collaborating with other hotels by sharing information. Such measures underscore the necessity of collaborative approaches to make security practices more comprehensive and sustainable. One participant's view on this theme is as follows: *"Once the identity of the guest who committed theft is determined and added to the list, the information can be shared with other hotels, allowing preventive measures to be taken against potential theft attempts by that guest at those hotels"* (P18).

5. Discussion and conclusions

Although previous studies in the literature have examined theft in hotels, they have predominantly focused on employees' stealing behaviors (Goh and Kong, 2018; Nguyen and Truong, 2021). Research specifically addressing customers' stealing behaviors has been largely overlooked (Sufi et al., 2023). Furthermore, studies utilizing the experiences of hotel employees and managers to explore the underlying causes of guests' stealing behaviors and to develop strategies for their prevention have received limited attention in the literature. In this context, the present study provides an in-depth qualitative investigation of guest theft, a phenomenon commonly observed in the hotel industry, drawing on Rational Choice Theory (Bouffard and Wolf, 2007) and Moral Disengagement Theory (Bandura, 2016). Based on the experiences of hotel managers and employees, significant insights have been obtained. The findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

First, perceptual and cognitive factors represent a key dimension of guest theft and arise primarily from misconceptions and cognitive distortions regarding property ownership and hotel services. The findings indicate that some guests perceive hotel items as personal property or regard them as complimentary or promotional goods. In particular, the belief that paying a high price for hotel services entitles guests to take certain items is especially

prevalent for portable products such as soap, shampoo and slippers. These results suggest that a substantial proportion of guest theft does not stem from deliberate criminal intent but rather from misinterpretations of service boundaries, highlighting the importance of clearly communicating what is and is not included in hotel services. This theme aligns with Rational Choice Theory (Bouffard and Wolf, 2007), where guests rationalize their theft behavior by perceiving low risk and high benefit.

Second, psychological and emotional factors further indicate that guest theft may occur for personal reasons such as emotional gratification, souvenir-seeking or habitual behavior. Some guests take items as tangible reminders of their stay, while others develop repetitive patterns of such conduct. In these cases, motivation is driven more by emotional attachment or psychological needs than by economic gain, underscoring the role of individual guest characteristics in shaping unethical behavior. This theme is connected to Moral Disengagement Theory (Bandura, 2016), as guests rationalize their theft as a means of fulfilling emotional or psychological needs without feeling morally conflicted.

Third, economic and utilitarian factors also play a significant role in guest theft. The findings reveal that low income levels, the desire to contribute to household savings or cost-avoidance motivations can encourage guests to steal hotel items. In this context, the functional value of the products becomes salient, as guests intend to use the stolen items in their everyday lives. This indicates that guest theft is not merely impulsive but may also be grounded in rational and utilitarian considerations. This theme overlaps with both Rational Choice Theory (Bouffard and Wolf, 2007) and Moral Disengagement Theory (Bandura, 2016), where guests may justify theft by focusing on material needs or practical benefits, rationalizing their actions as acceptable.

Finally, sociocultural and reactive factors emerge as another important theme. The results show that in certain cultural contexts, taking specific hotel items is perceived as socially acceptable and even legitimized by prevailing norms. Moreover, guests who experience dissatisfaction with service quality may engage in theft as a form of retaliation. This finding underscores that customer satisfaction influences not only loyalty and revisit intentions but also the likelihood of unethical behaviors. This theme relates to Moral Disengagement Theory (Bandura, 2016), as guests rationalize their theft as a form of protest or punishment when service expectations are not met.

Overall, the study also highlights several strategies that can be implemented to prevent guest theft. The findings suggest that preventive efforts should not be limited to surveillance systems or financial sanctions but should be complemented by open communication, cultural sensitivity and initiatives aimed at raising customer awareness. Clearly informing guests about service boundaries and enhancing their ethical awareness emerge as critical components of an effective and sustainable prevention strategy.

5.1 Contributions

This study makes significant theoretical and practical contributions to the field of hospitality management. Theoretically, it advances the understanding of guest theft by conceptualizing it as a multidimensional consumer behavior, integrating psychological, cognitive, emotional, economic and sociocultural factors. By drawing on Rational Choice Theory (Bouffard and Wolf, 2007) and Moral Disengagement Theory (Bandura, 2016), the study provides a nuanced framework to explain how guests' rational calculations, cognitive distortions and emotional or cultural factors drive theft behaviors. This expands existing models of consumer ethics and offers a more comprehensive view of unethical behaviors in tourism. Practically, the research provides actionable strategies for hotel managers to prevent guest theft and improve operational security, such as offering low-cost souvenirs to satisfy emotional desires, ensuring clear communication of property boundaries and addressing economic and sociocultural motivations. These insights help create a safer, more ethically aware hotel environment, ultimately reducing both financial and reputational losses.

5.2 Limitations

This research has certain limitations. First, the study is limited to all-inclusive hotels operating in the province of Mugla. This makes it difficult to directly generalize the findings to different destinations or hotel types. Studies conducted in different regions and with different concepts could provide a comparative perspective. Second, the research was conducted using qualitative methods and purposive sampling. Because participants were selected based on specific criteria, the findings do not represent all hotel employees or all tourist groups. Therefore, the results are context-specific and need to be validated with different samples. The third limitation relates to the data collection tool. Semistructured questions were used in the interviews, and participants were asked to share their own experiences. Although this method provides in-depth information, participants' subjective interpretations and personal perceptions may have influenced the data. Therefore, it is acknowledged that the themes obtained are limited to the participants' perspectives. Fourth, the study only considered the observations of hotel managers and employees. Data was not collected directly from the guests themselves. Thus, the motivations behind theft behaviors were evaluated based on participants' comments, and guests' own perspectives could not be reflected in the study.

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Ethics statement

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