

EXAMINING CLEANING STANDARDS OF HOTELS' GUESTROOMS DURING COVID - 19 PANDEMIC

Mrs Pritilata Acharya

Research Scholar, SOA University, Bhubaneswar

Dr Smita S Mahapatra

Professor, HOD RDM, Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism management, SOA University,
Bhubaneswar

ABSTRACT

Cleaning is an important task performed by the housekeeping department of the hotel. There are certain standards set by the hotels for doing the day today cleaning in different areas. However, in the growing pandemic situation the question that comes to the mind is if the cleaning procedures and standards adopted by the hotel are sufficient for the guests coming in the current situation. Are the guests going to feel secure when they enter the premises of the hotel and their rooms? How often should the cleaning activities be carried out to avoid the risk of infection from Covid 19.

In this paper we would discuss about the strategies that the hotels are adapting to sustain in a difficult situation like Covid - 19. Does the changes in the daily procedures affects the guest satisfaction and what is the observed change in acceptance by the guest for housekeeping in hotels for pre and post Covid situation? Also we would analyse the guest reviews for their stay in the hotel during the Covid situation to measure the guest perception on the cleaning standards adopted by the hotel industry.

Keywords: Cleaning, Infection, SOP's, Safety, Hygiene

INTRODUCTION

The housekeeping department in a hotel plays a crucial role in the sale of a guest room or in adding up to the experience of a guest. Either it is making a room spic and span for the guest or it is cleaning and maintaining the public area of the hotel, this department keeps working 24X7 to keep the areas clean and presentable.

Any surface kept unclean for a longer period of time are susceptible to a variety of micro organisms (Donskey, 2013). Cross infection can occur by touching the mucous of the nose and then touching any surface (Barker et al, 2001). There were several news in the past which showed that the hotel industry has suffered a lot in the past due to different viral infections.

In March 2003, the outbreak of severe acute respiratory symptom (SARS) has affected a major part of the hotel industry in Asia. The World health Organization (WHO) had laid a number of rules to restrict the tourists from visiting different tourism regions to prevent the spread of the virus (Pine et al, 2004). The first SARS case was identified in the hotel Industry when a guest checked

into a room and then started feeling ill in some days. When the treatment was done the guest was identified with SARS after which many other guests and staffs of the hotel were identified having the infection (Khan, 2016).

In July 2001, Legionnaires disease outbreak was the largest in the world. The first case of the Legionnaire disease occurred in 1976 at Philadelphia in a hotel when attendees came to attend a convention (García-Fulgueiras et al, 2003; Dondero et al, 1980). Legionnaire disease occurs in fresh water when the water is stagnant for certain period of time (Stout et al, 1992).

After the above two outbreaks the industry faced recently the outbreak of Norovirus which spreaded through contaminated food and water. Many guests were infected with the spread of the virus (Doménech-Sánchez et al, 2011). Norovirus is connected to the hotel industry as well as cruise liners. The virus is said to be able to remain in a dry room temperature for 28 days.

Very recently the outbreak of corona virus commonly known as COVID-19 has got the hospitality industry to come into standstill. Many countries are still fighting with the pandemic situation. The infection spreads through coughing and sneezing without covering the nose and mouth. There are various norms advised by WHO and the governing bodies of the countries to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (Hoque et al, 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

As per the Oxford dictionary, housekeeping is defined as "Operations such as maintenance or record keeping which facilitates productive work in an organization". Powel et al (2006) describes that a room attendant is responsible for the upkeep of the guestroom along with the maintenance of the building, furniture's etc. He also describes housekeeping work in the hotel to be an unseen work which is the main reason for the profit earning from the major source of revenue that is the rooms. Also, when a guest steps into the lobby of the hotel the way the area is maintained gives the first impression to the guest regarding what could be the expected service in the hotel.

Raghubalan et al (2009) describes the procedures adopted by the housekeeping department in the star classified hotels for cleaning of the guestrooms. He also lists the various sub departments which operate under the umbrella of housekeeping department in order to meet all the requirements of the guest related to housekeeping during his stay like laundry, flower arrangement, cleaning of guestroom and bathroom etc. In order to maintain the quality of service in housekeeping department, the organisation has devised certain standard operating procedures (SOP's). Standard operating procedures are a set of step by step procedures listed in the pattern of a format, designed in such a way that it is understandable by a common man (Prasanna, 2013; Raghubalan et al, 2009; Andrews, 2013).

The American association of hotels and association (AHLA) on march 2020 published the guidelines for hotel cleaning after the start of COVID, which hit the industry. As per AHLA, there are various steps that should be followed by the employees for the safety of the staffs and the guest while they are in the hotel environment. The various steps advised by AHLA are washing hands

in the prescribed method, using hand sanitizer with a minimum of 60% of alcohol content, using face masks in high traffic areas as well as in lobby areas, by posting the list of ways to be adopted by the guests in order to reduce the chance of infection etc. AHLA has also laid out number of steps in order to clean the different areas of the hotel. As per the advise laid out by AHLA all the high traffic areas should be cleaned and disinfected properly in various intervals, after a guest checks out of a room a housekeeper should wait for 15 minutes before entering the room so that the room gets sufficient time for the exchange of the air, all single use items by the guest should be disposed and all the touch points that is hard surfaces in the guest room should be sanitized properly, all the linens from the guest room should be cleaned by using the specified standards etc. Almanza et al (2015) studied about the cleaning standards of the hotel industry by comparing the difference in cleaning standards of hotels to that of other industries. During his study he compared the various cleaning methods used for cleaning a guestroom to that of the cleaning standards used in different other organisations like the food industry, hospitals etc. It was found that the hotel guestrooms failed to attain the microbial standards set by the other industry. The current evaluation of the cleaning standards are based completely on visual assessments. He also advised that the visual assessment of the surface is good for aesthetic evaluation where as the microbial assessment of the surface helps to prevent contamination or infection.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Cleaning standard of a hotel's guestroom can be measured either by taking a sample and doing a microbial study or it can be measured by visual assessments. In the current scenario as the situations are different and there is an awareness among the guests also regarding the cleaning procedures to be followed in the hotel, it is important to know the perception of the guest when they are staying in the hotel's guest room after COVID. Therefore, the purpose of the above research is to find out the answers to the following research questions which are:

1. What current strategies are adopted by the hotels to prevent COVID among the guests?
2. What effect the change in the current daily procedures in housekeeping department has on the guest satisfaction level?
3. Has the new protocols in housekeeping useful in building the trust among guests of the hotel?
4. What difference in the experience the guests have during their stay for pre and post COVID?
5. Which particular service is provided by the hotels to exceed their expectation in the current scenario ?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Two methods were followed in order to understand the impact of the cleanliness standards of the hotel on the satisfaction level of the guest.

1. The first method consists of an analysis of the guest reviews from different online portals for their stay in hotel during COVID times.
2. The second method consists of designing an unstructured questionnaire to understand the perception of the guest regarding the cleanliness of the guestroom during COVID.

FINDINGS

Different online sites were visited like LinkedIn, Face book, Twitter etc to find out about various pictorial images uploaded by the hotels for the reviews of the experience shared by guests staying in their hotel during COVID. All the guest reviews were collected and analyzed by NVIVO software to find out the satisfaction level of the guest with the new cleaning procedures. It was observed that Cleanliness covered around 7.81% of the first review given by the guest, 3.94% of the second reviews given by the guest 2.31% of the third review. Aspects on Covid measures covered 5.88% of the first review and 5.04% of the third review. Guest satisfaction covered around 7.31% of the first review, 3.06% of the second review and 4.20% of the third review.

Also, an unstructured questionnaire was prepared which was sent to the guest by their email ids with the help of conventional sampling method. The questionnaire was specifically designed for the set of guests who have stayed in a star category (A star category property is being defined as a property which has been given as a minimum of 3 star or above) hotel post COVID. A total of 11 respondents answered the questionnaire out of which only 9 filled questionnaires are valid. Then all the questionnaires were analyzed to interpret the findings under different themes like Cleaning procedure, Trust, Guest satisfaction, Experience and WOW factor.

Question 1 What difference have you found/ observed in the cleaning methods/ ways after COVID-19?

All the participants agreed to the same point that after COVID the cleaning procedure has been revised and the hotel rooms and all the periphery areas are more strategically cleaned. The participants have listed down the various cleaning standards observed by them during their stay in the property.

Participant 1 mentioned that

" They are disinfecting the rooms while cleaning. Post checkout keeping room vacant for 12 hours"

Participant 2 mentioned that

" Frequency of cleaning and sanitization has increased"

Participant 3 mentioned that

" Social distancing norms are followed by the hotels after the outbreak of COVID-19. In the reception area, proper demarcations are made to ensure unnecessary crowding of the place. Express check in services are being followed now a days to prevent contamination of hotel premises. Hand sanitizers are placed in all public areas. All the staffs are found wearing gloves ,masks and even face shields while coming in close vicinity to the guests. Washable linen skip bags are used for collection of soiled linen from the guest rooms"

Participant 4 mentioned that

" Sops of covid has been introduced and the same is practiced in a serious manner for proper hygiene to be maintained"

Participant 5 mentioned that

" Fumigating and sanitizing the property on regular basis"

Participant 6 mentioned that

" Sensitization right from the main porch. Glass shield on counters. Staff is wearing mask. Room had marks of disinfectant"

Participant 7 mentioned that

" Hygiene and sanitisation at other level"

Participant 8 mentioned that

" Precautions have been taken post Covid in the hotel"

Question 2 What steps according to you was taken by the hotel housekeeping department which made you to develop the trust to stay in their property?

It was observed that the revised cleaning procedures followed by the hotels for different areas including the guest rooms led to developing trust of the guest to stay in the property. When the participants were individually asked about the same their replies were as follows.

Participant 1 stated that

" Using PPE kit while cleaning and disinfecting time to time"

Participant 2 stated that

" Hygiene and sanitization minutely"

Participant 3 stated that

" Use of washable linen skip bags for soiled linen. Fumigation of guest rooms after every department of guest. Sanitising all the surfaces with VIREX solution"

Participant 4 stated that

" Social distancing norms are followed by the hotels after the outbreak of COVID-19. In the reception area, proper demarcations are made to ensure unnecessary crowding of the place. Express check in services are being followed now a days to prevent contamination of hotel premises. Hand sanitizers are placed in all public areas. All the staffs are found wearing gloves ,masks and even face shields while coming in close vicinity to the guests. Washable linen skip bags are used for collection of soiled linen from the guest rooms"

Participant 5 stated that

" Sops of housekeeping and cleanliness was observed during the stay"

Participant 6 stated that

" Fumigating and sanitizing the property on regular basis"

Participant 7 stated that

" Seals used"

Participant 8 stated that

" Happy with multiple disinfecting of the room"

Participant 9 stated that

" Precautions taken"

Question 3 How satisfied are you with the new rules for cleaning the Hotel to visit the Hotel again?

Majority of the guests gave their view point of being completely satisfied with the change in the cleaning procedures due to covid. However, certain guests found strict cleaning protocols to be stuffy which reflected on their satisfaction level compared to their stay pre COVID.

Participant 1 remarked by saying

" Good but not 100% satisfied"

Participant 2 answered by saying

" Due to check procedure strictly"

Participant 3, Participant 4, Participant 5 and Participant 6 reacted by saying

" Good", " Very Satisfied", "Satisfied" and "Quiet Satisfied"

Participant 7 said

" Satisfied, however closed rooms with no or less ventilation still feel uncomfortable"

Participant 8 answered by saying

"Very Satisfied"

Question 4 Explain the difference in the experience you have during your stay in the guestroom for pre and post COVID?

The Difference in the experience of stay in the hotel was only observed due to the extra protocols followed by the hotels to provide a safe, hygienic and comfortable stay to the guest.

Participant 1 shared his experience as

" Boys are using PPE kit while cleaning . There is no regular cleaning like morning service or evening service. Cleaning On call basis"

Participant 2 responded by saying

" More professional approach and strictly adhering with SOP which is set by MOHFW"

Participant 3 said that

" Staff maintains distance .staff guest conversation is very short"

Participant 4 answered by saying

" Using and scanning of QR code to know the facilities provided by hotel. Knock and drop room service facility "

Participant 5 answered by saying

" More use of masks and sanitizers"

Participant 6 said that

" It is Safe"

Participant 7 answered by saying

" Now it is less crowded than before"

Participant 8 said that

"It is same, no major difference"

Question 5 During your recent stay in the hotel, what particular service was given by the housekeeping department which exceeded your experience

Many guests have responded by saying that the provision of certain facilities specially meant for taking care of the situation of COVID like provision of mask, sanitizer in different places etc contributed to the WOW factor which led to the exceeding factor of the guest experience.

Participant 2 said

" Sanitizer provided by the hotel @entrance as well as in the room and frequency of sanitization increased specially in public area with SOP and proper documentation now a day's"

Participant 5 said that

" Contactless pickup and delivery of linen in housekeeping"

Participant 6 said that

" Providing Masks"

Participant 7 said that

" Contact less check-in"

Participant 9 said that

"Precautions taken while cleaning the room"

ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of the present study is to understand the change in the work procedures due to the pandemic in hotel industry. Several guidelines have been introduced by the international bodies like WHO (World health organization) for the safety of the staffs and the guests coming to the hotel so that the spread of the virus can be kept at bay.

When the guests were interviewed they confirmed about the various steps followed by the hotel industry to ensure proper cleaning and sanitization of the guestroom. Some examples of the steps followed in the industries are using PPE kit while entering the guestroom for cleaning, Not entering the guestroom for room service, using glass bars at the front desk while communicating with the guest, marking at different places for ensuring proper social distancing, developing new SOP's for different work keeping COVID 19 in mind etc.

The use of these techniques helps the hotel in developing trust for them in their guests mind. The guests feel more secure which makes them more loyal towards the organization. As we know that trust is directly related to the satisfaction of the guest, so the guests are now more satisfied.

Service was often thought to be personal when it was given by a person to the guest personally but then the guests also confirmed that the contactless service done by the staffs, exceeded their experience of service till that date. The change in the protocols of giving a service to the guest

along with the use of protective gear and following the norms of social distancing helped the guests in experiencing service in a complete different level which led to the exceeding of the guest experience.

REFERENCES

1. Ahla.com. (2020). Retrieved 4 October 2020, from <https://www.ahla.com/sites/default/files/SafeStayGuidelines061220.pdf>.
2. Almanza, B. A., Kirsch, K., Kline, S. F., Sirsat, S., Stroia, O., Choi, J. K., & Neal, J. (2015). How clean are hotel rooms? Part II: Examining the concept of cleanliness standards. *Journal of environmental health*, 78(1), 14-19.
3. Andrews, S. (2013). *Hotel housekeeping: A training manual*. Tata McGraw-Hill Education.
4. Barker, J., Stevens, D., & Bloomfield, S. F. (2001). Spread and prevention of some common viral infections in community facilities and domestic homes. *Journal of Applied Microbiology*, 91(1), 7-21.
5. Domenech-Sanchez, A. (2011). Gastroenteritis outbreak caused by norovirus associated with the children's club of a hotel located in Majorca, Spain. *Clinical microbiology and infection*, 17(6), 949-951.
6. Dondero Jr, T. J., Rendtorff, R. C., Mallison, G. F., Weeks, R. M., Levy, J. S., Wong, E. W., & Schaffner, W. (1980). An outbreak of Legionnaires' disease associated with a contaminated air-conditioning cooling tower. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 302(7), 365-370.
7. Donskey, C. J. (2013). Does improving surface cleaning and disinfection reduce health care-associated infections?. *American journal of infection control*, 41(5), S12-S19.
8. García-Fulgueiras, A., Navarro, C., Fenoll, D., García, J., González-Diego, P., Jiménez-Buñuales, T., ... & Segovia, M. (2003). Legionnaires' disease outbreak in Murcia, Spain. *Emerging infectious diseases*, 9(8), 915.
9. Hoque, A., Shikha, F. A., Hasanat, M. W., Arif, I., & Hamid, A. B. A. (2020). The effect of Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the tourism industry in China. *Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 3(1), 52-58.
10. Khan, A. S. (2016). *The Next Pandemic: On the Front Lines Against Humankind's Gravest Dangers*. PublicAffairs.
11. Pine, R., & McKercher, B. (2004). The impact of SARS on Hong Kong's tourism industry. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*.
12. Powell, P. H., & Watson, D. (2006). Service unseen: The hotel room attendant at work. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 25(2), 297-312.
13. Prasanna, K. (2013). Standard Operating Procedures for Standalone Hotels. *Research Journal of Management Sciences ISSN, 2319, 1171*.

14. Raghubalan, G., & Raghubalan, S. (2009). *Hotel housekeeping: operations and management*. Oxford University Press.
15. Stout, J. E., Yu, V. L., Muraca, P., Joly, J., Troup, N., & Tompkins, L. S. (1992). Potable water as a cause of sporadic cases of community-acquired legionnaires' disease. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 326(3), 151-155.