



Analysis of the Role of Housekeeping in Maintaining Cleanliness Standards and Guest Comfort at KHAS Semarang Hotel

Muhammad Yul'astomo¹, Krisnawati Setyaningrum Nugraheni²

¹⁻² Hotel Management Study Program, Indonesian College of Tourism Economics (STIEPARI) Semarang, Indonesia

Author correspondence: krisnawati.setyaningrum@stiepari.ac.id

Abstract . Housekeeping plays a central role in shaping guests' cleanliness and comfort experience, yet how the standard operating procedures are formulated, executed, and perceived across managerial, operational, and guest perspectives has rarely been examined together in a single qualitative study. This research explores the role of housekeeping in maintaining cleanliness standards and guest comfort at KHAS Semarang Hotel. A qualitative case study approach was used, with semi-structured interviews conducted with three informants: an Executive Housekeeper (key informant), a Room Attendant (main informant), and a hotel guest (supporting informant). Data were analyzed thematically and validated through source triangulation and member checking. The findings reveal three interconnected themes: the formulation and execution of cleanliness SOPs prioritizing guest-touched surfaces, a layered quality control mechanism involving room inspection and cross-department coordination, and guest perceptions of cleanliness and comfort shaped by both sensory and psychological elements, including privacy assurance. Findings align with the Servqual dimensions of tangibles, reliability, and assurance, as well as servicescape elements such as ambient conditions and social interaction. A consistent gap identified from both staff and guest perspectives is service speed during high-occupancy periods. This study contributes theoretically by integrating managerial, operational, and guest perspectives within the Servqual and servicescape frameworks, and practically by offering evidence-based input for hotel management to strengthen housekeeping SOPs and workforce allocation during peak periods.

Keywords: Cleanliness Standard; Guest Comfort; Housekeeping; Servicescape; Service Quality.

1. BACKGROUND

Room cleanliness and guest comfort should ideally be absolute priorities in hotel operations, given that both are key determinants of guest satisfaction and repeat stays. Housekeeping, as the department directly responsible for room cleanliness and readiness, is required to consistently implement standard operating procedures (SOPs) in every room without exception. However, the reality on the ground shows that meeting these standards is not always smooth sailing. Time constraints during high occupancy rates, the need to maintain coordination between staff, and the need to balance work speed with guest privacy are real challenges faced by housekeeping staff on a daily basis.

The gap between SOPs formulated by management and their implementation in the field has the potential to create variations in the quality of cleaning services perceived by guests, especially during times of high workload. To fully understand this gap, data is needed from all three parties directly involved: the managerial side (Executive Housekeeper as the policy formulator and quality supervisor), the implementing side (Room Attendant as the SOP executor in the field), and the service recipient side (guests as the parties who directly experience the results of housekeeping work).

Service quality in the hospitality industry is generally assessed through the Servqual framework, which emphasizes five dimensions of service quality assessment: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988), and has been widely adapted to the hotel context since the early 1990s (Saleh & Ryan, 1991; Akbaba, 2006), although the degree of influence of each dimension on guest satisfaction has been shown to vary across cultural contexts and hotel segments (Ladhari, 2009; Dewantara et al., 2025; Ezech et al., 2021). Furthermore, the physical environment in which the service takes place—known as the servicescape—contributes to the emotional and behavioral responses of customers, not only in terms of technical functions but also ambient elements such as aroma and layout (Bitner, 1992; Lee et al., 2021). This concept has evolved from a focus solely on physical elements to social dimensions and customer engagement (Li, 2021; Li et al., 2021; Fariño Espitia et al., 2025; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011; Mari & Poggesi, 2013). Previous studies have shown that housekeeping performance contributes significantly to guest satisfaction (Bhatnagar et al., 2019; Utami et al., 2026; Widyalasmono, 2026), and that the implementation of cleaning SOPs often faces deviations, especially during high occupancy (Sharma et al., 2021; Faustine et al., 2026; Sinulingga et al., 2024). Other studies have revealed that housekeeping staff face significant physical workloads and time pressures, impacting work stress and productivity (Shapoval et al., 2022; Chela-Alvarez et al., 2020; Chela-Alvarez et al., 2022; García-Buades et al., 2024; Sánchez-González et al., 2026; Tavitiyaman et al., 2021; Iing et al., 2025), and that guest privacy is a stand-alone comfort element beyond technical cleanliness (D'Acunto et al., 2021; Moon et al., 2022). However, studies that combine managerial, executive, and guest perspectives in a single qualitative study are still rare (Dedeoğlu & Demirer, 2015), making this gap the focus of the current research.

Based on the description, this study aims to explore how cleanliness standards are formulated, implemented, and monitored by KHAS Semarang Hotel housekeeping, and how these efforts are perceived by guests. This study uses a qualitative case study approach with the Servqual (Parasuraman et al., 1988) and Servicescape (Bitner, 1992) frameworks, combining three perspectives—managerial, implementer, and service recipient—that are rarely examined together in a single study. Practically, the findings are expected to provide input for hotel management in evaluating housekeeping SOPs; theoretically, this study enriches the study of hotel service quality with a multi-stakeholder perspective.

2. THEORETICAL STUDY

This section outlines the relevant theories underlying the research topic and provides a review of several relevant previous studies, providing a reference and foundation for this research. If there is a hypothesis, it can be stated implicitly and does not have to be phrased as a question.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen because the research objective was to understand in-depth how cleanliness standards are formulated, implemented, and perceived in a real operational context at a specific location, namely the KHAS Semarang Hotel, thus allowing for the exploration of perspectives from various parties involved in a contextual and comprehensive manner.

The research was conducted at the KHAS Semarang Hotel. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, with the criteria of having direct involvement in the room cleaning process from the managerial, implementing, and service recipient sides. The key informant was the Executive Housekeeper who formulated the SOP and monitored the quality of cleanliness; the main informant was the Room Attendant as the direct implementer of the SOP in the field; and supporting informants were hotel guests as service recipients who experienced the results of housekeeping work.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the three informants. Questions were designed to explore the SOP formulation process, field implementation, quality control mechanisms, operational challenges, and guest perceptions of room cleanliness and comfort. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following a process of data familiarization, initial coding, theme grouping, theme review, and final theme naming (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). The analysis was conducted across the three informants to identify consistent and contrasting patterns between managerial, executive, and guest perspectives.

Data validity was strengthened in two ways. First, source triangulation, which involves comparing the interview results of three informants to see the consistency and differences in findings between perspectives (Morgan, 2024; Decrop, 1999). Second, member checking, which involves reconfirming the transcript results and initial interpretations with each informant to ensure accuracy and conformity with the intended meaning (Birt et al., 2016).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Formulation and Implementation of Room Cleanliness SOPs

These findings indicate that the effectiveness of housekeeping SOPs is determined not only by the completeness of the procedural documents, but also by the consistency of their application at the most frequently touched guest touchpoints.

Key informants explained that the formulation of SOPs refers to hotel operational standards and sanitation principles, with particular emphasis on surfaces frequently touched by guests:

"Every room must be thoroughly cleaned, starting from the bedroom area, the bathroom, and all surfaces frequently touched by guests, such as doorknobs, light switches, TV remotes, telephones, and tables. In addition to visual cleanliness, we also use standard disinfectant..." — Key Informant (Executive Housekeeper)

This quote shows that SOPs are not designed as generic task lists, but rather prioritized based on the guest's physical touchpoints — an approach that leads to the tangibles and reliability dimensions in Servqual (Parasuraman et al., 1988), where consistent cleanliness of physical elements forms the basis for assessing service quality.

A similar pattern was observed at the executive level. Key informants outlined the make-up room process sequentially and emphasized priority sanitation points that align with managerial directives:

"...I knocked on the door three times while saying 'Housekeeping'. After confirming that the room was empty, I opened the curtains and windows if possible, collected the trash and dirty linen, cleaned the bathroom, changed the linen..." — Main Informant (Room Attendant)

This procedure reflects the internalization of SOPs down to the level of individual work habits, indicating that the transmission of standards from the managerial level to the implementers is quite effective, at least in terms of procedural understanding.

There is a consistent alignment between what the Executive Housekeeper formulated (focusing on guest touchpoints) and what the Room Attendant actually implemented (toilets, sinks, door handles, remotes, and telephones are explicitly mentioned as priorities). This shows that the SOP is not just a formality document, but is actually applied in the field, strengthening the reliability dimension of Servqual (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

Quality Control Mechanisms and Handling Operational Challenges

These findings indicate that hygiene standards are maintained through a multi-layered system involving functional checks, quality inspections, and cross-staff coordination as workloads increase.

"Before a room is declared ready for sale (Vacant Clean), the Room Attendant is required to inspect all facilities such as the AC, television, lights, shower, water heater, hair dryer, telephone, and amenities. If any damage is found, a report must be made immediately to Engineering before the room is sold." — Key Informant (Executive Housekeeper)

Quality control here does not stop at visual cleanliness, but includes functional verification of the facility, showing that the reliability dimension in Servqual (Parasuraman et al., 1988) is applied more broadly than just a clean appearance, also including function as promised.

"The supervisor will conduct a room inspection after the room attendant has finished cleaning the room. The inspection includes cleanliness, bed tidiness, completeness of amenities, function of facilities, and room aroma. If there are any deficiencies, the room will be returned to the room attendant for repair." — Key Informant (Executive Housekeeper)

This mechanism for returning rooms for repair indicates the existence of a quality gate: rooms are not automatically considered finished just because they have been cleaned, but must pass independent verification by another party before they are truly ready for sale.

For operational challenges during high workloads, both levels (managerial and executive) showed a coordinated response:

"When occupancy rates are high, the challenge is limited time. The solution is to distribute the workload evenly, coordinate well with staff, and ensure supervisory oversight to maintain quality." — Key Informant (Executive Housekeeper)

"A common problem is that many rooms check out at the same time during the day, which limits time. However, we still follow standard operating procedures (SOPs) to maintain cleanliness." — Key Informant (Room Attendant)

There is narrative consistency between management's strategies (workload allocation, coordination, and supervision) and the work attitudes of field implementers (continuing to follow SOPs despite limited time). Time pressure is not necessarily compensated for by lowering standards, but rather addressed through workload management.

Guest Perception of Cleanliness and Comfort

These findings suggest that guest comfort is not shaped by technical cleanliness alone, but rather by a combination of mutually reinforcing sensory, functional and safety elements, in line with the servicescape idea that the physical environment shapes the emotional responses of service users (Bitner, 1992).

"My first impression was that the room was clean, tidy, fragrant, spacious, and everything worked well." — Supporting Informant (Hotel Guest)

The words 'fragrant' and 'spacious room' are important here; they are not indicators of cleanliness in the narrow sense, but rather elements of ambient conditions in the servicescape (Bitner, 1992) that create a comfortable impression from the first second.

"The room was clean and fragrant, the bed was comfortable, the AC was cold, the hot water worked well, all the facilities in the room were functioning well and the toiletries were complete." — Supporting Informant (Hotel Guest)

This finding aligns with the Room Attendant's work in sections 3.1 and 3.2 — the list of amenities mentioned by guests is precisely the points that staff explicitly check before a room is declared ready for sale.

The dimensions of privacy and security also emerged as important elements of comfort, with direct alignment between the service provider and recipient:

"Whether a guest has a DnD (Don't Disturb) sign on the door handle or not, if they do, we as Room Attendants are not allowed to enter the room... we always ask for permission first, do not open the guest's personal belongings, and maintain the confidentiality of the guest's belongings and information." — Main Informant (Room Attendant)

"Yes, the housekeeping staff always knocks before entering so I feel my privacy is respected." — Supporting Informant (Hotel Guest)

Privacy is not just an administrative rule, but an element that is directly felt and appreciated by guests, strengthening the assurance dimension in Servqual (Parasuraman et al., 1988) as well as the social element in the servicescape (Bitner, 1992).

"Overall, it's good, perhaps the soundproofing in the rooms could be better or the speed of housekeeping during peak hours could be improved." — Supporting Informant (Hotel Guest)

The only gap point that emerged from the guest perspective, namely the speed of service during peak hours, resonates directly with the challenges that staff themselves acknowledged in section 3.2, indicating that guest perceptions fairly accurately reflect the real operational challenges on the ground.

Discussion

Overall, the three themes indicate that the housekeeping role at KHAS Semarang Hotel operates as a coherent chain, starting from the formulation of SOPs by the Executive Housekeeper, consistent implementation by the Room Attendant, to layered verification through quality control, and ultimately being positively received by guests. This finding is in line with the Servqual framework (Parasuraman et al., 1988), particularly on the dimensions of tangibles, reliability, and assurance, as well as the servicescape framework (Bitner, 1992)

which is confirmed through guests' emphasis on ambient elements such as room aroma and room spaciousness.

The findings on the multi-layered quality control mechanism (Room Attendant–Supervisor–Engineering) indicate that KHAS Semarang Hotel has built a quality control system that does not rely on a single individual, but rather on a cross-verification process. This is particularly relevant for the context of hotels with fluctuating occupancy, where time pressures during high occupancy are managed through teamwork coordination, rather than through relaxing standards — in line with the finding that excessive workload on housekeeping staff is a consistently reported challenge across hotel contexts (Shapoval et al., 2022; Sánchez-Rodríguez et al., 2023; Sánchez-González et al., 2026), making the team coordination strategies found here a relevant practical contribution. The findings on guest privacy also confirm that this dimension is increasingly recognized as a stand-alone element of comfort, rather than simply part of technical cleanliness (D'Acunto et al., 2021; Moon et al., 2022).

For the management of KHAS Semarang Hotel, these findings confirm that the existing multi-layered quality control system is worth maintaining, while an area that needs to be strengthened is the speed of service during peak hours, a point mentioned by both staff and guests. The consistency of SOP implementation by Room Attendants in this study is also in line with the finding that transformational leadership and staff empowerment are factors that drive employee performance in star-rated hotels (Nugraheni et al., 2025), indicating that strengthening the leadership style of housekeeping supervisors has the potential to further improve work consistency in the field. Returning to the main research question, the findings indicate that the role of housekeeping in maintaining cleanliness standards and guest comfort is carried out through three mutually reinforcing layers: the formulation of SOPs oriented towards guest contact points, consistent implementation by Room Attendants, and multi-layered quality control by supervisors.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study found that the role of housekeeping at KHAS Semarang Hotel in maintaining cleanliness standards and guest comfort operates through a coherent chain of work between three layers: the formulation of SOPs by the Executive Housekeeper that prioritizes physical guest contact points, consistent implementation by Room Attendants reflected in structured work procedures and strictly maintained privacy protocols, and a multi-layered quality control mechanism that ensures no room passes without independent verification. From the guest perspective, these three layers are proven to shape a positive stay experience, both in terms of

technical cleanliness and sensory and psychological elements that align with the servicescape framework. One gap that consistently emerges from both sides is the speed of service during high workloads.

This study is limited by the number of informants (one informant per category) and its focus on a single research location. Therefore, the findings reflect individual perspectives and may not be representative of all staff or guests at KHAS Semarang Hotel or other hotels. Management is advised to evaluate housekeeping workforce allocation during peak check-out hours and systematically document room inspection results. Further research is recommended to involve more informants per category and compare the implementation of housekeeping SOPs across hotels of different classes.

REFERENCE LIST

- Akbaba, A. (2006). Measuring service quality in the hotel industry: A study in a hotel business in Turkey. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*.
- Bhatnagar, E., et al. (2019). Impact of housekeeping services and practices on customer satisfaction and repeat business. *Prabandhan: Indian Journal of Management*.
- Birt, L., et al. (2016). Member checking. *Qualitative Health Research*.
- Bitner, M. J. (1992). Servicescapes: The impact of physical surroundings on customers and employees. *Journal of Marketing*, 56(2), 57–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299205600205>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Chela-Alvarez, X., et al. (2020). Perceived factors of stress and its outcomes among hotel housekeepers in the Balearic Islands: A qualitative approach from a gender perspective. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.
- Chela-Alvarez, X., et al. (2022). Hotel housekeepers and occupational health: Experiences and perceived risks. *Annals of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*.
- D'Acunto, D., et al. (2021). 'Most Americans like their privacy.' Exploring privacy concerns through US guests' reviews. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*.
- Decrop, A. (1999). Triangulation in qualitative tourism research. *Tourism Management*.
- Dedeoğlu, B., & Demirer, H. (2015). Differences in service quality perceptions of stakeholders in the hotel industry. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*.
- Dewantara, H., et al. (2025). Prioritizing service quality levers in a business hotel: Empirical evidence from SERVQUAL. *Fundamental and Applied Management Journal*.
- Ezeh, P., et al. (2021). Moderating role of religion in the relationship between SERVQUAL dimensions and hotel guest satisfaction. *Journal of Islamic Marketing*.
- Fariño Espitia, L. F., et al. (2025). Reimagining the servicescape: A systematic review and multi-stakeholder conceptual framework. *Journal of Services Marketing*.

- Faustine, J., et al. (2026). Implementation of housekeeping standard operating procedures to achieve service excellence: A qualitative case study at Atria Hotel Gading Serpong. *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*.
- García-Buades, M. E., et al. (2024). Psychosocial work factors, job stress, and self-rated health among hotel housekeepers. *Workplace Health & Safety*.
- Ing, I., et al. (2025). Occupational health challenges among hotel housekeepers. *The Indonesian Journal of Occupational Safety and Health*.
- Ladhari, R. (2009). A review of twenty years of SERVQUAL research. *International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences*.
- Lee, S., et al. (2021). Applying expanded servicescape to the hotel industry. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*.
- Li, S. (2021). Linking servicescape and customer engagement: An investigation in the hotel context. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*.
- Li, S., et al. (2021). Hotel servicescape and customer citizenship behaviors: Mediating role of customer engagement and moderating role of gender. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*.
- Mari, M., & Poggesi, S. (2013). Servicescape cues and customer behavior: A systematic literature review and research agenda. *The Service Industries Journal*.
- Moon, H., et al. (2022). Hotel privacy management and guest trust building: A relational signaling perspective. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*.
- Morgan, H. (2024). Using triangulation and crystallization to make qualitative studies trustworthy and rigorous. *The Qualitative Report*.
- Nowell, L., et al. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*.
- Nugraheni, K. S., Palupiningtyas, D., & Ardi, R. P. (2025). Transformational leadership and empowerment as driving factors for employee performance in star-rated hotels in Central Java. *Annals of Human Resource Management Research*, 5(2), 231–242.
- Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1988). SERVQUAL: A multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality. *Journal of Retailing*, 64(1), 12–40.
- Rosenbaum, M., & Massiah, C. (2011). An expanded servicescape perspective. *Journal of Service Management*.
- Saleh, F. A., & Ryan, C. (1991). Analysing service quality in the hospitality industry using the SERVQUAL model. *Service Industries Journal*.
- Sánchez-González, I., et al. (2026). Prevalence of work-related health conditions among hotel housekeepers: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Archives of Public Health*.
- Sánchez-Rodríguez, C., et al. (2023). Prevalence of musculoskeletal disorders among hotel housekeepers and cleaners: A systematic review with meta-analysis. *Musculoskeletal Science & Practice*.
- Shapoval, V., et al. (2022). Occupational health and safety of immigrant hotel housekeepers. *Workplace Health & Safety*.

- Sharma, S., et al. (2021). Aesthetically clean to clinically clean – A study on new housekeeping practices in Delhi hotels beyond COVID-19 pandemic. *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*.
- Sinulingga, S., et al. (2024). Optimizing hotel management performance through standard operating procedures: A path model analysis and strategic monitoring framework. *TourismSpectrum: Diversity & Dynamics*.
- Tavitiyaman, P., et al. (2021). Employee productivity of hotel room attendants: An input–output perspective. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*.
- Utami, A., et al. (2026). The role of housekeeping in improving the quality of guest service at Hotel Swarna Dwipa Palembang. *Economic Reviews Journal*.
- Widyalasmono, R. P. (2026). The role of housekeeping in maintaining the image and guest satisfaction at Tunjungan Hotel Surabaya, East Java. *International Journal of Travel, Hospitality and Events*.