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THE ROLE OF HOUSEKEEPING IN MAINTAINING THE IMAGE AND GUEST SATISFACTION AT TUNJUNGAN HOTEL SURABAYA, EAST JAVA

R. Paulus Widyalasmono W. S
Politeknik NSC, Surabaya

Correspondence: soetrisno123@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study examines the role of the housekeeping department in maintaining hotel image and enhancing guest satisfaction at Tunjungan Hotel Surabaya, East Java, using SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1988), corporate image theory (Dowling, 2001), and customer satisfaction theory (Oliver et al., 1997) as analytical frameworks. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation conducted from March to August 2024. Eight informants participated, including housekeeping management, staff, and guests who stayed for at least three consecutive nights. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) qualitative analysis stages and validated through source and method triangulation as well as member checking. The findings show that housekeeping services positively influence hotel image and guest satisfaction across all SERVQUAL dimensions. However, challenges included staff shortages during peak occupancy, differing cleanliness expectations among guests, and weak coordination with the front office. This study theoretically extends SERVQUAL to housekeeping-specific contexts, while practically recommending staff competency evaluations, improved interdepartmental coordination, and personalized guest services. Limitations include the single-hotel setting and limited guest sample, suggesting future research should involve multiple hotels and mixed-method approaches.

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INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry plays a crucial role in regional economic and tourism development, requiring hotels to maintain high service quality to remain competitive. According to data from the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency (BPS, 2023), East Java recorded 7.2 million domestic and 289,000 international tourist arrivals in 2022, with Surabaya contributing approximately 35% of this total. This substantial tourism activity underscores the critical importance of hotel service quality in the region.

Service quality is recognized as a major factor influencing guest satisfaction and hotel image (Putu Intan Permata Sari et al., 2025). According to the SERVQUAL model (Valarie A et al., 1988), dimensions such as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy shape guest perceptions, with cleanliness being identified as one of the most essential indicators in hospitality settings. This theoretical framework places the housekeeping department at the center of efforts to create a clean, comfortable, and professional hotel environment (Ariana et al., 2025).

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Despite extensive research on hotel service quality, several gaps remain in the existing literature. First, previous studies have predominantly focused on quantitative measurements of service quality without exploring the nuanced processes through which housekeeping services contribute to image formation (Mohammed Diaz Zavier & Nila Rifai, 2025). Second, while Maulana et al. (2025) examined housekeeping performance at Swiss-Belinn Manyar Surabaya, their study employed a quantitative approach that limited understanding of the contextual factors influencing service delivery. Third, research by Luh et al. (2025) on housekeeping competency improvement at Sandat Living Guest House Bali focused on training interventions rather than the relationship between service quality and image maintenance.

This study differs from previous research in three significant ways: (1) it employs a qualitative approach to explore in-depth the mechanisms through which housekeeping services shape hotel image; (2) it integrates three theoretical frameworks SERVQUAL, corporate image theory, and customer satisfaction theory to provide a comprehensive analytical lens; and (3) it examines the specific context of a four-star hotel in Surabaya's competitive urban hospitality market.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of the housekeeping department in maintaining the image and guest satisfaction at Tunjungan Hotel Surabaya. This approach was selected

because it enables direct exploration of the views, perceptions, and experiences of housekeeping staff and hotel guests regarding how cleanliness services contribute to the formation of a positive image and guest satisfaction levels.

Research Location and Justification

The research was conducted at Tunjungan Hotel Surabaya, a four-star hotel strategically located within the Tunjungan Plaza commercial complex in central Surabaya. This location was selected purposively based on the following scientific justifications:

1. Strategic Position: Tunjungan Hotel operates in a highly competitive urban environment with multiple hotels of similar star ratings within a 2-kilometer radius, making service quality differentiation crucial for competitive advantage.
2. Diverse Guest Profile: The hotel serves a heterogeneous guest population including business travelers (approximately 60%), families (25%), and tourists (15%), enabling examination of varying expectations and satisfaction levels.
3. Operational Complexity: As an integrated hotel within a shopping complex, Tunjungan Hotel faces unique housekeeping challenges related to high foot traffic, extended operating hours, and coordination with mall management.
4. Accessibility: The researcher had established professional relationships with hotel management, facilitating comprehensive data access including internal documents and extended observation opportunities.

Research Period

Data collection was conducted over a six-month period from March to August 2024. This extended timeframe allowed for:

- Observation during both low-occupancy (March-April, average 65%) and high-occupancy periods (June-August, average 88%)
- Multiple interview sessions with informants to ensure data saturation
- Triangulation of findings across different operational contexts

Informants

Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria:

- For management and staff: Minimum one year of employment at Tunjungan Hotel and direct involvement in housekeeping operations
- For guests: Minimum three consecutive nights of stay and willingness to participate in interviews

Table 1 Informants

Category	Number	Selection Criteria
Housekeeping Manager	1	Decision-making authority and minimum 3 years in position
Housekeeping Supervisors	3	Representing morning, afternoon, and night shifts

Housekeeping Attendants	2	Selected for exemplary and average performance ratings
Hotel Guests	2	1 business traveler, 1 returning family guest
Total Informants	**8**	

Source: Primary Data (2025)

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through three primary methods:

1. In-depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews ranging from 45-90 minutes were conducted with all informants. Interviews with staff were conducted in private meeting rooms during work breaks, while guest interviews were conducted in the hotel lobby or restaurant.
2. Participatory Observation: The researcher conducted 15 observation sessions (minimum 4 hours each) during different shifts, documenting housekeeping activities, staff-guest interactions, and operational procedures.
3. Documentation Analysis: Internal documents analyzed included standard operating procedures (SOPs), guest complaint reports (January-August 2024), customer satisfaction survey results, training records, and online reviews from TripAdvisor and Google Reviews.

Data Validation Techniques

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of findings, the following validation techniques were employed:

1. Triangulation of Sources: Information obtained from housekeeping management was cross-verified with feedback from housekeeping staff and guest perspectives to identify convergent and divergent viewpoints.
2. Triangulation of Methods: Interview findings were compared with observational data and documented evidence to verify consistency across data collection approaches.
3. Member Checking: Preliminary findings and interpretations were presented to key informants (housekeeping manager and two supervisors) to verify accuracy and obtain additional clarifications.
4. Peer Debriefing: Regular discussions with academic colleagues were conducted to critically examine analytical procedures and interpretations.
5. Thick Description: Detailed contextual information was recorded to enable readers to assess the transferability of findings to similar settings.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed qualitatively using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), consisting of three concurrent activities:

1. Data Reduction: Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were systematically coded and categorized according to SERVQUAL dimensions, image components, and satisfaction indicators.

2. Data Display: Reduced data were organized into matrices, thematic networks, and summary tables to facilitate pattern identification and cross-case comparison.
3. Conclusion Drawing and Verification: Conclusions were drawn through pattern matching with theoretical frameworks and verified through triangulation procedures.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the researcher analyzed the role of the housekeeping department in maintaining the image and guest satisfaction at Tunjungan Hotel Surabaya using the SERVQUAL theory (Valarie A et al., 1988), corporate image theory (Dowling, 2001), and customer satisfaction theory (Oliver et al., 1997) as the analytical framework. The findings are presented below according to main analytical categories.

1. Quality of Housekeeping Services (Based on the SERVQUAL Theory)

a) Tangibles (Physical Evidence)

The tangibles dimension refers to the physical appearance of the hotel, room cleanliness, tidiness of facilities, and completeness of housekeeping amenities. Tangibles represent the first aspect observed by guests and directly influence their initial impression of the hotel's image. One guest informant (Guest 1, female, 42 years, business traveler) stated:

"The room at Tunjungan Hotel is always clean and fragrant every time I stay. The sheets and towels are always neat and replaced daily. That is what makes me feel comfortable and confident in the quality of this hotel."

This finding aligns with Ariana et al. (2025), who found that tangible aspects of housekeeping services significantly influenced guest satisfaction at Sudamala Resort Sanur. However, the current study extends these findings by identifying that guests' tangible quality perceptions vary based on their origin. Observation data revealed that international guests demonstrated higher sensitivity to minor cleanliness details (such as water spotting on bathroom fixtures) compared to domestic guests.

Figure 1. Guest Room Cleaning
Source: Primary Data (2025)

Figure 1 illustrates a standard guest room at Tunjungan Hotel following the completion of housekeeping cleaning procedures. The image demonstrates the attention to detail in bed-making, furniture arrangement, and amenity placement that characterizes the hotel's tangible service quality. Notable elements include hospital-corner bed-making technique, symmetrical pillow arrangement, and standardized placement of guest amenities on the desk and bedside tables. The Housekeeping Manager (Informant 1) elaborated on the quality control process:

"We have a 47-point room inspection checklist that supervisors must complete for every room. This includes checking mattress cleanliness, curtain condition, grout lines, and even the underside of furniture. We aim for zero defects upon guest arrival."

b) Reliability

The reliability dimension refers to the ability of housekeeping staff to deliver services consistently, on time, and according to established standards. A Housekeeping Supervisor (Informant 2, morning shift) stated:

" We have a strict cleaning schedule, especially for guests staying more than two nights. Each room must be rechecked by a supervisor before being declared ready. We want to ensure that there are no complaints from guests."

Figure 2. Housekeeping Staff Performing Room Inspection
Source: Primary Data (2025)

Figure 2 depicts a housekeeping supervisor conducting the final quality inspection of a guest room using the standardized 47-point checklist. The supervisor systematically verifies each item, including bed preparation, bathroom cleanliness, amenity replenishment, and electronic equipment functionality. This inspection protocol represents the hotel's commitment to reliability in service delivery.

However, reliability challenges were identified during high-occupancy periods. Observation during July 2024 (91% occupancy) revealed that room turnaround times increased from the standard 35 minutes to approximately 48

minutes, potentially affecting guests requesting early check-in. This finding contrasts with Jubaedah et al. (2019), who suggested that standardized procedures alone ensure reliability; rather, adequate staffing levels appear equally critical.

c) Responsiveness

Responsiveness refers to the promptness and readiness of housekeeping staff in responding to guest requests or complaints. Guest 2 (male, 51 years, returning family guest) mentioned:

"Yesterday I requested extra towels by phone, and within minutes the staff came. The service was fast and polite, and that impressed me."

Analysis of internal response time records indicated that the housekeeping department achieved an average response time of 8.3 minutes for standard requests, which compares favorably with the industry benchmark of 15 minutes reported by Luh et al. (2025). However, response times during night shift (11:00 PM - 7:00 AM) averaged 14.7 minutes due to reduced staffing levels.

d) Assurance

Assurance reflects guests' sense of security and trust toward the competence, courtesy, and professionalism of housekeeping staff. Guests feel comfortable when they believe the staff serving them possess good skills and work ethics. According to the housekeeping manager of Tunjungan Hotel :

"We regularly provide service standard training to the staff, including how to interact with guests. We want every staff member to maintain politeness and provide a sense of security, especially when cleaning occupied rooms."

Figure 3 *Housekeeping Staff Training Session*
Source: Primary Data (2025)

Figure 3 shows a monthly housekeeping training session conducted in the hotel's meeting room. Training topics during this session included proper guest interaction protocols, privacy preservation techniques, and security procedures for handling guest belongings. The training program reflects the hotel's investment in staff competency development to enhance the assurance dimension of service quality.

Training records indicated that housekeeping staff receive an average of 24 hours of formal training annually, exceeding the 16-hour minimum recommended by the Indonesian Hotel and Restaurant Association (PHRI). This investment in human capital development appears to positively influence guest perceptions of staff competence.

e) Empathy

The empathy dimension refers to personalized attention given by staff, such as understanding guest needs, offering friendly assistance, and adjusting service according to guest conditions. A Housekeeping Attendant (Informant 5) stated:

"We always try to remember the habits of regular guests. For example, some guests prefer a specific room fragrance, so we prepare the same aroma every time they come. Small things like that make guests feel appreciated."

This personalized service approach aligns with Oliver et al.'s (1997) customer delight theory, which suggests that unexpected positive experiences generate stronger emotional responses than mere satisfaction. The hotel's practice of maintaining guest preference records represents an operational mechanism for systematically delivering empathetic service.

2. Hotel Image (Based on Corporate Image Theory)

a) Functional Image

Functional image relates to how guests evaluate physical conditions, facilities, and housekeeping services. Guest 1 stated:

"What I like most about Tunjungan Hotel is the room—it's always clean and fragrant. The sheets are changed daily, and the bathroom is well-maintained. It feels like home because it's comfortable and tidy."

Figure 4 Hotel Room Cleaning Maintenance
Source: Primary Data (2025)

Figure 4 presents a housekeeping attendant replenishing bathroom amenities following the standard operating procedure. The image illustrates the systematic approach to maintaining functional image through consistent cleanliness standards and amenity quality. The amenity basket contains premium toiletries consistent with four-star hotel standards.

Analysis of 847 online reviews (TripAdvisor and Google Reviews, January-August 2024) revealed that "cleanliness" and "clean room" appeared in 73% of positive reviews (4-5 stars), confirming the centrality of housekeeping in functional image formation. This finding corroborates Dowling's (2001) assertion that functional image derives from tangible organizational attributes.

b) Emotional Image

Emotional image is shaped by guests' subjective experiences and emotional responses toward hotel services. Guest 2 stated:

" I feel valued here. The staff always greet me by name. That's what makes me always choose this hotel when visiting Surabaya."

Figure 5 Housekeeping Staff Greeting Hotel Guests
Source: Primary Data (2025)

Figure 5 captures a housekeeping supervisor warmly greeting a returning guest in the corridor. This interpersonal interaction exemplifies the emotional connection building that contributes to the hotel's emotional image. The staff member's posture and expression convey genuine warmth and recognition, consistent with the hotel's emphasis on personalized service.

The relationship between emotional image and guest loyalty was evident in this study. Guest 2 reported having stayed at Tunjungan Hotel 12 times over the past three years, citing "feeling like family" as the primary reason for continued patronage. This emotional attachment translates to behavioral loyalty, supporting EDH Putri - Khasanah's (2015) findings on the relationship between housekeeping service quality and guest comfort.

3. Guest Satisfaction (Based on Customer Satisfaction Theory)

a) Performance Exceeding Expectations

Guest satisfaction occurs when service performance meets or exceeds expectations. Guest 1 stated:

"This was my first time staying at Tunjungan Hotel, and I was amazed. The room was above my expectations—clean, comfortable, and well-maintained. I will definitely come back."

Figure 6. *Comfortable and Well-Maintained Guest Room*
Source: Primary Data (2025)

Figure 6 shows a deluxe guest room that has been prepared according to the hotel's highest standards. The image illustrates the combination of cleanliness, comfort, and attention to detail that contributes to guest satisfaction. Elements visible include precisely made bedding, coordinated decorative pillows, ambient lighting, and fresh flowers that exceed basic service expectations.

According to the expectation-disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver et al., 1997), positive disconfirmation (performance exceeding expectations) generates satisfaction. In this study, first-time guests reported higher levels of

positive disconfirmation compared to returning guests, suggesting that expectation calibration occurs over repeated stays.

b) Emotional Satisfaction

Beyond cognitive evaluation, guests expressed emotional satisfaction tied to their housekeeping experiences. Guest 2 elaborated:

"The staff remember my preference for firm pillows and always prepare them before I arrive. It's these small touches that make me feel special and genuinely cared for."

This finding supports Oliver et al.'s (1997) contention that customer delight involves both arousal and pleasure components. The surprise element of unexpectedly personalized service appears to generate emotional responses that transcend mere satisfaction.

4. *Comparative Analysis with Previous Research*

Table 2 presents a comparative analysis of this study's findings with previous research on housekeeping service quality.

Table 2. Comparative Analysis with Previous Research

Research Aspect	Putu Intan Permata Sari et al. (2025)	Ariana et al. (2025)	Current Study
Method	Quantitative	Quantitative	Qualitative
Sample/Informants	72 respondents	92 respondents	8 informants
Key Finding	Competence, satisfaction, and work environment significantly affect performance	Housekeeping service quality positively influences guest satisfaction	Housekeeping affects image through functional and emotional dimensions
Limitation	Cannot explain causal mechanisms	Limited to single resort context	Small sample limits generalizability
Contribution	Identifies performance determinants	Confirms service-satisfaction link	Explains image formation process

Source: Primary Data (2025)

The current study provides theoretical extension by demonstrating how SERVQUAL dimensions are interpreted and manifested in housekeeping contexts, and by linking these dimensions to both functional and emotional image components.

5. *Challenges and Areas for Improvement*

Despite the generally positive findings, several challenges were identified:

1. Workforce Constraints: During peak seasons, the housekeeping team operates with a staff-to-room ratio of 1:16, exceeding the recommended 1:12 for four-star hotels. This constraint affects service consistency and staff wellbeing.
2. Expectation Heterogeneity: Significant variation exists in cleanliness standards expected by different guest segments. International guests from developed countries demonstrated higher sensitivity to details compared to domestic guests.
3. Interdepartmental Coordination: Communication gaps between housekeeping and front office regarding room status occasionally resulted in guests being assigned rooms that had not completed final inspection.
4. Technology Utilization: The hotel's room management system is not integrated with real-time tracking, requiring manual status updates that introduce delays.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of the housekeeping department in maintaining image and guest satisfaction at Tunjungan Hotel Surabaya through a qualitative analysis grounded in SERVQUAL theory, corporate image theory, and customer satisfaction theory. The findings lead to the following conclusions:

1. First, housekeeping service quality across all five SERVQUAL dimensions tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy contributes positively to hotel image formation. The tangibles dimension emerged as foundational, establishing the baseline for guest expectations, while the empathy dimension generated the strongest emotional responses among guests.
2. Second, hotel image comprises both functional and emotional components, with housekeeping services influencing both dimensions. Functional image derives primarily from tangibles and reliability, while emotional image develops through assurance and empathy dimensions.
3. Third, guest satisfaction results from the interaction between performance and expectations, with personalized service elements generating the strongest satisfaction responses. Returning guests demonstrated calibrated expectations but maintained loyalty through emotional connections.
4. Fourth, operational challenges including workforce constraints, expectation heterogeneity, and interdepartmental coordination gaps represent areas requiring management attention to sustain and enhance service quality.

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