

Customer Satisfaction with Housekeeping Services: Evidence from Four-Star Hotels in Desaru, Malaysia

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of cleanliness, physical facilities, and room décor on customer satisfaction with housekeeping services in four-star hotels in Desaru, Malaysia. Guided by the Service Quality Theory and Expectancy–Disconfirmation Theory, a quantitative cross-sectional survey was

conducted with 365 guests using validated hospitality research instruments. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression. Results show that all three factors significantly and positively affect guest satisfaction, with cleanliness having the most decisive influence, followed by physical facilities and room décor. The model explained 66.9% of the variance in satisfaction, underscoring the strategic role of housekeeping in shaping guest perceptions, loyalty, and online reputation. The findings provide hotel managers with practical insights for enhancing hygiene, facility maintenance, and aesthetic appeal to meet evolving guest expectations, strengthen brand image, and support sustainable tourism growth in regional destinations.

Keywords:

Customer satisfaction, housekeeping service, cleanliness, room décor, physical facilities

1 Introduction

Desaru, located on the southeastern coast of Johor, Malaysia, has rapidly developed into a premier beach and family resort destination over the past decade. With investments in integrated resorts, international hotel brands, and supporting infrastructure, the area recorded more than 15 million domestic and international visitors in 2023 (Johor Tourism Board, 2024). This growth has intensified competition among four-star hotels that cater to leisure, MICE, and family markets, making consistent service quality, particularly in housekeeping, a decisive factor in sustaining positive guest experiences and online reputations.

Within hotel operations, the housekeeping department is widely regarded as the “heart of the hotel,” ensuring hygienic, functional, and aesthetically pleasing room environments that influence first impressions and repeat patronage (Ahmad, 2024; Ishak et al., 2024). Recent studies highlight that even minor lapses in cleanliness, room décor, or physical facilities can trigger negative electronic word-of-mouth and erode brand equity (Nguyen et al., 2023; Hasan et al., 2023).

Despite its strategic role, housekeeping frequently faces systemic challenges such as limited standardised training, staff shortages, and high turnover (Tan et al., 2023). Existing Malaysian hospitality research rarely examines the combined influence of cleanliness, physical facilities, and room décor within a single empirical model, and few studies focus specifically on Desaru’s rapidly expanding hotel sector. Addressing this gap, the present study concentrates on four-star hotels in Desaru to generate destination-specific, evidence-based recommendations. Thus, this study addresses three 2 research objectives:

1. To identify the key housekeeping attributes such as cleanliness, physical facilities, and room décor that shape customer satisfaction in four-star hotels in Desaru.
2. To examine the relationships between these attributes and overall customer satisfaction.

Guided by the Service Quality Theory (Parasuraman et al., 1988), this study integrates validated hospitality research instruments with quantitative analysis to clarify

how tangible and aesthetic housekeeping elements contribute to satisfaction. The findings aim to inform hotel managers, policymakers, and academics seeking to strengthen Malaysia's competitive positioning in regional tourism.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Customer satisfaction in hotel housekeeping contexts

Customer satisfaction is a central performance indicator in hotels because it shapes repeat patronage, loyalty intentions, and electronic word-of-mouth, affecting revenue and brand equity (Abdullah et al., 2022; Chen & Lee, 2022). In post-pandemic travel, satisfaction has become primarily contingent on perceptions of hygiene and safety, with cleanliness now a salient cue in guests' evaluation of overall service quality (Goh & Nguyen, 2023). In Malaysia's competitive destinations including regional hubs such as Desaru guest satisfaction is strongly conditioned by the in-room experience managed by housekeeping (cleanliness standards, condition of amenities, and aesthetics), which collectively signal reliability, value for money, and care (Jiang et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2023). Within this study, customer satisfaction is the dependent variable capturing the extent to which guests' expectations regarding room condition and upkeep are met or exceeded.

2.2 Theoretical Foundation

This study adopts Service Quality Theory (SERVQUAL) (Parasuraman et al., 1988) as its central interpretive frame. SERVQUAL posits that satisfaction emerges when perceived service performance meets or exceeds expectations across dimensions such as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance; in the housekeeping domain, tangibles map directly onto room cleanliness, décor, and physical facilities, while reliability/responsiveness map onto consistency and timeliness of upkeep. Recent hospitality studies continue to operationalise satisfaction via these perceived-performance gaps, reaffirming the explanatory power of SERVQUAL in contemporary hotel settings.

SERVQUAL posits that satisfaction emerges from minimising the gap between expected and perceived service across dimensions such as tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance. In a housekeeping context, "tangibility" maps onto room cleanliness, décor, and physical facilities; "reliability/responsiveness" relates to timely, consistent upkeep. When these cues are favourable, perceived service quality and thus satisfaction rises. (Kim & Lee, 2021).

2.3 Independent Variables and Hypotheses

2.2.1 Cleanliness

Construct focus. Cleanliness encompasses hygiene, the absence of dirt or stains, odour control, and attention to detail in visible and "high-touch" areas (Lacalle, 2023).

It is consistently the most salient determinant of guests' quality judgments and a frequent driver of online evaluations (Goh et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2023).

Link to theory. In SERVQUAL, cleanliness is a primary **tangible** cue; high standards reduce the expectation–perception gap.

Empirical support. Prior hospitality studies repeatedly rank cleanliness among the strongest satisfaction and revisit intention correlates, particularly in the post-COVID era when risk perceptions amplify hygiene salience (Goh & Nguyen, 2023; Kim & Lee, 2021). Your preliminary results likewise show cleanliness as the strongest predictor.

2.2.2 Physical Facilities

Construct focus. Physical facilities refer to the tangible infrastructure and amenities that support guest comfort and functionality (e.g., fixtures, lighting, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC), plumbing, bedding, and equipment condition) (Hull, 2014). Well-maintained facilities communicate reliability and value; deteriorated infrastructure cues poor quality and elicits complaints (Jiang et al., 2023).

Link to theory. In SERVQUAL, facilities contribute to **tangibles** and **reliability** (consistent, fault-free performance).

Empirical support. Studies in Southeast Asian hotels show facility upkeep and functionality strongly correlate with satisfaction and online ratings (Jiang et al., 2023). Your dataset indicates facilities rival cleanliness in predicting satisfaction.

2.2.3 Room Décor

Construct focus. Room décor captures the aesthetic and design qualities of the room including coherence of style, colour palettes, furnishings, and layout that influence affective responses and perceived ambience (Liu & Lee, 2021; Amri, 2024). Décor often differentiates otherwise similar service offerings and contributes to "experiential value."

Link to theory. Within SERVQUAL, décor is a salient **tangible** that shapes first impressions.

Empirical support. Research notes décor's growing role as guests seek spaces that are not only clean and functional but also aesthetically pleasing and "Instagram-able," with measurable effects on satisfaction and recommendation intentions (Liu & Lee, 2021). Your descriptive results identify décor as comparatively weaker than cleanliness/facilities, signalling a practical improvement area.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

Grounded in the Service Quality Theory (Parasuraman et al., 1988), this study proposes a model that links housekeeping service attributes to customer satisfaction. Service Quality Theory emphasises the gap between customer expectations and perceptions of service delivery, particularly across dimensions such as tangibility, reliability, and responsiveness, all of which are relevant to housekeeping. Similarly, the Expectancy-disconfirmation theory explains satisfaction as the outcome of comparing

expected service standards with actual experiences. These frameworks provide a logical basis for examining how specific housekeeping factors influence guest perceptions and satisfaction.

In this study, three independent variables namely, cleanliness, physical facilities, and room décor are hypothesised to influence the dependent variable, customer satisfaction. Cleanliness represents hygiene and upkeep; physical facilities reflect the functionality and condition of infrastructure; and room décor captures aesthetic and emotional dimensions of the guest experience. These variables have been consistently highlighted in hospitality research as significant drivers of satisfaction (Ahmad, 2024; Jiang et al., 2023; Liu & Lee, 2021).

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) illustrates the proposed relationships:

H1: Cleanliness has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction.

H2: Physical facilities have a positive relationship with customer satisfaction.

H3: Room décor has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction.

This framework integrates established service quality and satisfaction theories with empirical evidence from hospitality research, offering a structured approach to test the hypothesised relationships within the Malaysian hotel context. It is adapted from Ahmad, A. B. (2024). Factors influencing customer satisfaction with housekeeping services and practices.

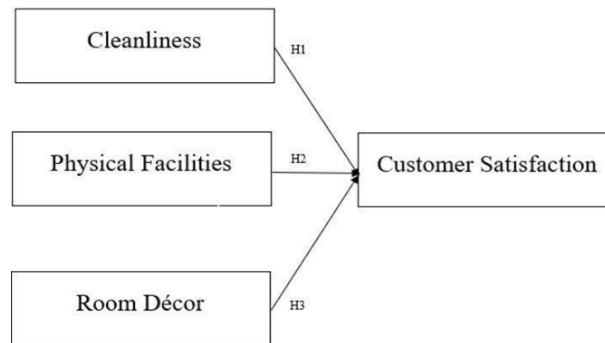


Figure 1: Study Framework

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between housekeeping service attributes and customer satisfaction in four-star hotels in Desaru, Malaysia. Using standardised instruments, the design was appropriate because it enabled the systematic measurement of guest perceptions across key variables focusing on cleanliness, physical facilities, and room décor. A correlational approach was applied to test the proposed hypotheses derived from the Service Quality Theory and Expectancy–Disconfirmation Theory.

3.2 Population, Sample, and Unit of Analysis

The study population comprised guests who had stayed at four selected four-star hotels in Desaru, Johor. This segment was deemed suitable because these guests had direct experience with housekeeping services and could provide relevant feedback. Based on hotel records, the estimated target population was 4,478 guests. Using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, the minimum required sample size was 354. To allow for incomplete responses, 400 questionnaires were distributed, of which 365 valid responses were obtained.

The unit of analysis was individual hotel guests. Convenience sampling was employed, as it is widely used in hospitality research where respondents are dispersed across different locations and periods.

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from validated scales in prior hospitality studies (Ahmad, 2024; Zopiatis et al., 2021). The questionnaire consisted of three sections: (i) demographic information, (ii) items measuring the independent variables (cleanliness, physical facilities, and room décor), and (iii) items measuring the dependent variable (customer satisfaction). All constructs were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5).

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, and standard deviation) were first employed to profile respondents and assess perceptions of service attributes. Reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) was used to confirm internal consistency.

For hypothesis testing, Pearson correlation was applied to examine the strength and direction of relationships between the independent variables (cleanliness, physical facilities, and room décor) and the dependent variable (customer satisfaction). Multiple regression analysis was then conducted to determine the predictive power of the three service attributes on customer satisfaction. Model summary, ANOVA, and coefficient outputs were reported to evaluate significance, effect sizes, and variance explained (R^2).

3.5 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to institutional research ethics protocols. Approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee (REC), and informed consent was secured from all participants before data collection. Respondents were assured of voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality, with no personal identifiers collected. Data were used strictly for academic purposes and securely stored. These measures ensured compliance with ethical guidelines and reinforced the integrity of the research process.

4 Findings

4.1 Reliability Analysis

A pilot test ($n = 30$) was conducted to assess internal consistency for all constructs. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.74 for Cleanliness (5 items), 0.71 for Room décor (5 items), 0.71 for Physical facilities (4 items), and 0.72 for Customer satisfaction (4 items). All values meet or exceed the commonly accepted threshold of $\alpha \geq .70$, indicating satisfactory reliability for the main study.

Table 1: Reliability Analysis

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α
Cleanliness	5	0.74
Room décor	5	0.71
Physical facilities	4	0.71
Customer satisfaction	4	0.72

4.2 Descriptive Statistics of Core Constructs

Descriptive results indicate moderate evaluations overall. Cleanliness posted the highest mean ($M = 3.3216$), followed by Customer Satisfaction ($M = 3.2877$) and Physical Facilities ($M = 3.2692$); Room Décor showed the lowest mean ($M = 3.2603$). All standard deviations were reported as < 1 , suggesting relatively consistent responses.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of constructs

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation
Cleanliness	3.3216	< 1
Room décor	3.2692	< 1
Physical facilities	3.2603	< 1
Customer satisfaction	3.2877	< 1

4.3 Correlation Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlations were computed among the four study constructs: Cleanliness, Room Décor, Physical Facilities, and Customer Satisfaction ($N = 365$). All coefficients are positive and statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), indicating strong and meaningful associations among the variables. Specifically, cleanliness correlates strongly with Room Décor ($r = .741$), Physical Facilities ($r = .751$), and Customer Satisfaction ($r = .757$), suggesting that higher perceived hygiene standards co-occur with better perceptions of aesthetics, infrastructure condition, and overall satisfaction. Room Décor is likewise positively related to Physical Facilities ($r = .755$) and Customer Satisfaction ($r = .725$), while Physical Facilities show a strong positive association with Customer Satisfaction ($r = .758$). These consistently high coefficients (all $> .70$) reflect a tightly interlinked housekeeping quality bundle—hygiene, functionality, and aesthetics—that moves together with guests' satisfaction assessments in the hotel context.

Table 3. Pearson correlations among constructs (N = 365)

Variable	1. Cleanliness	2. Room Décor	3. Physical Facilities	4. Customer Satisfaction
Cleanliness	—	.741**	.751**	.757**
Room décor	.741**	—	.755**	.725**
Physical facilities	.751**	.755**	—	.758**
Customer satisfaction	.757**	.725**	.758**	—

Note. $p < .01$ (two-tailed)

4.4 Multiple Regression

A standard multiple linear regression evaluated the predictive effects of the three attributes on customer satisfaction. The model showed a strong fit ($R = 0.820$) and explained 66.9% of the variance (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.669$); the overall model was significant (ANOVA, $p < .001$). All predictors were positive and significant ($p < .001$) with the following standardised effects: $\beta = 0.342$ (Cleanliness), $\beta = 0.338$ (Physical Facilities), and $\beta = 0.216$ (Room Décor). The constant was not significant ($p = .060$).

Table 4.4: Multiple regression predicting customer satisfaction

Predictor	β (standardised)	p
Cleanliness	0.342	< .001
Physical facilities	0.338	< .001
Room décor	0.216	< .001
Model fit	$R = 0.820$	
Adjusted R^2	0.669	
ANOVA (model)	Significant	< .001
Constant	—	.060

4.5 Summary of Findings

In sum, Cleanliness, Physical Facilities, and Room Décor each significantly and positively affect Customer Satisfaction in four-star hotels in Desaru, collectively explaining 66.9% of its variance. Cleanliness and Physical Facilities emerged as the two strongest, nearly equivalent predictors, while Room Décor, though weaker, remained a significant determinant. These results substantiate the centrality of housekeeping attributes in shaping guests' overall satisfaction and provide a clear quantitative basis for prioritising improvements (detailed interpretation and implications are presented in the discussion).

5 Discussion

The empirical results demonstrate that housekeeping attributes, cleanliness, physical facilities, and room décor jointly and positively shape guest satisfaction in four-star hotels in Desaru. Descriptive patterns indicate that cleanliness is the most positively appraised attribute on average. At the same time, room décor lags and thus presents the most significant opportunity for improvement, with overall dispersion modest

across constructs (all SDs < 1). In parallel, bivariate associations among all four constructs exceed .70 and are significant at $p < .01$, evidencing a tightly interlinked "housekeeping quality bundle" (hygiene, functionality, aesthetics).

Model-based tests converge with these descriptive insights. The multiple regression shows a strong overall fit ($R = .820$; Adjusted $R^2 = .669$; model $p < .001$), with all three predictors significant and in the expected direction: cleanliness ($\beta = .342$), physical facilities ($\beta = .338$), and room décor ($\beta = .216$). This pattern implies that incremental improvements to any attribute will raise satisfaction, though marginal effects are most significant for cleanliness and physical facilities. The alignment between high correlations, significant betas, and theory is consistent with expectancy – disconfirmation: when perceived room hygiene, infrastructure condition, and design meet or exceed guests' expectations, satisfaction rises.

5.1 Hypotheses testing (summary)

Table 5.1 summarises each hypothesis against the bivariate (r) and multivariate (β) results to consolidate evidence from correlations and the regression. These results corroborate that the housekeeping quality bundle moves in tandem with guest satisfaction in this context.

Table 5.1: Summary of Hypothesis Results

	Operational statement	Evidence (Correlation with CS)	Evidence (Regression β)	Decision
H1	Cleanliness → Customer satisfaction	$r = .757, p < .01$	$\beta = .342, p < .001$	Accepted
H2	Physical facilities → Customer satisfaction	$r = .758, p < .01$	$\beta = .338, p < .001$	Accepted
H3	Room décor → Customer satisfaction	$r = .725, p < .01$	$\beta = .216, p < .001$	Accepted

5.2 Theoretical implications

The findings substantiate and extend service quality perspectives by showing that both tangible (hygiene, facilities) and aesthetic (décor) cues are consequential for satisfaction, with décor's more minor (yet significant) effect indicating an incremental layer of experiential value beyond functional adequacy.

5.3 Managerial implications

For operators in Desaru's four-star segment, prioritising cleanliness and physical upkeep remains the most efficient route to satisfaction gains, while décor refreshes (lighting, textures, cohesive colour palettes) can deliver additional uplift given their significant, albeit weaker, returns. The combined evidence suggests embedding décor-sensitive SOPs into routine housekeeping, coordinating with engineering for preventive maintenance, and pacing aesthetic upgrades to complement hygiene and functionality improvements.

5.4 Limitations and avenues for future research

The study focuses on a single destination and hotel class, uses self-reported perceptual measures, and evaluates a targeted set of housekeeping attributes. Future work should widen the sampling frame across hotel categories and regions, incorporate additional operational variables (e.g., staff responsiveness, technology integration), and consider longitudinal or mixed-methods designs to connect service improvements with loyalty outcomes.

6 Conclusion and Recommendation

In sum, housekeeping tangibles are central to guests' satisfaction in four-star hotels in Desaru. Cleanliness, physical facilities, and room décor are each significant and positive predictors of satisfaction, and together they explain 66.9% of its variance in a well-fitting model ($R = .820$; Adjusted $R^2 = .669$; $p < .001$). The most significant standardised effects are observed for cleanliness and physical facilities ($\beta \approx .34$ each), with room décor contributing a more negligible yet meaningful effect ($\beta = .216$). These results consolidate the descriptive pattern in which cleanliness is rated most highly and décor least, and they underscore that sustained gains in satisfaction will depend on managing these attributes as an integrated quality bundle.

Based on these findings, managers should prioritise interventions that preserve and make visible uncompromising hygiene standards, institutionalising room-readiness checklists and periodic quality audits to maintain cleanliness leadership. In parallel, preventive maintenance cycles for fixtures, HVAC, lighting, and plumbing should be tightly coordinated between housekeeping and engineering to protect functional reliability, as the model indicates that failures in the physical plant can erode satisfaction as strongly as hygiene lapses. Finally, properties should phase cost-effective décor refreshes—coherent colour palettes, lighting warmth, soft furnishings, and minor layout adjustments that targeted first at room types or floors with the largest aesthetic gaps; given décor's smaller but significant effect size, such upgrades should complement (not substitute for) hygiene and maintenance work. Sequencing resources in this order is most consistent with the relative magnitudes of the regression coefficients and with the observed means across constructs.

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