

Implementation of Standard Operating Procedures for Bellboys Handling Guest Luggage During Check-In at Pangeran Beach Hotel

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ABSTRACT

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are essential in ensuring structured, consistent, and high-quality hotel operations. This study aims to analyze the implementation of SOPs by bellboys in handling guest luggage during the check-in process at Pangeran Beach Hotel in Padang, Indonesia. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through observations, interviews with hotel staff and guests, and documentation. The findings reveal that bellboys performed seven out of ten SOP components consistently, including greeting guests, unloading luggage, securing items, using luggage trolleys, waiting at appropriate locations, verifying room keys, and escorting guests to their rooms. However, certain procedures, such as inviting guests to recheck their belongings and confirming nothing was left in the vehicle, were often omitted. The study concludes that while SOP implementation is generally effective, some steps require reinforcement through staff training and periodic evaluations. Enhancing SOP compliance can strengthen service consistency, improve guest satisfaction, and reinforce the hotel's professional image.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The hospitality sector plays a vital role in supporting tourism and business travel by offering lodging services and tailored guest experiences. As competition among hotels intensifies, maintaining operational consistency and service quality has become a strategic priority [1]. Among the key personnel in a hotel's front office are bellboys, who serve as the first point of contact for guests upon arrival. Their performance during the check-in process significantly influences guests' first impressions and overall satisfaction [2].

To standardize service quality and minimize errors, hotels adopt Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that clearly define employee tasks and responsibilities. SOPs are critical in ensuring that routine services such as welcoming guests, handling luggage, and escorting them to their rooms are carried out in a professional, consistent, and efficient manner [3]. Nonetheless, the implementation of SOPs in hotel operations is often challenged by high turnover rates, limited training, and staffing constraints—factors that may affect compliance and service delivery [4].

Pangeran Beach Hotel in Padang, Indonesia, is a well-established hotel that continues to attract guests for both leisure and business purposes. Despite its longevity in the industry, the need for consistent SOP adherence in bellboy services remains important. Studies have shown that gaps in SOP implementation can lead to service inconsistency and a decline in guest satisfaction [5].

This study aims to assess the implementation of bellboy SOPs during guest check-in, particularly in the process of handling luggage. It explores the extent of compliance with standard procedures and identifies areas for improvement. By employing a qualitative approach, the research provides practical insights into how SOP adherence influences the perceived professionalism of front office services in the hospitality industry.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate the implementation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) by bellboys in handling guest luggage during the check-in process at Pangeran Beach Hotel, Padang, Indonesia. The qualitative approach was selected to capture actual behaviors, routines, and contextual realities within the hotel's operational environment, allowing for a deeper understanding of SOP adherence in real-world conditions [6]. Data collection techniques included structured observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observational data were gathered using a checklist containing ten predefined SOP indicators, focused on bellboy tasks from the moment of guest arrival through to luggage delivery to guest rooms. Two bellboys were observed across multiple guest check-in sessions to ensure reliability and consistency. In-depth interviews were conducted with five participants—namely the Front Office Manager, Bell Captain, two bellboys, and one hotel guest—to provide diverse perspectives on the application and perceived effectiveness of the SOPs. Secondary data were obtained from internal operational documents, such as SOP manuals, to support the primary findings. All qualitative data were transcribed verbatim, coded manually, and analyzed thematically to identify patterns, compliance levels, and procedural gaps. Thematic analysis allowed for the synthesis of narrative insights without compromising contextual integrity. Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring anonymity, and securing permission from hotel management for field observations and interviews [7], [8].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Overview of SOP Implementation by Bellboys

The implementation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) by bellboys during guest check-in at Pangeran Beach Hotel was evaluated based on ten operational components outlined in the hotel's internal guidelines. Observational data revealed that bellboys consistently executed seven out of the ten SOP elements. These included greeting guests according to the time of day, retrieving luggage from guest vehicles, securing and organizing luggage on a trolley, waiting in the designated area during the check-in process, verifying the room key number, allowing the guest to enter the elevator first, and escorting the guest to their room using the guest lift.

These routine actions demonstrated an adequate level of procedural compliance and reflected the staff's operational familiarity with front office standards. However, three SOP components were either inconsistently applied or frequently omitted. These included inviting guests to recheck their luggage, ensuring no items were left in the vehicle, and directing guests to the reception counter before check-in. These deviations indicate areas requiring further training and procedural reinforcement [3].

Bellboys serve as the first point of human contact for arriving guests, positioning them as key contributors to the hotel's initial impression. As front office representatives, their conduct directly influences the perceived professionalism and hospitality standards of the property. Consistent implementation of SOPs at this early touchpoint not only streamlines the check-in process but also reinforces a sense of trust and care that can shape the overall guest experience positively. Previous studies have emphasized that the quality of first-contact service, particularly during arrival, significantly shapes guest perceptions, satisfaction, and the likelihood of repeat visits [2], [9]. Therefore, ensuring discipline in bellboy SOP execution is essential for maintaining service excellence and sustaining the hotel's reputation in a competitive hospitality landscape.

3.2. Compliance with Core SOP Tasks

The observations conducted at Pangeran Beach Hotel revealed a consistent execution of key SOP components by bellboys, particularly in tasks that are highly visible to guests during arrival. The first task performed reliably was greeting guests in accordance with the appropriate time of day (morning, afternoon, or evening). This initial gesture, though seemingly simple, establishes a courteous atmosphere and is critical in shaping the guest's first impression of the hotel's service culture.

Furthermore, bellboys demonstrated operational competence in unloading luggage from guest vehicles promptly and handling the items with care. Each item was transferred to a secure position on a

hotel trolley, which not only ensured efficiency in movement but also minimized the risk of damage or misplacement. The bellboys waited at an appropriate distance during the front desk registration process and later escorted guests to their rooms using the designated guest elevator, adhering to protocols such as allowing the guest to enter the lift first.

The consistency observed in these core SOP tasks reflects a foundational level of service discipline that is vital in delivering a seamless guest experience. Research has shown that service consistency—especially in frontline operations—plays a critical role in enhancing perceived service quality, guest satisfaction, and ultimately brand loyalty [10]. In a hospitality setting where expectations are often shaped by small, repeated interactions, the execution of these basic procedures with precision contributes significantly to the hotel's image of professionalism and reliability.

3.3. Deviations and Operational Gaps

Although several core tasks were performed in line with the established Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), observations at Pangeran Beach Hotel revealed notable deviations in the implementation of certain SOP components. Specifically, three procedures were found to be inconsistently executed or frequently omitted. First, bellboys seldom invited guests to recheck their belongings before proceeding to the lobby. Second, there was limited effort to verify whether items were left behind in the guest's vehicle—an essential step to ensure guest satisfaction and to minimize liability. Third, in several observed instances, guests were not clearly directed to the reception counter after their arrival, resulting in brief confusion during the registration process.

Interviews with bellboys and front office personnel suggested that these inconsistencies were not due to a lack of awareness but rather the result of real-time operational flexibility. In practice, bellboys assessed the situation visually—for example, confirming an empty vehicle trunk—before proceeding without explicitly consulting the guest. While such discretion is intended to enhance service fluidity, it introduces variability and potential gaps in service delivery. Additionally, staffing limitations and peak-hour workload were cited as contributing factors that pressured employees to shorten certain SOP sequences in order to serve multiple guests efficiently within limited timeframes.

Such deviations underline the tension between standardized service procedures and operational realities on the ground. Prior studies in hospitality management have noted that frontline employees often engage in improvised service behaviors when faced with resource constraints or time pressure, which can compromise procedural consistency [11]. While operational adaptability is occasionally necessary, it must be balanced with a commitment to procedural integrity to safeguard the overall service experience.

3.4. Front Office Perspectives on SOP Discipline

Interviews with key front office personnel—including the Front Office Manager, Bell Captain, and bellboys—revealed a strong organizational emphasis on the importance of SOP discipline in maintaining service consistency and enhancing guest satisfaction. The Front Office Manager highlighted that bellboys are expected to follow standard procedures, especially during peak operational hours when service flow must remain uninterrupted. A critical mechanism supporting this expectation is the daily briefing, which functions as a platform to reiterate SOP protocols, review performance feedback, and align staff duties with the day's operational plan. These briefings contribute to procedural awareness, reduce uncertainty, and enhance team coordination.

The Bell Captain added that operational discipline is also maintained through real-time supervision and informal performance checks, especially during high guest turnover periods. Despite these efforts, certain limitations—such as staff shortages, multitasking, and fluctuating guest behaviors—can occasionally affect SOP consistency. However, management compensates for these challenges by encouraging proactive communication, peer support, and feedback-oriented evaluations. Bellboys interviewed noted that while they understand the core procedures, the dynamic nature of guest interactions sometimes requires quick judgment and deviations from strict protocol.

Training and evaluation play a central role in reinforcing SOP compliance. Staff expressed appreciation for role-play simulations and problem-based learning methods introduced during routine training. These methods help operationalize SOPs in varied, unpredictable guest scenarios. Prior studies support this view, showing that frequent, scenario-based training sessions significantly improve SOP adherence and overall service performance [12]. Furthermore, integrating training with regular performance evaluations has been shown to reduce procedural drift and increase staff accountability [13]. Without these continuous efforts from the front office leadership, SOPs risk being perceived as administrative formalities rather than operational standards essential to hotel excellence.

3.5. Guest Perception of Bellboy Service

Guest feedback collected through interviews revealed a generally positive perception of the bellboy service at Pangeran Beach Hotel. One guest who had recently stayed at the hotel expressed high satisfaction with the bellboy's demeanor, emphasizing the timeliness, politeness, and attentiveness shown from the moment of arrival to room escort. The guest described the bellboy as "well-mannered, quick to respond, and professionally dressed," reinforcing the perception of a structured and guest-oriented service culture. This testimonial aligns closely with the observed implementation of seven out of ten SOP elements (see Table 1), particularly regarding greeting guests appropriately, handling luggage efficiently, and escorting them to their rooms with professionalism.

These service behaviors reflect key dimensions of hospitality—namely, professionalism, efficiency, and courtesy—that contribute to the psychological comfort of guests, especially during the high-contact check-in phase. Bellboys' role in managing luggage and providing navigational assistance not only fulfills functional tasks but also serves as a symbolic cue of the hotel's overall service quality. Table 2 further supports this view, as both the Front Office Manager and Bell Captain confirmed that maintaining a consistent guest experience is a strategic priority, reinforced through daily briefings and informal supervision routines.

Moreover, the guest's perception of personalized attention—particularly in the way bellboys adapted to situational needs—was seen as a strong contributor to emotional engagement. Previous studies have shown that such personalized interactions significantly enhance guest satisfaction, loyalty, and word-of-mouth intentions [14], [15]. In line with service quality theory, the bellboy represents a tangible embodiment of otherwise intangible hospitality services, making their role a critical determinant of perceived brand image [16].

By ensuring consistency in bellboy SOP execution, as documented in Tables 1 and 2, the hotel not only fulfills expected service standards but also reinforces trust, emotional connection, and positive brand recall among guests. This underscores the importance of investing in continuous training, staff accountability, and feedback integration to sustain long-term guest loyalty.

Table 1. Summary of Observation on Bellboy SOP Implementation

SOP Component	Status of Implementation	Observation Notes
Greeting guests according to time	Consistently implemented	Bellboys greeted guests politely with time-appropriate phrases
Retrieving luggage from the vehicle	Consistently implemented	Handled efficiently and with visible courtesy
Placing luggage in a secure area	Consistently implemented	Trolley used; care taken in organizing items
Escorting guests using the guest lift	Consistently implemented	Bellboys ensured guest entered the lift first and were escorted to the room
Waiting at designated area during check-in	Consistently implemented	Bellboys waited near the front desk until guest registration was complete
Verifying room key number	Consistently implemented	Confirmed with receptionist before escorting guests
Asking guests to recheck their belongings	Rarely implemented	Often omitted unless bags looked disorganized
Verifying items left in the vehicle	Inconsistently implemented	Bellboys visually checked vehicle, but did not confirm with guest
Inviting guests to proceed to reception counter	Occasionally omitted	Some bellboys assumed guests knew the check-in flow

SOP Component	Status of Implementation	Observation Notes
Offering assistance with additional guest needs	Occasionally implemented	Done upon guest request, not proactively

Table 2. Interview-Based Perceptions of SOP and Bellboy Performance

Respondent	Key Insights
Front Office Manager	SOP reviewed daily in morning briefings; staff are expected to comply strictly
Bell Captain	Real-time supervision ensures compliance; staffing issues may affect execution
Bellboys	Aware of SOP but rely on situational judgment; prefer practical training methods
Guest	Appreciated politeness, quick response, and professionalism of bellboy service

3.6. Managerial Implications and Service Quality

The findings of this study underscore the vital role of consistent SOP implementation in reinforcing perceived service quality and strengthening guest loyalty. Bellboys, as first-contact service agents, not only carry out operational tasks but also shape the emotional tone of the guest experience. Thus, managerial practices that emphasize structured SOP reinforcement—through daily briefings, real-time supervision, and role-based training—are essential for sustaining front office performance standards. Given the identified gaps in SOP execution (Table 1), targeted interventions are needed to address overlooked procedures such as guest confirmation of belongings and explicit guidance to the reception desk.

Hotel management is advised to implement scenario-based training every two months, integrating role-play simulations into onboarding and refresher sessions. This aligns with best practices in hospitality service learning, where experiential methods improve situational judgment, adaptability, and procedural recall among frontline staff [17]. In parallel, feedback loops—collected via guest satisfaction surveys and team performance reviews—should be actively used to monitor compliance and adjust SOP protocols as necessary.

The strategic value of SOP discipline is evident in the strong correlation between consistent bellboy service and guest perception of professionalism, attentiveness, and care. As shown in Table 3, the alignment between procedural implementation, guest perception, and brand loyalty highlights how service delivery frameworks translate directly into reputational outcomes. Therefore, managerial commitment to operational consistency is not merely administrative, but an integral component of the hotel's competitive positioning and long-term customer retention.

Table 3. Matrix of SOP Execution, Guest Perception, and Loyalty Impact

SOP Element	Observed Consistency	Guest Perception	Potential Loyalty Impact
Greeting guests according to time	High	Professional, respectful welcome	Positive emotional engagement
Handling luggage from vehicle	High	Efficient, trustworthy	Enhanced satisfaction, trust
Escorting guests to room (via guest lift)	High	Structured, well-managed process	Reinforces brand image
Asking guests to recheck belongings	Low	Perceived as less attentive	Potential service gap, minor risk

SOP Element	Observed Consistency	Guest Perception	Potential Loyalty Impact
Verifying items left in vehicle	Inconsistent	Missed opportunity for assurance	Risk of complaint or perceived neglect
Directing guests to reception counter	Moderate	Occasionally confusing	May affect flow, reduces perceived polish

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the implementation of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) by bellboys during the guest check-in process at Pangeran Beach Hotel, Padang. Through direct observation and in-depth interviews, it was found that bellboys consistently executed seven out of ten core SOP components, demonstrating strong operational discipline in areas such as greeting guests, handling luggage, and escorting them to their rooms. However, inconsistencies were identified in procedures involving guest confirmation of belongings, verification of items left in vehicles, and directions to the reception desk.

Guest feedback reinforced the importance of bellboy services in shaping first impressions and enhancing perceived service quality. Professionalism, promptness, and courtesy were highly valued by guests and directly influenced emotional engagement, satisfaction, and brand loyalty. From the front office perspective, routine briefings, on-the-job supervision, and scenario-based training were acknowledged as critical mechanisms to support SOP compliance.

The findings highlight the need for continuous managerial investment in frontline training, performance monitoring, and adaptive service reinforcement. By aligning procedural discipline with personalized guest interactions, hotels can strengthen their service consistency, build trust, and maintain a positive brand image in a highly competitive hospitality market. Future research may expand this framework by incorporating quantitative guest satisfaction measures and comparative analysis across multiple hotel properties.

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