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## Hospitality students perceptions of housekeeping as a career choice in the hospitality industry: A study in Uttarakhand, India

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### Abstract

This research explored hospitality students' perceptions of careers in housekeeping, using surveys (n=384) and focus groups in Uttarakhand. Most students viewed housekeeping as a low-status job with few career progression opportunities, identifying issues of low pay, stigma associated with the profession, and a lack of awareness regarding professionalism and leadership and managerial opportunities. Internship experience helped students to have a more well-rounded viewpoint of housekeeping careers. This study was the first of its kind in this region, and it may provide some useful insights to help develop the curriculum, or raise awareness of housekeeping positions as inclusive careers.

**Keywords:** Hospitality education, Housekeeping careers, Career perceptions, Hospitality students, Uttarakhand, Tourism workforce

### 1. Introduction

The global hospitality industry, valued at over \$4.7 trillion pre-pandemic, continues to face significant workforce challenges, particularly in operational departments such as housekeeping (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2023). Despite housekeeping's critical role in ensuring guest satisfaction and operational efficiency, the department consistently struggles with recruitment and retention issues across international markets (Kim & Jagaratnam, 2010; Yang *et al.*, 2012)<sup>[17, 29]</sup>. This challenge is particularly acute in emerging markets like India, where rapid tourism growth has created substantial demand for skilled hospitality professionals.

India's hospitality sector, contributing approximately 9.2% to the country's GDP, has witnessed exponential growth in recent decades (Ministry of Tourism, 2023). The sector's expansion has created diverse career opportunities, yet housekeeping departments continue to face staffing shortages and high turnover rates exceeding 85% annually (FHRAI, 2022). This phenomenon raises critical questions about how housekeeping careers are perceived by the industry's future workforce—hospitality students.

Career choice theories, particularly Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (1991), argue that behavioral intention is predicated on attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived ability to behave. In hospitality, students' perceptions during their academic career are critical towards the direction of their ultimate profession (Richardson, 2008; Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000)<sup>[20, 23]</sup>. When attempting to address the issue of hospitality education and workforce sustainability, understanding those perceptions will provide educational institutions and industry professionals opportunities to create sustainable workforce solutions.

The research has aimed to address this gap in research on hospitality students' perceptions of careers in housekeeping through the specific socio-cultural context of Uttarakhand. The study has implications for understanding students' attitudes, influencing factors, and the misunderstanding as to why perceptions about the career are not aligned with the realities. Ultimately, the study was meant to provide suggestions for educational practice and industry recommendations for sustainable workforce development.

### 2. Literature Review

#### 2.1 Housekeeping in Modern Hospitality Operations

Housekeeping management in the contemporary environment is much more than cleaning and maintenance. Housekeeping management has developed into complex operational areas,

such as inventory management, quality management, sustainable housekeeping practices, and guest relations (Vallen & Vallen, 2017) <sup>[27]</sup>. Housekeeping managers of today also needs competencies in technology, staff management, budgets, and other elements of planning (Raghubalan & Raghubalan, 2007) <sup>[22]</sup>. Notwithstanding this development, the notion that housekeeping is manual, low-skilled work still prevails in many settings (Jones & Siag, 2009) <sup>[16]</sup>.

Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000) <sup>[20]</sup> found that it was common for hospitality management students to view operational departments negatively, as not offering prospects beyond their degree. Similar to this idea is the findings of Richardson and Butler (2012) <sup>[24]</sup> which indicate hospitality students often view housekeeping management roles as transitional, rather than careers. These perceptions dramatically impact the career choices made by graduates, which also presents challenges to staffing areas of departments could be utilized.

## 2.2 Career Perceptions in Hospitality Education

The development of career-related perceptions among hospitality students can manifest through different contingencies between their educational experiences, exposure to industry contexts, sociocultural realities, and their personal aspirations (Kim *et al.*, 2010) <sup>[17]</sup>. While some research shows that students do consider multiple perceived job characteristics such as perceived salary range, perceived social status related to the work undertaken, perceived context of the work undertaken, and perceived opportunities for mobility in their eventual career decisions (Barron *et al.*, 2007; Kong *et al.*, 2012) <sup>[11, 19]</sup>, studies conducted in the Indian context have identified additional perceived factors that shape career perceptions, including: perceptions of family expectations, perceptions of the social status attached to a service-related role, and perceptions of expected behaviours toward their work in a service-related role (Sharma & Sharma, 2018) <sup>[25]</sup>. The collective nature of Indian society is reflected in an expectation that one's career choice also must extend to consideration by family members (Hofstede, 2001) <sup>[15]</sup>. Across this research, it is possible to see that continuing education, types of hospitality industry exposure, culture and personal aspirations, are all dynamically related variables that influence the perceptions of career-related choices among hospitality students.

## Regional Context: The Hospitality Industry of Uttarakhand

Uttarakhand's tourism industry contributes to over 15 percent of the state's GDP. The state has a multitude of tourism segments from spiritual tourism to adventure tourism (Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board, 2023). Given Uttarakhand's interest in sustainable tourism and environmentally curated livelihoods, new types of housekeeping roles focusing on environmental stewardship and cultural sustainability emerged (Bhatt & Sharma, 2020) <sup>[12]</sup>.

Therefore, there is a lack of inquiry bringing about an understanding of how such local identifiers shape local hospitality students' perceptions of their career. To have knowledge of relevant and important local identifiers is essential for workforce planning and education within the context of the region.

## 2.4 Theoretical Framework

We draw upon Ajzen's (1991) <sup>[10]</sup> Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) as a theoretical discussion to support this research. TPB theorizes that three considerations behaviour intent; attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, inform each other (Ajzen, 1991) <sup>[10]</sup>. Therefore, applying TPB to students' career choices indicates; students' intent to pursue a career in housekeeping is informed by;

- **Attitudes:** Personal assessment of housekeeping careers along with observed consequences.
- **Subjective norm:** Social pressures and expectations related to career choices;
- **Perceived behavioral control:** Beliefs about one's personal ability to perform an action in housekeeping careers.

## 3. Methodology

### Research Design

This study used a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design where quantitative surveys and qualitative focus group discussions utilized to provide a full perspective on students' perceptions of careers in housekeeping.

#### • Sample and Participants

The study population included final-year hospitality management students from five prominent hospitality institutions located in Uttarakhand;

- **Quantitative Phase:** 384 students participated in the survey (confidence level 95%, margin of error 5%). The sample included 58% female and 42% male participants, aged 20-24 years, representing various specializations within hospitality management.
- **Qualitative Phase:** Six focus group discussions were conducted with 8-10 participants each, selected purposively to ensure diverse perspectives across institutions and demographic characteristics.

### 3.3 Data Collection Instruments

**Survey Instrument:** A structured questionnaire was developed based on established career perception scales (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000; Richardson, 2008) <sup>[20, 23]</sup> and adapted for the housekeeping context. The instrument comprised five sections:

1. Demographic information (8 items)
2. Career perceptions and attitudes (22 items, 5-point Likert scale)
3. Subjective norms and social influences (12 items)
4. Perceived behavioral control (8 items)
5. Career intentions and preferences (15 items)

The questionnaire was validated through expert review (n=5) and pilot testing (n=30), achieving a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87.

**Focus Group Guide:** Semi-structured discussions explored themes including career aspirations, housekeeping perceptions, influencing factors, and suggestions for improvement. Sessions lasted 60-90 minutes and were audio-recorded with participant consent.

### 3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection occurred over three months (February-April 2025) following institutional ethical approvals. Surveys were administered online using Google Forms, while focus

groups were conducted in-person at participating institutions. All participants provided informed consent, and anonymity was ensured throughout the process.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

**Quantitative Analysis:** Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 28.0, including descriptive statistics, t-tests, ANOVA, and multiple regression analysis to examine relationships between variables and predict career intentions.

**Qualitative Analysis:** Focus group transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. NVivo 12 software facilitated coding and theme development.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study received ethical approval from the lead institution's research ethics committee. Participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time. Data confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Participant Demographics

The sample comprised 384 final-year hospitality students from five institutions across Uttarakhand.

**Table 1:** Participant Demographics (N=384)

| Characteristic        | Category                   | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Gender                | Male                       | 161           | 42             |
|                       | Female                     | 223           | 58             |
| Age Group             | 20-21 years                | 145           | 37.8           |
|                       | 22-23 years                | 189           | 49.2           |
|                       | 24+ years                  | 50            | 13             |
|                       | Mean (SD)                  | 21.7 (1.2)    | -              |
| Specialization        | Hotel Management           | 173           | 45             |
|                       | Tourism Management         | 123           | 32             |
|                       | Food & Beverage Management | 88            | 23             |
| Internship Experience | Any hospitality internship | 346           | 90.1           |
|                       | Housekeeping department    | 131           | 34.1           |
|                       | Front office               | 198           | 51.6           |
|                       | Food & Beverage            | 256           | 66.7           |
|                       | Sales & Marketing          | 89            | 23.2           |

### 4.2 Career Preferences and Intentions

Students' career preferences were assessed using a ranking system and Likert-scale questions.

**Table 2:** Career Preferences among Hospitality Students (N=384)

| Department                 | First Choice | Top 3 Choices | Mean Interest Score* | SD   | Rank |
|----------------------------|--------------|---------------|----------------------|------|------|
| Food & Beverage Management | 261 (68.0%)  | 342 (89.1%)   | 4.23                 | 0.87 | 1    |
| Front Office Operations    | 200 (52.1%)  | 298 (77.6%)   | 3.89                 | 0.92 | 2    |
| Sales & Marketing          | 165 (43.0%)  | 234 (60.9%)   | 3.45                 | 1.08 | 3    |
| Human Resources            | 119 (31.0%)  | 189 (49.2%)   | 3.12                 | 1.15 | 4    |
| Finance & Accounting       | 87 (22.7%)   | 156 (40.6%)   | 2.87                 | 1.03 | 5    |
| Housekeeping               | 46 (12.0%)   | 89 (23.2%)    | 2.34                 | 0.78 | 6    |

\*5-point Likert scale: 1=Very Low Interest, 5=Very High Interest

**Statistical Analysis:** One-way ANOVA revealed significant differences in interest scores across departments ( $F(5,2299) = 247.3$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Post-hoc Tukey tests confirmed

housekeeping scored significantly lower than all other departments ( $p < 0.001$  for all comparisons).

### 4.3 Perceptions of Housekeeping Careers

**Table 3:** Attitudes toward Housekeeping Careers (N=384)

| Perception Dimension | Statement                                             | Mean* | SD   | % Negative** |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------|------|--------------|
| Career Growth        | Housekeeping offers excellent promotion opportunities | 2.18  | 0.89 | 72.10%       |
|                      | Clear career progression paths exist in housekeeping  | 2.31  | 0.94 | 68.50%       |
|                      | Housekeeping can lead to senior management roles      | 2.45  | 1.02 | 65.40%       |
| Compensation         | Housekeeping salaries are competitive                 | 2.23  | 0.85 | 67.70%       |
|                      | Financial growth potential is satisfactory            | 2.35  | 0.91 | 64.60%       |
|                      | Benefits packages are attractive                      | 2.41  | 0.88 | 61.20%       |
| Social Status        | Housekeeping is a respected profession                | 2.19  | 0.97 | 70.30%       |
|                      | Family would be proud of housekeeping career          | 2.12  | 1.04 | 74.50%       |
|                      | Society values housekeeping professionals             | 2.28  | 0.93 | 68.80%       |
| Work Environment     | Housekeeping provides good work-life balance          | 2.67  | 1.15 | 48.20%       |
|                      | Physical demands are manageable                       | 2.54  | 1.08 | 52.60%       |
|                      | Work environment is pleasant                          | 2.73  | 1.03 | 43.80%       |
| Job Content          | Housekeeping work is intellectually stimulating       | 2.29  | 0.92 | 66.90%       |
|                      | Tasks are varied and interesting                      | 2.58  | 1.01 | 51.30%       |
|                      | Technology integration makes work modern              | 2.89  | 1.12 | 38.50%       |
|                      | Overall Attitude Score                                | 2.34  | 0.78 | 61.40%       |

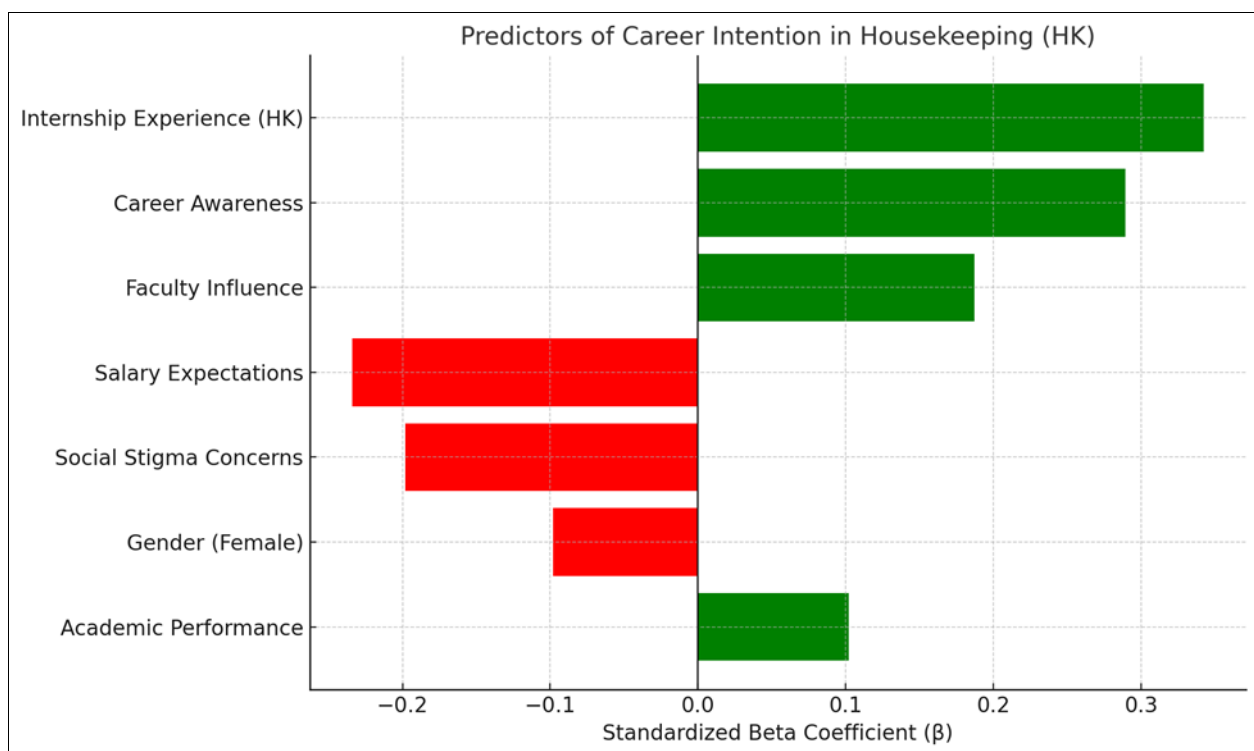
\*5-point Likert scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree \*\*Percentage responding "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree"

#### 4.4 Correlation Analysis

**Table 4:** Correlation Matrix of Key Variables

| Variables                    | Career Intention (HK) | Attitude toward HK | Subjective Norms | Perceived Behavioral Control | Internship Experience (HK) | Career Awareness | Academic Performance | Age  |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------------|------|
| Career Intention (HK)        | 1.00                  | 0.74               | 0.58             | 0.52                         | 0.45                       | 0.43             | 0.28                 | 0.19 |
| Attitude toward HK           | 0.74                  | 1.00               | 0.61             | 0.48                         | 0.52                       | 0.49             | 0.31                 | 0.23 |
| Subjective Norms             | 0.58                  | 0.61               | 1.00             | 0.35                         | 0.38                       | 0.36             | 0.22                 | 0.15 |
| Perceived Behavioral Control | 0.52                  | 0.48               | 0.35             | 1.00                         | 0.41                       | 0.44             | 0.35                 | 0.21 |
| Internship Experience (HK)   | 0.45                  | 0.52               | 0.38             | 0.41                         | 1.00                       | 0.67             | 0.29                 | 0.26 |
| Career Awareness             | 0.43                  | 0.49               | 0.36             | 0.44                         | 0.67                       | 1.00             | 0.33                 | 0.28 |
| Academic Performance         | 0.28                  | 0.31               | 0.22             | 0.35                         | 0.29                       | 0.33             | 1.00                 | 0.18 |
| Age                          | 0.19                  | 0.23               | 0.15             | 0.21                         | 0.26                       | 0.28             | 0.18                 | 1.00 |

#### 4.5 Regression Analysis: Predictors of Housekeeping Career Intentions



**Fig 1:** Multiple Regression Analysis Results

#### Model Summary

- $R^2 = 0.472$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.462$
- $F(7,376) = 48.15$ ,  $p < 0.001$
- Durbin-Watson = 1.89 (acceptable)
- All VIF values  $< 2.0$  (no multicollinearity concerns)

#### 4.6 Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of focus group discussions revealed five major themes:

**Table 5:** Major Themes from Focus Group Discussions

| Major Theme                | Sub-themes          | Frequency* | Representative Quotes                                                                                                                                            |
|----------------------------|---------------------|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Status & Prestige Concerns | Social stigma       | 47         | "When I tell people I'm studying hotel management, they assume I'll be in F&B or front office. Nobody thinks about housekeeping as a management career." (P23-F) |
|                            | Family expectations | 34         | "My family invested so much in my education. They expect me to get a 'respectable' job, not cleaning rooms." (P31-M)                                             |
| Limited Growth             | Unclear career      | 52         | "I don't see clear career paths in housekeeping. Where do you go after housekeeping                                                                              |

| Perception                | paths                 |    | manager?" (P67-F)                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                           | Senior role awareness | 31 | "I've never met a hotel GM who came from housekeeping background." (P55-F)                                        |
| Compensation Concerns     | Starting salary       | 45 | "Honestly, I don't think housekeeping pays as well as other departments. We have student loans to repay." (P52-F) |
|                           | Long-term earning     | 38 | "The starting salaries in housekeeping are lower, and I'm not sure about long-term earning potential." (P38-M)    |
| Lack of Industry Exposure | Limited internships   | 41 | "Our internships were mostly in F&B. I've never really seen what a housekeeping manager actually does." (P29-F)   |
|                           | Theoretical learning  | 36 | "We learn theory about housekeeping, but don't get real exposure to the strategic side of operations." (P61-M)    |
| Educational Gaps          | Curriculum outdated   | 39 | "The curriculum makes housekeeping sound boring—just cleaning procedures and laundry operations." (P44-F)         |
|                           | Practical exposure    | 43 | "We need more exposure to technology in housekeeping, sustainability practices, and management aspects." (P17-M)  |

\*Frequency = Number of coded references across all focus groups

#### 4.7 Positive Perceptions and Opportunities

Despite overall negative attitudes, some students recognized housekeeping career potential:

- **Sustainability Focus:** 43% appreciated housekeeping's role in environmental sustainability, particularly relevant in Uttarakhand's eco-tourism context
- **Technology Integration:** Students with technology exposure (31%) showed interest in smart housekeeping systems and automation
- **Entrepreneurial Opportunities:** 28% recognized potential for starting housekeeping service businesses
- **Guest Impact:** 39% acknowledged housekeeping's direct influence on guest satisfaction and loyalty

### 5. Discussion

#### 5.1 Principal Findings

This study reveals significant negative perceptions among hospitality students regarding housekeeping careers, with only 12% expressing interest in this field. These findings align with international research (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000; Richardson, 2008) [20, 23] but provide new insights within the Indian regional context.

The Theory of Planned Behavior proved effective in explaining career intentions, with attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control all significantly influencing students' housekeeping career preferences. Notably, internship experience emerged as the strongest positive predictor, suggesting that direct exposure to modern housekeeping operations can reshape perceptions.

#### 5.2 Cultural and Regional Context

The study reveals unique regional factors influencing career perceptions in Uttarakhand:

- **Cultural Values:** Traditional Indian values emphasize social status and prestige associated with the family name, which also informs career paths. The social hierarchy associated with housekeeping was contradicted by their cultural values.
- **Aspects Relating to the Tourism/Industry:** Due to Uttarakhand being attributed to spiritual and eco-tourism, there are particular paths that can enhance a career in housekeeping but there has been no consideration given to the paths from some of the students.
- **Family influences:** Family perceptions are important in a collectivist culture. Family thoughts on potential career paths are highly influential: 67% indicated their families dissuaded them from pursuing a career in housekeeping.

#### 5.3 Educational Implications

The findings have implications for educational reform:

- **Curriculum:** Current curriculum does not adequately provide modern housekeeping management, using operational procedures, rather than strategic and managerial.
- **Work Experience:** Work experience with a structured internship program in housekeeping departments could shape student's perceptions and enhance career interest.
- **Faculties:** Educators who have learning and training with modern housekeeping and knowledge of career opportunities can impart and motivate learning.
- **Careers:** Counselors that are available to students who can tell them the breadth of housekeeping careers and has growth potential.

#### 5.4 Industry Implications

The hospitality industry must address perception challenges through:

- **Career Path Clarity:** Clear articulation of housekeeping career progression from entry-level to executive positions.
- **Compensation Transparency:** Honest communication about salary scales and growth potential in housekeeping careers.
- **Technology Showcasing:** Highlighting technological innovations and smart systems in modern housekeeping operations.
- **Success Stories:** Promoting successful housekeeping professionals as role models and career ambassadors.

### 6. Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this study:

- **Geography:** This is a study of Uttarakhand and any conclusions may not be representative of other states in India or across the globe.
- **Time:** A cross-sectional study indicates a perception at a given point in time; a cross-sectional study cannot infer perceptions from different academic years, nor consider any change in perceptions over time.
- **Sample:** Focusing on final-year students means any concerns or perceptions of early-stage students will not be included, nor will the experiences of graduating students at work before they reach graduation.
- **Response bias:** Survey responses may depict socially-desirable responses rather than authentic self-representation.

- **Industry input:** Input from housekeeping practitioners and managers too limited to able to provide any insight to illustrate the perception and reality gap from that perspective.

## 7. Conclusion

This research presents the first evaluation in the context of Uttarakhand of perceptions of hospitality students' perceptions of cleaning careers. The results indicate some significant negative perceptions, largely due to societal perceptions of status, career development opportunities and salary. However, students' overall perceptions were greatly positively impacted by having an internship; therefore, direct experiences of contemporary versions of the cleaning functions may turn their perceptions around.

The study suggests educational institutions and industry need to work collaboratively to bridge the perceptual gap. Should educational institutions provide curricula that emphasize contemporary cleaning management, offering structured programs that expose students to industry, and provide reputable career advice on careers in cleaning, students would be more positively disposed towards career opportunities in cleaning and / or housekeeping.

Addressing perceptions in the hospitality industry which has ongoing significant workforce development challenges, is essential in improving the prospects of developing a sustainable motivated cleaning workforce. Nevertheless, Uttarakhand's regional context, particularly its tourism dynamics and cultural context presents its own challenges that require regional focused solutions, while nonetheless applying universally applicable frameworks for career development, workforce planning or whatever other sustainable measures the hospitality industry could work towards.

Transforming the perceptions of working in cleaning, or a housekeeping career, will require concerted and collaborative action from education/ industry and policy sectors, that focus on resolving critical challenges and seizing opportunities identified in this study to create a more attractive sustainable career in cleaning/ housekeeping for the benefit of the individual and the hospitality industry as a whole.

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