Service Failures in 3- to 5-Star Hotels in Accra, Ghana

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This paper examines service failures in 3- to 5-star hotels in the Accra Metropolis in Ghana. The objectives of the research were to ascertain the categories of service failures commonly experienced by guests and assess guests' level of dissatisfaction with the service failures. Descriptive survey design using critical incident questionnaires (CIQ) was used to collect data from a purposive sample of 174 guests who experienced service failures in ten 3- to 5-star hotels. The data were analyzed using SPSS. The most dominant service failures experienced by guests were service system failures, such as unavailable/irregular service and defective products, occurring mostly in the housekeeping departments. With the revelation of potential service failures experienced by guests and their effect on guests, this study offers suggestions to managers to revamp some policies to curtail some service failures and improve service delivery. This study contributes to the literature on service failure in the context of a developing country.

Keywords: service failures, hotels, guest dissatisfaction, services, interaction, Accra

Introduction

There has been a considerable increase in hotels in Accra, the capital city of Ghana (Akyeampong, 2007; Mensah, 2009). The growth in the hospitality industry and globalization of tourism markets, coupled with increased competition and guests' demands in the last two decades, have rendered service failures inevitable (Lee, Barker, & Kandampully, 2003). The increase in hotel facilities has also given guests many options to choose from, and this has further compounded the problem of service failures (Lee et al., 2003).

Services are simultaneously produced and consumed; as such, service quality may be subject to considerable variability (Jones & Lockwood, 2004). In a hotel, service failures are bound to occur due to the high degree of interaction between frontline employees (FLEs) and guests. The commitment and experience of FLEs in excellent service delivery may be limited, and this is further compounded by miscommunication and varying attitudes from different encounters with guests (Lewis & McCann, 2004).

Walker (2007) argued that providing good services is a very difficult task; educational systems with diverse curricula do not seem to give in-depth practical teaching/demonstration on effective/excellent service delivery and few businesses give priority to training in service. In Ghana, for instance, the tourism industry pays very little attention to human resource training (Akyeampong, 2007). Sheriff (2013) concurred this by suggesting the need for a top-notch hotel school in Ghana with first-class curricula and facilities to train people who would offer quality services.

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Service Failure

Service failure describes the situation where a service or product fails to satisfy a guest's needs or meet his/her expectations due to the occurrence of fault in one of the links or processes of the service delivery chain (Mueller, Palmer, Mack, & McMullan, 2003; Tsai & Su, 2009). In several sectors of the world's economy, there is pressure to improve productivity resulting in intensified competition; there is also pressure from investors for higher returns on investments; coupled with these is the pressure on hotel managers to increase productivity by reducing costs, and in most cases, they have to cut down on labor (Reid & Bojanic, 2011). This further worsens the problem of service failures. Service failure could result in negative experiences by guests, jeopardize guest-hotel relationships, and elicit negative reactions by guests, such as negative word-of-mouth (NWOM) or switching to other competitors (Andreassen, 2001; Babakus, Yavas, Karatepe, & Avci, 2003).

To overcome competition and maintain satisfied guests, hotels are effectively trying to improve efficiency and increase guest retention on a longer-term basis without sacrificing the quality of service (Sabharwal, Soch, & Kaur, 2010). High-quality service is strongly related to profitability as it reduces loss of resources associated with complaint handling, service recovery, and replacement for guests who have defected (Sabharwal et al., 2010). However, owing to the characteristics of services, namely, perishability, intangibility, inseparability, and heterogeneity, there is a tendency for failures to occur, making the attainment of zero defect service delivery impossible (Gronröos, 1984; Lockwood & Deng, 2004). The instantaneous nature of service delivery and the critical nature of unexpected and uncontrollable external factors caused by mechanical, attitudinal, service-related, and unusual problems (Kasavana & Brooks, 2005) make it almost impossible for even upscale hotels to attain dissatisfaction-free guests (Becker, 2000). Lewis and McCann (2004) and Baker, Meyer, and Johnson (2008) asserted that as interactions between FLEs and guests increase, so does the rate of occurrence of service failures. Indeed, service fails faster than one contemplates, it is inevitable due to its unique characteristics, and service providers should recognize that the same service failure impacts guests differently (McCollough, 2009).

In a developing country like Ghana, inadequate policies and lack of institutional linkages and capabilities, coupled with the general laxity in systems, have resulted in hoteliers not paying attention to the issues of service failures. Although failures and complaints are unavoidable features in any human endeavor (Mack, Mueller, Crotts, & Broderick, 2000), the attitude of some Ghanaian guests when they encounter service failures does not help in addressing the problem, as they express statements like "It does not matter", "The mistake is insignificant, so one should let go", and "When the incident is reported, the employee would be dismissed, resulting in his inability to take care of his/her family". The rule of thumb is that an unsatisfied guest will tell his/her story verbally to 10 people (Walker, 2007). But with the advent of the internet and social media, the guest would probably tell the whole world on the internet. It is a common practice these days for guests to share their experiences on social media platforms, such as Trip Advisor. This has the tendency to damage the reputation of hotels involved.

The Ghana News Agency (GNA) carried a story, on December 1, 2009, of a minister of state who expressed dissatisfaction at services rendered by a hotel (GNA, 2009). Similarly, *Business Ghana Magazine* carried an article by Ulzen (2010) on August 21, 2010, entitled *Are We Ready for Prime Time Tourism?* In this article, he reported the growing dissatisfaction of guests in Ghanaian hotels as the services and products delivered by these hotels were getting worse; menus often had non-existent items; and most of the FLEs were

often sultry, slow, and rude. Such complaints are indications of guests becoming increasingly dissatisfied with services rendered by some hotels. This NWOM could result in potential loss of repeat business and other prospective clients to the hotels, thereby affecting their profitability.

Although multinational hotels are globally recognized for their high standards of excellence in management, operations, and innovations (Dutta, Venkatesh, & Parsa, 2007), the affiliated or managed hotels on the Ghanaian scene, such as La Beach Hotel, Accor, Golden Tulip Worldwide B.V. (Mensah, 2009), Best Western, Holiday Inn, and the recently opened Möevenpic Ambassador, also face the challenge of delivering quality services to guests. This is because that although Ghana is growing fast as a business travel destination, nothing is being done to prepare qualified staff to take up the required responsibilities (Sheriff, 2013). Again, with new hotels such as Kempiski (which would open early 2014) and oncoming ones like Hilton and Marriott poaching the fairly trained employees of other hotels and leaving the unqualified ones would worsen the situation of poor service delivery (Sheriff, 2013).

In addition, some available literature on service failure in hotels relied on sample from one or two hotels (Lewis & McCann, 2004; Lockwood & Deng, 2004), where respondents were requested to recall service failures experienced within the previous one year instead of current incidents; furthermore, literature focused on developed countries with very little or lack of reference or studies in developing countries in general and Ghana to be specific; this portrays neglect by researchers, thereby presenting a knowledge gap which needs to be filled. The research questions, then, are "What are the service failures commonly experienced by hotel guests in 3- to 5-star hotels?" and "What are their levels of dissatisfaction?". This study, therefore, seeks to ascertain the categories of service failures commonly experienced by guests in 3- to 5-star hotels and assess guests' level of dissatisfaction with service failures.

Literature Review

Categories of Service Failures

Service failures could occur as a result of a problem with the service facility, the process, product or its delivery, employee behavior, or a combination of any of them (Chua, Othman, Boo, Abkarim, & Ramachandran, 2010). Bitner, Booms, and Stanfield-Tetreault (1999) also identified four categories of service failures, namely, service system failures, failures arising from employees' responses to implicit/explicit guest requests, unprompted and unsolicited employee actions, and problematic guest behaviors.

Service system failures occur in core service delivery where guests are not offered the basic services promised by hotels; this encompasses all actions involved in a failed service delivery, such as product defect and slow or unavailable service. Failures arising from employees' responses to implicit/explicit customer requests occur mainly when employees are unable to comply with guests' individual needs, such as seating smokers in non-smoking sections or lost reservations (Bitner et al., 1999). Unprompted and unsolicited staff actions include unacceptable behaviors of employees which are unacceptable to guests, such as poor attitudes, misplaced orders, and incorrect charges. Problematic guest behaviors include drunkenness and flouting hotel policies or regulations; however, guests might not be aware that they caused the failures themselves (Bitner et al., 1999).

The hospitality services marketing literature identifies two types of service failures, namely, outcome and process (Bitner et al., 1999). Outcome failure is what guests actually receive from the service which portrays how the hotel does not perform the core service or fulfill guests' basic needs. These include unavailable

reserved guestrooms owing to overbooking. The process failure signifies how a core service delivered lacked something or was flawed, such as the rudeness of an FLE during food and beverage (F&B) service (Smith, Bolton, & Wagner, 1999; Gronröos, 2000).

Service failures in hotels. Service failures in hotels and restaurants are primarily due to inefficient and unfriendly staff, unavailable and slow services, incorrect billing of guests, and service facility/equipment failures such as slippery floors and defective products (Dutta et al., 2007). Others are the quality of F&B services, poor sanitation, unhelpful staff, missing reservations, poor ambience, undelivered promises (Chung & Hoffman, 1998), malfunctioning electrical fittings, and disruptive behaviors of other guests (Chung, Goldschmidt, & Hoffman, 2004).

In a study of Lewis and McCann (2004), almost 62% of the respondents ranked slow restaurant service as the commonest service failure encountered followed by inefficient staff (60.3%) and slow check-in/out (50.5%). Lockwood and Deng (2004), in a study in the UK and China, also found out that over 25% of the respondents experienced service system failures. Tsai and Su (2009), in a related study, also found the dominant service failure to be service delivery system failures with the main ones being defective products and slow or unavailable services.

Chua et al. (2010), in a study in China, Malaysia, and India, found that cleanliness issues such as contaminated food, dirty surroundings, and dirty equipment were the dominant service failures. The department in the hotels where service failures occurred mostly was the F&B department (Lewis & McCann, 2004; Lockwood & Deng, 2004; Chua et al., 2010), whilst the occupancy stage of the guest cycle is when most service failures occurred.

Lockwood and Deng (2004) found that the core service failure, which was the failure of the hotels to offer guests what they had promised, was almost 73%. Chung and Hoffman (1998) affirmed this by stating that breaking the service promise is the single most significant way in which hotels fail their guests.

Service Failures and Guests' Dissatisfaction

Service failures perceived to be trivial from hotels' viewpoint may be vital to guests (Thwaites & Williams, 2006). Severity of service failure is the magnitude of loss experienced by guests owing to the failure (Hess, Ganesan, & Klein, 2003) and the perceived intensity of the failure (Weun, Beatty, & Jones, 2004; Wang, Chen, Wang, & Zhao, 2007). The greater the severity of service failure, the greater the guests' dissatisfaction (Magnini, Ford, Markowski, & Honeycutt, 2007; McCollough, 2009).

Service failures lead to dissatisfied guests who often want to take actions in response to such service failures by complaining (Lai, Yu, & Kuo, 2010). Unfortunately, only 5%-10% of unhappy guests actually complain about their experiences (Walker, 2007). The reasons why most dissatisfied guests do not complain are varied; they include guests believing that the hotel would not respond; avoidance of confrontation with the one responsible for the failure; uncertainty about the rights of guests and the obligations of hotels; and concerns over the cost and time of complaining (Bamford & Xystouri, 2006).

Four types of guests who complain about service failures have been identified in the hotel sector, namely, Passives, Irates, Activists, and Voicers (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003). Passives are the least likely to take any action either within or outside the confines of the hotel. They doubt the effectiveness of complaining and believe that the outcome would not merit the time and effort spent on it (Becker, 2000). Irates are usually angry with their hosts and are less likely to give them a second chance, defect, and complain to family and friends.

Activists have a higher propensity to complain to the hosts, relatives, and friends and post experiences on websites. Voicers, who actively complain, give the hotel a second chance to improve their services. They are likely to spread NWOM, switch patronage, or seek redress from third parties (Becker, 2000).

Methodology

The research design was descriptive as the issue of service failures in the hospitality industry was systematically described from the guests' perspective. The study obtained information on the nature of the phenomena of service failures in upscale hotels in Accra through the critical incident technique (CIT).

CIT is a well-established systematic mode for collecting guests' detailed feedback, first developed by Flanagan (1954). The critical incident questionnaire (CIQ) simply asks respondents to retell a story about an experience within a specific service environment, enabling them to freely provide details of the incident as they perceive them (Flanagan, 1954; FitzGerald, Seale, Kerins, & McElvaney, 2008).

Primary data were collected from guests of 3- to 5-star hotels with more than 50 rooms in the Accra Metropolitan area (see Table 1). The unit of analysis was the resident guest of the selected hotels.

Purposive sampling procedure was employed to select ten 3- to 5-star hotels with more than 50 rooms located in the Accra Metropolis. First, permission was sought from the human resource and front office managers of the hotels. The questionnaires were then given to guests who had complained about service failures, with the assistance of front office staff, since they normally receive such complaints from guests. A total of 174 guests who had experienced service failures were selected from the hotels based on the number of rooms of the selected hotels (see Table 1).

Table 1

Study Sample

Hotel number	Star rating	Number of rooms	Number of respondents
1	5	164	18
2	4	174	19
3	4	100	12
4	4	238	28
5	4	152	17
6	4	100	12
7	4	190	23
8	3	109	13
9	3	109	13
10	3	168	19
Total		1,504	174

Note. Source: Ghana Tourism Authority's (2011) list for licensed hotels.

The instruments used for data collection consisted of self-administered questionnaires of two modules. Module A was on service failure incidents, whilst module B elicited the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The open-ended questions were designed to elicit information on guests' experiences; some close-ended questions are based on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree.

The completed questionnaires were edited to check for inconsistencies, the open-ended questions were coded, and SPSS (Version 16) was used to analyze and process the data from the questionnaires.

Results

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Presented in Table 2 is a summary of the socio-demographic characteristics of the 174 respondents. Males constituted the dominant group (70.1%), whilst females accounted for 29.9%. On the whole, more than half of the sampled respondents (65.0%) were between the ages of 26 and 45, indicating that most respondents were relatively young. Those aged 66 and above constituted only 2.3% of the respondents.

The majority of respondents (45.4%) had attained tertiary education, namely, polytechnic or first degree, closely followed by postgraduates (42.5%). In all, 87.9% had attained tertiary education.

In terms of occupation, the majority (32.8%) were businessmen and business consultants. Only 4.6% worked in the entertainment and tourism industries.

European respondents were 37.0%, with only 5.0% being Asians. Lastly, most respondents (78.2%) visited hotels for business purposes, further reinforcing the fact that upscale hotels in Accra targeted business travelers.

Table 2

Characteristics of Respondents

Socio-demographic characteristic		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	122	70.1
	Female	52	29.9
Total		174	100.0
Age	< 25	6	3.4
	26-45	113	65.0
	46-65	51	29.3
	66+	4	2.3
Total		174	100.0
Level of education	Secondary	13	7.5
	Vocational	8	4.6
	Higher national diploma/first degree	79	45.4
	Postgraduate	74	42.5
Total		174	100.0
Occupation	Business/consultancy	57	32.8
	Banking and finance	30	17.2
	Medical	20	11.5
	Media and communication	16	9.2
	Legal	12	6.9
	Entertainment and tourism	8	4.6
	Others	31	17.8
Total		174	100.0
Continent	European	64	37.0
	African	63	36.0
	American	38	22.0
	Asian	9	5.0
Total		174	100.0
Purpose of visit	Business	136	78.2
	Leisure	38	21.8
Total		174	100.0

Note. Source: Field work, 2011.

Frequency of Service Failures

Most guests patronized hotels with the hope of having a fulfilled stay devoid of any problem, but this is almost impossible as service failures usually ruin their pleasant experiences (Magnini & Ford, 2004). Figure 1 shows how often guests encountered service failures in the hotels; 41% of the guests frequently experienced service failures, whilst just 10% very rarely experienced it.

Contrary to these findings, the study of Lockwood and Deng (2004) in the UK and China revealed that only 9% frequently experienced service failures with as many as 25% very rarely encountering problems. This disparity is probably due to the fact that in a developing country context like Ghana, it is more prone to service failures than in developed countries where there is usually a service culture.
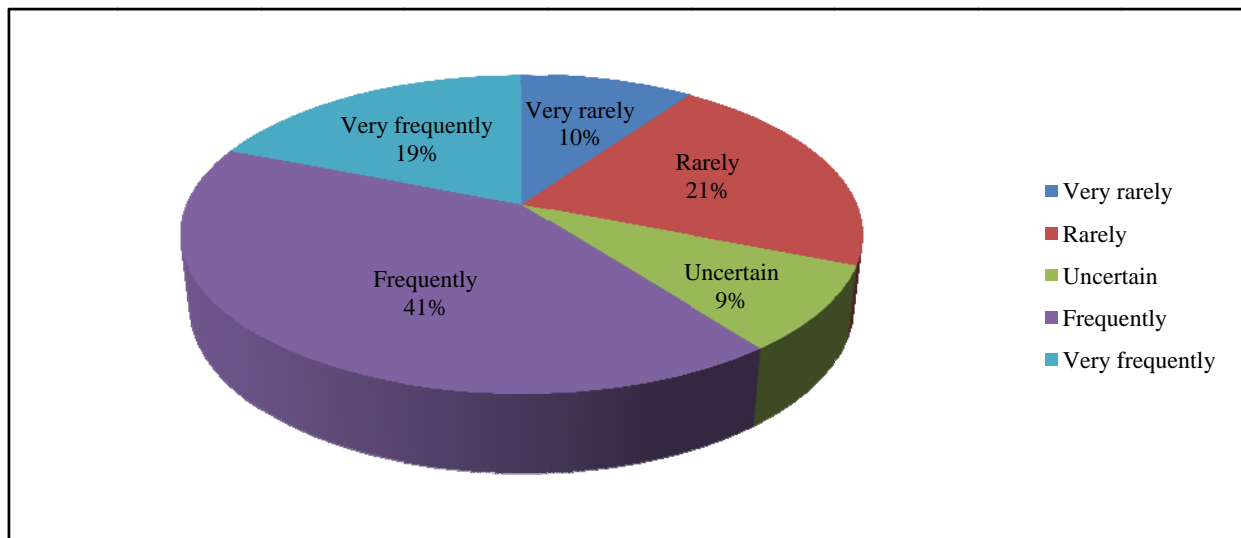

Figure 1. Frequency of service failures encountered by guests. Source: Field work, 2011.

Categories of Service Failures Experienced by Guests

Service failures experienced by respondents were categorized into three, namely, service system failures, employee attitudes, and guest-related problems (see Table 3). Guest dissatisfaction caused by service delivery system failures was the highest of all the service failure categories.

Almost three-quarters of the respondents (74.3%) experienced service system failures, 19.6% experienced service failures relating to employee attitudes, and just 6.1% encountered guest-related problems. All these service failures were mostly caused by mechanical, service-related, and staff attitudinal problems.

These findings are in line with the findings of Lockwood and Deng (2004) who found 72.5% and 17.5% of their respondents in the UK and China in a service failure study experiencing service system failures and employee attitude failures respectively.

In this study, there were a number of multiple service failures per respondent between pre-arrival and departure as asserted by Chua et al. (2010); this resulted in a total of 373 incidents which were collated from the 174 questionnaires.

From Table 3, the dominant service failures found in all the hotels were unavailable or irregular services (14.2%) with unfriendly guest policies accounting for the least (1.3%). Instances of unavailable or irregular services were: unavailability of reserved rooms even after guaranteed reservation; unavailability of internet and currency exchange; and unavailability of water, some guest amenities, and vegetarian dishes.

Table 3

Categories of Service Failures

Category and type of service failures		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Service system failures	Unavailable or irregular services	53	14.2
	Defective products	51	13.7
	Slow or delayed services	39	10.5
	Equipment (defective or broken down)	39	10.5
	Insanitary conditions	33	8.8
	Overpriced services or products	26	7.0
	Reservation or booking (associated problems)	18	4.8
	Noise emanating from the hotels	13	3.5
	Unfriendly guest policies	5	1.3
Employee attitudes	Guest requests not granted	34	9.1
	Unacceptable staff behaviors	29	7.8
	Overbilling	10	2.7
Guest-related problems	Disturbance	15	4.0
	Drunkenness or smoking	8	2.1
Total		373	100.0

Notes. Source: Field work, 2011. Multiple responses of service failures are applied.

Defective products accounted for 13.7% of the reported service failures. These included food which had gone bad thereby causing infection, food containing flies or hair, worn-out bath and bed linen, lumpy mattresses and pillows, and defective hotel buildings.

One guest, for example, described her gruesome experience as follows:

"I suffered a terrible accident when the wooden balcony balustrade gave way when I leaned on it. My lower arms which were resting on it had a few cuts from the splinters which were sticking out" (Guest of a 4-star hotel).

Slow or delayed service delivery accounted for 10.5% of the total service failures. This included employees' inappropriate response to guests' requests, which is comparable to the results of a related research by Tsai and Su (2009) where 9.9% of the respondents had the same problem. Some of the problems cited by the respondents were delay in picking up guests from the airport, delay in the delivery of food ordered, slow internet, as well as slow check-ins and check-outs. A respondent remarked:

"Internet is extremely slow... slowest service on earth; food ordered took over an hour—that's incredible!" (Guest of a 3-star hotel).

Service failures attributed to faulty or defective equipment or fittings by respondents accounted for 10.5% of all the reported service failures. Faulty equipment included television, air-condition, credit card reader, safes in guestrooms, and water heaters.

Only 9.7% of guests were dissatisfied with the prices of goods and services offered by their hotels. Although guests often associated higher rates or prices with better services (Ugboma, Ibe, & Ogwude, 2004), some guests were not prepared to pay so much for what they thought were sub-standard services. A respondent in a 3-star hotel lamented about the unfair pricing:

"The hotel rate is ridiculously overpriced at $300; no better than $89 at the same chain hotel in Britain. Cost of using the internet is $37/hour!".

Some of the unfavorable guest policies were charging guests who received visitors in their rooms, hotels not taking the local currency equivalent from guests who had used credit cards for payment, and allowing smoking in all areas. Others included hotels not taking responsibility for the loss of guests' properties, such as vehicles or electronic equipment left on the property. A shocked guest of a 4-star hotel narrated his ordeal in a theft case:

"During tea break, my laptop together with the electronic equipment of other participants was stolen from the conference room yesterday; management did not offer to replace or pay for any of those items".

Guest dissatisfaction resulting from the attitudes of employees accounted for 19.6% of the service failures as indicated in Table 3. For instance, a guest's clothing was destroyed when he took it to the laundry. Also, a couple on honeymoon were given a twin-bedded room instead of a king or queen-size bed, and a guest was put in a smoking room though he requested for a non-smoking room. However, only 7.8% of the respondents indicated that they were displeased with the behaviors of staff who they considered uncooperative, arrogant, unfriendly, impatient, disrespectful, and rude.

A guest of a 3-star hotel stated that:

"Staff chatted on mobile phone while guests waited to be checked-in; Guests had to wait to be seated at the restaurant while waiters were reading; I don't think management is involved in the day-to-day running of the hotel!".

A respondent concluded that FLEs who portrayed such behaviors were not adequately exhibiting the true Ghanaian culture of hospitality. Employees were also accused of incorrectly billing guests. Such accusations were attributed to staff who debited a guest's account with the same amount twice, overcharged credit cards, and charged for rooms already paid for. A guest of a 3-star hotel commented:

"They tried to pull a fast one on me by charging me a higher rate than what was agreed on when making the reservation".

Only two out of the 10 most dominant service failures were related to staffing issues, which is less than the number that Lewis and McCann (2004) found out in their research. They found out that only five out of the 10 most leading service failures were related to staffing issues. The least reported service failures, which were guest-related problems (6.1%), resulted from the behaviors of other guests and included smoking, snoring, drunkenness, and disturbances. A respondent complained about a guest next door who got drunk and disturbed throughout the whole night. There were also complaints about some guests who patronized prostitutes; other guests thought the latter were a nuisance:

"Guests are smoking everywhere; even the non-smoking rooms reek the stench of smoke" (Guest of a 4-star hotel).

"There are prostitutes here too; some of the guests even entertain them. I think they are a nuisance and burglars of a kind" (Guest of a 4-star hotel).

Service Failures Within the Guest Cycle and Departments

Table 4 shows the four stages of the guest cycle, namely, pre-arrival, arrival, occupancy, and departure. Service failures occurred throughout the guest cycle, but mostly during the occupancy stage (78.9%).

This is not surprising, because it was during the occupancy phase that guests were resident in the hotel and patronized most of its facilities. The least service failures occurred during the departure stage (2.6%). Tabulated below are some of the incidents recounted by the respondents at the four stages (see Table 5).

Table 4

Service Failures Within the Guest Cycle

When service failure occurred	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Pre-arrival	6	3.2
Arrival	29	15.3
Occupancy	150	78.9
Departure	5	2.6
Total	190	100.0

Notes. Source: Field work, 2011. Multiple responses of service failures are applied.

Table 5

Types of Service Failures Within the Guest Cycle

Guest cycle	Service failure	Type of service failure	Star rating
Pre-arrival	The hotel's airport pickup was nowhere to be found and so had to pick a taxi.	Unavailable services	3-star
Arrival	Check-in was very slow, and it took about 20 minutes to check the credit card.	Slow/delayed services	4-star
	The rooms were not ready, had to wait for three hours and even that, there were no pillowcases and the bed sheets were dirty.	Slow/delayed services, unavailable services, and insanitary conditions	4-star
	When checking in, the receptionist portrayed an unbecoming attitude that we nearly left the hotel.	Unacceptable staff behaviors	
Occupancy	A request made to the reception for my room to be cleaned was not heeded.	Guest requests not granted	5-star
	Consistent damp smell in the room even with the AC on, with lots of mosquitoes and cockroaches everywhere.	Insanitary conditions	4-star
	A drunken guest next door disturbed throughout the night with a "woman".	Guest-related problems (drunkenness, disturbance)	4-star
	My room is right above the pool where a live band plays in the evenings; that's quite disturbing!	Noise emanating from the hotels	4-star
Check-out	The cashier mixed up my bills with another guest's... unresolved even up till now as I'm checking out.		4-star
	Fully settled my bill with cash yester-night, but realized when checking out this morning that my credit card was still debited.	Overbilling	3-star

Table 6

Departments Where Service Failures Occurred

Department	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Front office	103	35.8
Housekeeping	130	45.1
F&B	55	19.1
Total	288	100.0

Notes. Source: Field work, 2011. Multiple responses of service failures are applied.

The three departments where service failures occurred were the front office, F&B, and housekeeping (see Table 6 above). The highest amount of service failures (45.1%) occurred in the housekeeping departments of the hotels, with F&B accounting for the least (19.1%), because residents use most of the facilities of the hotels during the occupancy stage in the housekeeping departments.

Problems associated with the housekeeping department were leaky toilets, dirty and worn-out bed linen, cigarette smoke, prostitutes, noisy air-conditions, as well as mosquito- and cockroach-infested rooms:

"My room which wasn't done on time was not well cleaned, and the bathroom light always goes off no matter the number of times the bulbs were replaced" (Guest of a 3-star hotel).

"For the past 2 days, the AC has been blowing hot air and disturbing, the room is smelly with lots of mosquitoes, and there was a dead cockroach with ants around it in the bathroom" (Guest of a 3-star hotel).

"Requested for a non-smoking room, but was checked into a smoking one".

"The foreign exchange bureau ran out of cedis for exchange with dollars most of the time" (Guest of a 4-star hotel).

Other forms of service failures at the front office were unfriendly staff with attitudes which were uncalled for coupled with unavailable or irregular services:

"The attitudes of the staff are not the best, they do not exhibit the Ghanaian hospitality as they even move ahead guests for the elevator; their attitude has unfortunately gone downhill" (Guest of a 3-star hotel).

"Despite contacting the hotel and confirming reservation, there was no room for me after a long haul flight from China; this was due to overbooking" (Guest of a 4-star hotel).

Perhaps the account of a guest of a 4-star hotel represented some of the worst service failures experienced by guests:

"It took almost 30 minutes to locate my reservation made more than two weeks ago. The first room given had already been occupied by someone; the second one had a leaky toilet, and there were mosquitoes in the one I settled for after 3 phone calls plus a visit to the reception".

"Since I arrived 5 days ago, the connections for both cable and wireless internet at the business centre had been unreliable thereby delaying my emails and business transactions; paid for 4 days' service but the internet was available for only 2 days" (Guest of a 4-star hotel).

Some common service failures in the F&B departments were inattentive waiters, greasy dishes, non-availability of variety of dishes, wrong orders delivered, overpriced dishes and menus, and late delivery of ordered food and drink:

"One does not have much choice of the menu—they are all greasy, and the waiters do not have any knowledge of the dishes being served" (Guest of a 3-star hotel).

"The vegetable salad I ordered during dinner had a worm. In fact, it was sickening; obviously not value for money" (Guest of a 4-star hotel).

"Waiter brought us a snack instead of the main meal we ordered for; we complained, but nothing was done about it. Just when we started eating because we were very hungry, he came for it saying they were not our order" (Guest of a 4-star hotel).

"Staff virtually kicked us out of the restaurant yester-night because they wanted to close early and go home" (Guest of a 3-star hotel).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The overall results of the research have revealed potential and relevant information on service failures experienced by guests in upscale hotels in Ghana. The dominant service failures experienced by respondents which comprise service system failures (74.3%) include unavailable or irregular services, defective products, slow or delayed services, and defective or broken-down equipment. The defective or broken-down equipment

which occurred mostly in the housekeeping departments during the occupancy stage is not surprising, as most management teams of such hotels resolve to ad hoc forms of maintenance to "cut down on cost" instead of preventive ones, to satisfy the high demand for more profits. Such measures result in high costs to the establishments in the long run, as dissatisfied respondents (71.8%) could abrogate the guest/hotel relationship in addition to other repercussions.

It would be necessary to revamp staff training, some policies, and standard operating procedures (SOPs) if standards have fallen to curtail unavailable or irregular services, defective products, slow or delayed services, and employee attitudes. However, it seems that not much could be done about guest-related problems although other guests abhor them; managers should not hesitate to tactically apprehend the wrongdoers, to some extent for effective results.

Hotel managers should invest in regular guest surveys, especially during the occupancy stage, and should encourage guests to complain about problems they encounter by creating an atmosphere which encourages them to voice their concerns. This could be done by providing outlets for complaints, such as guests' comment cards and receptionists who are ready to listen to guest complaints. Such information would enhance managers' understanding of their clients' behaviors and needs and assist in designing systems for an efficient service delivery.

This study has revealed various aspects of service failures as experienced by guests in 3- to 5-star hotels in Ghana. However, the research considered service failures from only the guests' standpoint instead of the hotels' staff; consequently, the findings cannot represent the whole hotel industry in Ghana. It also excluded the recovery aspect of the service failures experienced by the guests. It would be more appropriate for future research to broaden the sample to incorporate 1- to 2-star and budget hotels which have different and limited number of facilities. Further research could also investigate how such failures are recovered for guest satisfaction. Again, it would be interesting to investigate hotel managers' perspective of service failures and recoveries, especially to ascertain how effective their policies on service recovery strategies are when service failures occur.

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