

## **The Role Of Hotel Public Relations In Crisis Management During The Covid-19 Pandemic**

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### ***Abstrak***

Industri perhotelan telah merasakan dampak dari pandemi COVID-19. Kebijakan pembatasan sosial yang diterapkan pemerintah untuk mencegah penularan virus membuat tingkat mobilitas masyarakat menurun, dan tingkat hunian hotel menurun drastis. Pandemi ini telah menciptakan krisis yang parah. Penelitian ini dilakukan di dua hotel bintang lima di Yogyakarta untuk mengetahui bagaimana praktik humas dalam manajemen krisis. Satu hotel merek lokal, dan yang lainnya termasuk dalam jaringan hotel internasional. Kebaruan penelitian ini adalah pada sifat krisis, yang tidak memiliki tahap pra-krisis. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan metode penelitian kualitatif dan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif yang bersifat subjektif. Data digali secara mendalam dari manajemen hotel, karyawan, dan pelanggan. Saat penelitian dilakukan, krisis belum berakhir, sehingga peneliti fokus pada upaya mengatasi krisis dan belum sampai pada kondisi pasca krisis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat perbedaan strategi antara kedua objek penelitian, terutama pada awal krisis. Ada empat poin penting yang menyimpulkan penelitian ini. Pertama, dalam kondisi krisis, kepemimpinan menjadi sesuatu yang penting. Kedua, komunikasi krisis yang efektif dapat meminimalkan kerusakan reputasi yang disebabkan oleh krisis. Ketiga, ada peluang yang bisa dilakukan marketing dan PR selain mempromosikan kamar yang biasanya menjadi bisnis utama hotel. Keempat, hotel tidak hanya fokus pada pemasaran produk, tetapi upaya menjaga citra merek.

**Kata Kunci:** pandemi Covid-19, krisis manajemen, hotel, *public relations*

### ***Abstract***

*The hotel industry has felt the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The social restriction policy implemented by the government to prevent the transmission of the virus has made mobility levels decline, and hotel occupancy rates have drastically decreased. This pandemic has created severe crisis management. This research was conducted at two five-star hotels in Yogyakarta to determine how public relations practices deal with crisis management. One hotel is a local brand, and the other is included in an international hotel chain. The novelty of this research is in the nature of the crisis, which does not have a pre-crisis stage. The research was conducted with qualitative research methods and using a subjective approach. The data was dug in depth from hotel management, employees, and customers. When the research was conducted, the crisis had not yet ended, so the researcher focused on efforts to overcome the crisis and had not yet arrived at the post-crisis condition. The results showed that there were differences in strategy between the two research objects, especially at the beginning of the crisis. There are four important points that conclude this research. First, in crisis conditions, leadership becomes something important. Second, effective crisis communication can*

*minimize the reputational damage caused by the crisis. Third, there are opportunities that marketing and PR can do besides promoting rooms, which are usually the hotel's main business. Fourth, hotels do not only focus on product marketing, but efforts to maintain brand image.*

**Keywords:** Covid-19 pandemic, crisis management, hotel, public relations

## BACKGROUND

Coronavirus is spreading rapidly all over the world. COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2. WHO first became aware of this new virus on December 31, 2019, following reports of a cluster of 'virus pneumonia' cases in Wuhan, People's Republic of China. Most (about 80%) recover from the disease without requiring hospitalization among those who develop symptoms. However, about 15% become seriously ill and require oxygen, and 5% become critically ill and require intensive care. Complications leading to death may include respiratory failure, acute respiratory distress syndrome, sepsis and septic shock, thromboembolism, or multiorgan failure, including heart, liver, or kidney injury. In rare situations, children may develop severe inflammatory syndrome several weeks after infection (WHO, 2020).

Globally, on June 1, 2021, 170,426,245 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 3,548,628 death, were reported to WHO (WHO, 2021). Indonesia is one of the countries experiencing Covid-19 transmission. This virus spread to all regions in Indonesia and brought many victims. As of July 7, 2021, there were 2,379,397 positive people for Covid-19, 1,973,388 recovered and 62,908 people died (KPC, 2021). The sudden appearance of this virus made all parties shocked and confused. The government acted quickly by issuing various regulations which essentially prohibited or limited the mobility of the people. All aspects of human life are changing. Most activity stops. The slow rhythm of life because everyone restrains the rate of mobility affects many human activities. Transport stopped, markets, schools, places of worship, and other public places were closed. Students study from home, as well as some employees who work from home.

This condition creates a crisis, which is something extraordinary that shakes the existing order. A crisis can occur suddenly or slowly. According to research, as many as 65% of crises occur suddenly, and 35% occur with symptoms (Sapriel, 2003). The Covid-19 pandemic belongs to a sudden crisis as it spreads rapidly after the virus was first reported on December 31, 2021 (WHO, 2020). Meanwhile, the government officially announced the first COVID-19 case in Indonesia on March 2, 2020. Two positive Indonesian citizens said that they had direct contact with Japanese citizens who were visiting Indonesia. On March 11, 2020, there was a case of death caused by the corona virus for the first time. The victim who died was a 59-year-old man from Solo, Central Java (Sukur, 2020).

One of the areas affected by this pandemic is tourism. People travel from one place to another. The pandemic has paralyzed tourism activities. People prefer to stay at home to maintain health. The impact of the pandemic was also felt in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. This province has been widely known as one of the essential tourist destinations visited by many tourists from within the country and abroad. Tourist areas, commonly called

"tourist destinations," have attractive tourist objects as tourist destinations. A tourist attraction can be a natural beauty, an activity, a man-made object, or a combination of all of them (Tunggala Suanti, 2019). Currently, tourism or tourism has been recognized as one of the essential economic pillars for a country. Developing countries are currently competing to improve their tourism sector by utilizing new technologies that are currently being developed (Musa Hussein Gibreel, Mulyana Deddy, Atwar, & Santos, 2020).

Yogyakarta offers various tourist attractions such as nature tourism, historical tours, culinary tours, and others. Some of the favorite places for tourists include the Yogyakarta Palace, Malioboro Street, Parang Tritis Beach, and Mount Merapi. The location of Yogyakarta is also close to two prominent ancient temples, namely Borobudur and Prambanan. Although actually, these two temples are in Java (Bappeda, 2021). The development of this tourism was followed by the rapid growth of the hospitality industries to support the provision of accommodation services (Redi & Narena I Kadek, 2019). The hotel itself is already part of the tour. As a tourist destination, there are many hotels in Yogyakarta, as shown in table 1.

**Tabel 1. Number of Hotels in Yogyakarta**

No	Jumlah Hotel	Tahun				
		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
1	Jumlah Hotel Bintang Lima	9	9	11	11	11
2	Jumlah Hotel Bintang empat	18	18	36	42	42
3	Jumlah Hotel Bintang Tiga	32	32	61	68	68
4	Jumlah Hotel Bintang Dua	24	24	34	33	33
5	Jumlah Hotel Bintang Satu	13	13	21	18	18
	Jumlah Hotel Non Bintang	589	589	610	618	618
	Jumlah Hotel	685	685	773	790	790

Source: (Bappeda, 2021)

The number of hotels in table No. 1 is quite significant because the province of the Special Region of Yogyakarta only consists of 4 districts and one municipality. The number of non-star hotels dominates because they are generally owned and managed by the community. This is different from five-star hotels, mainly 4-star and 5-star hotels, part of the hotel business network. With this large number of hotels, the hospitality sector has undoubtedly contributed significantly to the government's revenue while also becoming a source of dependence for all hotel employees, their families, and other stakeholders. How much does the hotel earn? However, the pandemic and the declining number of visitors, making the hotel business very difficult. There are very few hotel visitors, and no events are held at the hotel. This has forced several hotels to close operational activities, especially at the beginning of the pandemic. Conditions like this had never happened before and happened very suddenly, confusing hotel managers. On the one hand, the number of visitors is minimal. On the other hand, they have to survive to maintain their business. Head of City Tourism Office Yogyakarta Wahyu Hendratmoko said that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the tourism sector was very significantly affected. For example, if in 2019 the number of tourist visits was

recorded at 4,378,600 people, in 2020, there will only be 1,384,781 people (Chairunnisa, 2021).

This study examines how hotel practices *public relations* in crisis management during the covid-19 pandemic. It is interesting to study because of the pandemic's unprecedented nature. The pandemic that has hit the world has become a crisis that has shaken many aspects of life, not only the health sector (Aziz Muhammad Saiful, 2020). Academically, this research contributes to the study of crisis management and crisis communication. A crisis can be defined as a "perception of an unexpected event" that threatens important stakeholder expectations and can have a severe impact on organizational performance and produce negative results" (Coombs, 2012). Meanwhile, Caroline Sapriel defines a crisis more broadly as an event, incident, inspiration, or series of circumstances that threaten the integrity, reputation, or survival of an individual or organization (Sapriel, 2003).

For organizations, the crisis is a challenge that must be faced. In the field of Strategic Communication, the crisis has given rise to a new study, namely crisis communication, whose role is to unravel the problems that arise and get out of the crisis. Crisis communication is a relatively new field of applied communication studies, with its origins being traced back to the 1980s. Initially, this study emphasized strong efforts to fix the problems created by the crisis. As the theory develops and matures, crisis communication research evolves from a tactical to a strategic focus. Crisis communication research emphasizes problem-solving organizations such as companies and nongovernmental organizations facing crises (Holladay, 2015).

The relationship of communication to crises and disasters has also been studied in the broader field. Here, communication has been discussed concerning interpersonal influence, media relations, technology systems, and inter-organizational networks (Kouzmin, 2007). In general, studies on emergency and disaster management have not focused on the quality of information or content, and there has been little interaction with communication researchers (Richardson & Byers, 2006). Lehtonen stated that crisis communication supports crisis management and is a rapidly growing study (Palttala & Vos, 2012).

Coombs stated that crisis management has 3 phases, namely pre-crisis (prevention and preparation), crisis response, and post-crisis (recovery). Pre-crisis consists of actions the organization took before the crisis occurred. When a crisis hits, an organization is in a crisis response phase. Management focuses on handling crises and trying to return the organization to normal operations. A crisis demands action that the organization must respond in some way. Post-crisis is the stage of recovery and prevention so that the crisis does not recur (Coombs, 2010).

The novelty of this study is that the Covid-19 pandemic does not have a pre-crisis phase. Unlike natural disasters, for example, this pandemic happened so suddenly. It is different with earthquake that usually precedes a volcanic eruption. The virus was first detected in Wuhan, China, on December 31, 2019. Three month later, on March 2, 2021, there have been patients in Indonesia who died from the virus (Sukur, 2020; WHO, 2021). In terms of coverage, the crisis is also global, spreading in all countries. In the modern age, this is the first time a pandemic has occurred that has affected most countries worldwide. This research also goes further on the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic crisis because there have been

several previous studies examining messages in the media regarding Covid-19 news (Angendari, 2021; Sulistyowati & Hasanah, 2021).

The theory used in this research is Situation Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). This theory argues that crisis managers match their reputation-improvement strategies with the reputational threat of a crisis situation. The crisis management team should adopt an accommodative reputation improvement strategy as the crisis escalates (Coombs & Holladay, 1996; Coombs, 2007).

Based on SCCT theory, the crisis management team performs a two-stage process to assess the reputational threat. The first step is to determine the type of crisis that befell the organization. Next, the crisis management team considers how the news media and stakeholders define the crisis. The type of crisis refers to how stakeholders frame the crisis. By identifying the type of crisis, the crisis management team can determine to what extent stakeholders will place crisis responsibility on the organization. Furthermore, crisis responsibility represents an initial threat to reputation as crisis responsibility has been shown to harm organizational reputation. The second step is to review the crisis threat factors. There are two factors to consider to make it easier to review threats: consistency and uniqueness. Consistency is operationalized as a history of crises. It is necessary to see if the organization has experienced similar crises in the past. This can be seen from the history of crises and the reputation that the organization has experienced. If the organization has a history of similar crises or a negative reputation, the threat to reputation increases.

Due to the abrupt nature of the event, stakeholders have no opportunity to mitigate or prepare. When all countries and regions impose restrictions on mobility, the daily routines of people change automatically. Individuals prefer to remain at home in order to avoid virus exposure. This is accomplished by individuals worldwide, thereby altering the pattern of life to one of minimal mobility. Hospitality is one of the sectors most affected by the pandemic. This relates to the essential functions of a hotel, which makes it very different from other types of business, and whose other functions are complementary (Ingram, 2000). For example, a hotel supports tourism activities, meetings, exhibitions, or other events. Once the main activities are affected, the hotel business will also be affected.

Crisis management, according to Fearn-Banks, is a strategic planning process against a crisis or turning point, a process that changes some of the risks and uncertainties of a crisis and tries to make the organization control its activities. Companies are encouraged to have crisis management strategy in place to guide them during moments of crisis (Heath & O'Hair, 2010; Tansey & Rayner, 2009). Effective crisis management mitigates or ends a crisis and can sometimes give an organization a more positive reputation than before the crisis. Crisis in the eyes of *public relations* is not always identified with a threat. Crisis, whether internal causes cause it (employee conflict, management conflict, product failure) or external (customer demands, government policy changes, or elite political conflict), is often seen as an opportunity to build an image more quickly. Of course, that depends entirely on how the crisis is managed. Furthermore, how the crisis can be predicted from the start.

According to Prayudi, seven components must be considered in crisis management planning: 1) There is a mechanism to determine potential crises in the company. The role of management is in reviewing areas of activity that are prone to crises. In this case, it is necessary

to design an early warning system in top-down and bottom-up reporting. 2) Identification of the affected audience. Anyone who is directly or indirectly affected by the crisis. 3) Procedures followed during a crisis. It usually contains a to-do list, a series of steps to be followed by setting up a crisis control center, a crisis management team, and communication procedures. 4) Contingency plans to continue activities during the crisis. Contains various possibilities about production facilities and services to markets or consumers, or the possibility of attracting products. 5) Appointment and training of crisis management team. The formation of a crisis management team using the company's functional considerations. 6) Crisis communication plan. Include who will be appointed as spokesperson and control the information that must be released to avoid confusing the target audience, media selection, and determining the message to be communicated. 7) valuation of the crisis. A good management strategy must at least pay attention to the above components (Prayudi, 2016).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach. The goal of the study is to create a comprehensive, in-depth picture of a situation (Alexander, 2018). The researcher describes the conditions related to the research problem and explores the data in depth. The data were obtained by in-depth interviews with the Marketing Managers of two five-star hotels in Yogyakarta. The field of Public Relations (PR) is under the marketing division. Therefore, researchers conducted interviews with the manager of the central branch, the division *Public Relations*. Questions to ask PR regarding the systematics and forms of handling the crises that occurred. The hotel management established a crisis management program in managing crises in the Covid-19 pandemic era. Researchers also conducted interviews with employees and consumers about the effectiveness of management performance and its effect.

In this study, the object of research is called Hotel A and Hotel B. There are two reasons why hotel names are confidential. First, some of the information is sensitive and the informants requested that the hotel's name and their name be kept confidential. Second, the crisis is still ongoing. There is information from informants that is used as a hotel strategy to deal with the crisis. Ethical issues such as confidentiality, anonymity and impartiality must be considered in qualitative research methods (Daymon, Christine, 2002; Given, 2008). Interviews with informants were conducted on various occasions to obtain more convincing information

In addition, the researchers also observed the hotel's condition and looked at the social media of each hotel, which became one of the communication channels. The researcher directly recorded the activities carried out by the management team and practitioners public relations in the programs held to resolve the crisis. This data collection can be a tool to find evidence of interview data or even find new data that the resource person has not submitted. Data were collected from February 2021 to July 2021, which was still a pandemic that impacted the hotel business.

Data analysis uses three related subprocesses presented by Miles & Huberman: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. These processes occur prior to data collection, during study design and planning; during data collection and analysis was carried out (Huberman & Miles, 1998). The data that has been obtained is sorted according to the similarity of themes. In the end, the researcher analyzes the research findings by using

relevant theories and references. The whole analysis is directed to answer the problem formulation and achieve the research objectives. The researcher analyzed the data using the Public Relations crisis and issue management stage scheme to prove the procedures for handling cases and preventing a crisis from happening again. Then the analysis results will be returned to the resource person to check the truth of the results of the researcher's analysis.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Hotel A is the research subject because it has a long history and has been proven to be a classy hotel. This hotel is infused with Javanese culture, and one of the buildings is designated as cultural heritage. Not only buildings, but various cultural activities such as tea ceremonies according to Javanese customs, archery, and singing are regularly held here. This hotel's central location makes it easily accessible. This hotel features one of Yogyakarta's largest ballrooms, which is frequently used to host various events. This is not a chain hotel but a locally owned establishment. Nonetheless, the hotel meets the criteria for a five-star establishment.

Hotel B is a relatively new five-star hotel in Yogyakarta. The hotel operation is still under five years. This hotel is targeting the *meeting incentive convention and exhibition* (MICE) market so that the supporting facilities are complete and varied, ranging from seven *meeting rooms*, several *pre-function areas* for various business meetings and other important events. In addition, hotel B provides a ballroom of 1,870 meters, without pillars. The business idea is to combine business with *leisure* for its guests. Not only prioritizing MICE facilities with their advantages but also utilizing a city with many tourist destinations for traveling for its guests. Therefore, hotel B brings together traditional tastes with modern life. In contrast to hotel A, hotel B is included in the global hotel business network. Therefore many standard operating procedures refer to the standard network center.

All hotels feel the impact of the pandemic, including the hotels that are the object of this research. For example, hotel A was forced to close for five months because residents made almost no tourist trips during the coronavirus's first three months. This condition was very unexpected because the hotel income became non-existent because there were no guests and a temporary hotel closure. The most crucial thing is related to human resources, where many of them have worked at this hotel for 20 years. As a result of this closure, management decided to temporarily not extend employee contracts that had already expired. However, employees whose contracts are not extended will be allowed to return to work when the condition returns to normal.

As one of Yogyakarta's five-star hotels, Hotel B also suffers the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the hotel management took a different approach, as the establishment had never been closed since the outbreak began. The hotel is continuing to operate normally. It is just that the pandemic has resulted in a reduction in employee numbers, which must be adjusted in order to keep the budget operational. Salary adjustments were also made for several months. Indeed, the first three months of the pandemic were highly challenging for hotels. After that, conditions are tranquil, as people prefer to stay at home and have ceased to be active. Automatic occupancy rates fell precipitously. From more than 350 rooms, the number of occupied rooms is estimated to be less than ten per day. Guests staying at the hotel are

typically members of the hotel's elite, who cannot return to their home country due to the pandemic. The hotel does sell food through a drive-thru window, but this does little to alleviate the situation.

As a business hotel, some partner companies were forced to stop their cooperation. The target income of 10-12 billion per month could not reach a third in the first three months. Sales promotions that have been carried out have not been able to lift hotel revenues. In the first three months, the hotel suffered losses and survived because it was supported by reserve funds owned by the hotel management. When hotels continue to open amid low *occupancy rates*, salaries must still be paid. Another solution is to reduce employees with no contract extension mechanism. There are 50% of employees whose contracts are not renewed. With a lot of reduced employees, rolling and double work were held for the first three months. A marketing staff, for example, has to do other jobs such as front office, housekeeping, and even security.

The remaining employees are briefly trained to do things that have been outside of their job descriptions. All employees must be ready to do work that has been outside their field. The conditions at that time were not normal, so the hotel reacted unusually. Principled employees are ready to be placed in any field so that hotel operations can continue to run. This kind of condition, of course, has never happened before.

### **Crisis Management Strategy**

The public relations department of the two research objects is under the marketing department. The crisis that occurred due to the pandemic has become a challenge for PR practitioners. However, both of them have different strategies in dealing with crises. For the hotel industry, the crisis due to the pandemic is terrible because it can make the industry close in a minute. Strategies to deal with the crisis must adapt to government policies. During the pandemic, the Indonesian government limited the mobility of the people to suppress the spread of the corona virus. This policy has had a huge impact on the hotel business because the number of customers has fallen drastically. After one year, the government began to relax policies. The government issued a CHSE (Cleanliness, Healthy, Safety, and Environmental Sustainability) certification policy which makes hotels safer to visit during the COVID-19 pandemic. This certification is expected to increase the level of consumer confidence in staying and doing activities at the hotel.

The government considers that the primary key in restoring conditions must be done through disciplined health protocols. This program was launched as a government effort to create a safe and comfortable space for the community. CHSE certification is intended for tourism and creative economy entrepreneurs. This certification will be proof that business actors have owned, implemented and improved health protocols in their respective businesses. In addition, tourists and the public can also feel secure with the fulfillment of the CHSE health protocol standards.

If the hotel is certified for health during this pandemic, people will be more confident and steady when they want to do activities at the hotel. Even though hotel A is independent, meaning that it is not part of any hotel chain, we still adopt strict health protocol standards. As an independent hotel, we inevitably go our way for the safety standards of its health protocols. Usually, if they have international hotel chains, they already have guidelines that must be



adopted by hotel members who are included in the hotel management network. There is even an independent health audit to ensure that they apply health standards at the hotel.

The highest leadership role, in this case, the General Manager (GM), is vital. GM must carry out strategic policies in the era of the pandemic. Internally, GM communicates downward through the head of the department to temper the employees. Based on observations, before the pandemic, the relationship between employees was not good. Many employees are somewhat individualistic because of busywork. To deal with the management crisis due to the pandemic, all employees must be familiar and solid. Employees understand that they have to work hard, but on the other hand, management is also trying to familiarize fellow employees and between employees and leaders. This is the primary capital for management to move in this challenging condition. Without the support of employees, any policies issued will not be effective. So, what GM does is build a cohesive organization as a whole.

Management tries to embrace employees to provide services to customers because, in principle, the hotel's activity is to serve. However, this is not easy because their salaries are not paid in full. What is the psychological condition of people who experience a decrease in salary but must still work well? Management admits that it is not easy. However, compared to the number of layoffs carried out by companies during the pandemic, this condition must be grateful for by employees. In the area dining room employee, nutritious food is provided to prevent the virus's transmission. It is necessary to eat nutritious food. Likewise, if employees get sick, then the impact is on hotel services to customers. To monitor employees' health and as part of health services, rapid antigen tests are also routinely carried out. This situation makes employees feel cared for and know that their safety is also important to management.

Hotel guests who will stay or hold *meetings* will be asked to submit a Health Certificate in the latest result *rapid antigen*. If later the hotel guest does not come with a letter, the hotel will facilitate it by providing a questionnaire *checklist*. Guests are asked to fill out a questionnaire regarding medical history and travel history and enter the room. This is following the WHO health standards. If there are hotels that are slow to respond to the pandemic, it could be because the implementation of health guidelines was not carried out immediately. In addition, the process of making guidelines involving third parties such as health auditors can also affect the speed at which hotels adopt health standards. Health auditors need time to make a guide, so there is a kind of test; first, changes and improvements are adopted by all these hotel chains, making the hotel close for too long.

In order to assure consumers that the hotel is ready to welcome guests again, Hotel A has taken several steps to restore its image and increase sales. The team sales and marketing carries out many strategies of digital marketing through various platforms social media. This is inseparable from the significant changes in people's behavior during the pandemic, which became more dominant in using online media because they had to stay at home to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Local print and television media also asked the hotel to place advertisements in their media. However, because hotel operations have not recovered, what can be done by barter promotions. For example, barter in the form of a *voucher*, but the hotel asks for help to be exposed in the media concerned.

The role of PR, in this case, is to support in the form of promo programs. One of the techniques used is an email campaign. The way it works is through a connected system between marketing communication and the front office hotels. The front office must record guest profiles. Especially the address email because that is what needs the most Marketing Communication. So, via email, the division Marketing Communication will blast promos to hotel customers hotel. Marketing communication makes what promos in one month later the revenue obtained through hotel reservations, promotional activities, and others, how much is an indicator of the success of marketing communication.

The hotel uses a system that records all guest comments about the hotel. Starting from Tripadvisor, Traveloka, Agoda, and so on, all comments are recorded. Usually, the one who asks the *customer* to write a comment is from the *front office*. Based on this system, for the sub-district area where Hotel A stands, Hotel A still leads. Based on statistical data, there are 19-star hotels in this area (Sleman, 2017). Hotel A is also quite intensive on social media advertisements, especially on Instagram and Facebook. Public Relations also ensures how web hotels appear at the top of the list when searching for hotels on search engines. Another promotional effort is to make flash sales through the company's booking engine. However, in terms of sales, Hotel A focused more on direct selling and telemarketing.

During the pandemic, hotel occupancy rates of 20% to 30% are said to be good. Apart from rooms, the hotel also sells other products, wedding packages. For health reasons, weddings should not be held by inviting many guests and strictly adhering to health protocols. This is a blessing in disguise because many families are reluctant to be bothered with health protocol matters, thus entrusting the wedding party to the hotel. By inviting fewer guests, wedding organizers generally want to provide the best for guests. In addition, organizing weddings at hotels is much safer because the protocol is certified. At the time of this study, weddings were almost always on every Saturday and Sunday.

As an independent hotel, the challenge of Hotel A is how people come directly or contact directly to the hotel because international chain hotels must do the same thing. Digital marketing is a significant concern. The hotel changes the appearance of the hotel website to make it more attractive, and people can also see the plus value of the hotel. Photo and video reshoots were carried out for the hotel to give it a better and eye-catching profile. The hotel cooperates with Times Indonesia. With an agreed budget, the hotel can send articles or photos. Partners provide a password to log in to the system and can directly upload articles and photos.

To further optimize marketing through social media, the hotel also uses influencers once a month. The selected influencers can be local or national influencers according to the hotel segment that focuses on families. Influencers are social media users who have many followers and can influence many people. Influencers open up opportunities to work with companies in promoting marketed product/service brands (Andreani, Gunawan, & Haryono, 2021). Hotel A uses influencers as a promotional medium for the company to maintain brand awareness and increase sales.

Still related to the brand, hotel A focuses not only on sales but also on maintaining brand image. Public Relations makes hotel storytelling connected to historical sites inside the hotel, then communicated through social media such as Instagram and Facebook. They have to construct messages that fit the hotel segment creatively. On the other hand, it can be said

that Marcomm and PR both have to play a role at this time. A source from hotel A stated that the government assisted in the form of a barter program with the media through the Ministry of Tourism and the creative economy. The hotel receives a news slot from the media. Both the hotel and the press benefit from this program. The media is subsidized, while hotels benefit from the publicity.

Hotel B continues to operate during the pandemic. Although the room occupancy is minimal, only about ten rooms, the management decided not to close the hotel's activities temporarily. The first thing that becomes a problem is the problem of human resources. It is challenging for management to terminate the employment relationship, but there is no other way. Hotel B accelerated the termination of employment contracts by up to 50%. However, if the number of guests increases or activities require much workforce, former employees will be hired daily. The management has planned that if the hotel conducts employee recruitment one day, the priority of the selected employees is those who have worked at this hotel.

There are no specific activities carried out, especially in terms of marketing. Hotel B has one marketing communication manager and one graphic designer. However, there is no dominant promotional activity. As a hotel in an international network, the hotel must follow the guidelines given by the network center. Hotel B had time to give a stay voucher with a discount of 50% from the standard price. However, this promotional activity is valid only until December 2020. The room price-cutting activity has never been given before a pandemic has occurred. This is because the Hotel B market is well established and not very responsive to sales promotion.

During the pandemic, Hotel B also consistently carried out weekend promos. As a result, the General Manager and Director of Operations are more likely to encourage hotel business packages from Jakarta. In addition, this hotel has a marketing representative in Jakarta who specializes in selling hotel products. Based on experience, consumers from Jakarta prefer Yogyakarta because it has more tourist attractions than Semarang or Surabaya. Bandung is also considered too close for Jakartans to travel, while Bali is considered too far, and consumers must carry out PCR swab tests.

The marketing activities carried out refer to hotel chains that are managed internationally. At the hotel level, they are more focused on updating the room rate. Promotion is enough to use the website, Instagram, and linked-in. Hotel B's Instagram account has almost 14 thousand followers. In this account, it appears that this hotel is exposing rooms as products and the MICE package, which is the basis. Like hotel A, wedding destinations are also the new flagship. The services provided are not only organizing weddings but also managing permits for the police. Armed with a good relationship with the police, hotel B ensures that the event will occur safely and not be dispersed by the police.

The challenge of meeting packages in the new normal era is that the number of participants is small, but it is more complicated in terms of facilities and preparation. Meeting organizers always ask for the preparation of health protocols and tools for remote meetings. When the government's health protocol expects a small gathering of people, this hotel facilitates it with a hybrid meeting service equipped with the latest communication technology facilities. Some of the meeting participants were physically present in the hotel meeting room, and others attended the online meeting.

However, because the current level of demand is low, the management is more accommodating, including holding small-scale meetings, around 5-10 rooms. In the pre-pandemic period, Hotel B had the option to accept meetings with many participants. During the pandemic, all customer requests are accommodated. Hotel B has also received CHSE certification from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy. In general, CHSE guarantees tourists to implement cleanliness, health, safety, and environmental sustainability. In particular, this certification makes the hotel safer to visit during the Covid-19 pandemic and is expected to increase consumer confidence in staying and doing activities at the hotel.

According to SCCT, the hotel's PR and crisis management team can determine the extent to which stakeholders will place crisis responsibility on the organization. Furthermore, crises are an initial threat to reputation because crisis responsibilities have been shown to damage the reputation of organizations. There are two factors to consider to make it easier to review threats: consistency and uniqueness. Consistency is operationalized as a historical crisis. It is important to see if the organization has experienced similar crises in the past. This can be seen from the history of the crisis and the reputation experienced by the organization. If the organization has a history of similar crises or a negative reputation, the threat to reputation increases.

Consistency is highly valued if the organization has experienced a similar crisis. The history of the crisis shows that the organization has a similar problem and needs to be addressed immediately. This is because the organization consistently experiences crises. While uniqueness can be seen as a history of relationships regarding reputation. That is, the crisis management team needs to analyze how well or poorly the organization treats stakeholders. Uniqueness is considered low if the organization has a history of persecuting stakeholders. The organization shows low concern for stakeholders in various aspects, so not only in times of crisis. High consistency or low uniqueness in a crisis context can be a threat. Each element indicates that the crisis is part of a pattern of behavior rather than an isolated incident.

Basically, every crisis that occurs threatens the reputation of the company/organization. In this context, effective crisis communication can minimize the reputational damage caused by the crisis. In other words, effective crisis communication can be a means to build and maintain a positive reputation of the organization or company. In a crisis situation, all messages or information conveyed in organizational communication plays an important role in dealing with a crisis. In this case, the hotel plays a role in providing information for both internal and public.

## **Discussion**

The COVID-19 pandemic came suddenly, causing a crisis or a sudden crisis. If, as Coombs (2010) states, a crisis has three stages: pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis, then the crisis caused by Covid-19 cannot have any pre-crisis stages because hotels cannot mitigate. In a crisis, leadership is crucial. Leadership is needed to enlighten, create resources, guide paths, make decisions, initiate and implement actions. The leadership at the two hotels that were the object of research has shown what should be done.

Interestingly, the two research objects show different responses, especially at the beginning of the crisis. This seems to be related to the type of hotel where hotel A is a local hotel, and hotel B is an international chain hotel. Balci (1995) describes the elements of crisis management as follows: forming a crisis management team, work with professional consultants, prepare crisis management plans, be aware of laws or regulations, providing coaching and consulting, implementing actions (Fener & Cevik, 2015). In addition to leadership, organizational communication is also essential. Management needs to communicate honestly and openly about existing conditions. The communication flow is two-way. The similarity of vision and mission with the company will build employee awareness to achieve the goals of hotel development progress (Redi & Narena I Kadek, 2019).

Hotel A takes longer to deal with the crisis. The sudden decline in occupancy forced the management to stop operations for five months. In comparison, hotel B has never closed the hotel during the pandemic. Thus, Human Resource problems became an internal crisis, while the decline in demand became an external crisis. The two are intertwined and cannot be separated. Difficult decisions have to be made by reducing the number of employees or reducing salaries by 50%. Furthermore, the two hotels build solidity with all employees and emphasize togetherness to go through the crisis together. As a crisis, many things are not normal, such as rolling employees in all existing fields of work. Hotels try to show empathy to employees in various ways. The team must be solid in order to face the crisis together

Changes in government policies are also an obstacle for hotels to respond to them. Policies such as tourism stimulus at the start of the pandemic, Large-Scale Social Restrictions, Transitional, micro-lockdown, prohibition of going home for religious holidays, and imposition of restrictions on community activities are examples (Wibowo, 2021). It is realized that government policies respond to conditions due to exposure to Covid-19, which are difficult to predict, but this makes it difficult for hotels to take the proper steps. However, the hotel management continues to adjust to the issued government policies. CHSE certificates, for example, are essential for hotels to obtain. This certification is a kind of guarantee for the safety and security of customers during the ongoing pandemic.

In these conditions, marketing and public relations both play a role so that the hotel can survive. Digital marketing was equally chosen by the two hotels that were the research object because it was considered the most effective and practical. So that customers can immediately take action, the efforts made by the two hotels are to hold sales promotions. Efforts like this were very rarely carried out by these two hotels before the pandemic, considering that both of them already have an established market. At the same time, public relations also carries out a function to maintain brand awareness and reputation. If the pandemic ends, customers are expected to have high awareness to recognize and like the hotel brand.

The SCCT theory developed by Coombs and Holladay assumes that crisis managers match their reputation improvement strategies with the reputational threat of a crisis situation. PR must use an accommodative reputation improvement strategy as the crisis develops. In dealing with a crisis, the PR must perform two stages to assess the reputational threat of a crisis. The first step is to identify the type of crisis, which aims to find out what caused the

crisis and identify the stakeholders and parties affected by the crisis. In this case, one way that crisis managers can do is to analyze how the news media and other publics define the crisis.

The second step is to review the causes of the crisis and the previous reputation. If the organization has experienced a crisis or similar bad reputation, then the threat to reputation can be said to have increased. The most important thing that becomes the point in this SCCT is the emphasis on protecting the public from loss and damage rather than protecting the reputation of the organization. According to this theory, public safety and security is the top priority in dealing with crisis situations. Crisis communication by Coombs builds a perception that a crisis is something bad whose emergence cannot be expected, so that the emergence of a crisis allows the public to have attributions related to the crisis.

## CONCLUSION

The hotel business has been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Hotels must quickly adjust to a sudden crisis. There were differences in strategy between the two research objects, especially at the beginning of the crisis. There are four important points that conclude this research. First, in crisis conditions, leadership becomes something important. The leadership has little time to deal with the crisis by taking steps to form a crisis management team; working with professional consultants (for international chain hotels), preparing crisis management plans, knowing laws or regulations; provide coaching and consultation and implement actions.

Second, effective crisis communication can minimize the reputational damage caused by the crisis. In a crisis situation, all messages or information conveyed in organizational communication plays an important role in dealing with a crisis. Hotels have an obligation to provide information to the internal and external public. Third, there are opportunities that marketing and PR can do besides promoting rooms, which are usually the hotel's main business. Meeting and wedding packages turned out to be promising during the pandemic due to health protocol reasons. Fourth, hotels do not only focus on product marketing, but efforts to maintain brand image are still being carried out so that when the pandemic ends, hotels can enjoy the results.

Until this research is done, the pandemic is still ongoing. Recommendations for hotel PR is to be more responsive in dealing with crises and provide information to all stakeholders. Even in a pandemic situation, PR needs to carry out branding activities so that it has an impact on the hotel's brand image. This PR effort is expected to be a useful investment for the future.

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