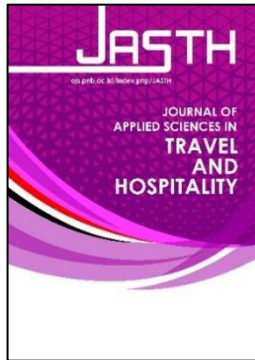


Public Relations Strategy in Strengthening Brand Image at Alila Villas Uluwatu Bali

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Abstract

This research aims to formulate the most appropriate public relations strategy as an option in strengthening brand image that can apply by Alila Villas Uluwatu to take advantage of the opportunities and anticipate the existing threats by utilizing the strength and anticipate shortcomings. Thus, it can help to achieve the occupancy target. This research used sequential exploratory mixed methods; IE (Internal-External) Matrix, SWOT (Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats) and QSPM (Quantitative Strategic Planning Matrix). This research used participation observation, semi-structured interview, questionnaires and documentation as data collecting methods. The study used a purposive sampling technic and the respondents consist of 7 people from the Sales & Marketing Department. The result of data analysis shows IFAS (Internal Factor Analysis Summary) score is 2.88 and EFAS (External Factor Analysis Summary) score is 2.80, which indicates the current position of public relations strategy is in cell V, which is of growth and stability in IE Matrix that requires horizontal integration. The SWOT analysis gives 7 alternative strategies, of which the highest TAS (Total Attractive Score) is 167.41 that generated by QSPM analysis. Thus, the main strategy that recommended which is the highest among the 7 of alternative strategies is allocating more budget to increase the number of hosted social influencers & media according to the target market and also for boosted branding contents on Facebook and Instagram.

Keywords: *strategy, public relations, brand image*

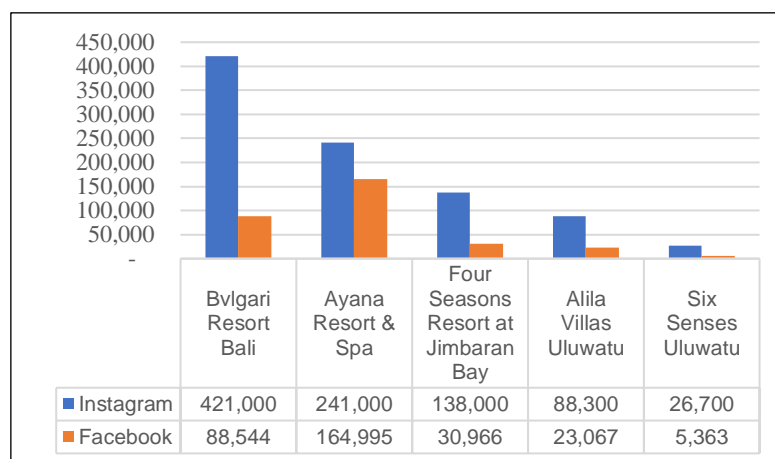
INTRODUCTION

Building a brand image is very important for the company's sustainability in the long-term. The brand image includes knowledge, customers' opinion, and non-physical characteristics and physical products', also image that customers give to the product (Soltani et al, 2016: 24). Brand image intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from the competitors (Kotler & Keller, 2012: 241). The brand image uses as a differentiating factor for Alila Villas Uluwatu that faces similar competitors such as Ayana Resort & Spa, Four Seasons Resort at Jimbaran Bay, Bvlgari Resort & Spa and Six Senses Uluwatu. The intended competitor determined by the location, market share and standard (star) of the hotel. A strong brand image generally is formed and developed by the Sales and Marketing Department, especially the Public Relations of Alila Villas Uluwatu in

establish and maintain two-way communication to earn understanding, acceptance and cooperation between some parties.

Alila recently being acquired by Hyatt Hotels Corporation in 2018, the resort should blend the image that also representing Hyatt Brand. Alila Villas Uluwatu has been building a brand image as a unique and sustainable resort for high-end travelers with the tagline "Surprisingly Different". One of the factors that needed in building and strengthening brand image is the strength of brand association (Keller, 2013). It means a brand should be more recognized than the competitors. One of the indicators used to measure it is the number of followers on social media accounts. The strategy used by the Public Relations of Alila Villas Uluwatu to develop this through collaboration with external parties such as the media and influencers in providing information to the public and maximizing social media channels. Although the hosted social media influencers and media were increasing over the years, there is no significant impact on the brand image. This assessment showed through social media comparison (Graph 1) and room occupancy (Table 1). Besides that, the Alila Villas Uluwatu's media event such as media gathering, press conference and press tour in the marketing department is less organized also the section should have work the online review as a priority, as we have received some bad reviews that causing this resort is facing a crisis of trust.

As mentioned earlier, the number of followers on social media will strengthen brand association. Instagram becomes an indispensable part of marketing for many companies in pioneering and building a brand image. Besides that, Facebook is also a kind of popular social media that currently integrated with Instagram. Based on Figure 1, Alila Villas Uluwatu ranked the 4th position compared to its competitors, with the total of Instagram's followers were 88,300 and Facebook Page's subscribers were 23,067.



(Source: Alila Villas Uluwatu Instagram (Data Processed), 2019)

Figure 1. Social Media Comparison

Observing the room occupancy over the years (Table 1) of among 57% - 61% occupancy level, it indicates the fluctuation and the target sales has not been achieved. As seen in Table 1, starting from 2015 to 2018, only in 2017, the management has been successfully reach the target. The variance between actual and targeted occupancy runs from 3%-12%. Brand image is one of the marketing tools that also help companies in increasing room occupancy. Consumers will be more likely to carry out the purchase to the brand with a positive and strong image (Setiadi, 2003: 180). Consumers could also often buy products with a famous brand because of the emotional factor with things that already known.

Table 1. Room Occupancy of Alila Villas Uluwatu from 2015 to 2018

No	Year	Actual	Target	Variance
1	2015	57%	60%	-3%
2	2016	47%	60%	-12%
3	2017	63%	52%	11%
4	2018	61%	67%	-5%

(Source: Sales & Marketing Department, Alila Villas Uluwatu 2019)

Based on this situation faced by the Alila Villas Uluwatu, the researcher is interested in formulating an alternative strategy that can apply to strengthen the hotel brand. This research conducted to optimize public relations role by formularizing strategies through assessing strength and weakness of the internal factor; defining the opportunity and threat of external factors so that the massive influences of public relations can be perceived.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research took a place at Alila Villas Uluwatu, which is located at Jalan Belimbing Sari, Banjar Tambiyak, Desa Pecatu, Kuta Selatan, Badung. This research used sequential exploratory mixed model approach. Mixed methods involved the integration of both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2017:61). In the sequential exploratory approach, the literature presented in each phase in a way consistent with the method being used. First begins with qualitative data analysis then uses the findings in a second quantitative phase. The combination of the two methods aims to connect the results of the first stage of research and the next stage. This research design used to provide the best understanding and explore in further depth the research problems with comprehensive, valid, reliable and objective data (Creswell, 2017). Those combinations of some analysis technics were IE (Internal-External) Matrix, SWOT (Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats) and QSPM (Quantitative Strategic Planning Matrix). Variables in this research were The Strength and Weakness of the

Internal Factors and The Opportunity and Threat of the External Factors of Alila Villas Uluwatu. The Internal factors were evaluated through public relations strategy approach by (Ruslan, 2013: 13) that consists of publications, event, news, community, inform/image, lobbying and social responsibilities; while the External factors were evaluated through the external business environment by (Salman, 2017) that consists of purse string, partnership, policy, people, perception and promotion. There were two types of data namely qualitative and quantitative, while the sources of data that used were primary and secondary data. The research data obtained through several techniques such as participant observation, semi-structured interview, questionnaires and documentation that involved 7 respondents from the Sales & Marketing department who know about the issue that studied.

Based on the sequential exploratory model approach (Sugiyono, 2012: 40), this research began from a qualitative analysis method with collected data through observation and interviews in where the problems occurred with the purpose to identify the internal and external factors of Alila Villas Uluwatu to the 7 respondents. The researcher in this phase also used literature reviews as guidance in established a hypothesis. This phase intended to explore and analyze the implementation of public relations strategy with PENCILS theory. The next stage was quantitative data analysis in which find hypothesis testing results through collecting the data by deployed questionnaires to all respondents. The interpretation of the entire analysis phase has generated IFAS-EFAS, IE (Internal-External) Matrix, SWOT Matrix analysis and QSPM analysis (Rangkuti, 2018) then conclude it and gave some suggestions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Internal and External Analysis

In achieving company purpose, there are strategies implemented by each company. The results of deployed questionnaires that used to explore public relations strategy were converted into the Internal Factor Analysis Summary (IFAS) matrix that shown in Table 2 below and the External Factor Analysis Summary (EFAS) matrix in Table 3, which is consist of the measurement of weighting, rating and score. Then all obtained assessments were used to find out the position of public relations strategy in the IE Matrix presented in Figure 1.

The IFAS score obtained from the weighting of the internal indicators that multiplied with rating in each of the internal indicators. The internal factors in IFAS matrix divided into two categories are strengths and weaknesses. The details of IFAS matrix with a total score of 2.88 presented in Table 2.

Table 2. IFAS of Public Relations Strategy

No	Strength	Weight	Rating	Score
1	Variety of publication media	0.08	3.00	0.23
2	Intensity of publications through social media	0.08	3.71	0.28
3	Variety of news	0.07	2.86	0.19
4	Intensity of releasing news	0.07	3.29	0.23
5	Public relations activities that involves local community	0.07	3.14	0.21
6	Variety of goods that using Alila's signature	0.07	3.57	0.23
7	Consistency of building concept	0.06	3.57	0.21
8	Intensity of media call with press	0.07	3.29	0.24
9	Intensity in hosting social media influencer	0.08	3.29	0.25
10	Variety of CSR activities	0.06	3.29	0.21
11	Intensity of CSR activities	0.05	3.00	0.16
	Total	0.82	39.01	2.44
No	Weakness	Weight	Rating	Score
1	Intensity of creating publication contents	0.07	1.86	0.13
2	Variety of events	0.06	1.86	0.11
3	Intensity of events	0.05	1.71	0.09
4	Readiness in responding guest review and deliver it to related departments	0.07	1.57	0.11
	Total	0.25	7.00	0.44
Total Weight x Rating for Internal Factor				2.88

After analyzing the internal factors, it continued by the external factors which consist of opportunities and threats. This EFAS (External Factors Analysis Summary) will show the total score determined by multiplying the weight and rating of each indicator with a total score of 2.80 as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. External Factor Rating of Public Relations Strategy

No	Opportunity	Weight	Rating	Score
1	The availability of funding by chains in supporting branding	0.11	3.29	0.37
2	Mutually cooperation among hospitality chains	0.08	2.57	0.21
3	Intensity of beneficially campaign	0.08	2.57	0.21
4	Sustainability policy	0.11	3.29	0.37
5	Brand manager digital assets policy	0.10	3.29	0.33
6	Local people culture and hospitality	0.09	3.14	0.29
7	Characteristic and type of guests that have been visited Alila Villas Uluwatu	0.07	2.57	0.19
8	Type of external services on promotion	0.09	3.29	0.29
9	Credibility and rating of external services	0.09	3.29	0.29
	Total	0.83		2.55
No	Threats	Weight	Rating	Score
1	The activities of Alila Villas Uluwatu's surrounding in relation with competitor existence	0.09	1.86	0.16
2	Bad reviews given by guests about Alila Villas Uluwatu	0.08	1.14	0.09
	Total	0.08		0.25
Total Weight x Rating for External Factor				2.80

The next step is finding the position of Alila Villas Uluwatu's public relations strategy with IE Matrix. In the previous calculation, the score of current IFAS is 2.88 and the current EFAS score is 2.80. Through these scores, the position of public relations strategy of Alila Villas Uluwatu presented in Figure 2 below.

2.88

		High 3,0-4,00	Average 2,0-2,99	Weak 1,0-1,99
The Total Score of External Strategy Factor	High 3,0-4,00	I GROWTH (Concentration Through Vertical Integration)	II GROWTH (Concentration Through Horizontal Integration)	III RETRENCHMENT Turn Around
	Medium 2,0-2,99	IV STABILITY Wary	V GROWTH (Concentration Through Horizontal Integration)	VI RETRENCHMENT Captive Company or Divestment
			GROWTH Stability	
	Low 1,0-1,99	VII GROWTH (Concentric Diversification)	VIII GROWTH (Conglomerate Diversification)	IX LIQUIDITY (Bankrupt or Liquidation)
		The Total Score of Internal Strategy Factor		

2.80

Figure 2. IE Matrix of Public Relations Strategy

Figure 2 shows the position of the current strategy in cell V that is in growth and stability strategy. Growth strategy through horizontal integration is an activity to expand the company by increasing the types of products and services, companies in this cell can expand markets, production facilities, and technology through external development (Rangkuti 2018: 98). The result of horizontal integration is the ability to produce more revenue together compared to if they were to compete independently. Based on the result of the Internal-External (IE) Matrix, Alila is recently being acquired by Hyatt Hotels Corporation, the horizontal integration could blend the brand image into Hyatt Brand by applying PENCILS strategy. This horizontal integration wish to help the company expand into new markets including overseas. There are 7 alternative strategies generated from SWOT matrix as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. SWOT Matrix

IFAS	Strengths (S) S1,S2,S3,S4,S5,S6,S7,S8,S9,S10,S11	Weaknesses (W) W1,W2,W3,W4
EFAS	SO Strategies	WO Strategies
Opportunities (O) O1,O2,O3,O4,O5, O6,O7,O8,O9	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Allocating more budget to increase the number of hosted social influencers & media according to the target market and also for boosted branding contents in Facebook and Instagram Develop multi publication channels such as Twitter and YouTube account 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Create collaborative events among chains Utilizing PR agencies to release testimonial - press release to overcome a crisis of trust.
Threats (T) T1,T2	ST Strategies	WT Strategy
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Conducting competitor research and benchmarking to increase the digital reputation and customer care Create YouTubers and Photoshoot collaboration 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Create small-scale events such as giveaway and give complimentary to people who gave terrible reviews.

Based on Table 4, the detailed explanation presented as follows.

1. SO (Strength Opportunity) Strategies

Based on the strengths and opportunities of Alila Villas Uluwatu, there are two alternative strategies recommended in these SO strategies.

- a. As Alila Villas Uluwatu currently being acquired by Hyatt Hotels Corporation, it has provided a bigger platform that can help in strengthening the brand image. It should encompass branding's budget. This budget intended to increase the number of hosted social media influencers & media that meet the targeted public of Alila Villas Uluwatu. Those targets are Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, South East Asia and currently is developing to Russia. Even though the intensity in hosting social media influencers becomes the major strength, when it compared into the other competitors, the average hosting were 5 influencers & media while Four Seasons Resort Bali at Jimbaran Bay was able to host up to 27 influencers and medias in a month based on the previous research by (Dika, 2018). Besides that, also a budget to boost branding content in social media. Through this paid feature, Alila Villas Uluwatu can publish branding contents such as carousel contents, CSR activities or brand campaign events that have been held to be seen by the massive public. The benefit of this feature is helping the Alila Villas Uluwatu in raising awareness by serving appropriate content based on user interests and based on user location.
- b. Alila Villas Uluwatu can develop multi publication channels. It can start by creating another social channel such as a Twitter and a YouTube because Alila Villas Uluwatu does not have YouTube account while others Alila's group and Hyatt Hotels Corporation are using these kinds of social channels.

2. ST (Strength Threat) Strategies

ST strategies use the strengths to tackle the threats faced by Alila Villas Uluwatu. There are two alternative strategies recommended in this ST strategy.

- a. Alila Villas Uluwatu should conduct competitor research and benchmarking to increase the digital reputation and customer care. Digital reputation and customer care here is regarding an application that can use to manage all social channels. It could be better if the management considers adding a new person in charge as a social media specialist, as the competitors did. Here is focused to listen, monitor and respond to the conversation happening. After that, scheduling time to respond all notifications and re-updating all digital marketing contents in social channels especially the latest photo about this property or promotion. This kind of strategy also suggested in previous research conducted by (Dika, 2018).

- b. Create collaborations with YouTubers and photoshoot collaboration. Photoshoot collaboration conduct with some magazine or talent agency. These collaborations will allow people to see the visual aspects of the resort through all detailed venue in some pictures and the real situation through video. Nowadays, YouTube becomes a famous platform to share the video in a wider scope. This channel can help this resort in branding also generates new inquiries.

3. WO (Weakness Opportunity) Strategies

WO strategies will be used to minimize the weaknesses and utilize the opportunities. There are two alternative strategies recommended in these WO strategies.

- a. Create collaborative events that involved all external environments. These events held by some hotels/resorts in the same chain. This event could be a press conference, anniversary event or wedding exhibition. The purpose is to reach more prospective public/markets and save the cost at the same time; also, can gain more publication distribution according to the target market when they are together holding a press conference or other media events. Comparing to the previous researches, organizing a media event helps the company in raising awareness of the hotel's brand image.
- b. Utilizing PR agencies to release a testimonial press release. Currently, the deployed press releases about Alila Villas Uluwatu only three types of press releases; basic press release, product release and executive statement release. PR agencies can develop another testimonial release that contains the story during people's stay at Alila Villas Uluwatu. PR agencies that have good credibility will have a complex strategy with a wider scope to overcome the crisis of trust.

4. WT (Weakness Threat) Strategy

WT strategy will be used to minimize the weaknesses and tackles the threat. The strategy that can apply is create small-scale events like give away and give complimentary to people who gave terrible reviews. This strategy is expected to make the guests or happy and satisfied. By this chance, the resort can ask the guests to create a positive review in TripAdvisor, Website, Google or Social Media with pictures in resort area as evidence and it can help the hotel to create a good image as an accommodation provider.

QSPM (Quantitative Strategic Planning Matrix) Analysis

The last step of this research is to find out the most effective alternative public relations strategy that can be applied by Alila Villas Uluwatu. The summary of the QSPM assessment presented in Table 5.

As presented earlier in Figure 2, the current position of public relations strategy is in Cell V, which is of growth and stability in the IE Matrix that requires horizontal integration (Rangkuti

2018:98). The seven alternative strategies generated by SWOT Matrix were ranked by using QSPM based on the total attractive score (TAS) that given by respondents. The highest score gained from SO1, ST1 and WO1 strategy. The combination strategies can be the option that has to apply.

Table 5. Alternative PR Strategy by QSPM

Strategy Code	Strategy	TAS
SO1	Allocate more budget to increase the number of hosted social influencers & media according to the target market and also for boosted branding contents in Facebook and Instagram	167.41
ST1	Conducting competitor research and benchmarking to increase the digital reputation and customer care	149.74
WO1	Create collaborative events among chains	145.24
WT1	Create small-scale events such as giveaway and give complimentary to people who gave terrible reviews	142.51
ST2	Create YouTubers and photoshoot collaboration	140.91
SO2	Develop multi publication channels such as Twitter and YouTube account	138.78
WO2	Utilizing PR agencies to release testimonial-press release to overcome a crisis of trust	135.95

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the previous results and discussion, the conclusions drawn as follow. Two factors that affect the public relations strategy in strengthening brand image at Alila Villas Uluwatu; The Strengths and Weaknesses of Internal factors and The Opportunities and Threats of External factors. Alila Villas Uluwatu has 11 Strengths and 4 Weaknesses of Internal Factors: 9 Opportunities and 2 Threats of External Factors. The appropriate strategies among seven alternative strategies that could be applied by Alila Villas Uluwatu are allocating more budget to increase the number of hosted social influencers & media according to the target market, also for boosted branding contents in Facebook and Instagram, conducting competitor research and benchmarking to increase digital reputation and customer care and create collaborative events among chains.

Some suggestion needs to be considered to make improvements in the future. Internal and external factors should work together in applying a combination of main alternative strategies also work in the reviews given by the public to earn public trust that affecting the brand image.

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