

# **Opportunity Strategy for Hotel Business during The COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study from Bengkulu City**

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## **Abstract**

The pandemic has changed the hospitality business globally. There are business opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic with new-normal adaptations for the sustainability of the hotel industry, which is very important to be explored in Bengkulu. This study aims to find out how the industry takes advantage of the new-normal opportunities from the policies made by the government in the hotel business sector in Bengkulu City during the COVID-19 pandemic. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative method with data collection techniques of observation, interviews, literature study also interpret and describe existing data concerning the current situation. Primary data was collected through interviews by applying standard and operational COVID-19 to city hotels in Bengkulu which were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that they knew and understood the cases studied, and secondary data were collected from online publications. The results of the study also use validation of the responses of hotel guests visiting from online reviews made about how business hotel operations follow the standard COVID-19 protocol by wearing masks, washing hands where they are available, and maintaining distance.

Pandemic, Opportunity, COVID-19, Hospitality, and Bengkulu.

## **1. Introduction**

Pandemic COVID-19 has made a worldwide tourism activity paralyzed included in the city of Bengkulu. The regulation for large-scale social restrictions (PSBB) from Governor of Bengkulu number 22nd the year 2020 that concerning the application of discipline and enforcement of health protocol laws as an effort to prevent and control coronavirus disease (Govenor, 2020). The impact was huge to the hotel business that required to temporarily close down the business from April to June 2020 (Kominfo, 2020). The impact has caused the decline of the occupancy rate of the hotel rooms to continue their business activities due to decreased interest and purchasing power of hotel business customers

accordingly. This lack of anticipation caused the sustainability of hotel business the Bengkulu City in critical situation contract with the Government of Bengkulu vision towards economic pillars and economic development at alleviation of poverty throughout the world in 2030 (Murniningtyas & Endah, 2018). The strategies are to implement adoption of the COVID-19 protocol in business operations while obtained credibility through online reviews of hotels in Bengkulu that operate to target customers during the pandemic (Farmaki et al., 2020).

Online reviews are an important parameter to maximize the strategy of companies to be customer-centric providing relevant information needs for a hotel during a pandemic (Yacoub & ElHajjar, 2021). According to a study (Mayer, 2015), online travel review titles have a similar function to newspaper headlines or advertising slogans. The title is a summary of the consumer's experience with the trip and will influence consumers in how they estimate review content based on the title (Baka, 2016). The online reviews on the online platform are important to understand customer satisfaction levels during a pandemic. Customer satisfaction will be room for improvement to increase the performance of hotel business services in the city of Bengkulu.

The hotel business still survives to continue the operational continuity with the strategies undertaken to sold out the products. Therefore, by looking at the description above, the authors are interested in researching how to take advantage of opportunities from the existing marketing strategy in Bengkulu city hotels during the COVID-19 Pandemic. This study will highlight the experience by business practice with the presence of COVID-19, how the marketing strategy was chosen, and how was the review of customer response.

## 1.1 Objectives

Changes in the hotel business during the COVID-19 crisis to the hotel industry have created a new normal order which is interesting to understand the transformation of the hospitality industry (Hall et al., 2020). The purpose of this study is to determine how consumer reviews of city hotels in Bengkulu during the pandemic crisis and the implementation of hotel business adopting the new normal during the pandemic crisis. There are two research questions, namely (1) what are strategy was implemented during the pandemic COVID-19 in Bengkulu city hotels? (2) What is the review of customers based on the strategy applied in Bengkulu City hotels according to the digital platform during the pandemic COVID-19 period?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Hotel Business Digital Media Platform

Marketing through digital media is a method for marketing products or services using electronic / internet devices with various marketing strategies and digital media. The internet is an influential tool for business. The internet provides sales opportunities from customer demand in the consumer market with a method without meeting buyers and sellers on a trading platform. The communication process is very interactive and effective so that the participants can communicate more accurately, effective, and satisfying, especially in times of pandemic COVID-19 (Hassan & Soliman, 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, middleman sales such as online travel agents (OTA) were very effective in helping to sell hotel rooms that were empty of visitors because of working or studying from home (Carroll & Sileo, 2014). This is also driven by the prohibition regulations made by the government. After the WHO decree regarding the Corona Virus pandemic, on April 2, 2020, the Indonesian Government has enacted the regulation of the Minister of Law and Human Rights of the Republic of Indonesia Number 11 of 2020 concerning the temporary prohibition of foreigners entering the territory of the Republic of Indonesia. Based on this regulation, the resto modifies the booking with the reservation has made need to be rescheduled due to pandemic constraints, on top of that OTA has given the flexibility to customer stay latter that help the hotel business not refund the money while several countries in the world are unable to travel to Indonesia, thus closing the entrance to foreign tourists visiting Bengkulu. According to (Wen et al., 2020) that social media is a form of public relations (PR), the most transparent, attractive, and interactive at this time. Online review on platform OTA tends to be faster in drawing attention than direct interaction in the real world. This moment is then used to build consumer confidence with the support platform of OTA. The open online review is used by businesses to market their products as the customer experience practices (Cohen et al., 2016).

### 2.2 Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Pandemic is the level or volume of the spread of disease that ranks highest. A pandemic if the disease is said to have spread rapidly throughout the world with a high rate of infection (Soetjipto, 2020). Although the Coronavirus was

declared a pandemic, the WHO asserts that the pandemic is still manageable. At this time the pandemic is HIV / AIDS pandemic and Corona Virus disease (COVID-19). The Corona Virus (COVID- 19) based on data from Worldmeters until Sat, May 1, 2020, has amounted to 4,885,035 (4.88 million) cases. Of these, there have been 319 779 deaths. Meanwhile, 1.9 million cases were declared cured (Mukaromah, 2020). Pandemic is an infection rate that ranks highest. A pandemic if the disease is said to have spread rapidly throughout the world with a high rate of infection (Giousmpasoglou et al., 2021). Although the Coronavirus was declared a pandemic, the WHO asserts that the pandemic is still manageable. At this time the pandemic is HIV / AIDS pandemic and Corona Virus disease (COVID-19). Figures spread of Corona Virus (COVID- 19) based on data from World meters until Sat 1st May 1, 2021, has amounted to 4,885,035 (4.88 million) cases. Of these, there have been 319 779 deaths. Meanwhile, 1.9 million cases were cured.

To break the chain of COVID- 19, WHO and the government advised to take precautions, namely by limiting meetings or social interaction (social distancing), conduct all activities at home (stay at home), the suggesting of the environment and personal hygiene with frequent handwashing with soap or hand sanitizer and spray disinfectant in a place where a high risk of transmission to impose PSBB (Large-Scale Social restricted). Doing social distancing is believed by some to be a powerful way to reduce the spread of infectious diseases. Although there is no measurement of the COVID-19, social distancing strategies are now used to slow the spread of this virus (Hall et al., 2020) From the economic side as a result of the policy to work at home (work from home) home study (studying from home) and Restriction of Social our Large (PSBB), entrepreneurs suffered losses, as a result, many businesses were closed for a quiet buyer plus regional policies that enforce social distancing or curfew makes the atmosphere tenser. As a result, many employees have forced termination. From the point of Social and Cultural also impaired by the imposition stay at home and social distancing include advice not going home and enforcement of PSBB make social interaction is very limited. The restriction of movement and interaction will certainly impact the tourism industry are the focus of industry service and interaction. The tourism industry into the industry most affected by pandemic COVID- 19 that causes a lot of entrepreneurs in the field of tourism and tourist accommodation services or folded closed. Chairman of the Association of Hotels of the Republic of Indonesia (IHRA) declared until Monday 6 April 2020 has been noted that there is 1,226 hotel closed.

### **2.3 Bengkulu City Area**

Bengkulu city is one of the provinces in the western part of the island of Sumatra at latitude 2016'3031 LS and longitude 10101'103041 BT in Indonesia (Herlin & Yati, 2019). Bengkulu City has an area of 152.00 km<sup>2</sup> with a population in 2020 of 371,828 people. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), Bengkulu Province noted that Bengkulu's economic growth in the fourth quarter of 2020 still contracted or -2.39% when compared to the same period in the previous year (YoY) due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Azhar, 2021). As a part of economic condition and contribution, the hotel business is playing a role to contribute to support gross domestic product (GRP) Bengkulu that is the lowest in Sumatra with an amount IDR 72,143 per capita (bps.go.id, 2021). The condition of economic turbulence with the innovation protocol standard is to drive the creative economy of the people around it. Hoteliers must collaborate with tour and online travel agents to promote events and tourist spots worth visiting to create positive reviews during the pandemic crisis.

### **3. Methods**

In this study, the authors used a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The purpose of using qualitative methods is so that the author can describe the empirical reality behind the phenomena that occur related to the economic decline due to the COVID-19 pandemic where City Hotel Bengkulu has to develop a marketing strategy so that hotels continue to operate amid the pandemic in a deep, detailed and thorough manner (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021). The data collection technique is done in a combination, the data analysis is deductive, and the results of qualitative writing emphasize the meaning more than generalization. The type of writing used is descriptive writing. The description clearly describes the phenomenon of the field. In this study, the authors are looking for facts about how the strategies applied by the City hotels in Bengkulu that hotels can continue to operate during the COVID-19 pandemic with the right interpretation, and will study problems that occur in the field, including marketing strategies, and their impacts.

#### 4. Data Collection

Observations were made on the various efforts made by the City hotel in Bengkulu to be able to continue operating amid the COVID-19 pandemic, where the cancellation of room bookings and events greatly affects the sustainability of the hotel and limitations in the sale of products in the offer hotels. The interview technique used in this writing is in-depth interviews. The interview in this writing was conducted to obtain data and information about the impacts felt during the COVID-19 pandemic and the strategies applied by the City hotels in Bengkulu to market their products during the COVID-19 pandemic. Documentation In this paper, the authors obtained several documents in the form of the application of the COVID-19 standard protocol.

Table 1. The object of the research

<i>No</i>	<i>Hotel</i>	<i>Ranking of hotel in TripAdvisor website</i>	<i>Address</i>
1	Sinar Sport Hotel Bengkulu	1st	Jl. Letjend Soeprapto no. 378 Ratu Samban, Bengkulu 38222 Indonesia
2	Hotel Santika Bengkulu	2nd	Jln. Jati No. 45 Sawah Lebar, Bengkulu 38228 Indonesia
3	Mercure Bengkulu	3rd	Jl. S. Parman No.27 Padang Jati, Ratu Samban, Bengkulu 38227 Indonesia

Source: TripAdvisor (2021)

Based on table 1, the population in this study were hotels in Bengkulu, amounting to three hotels based on the TripAdvisor online platform collected in April 2021. The sample was selected by non-probability sampling and purposive sampling with the consideration of object selection based on the 1st to 3rd hotel ranking category from the TripAdvisor website from a total of 36 hotels on the TripAdvisor website so that three hotels were sampled or the object of this research which can be seen in Table 1 which is located in the city of Bengkulu.

#### 5. Results and Discussion

Indonesia confirms the first case of coronavirus infection started in Indonesia in early March 2020. Since then, various prevention efforts taken by the government to cushion the impact of the pandemic COVID-19 in various sectors. Almost all affected sectors, not just health. The economic sector is also experiencing a serious impact due to the coronavirus pandemic. Restriction community activities affect the business activities then the impact on the economy. (Rizal, 2020) The impact of a pandemic COVID-19 makes the hotel industry took a big hit and some of the hotels were forced to shut down operations and laid off several employees. In addition, several hotels are repurposed for medical personnel. Meanwhile, the hotel is still open, generally as an effort to still get revenue and implement staggered work time to prevent the spread of the virus COVID-19.



Figure 1. Strategies for Hotel Business in Indonesia during COVID-19

The hospitality business into one of the sectors most affected by the pandemic virus COVID-19, but that does not mean the existence of the hotel should be allowed to fade. In the era of pandemics such as the current level of consumer confidence is down, and customers tend to demand more particularly the application of good health and hygiene. The hotel should be able to survive one of them by providing services and products that are relevant to the situation of a pandemic condition COVID-19. Business actors in the tourism sector during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially hoteliers, must have a strategy to maintain their business. Opportunity marketing strategy is a ploy by the company to see the opportunity to offer products or services to customers from the existing conditions to maximize revenue. Every company wants to make the product or service in the offer is sold, and therefore companies should make strategies in marketing their products to compete with other companies, especially City hotels in Bengkulu.

To keep running its daily operations, as well as adjusting to changing market needs, the management of Hotel City in Bengkulu adjusted several elements of the marketing mix carried out by the management. According to Figure.1, the strategy was focused on four key things following the principles of the marketing mix, the service, price, promotion, and sharing of data process. Furthermore, the adjustment made by the management Hotel in Bengkulu city hotel at a high level is described as follows.

### 5.1.1 Product

According to (Farmaki et al., 2020) a product is any offer that can satisfy needs and desires. Hotel City in Bengkulu has a product that is capable enough to meet the needs of hotel guests, ranging from complete facilities and also a large number of rooms. In addition, Hotel City in Bengkulu provides a wide variety of quality food and beverage menus. According to Figure 1, the product obtained 4.2 strategy priority to increase the trust of potential customers, hotels are currently increasing efforts to implement ideal hygiene. The application of high cleanliness standards is also carried out evenly throughout the hotel by spraying disinfectants to every place that is frequently exposed to physical contact, providing special boundary instructions in places that are considered to cause crowds and are required to queue, as well as providing hand sanitizers at every place. These are often exposed to physical contacts, such as the lobby area, elevator, and at the entrance to each meeting room. Based on the business operation practices, all of the hotels in Bengkulu city were allowing customers to search the hotel's information protocol on the online platform. On top of that, the product was more flexible given to customer cancelation booking for terms and conditions. The hotel's business is difficult to provide the level best of services due to amenities limitation could be given which not along with the pandemic protocol standard in the hotel.

### 5.1.2 Price

In determining the price, a mature analysis is needed for the product to be marketed so that it can be used as an advantage of the product produced by the company. Hotels city in Bengkulu has adjusted the price to existing standards. Hotels city in Bengkulu uses the fixed fee pricing method, which is to reduce room rates according to market purchasing power conditions, where the main objective is for hotels to survive the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Figure 1, the price was obtained 4,1 that the lowest strategy priority that impacted the business operation.

Therefore all the hotel in Bengkulu city has agreed that the prices given were adapting to consumer purchasing power during Covid 19 pandemic. Although the hotel rate was flexible, the international customer was unable to accommodate a special rate for the international traveler to encourage the booking due to Government is still suspending the International tourist to Indonesia (Yacoub & ElHajjar, 2021).

### 5.1.3 Promotions

Promotion is the process of communicating the marketing mix variables carried out by the company in marketing its products or services. Hotel City Bengkulu carries out various promotional activities ranging from direct marketing, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling, interactive marketing, to digital marketing. In addition, the hotel also carries out several promotions that are displayed in newspapers to television. During the COVID-19 pandemic, promotions were only carried out using an online travel agent to maximize the contact with the customer compare to direct booking. The investigation found that OTA provides coupons to customers to attract a customer that challenges with the purchasing power, therefore the promotions were not locally relevant because the Government regulations often changed with immediate effect cause the industry dilemma (Farmaki et al., 2020).

### 5.1.4 Process

The process here includes how the company serves each customer during the pandemic COVID-19. The process is an important element of the marketing mix. Hotel City in Bengkulu always provides the best service for hotel guests or customers, from booking a room or an easy meeting place, payment, check-in process to check out process. Along with government regulations on implementing health protocols, all business fields or agencies in Indonesia add processes to their services. The processes implemented by the City hotels in Bengkulu are as follows: (1) Providing instructions on the distance to the place that is required to queue up; (2) Requiring body temperature checks for anyone who intends to enter the hotel area; (3) Requiring customers to use a mask or face shield during activities in the hotel area. The study found that the hotels in Bengkulu have educated the customer on the current situation and market condition caused the limitation of services given accordingly. The customers are provided an insight new normal process although the campaign in the hotel or online platform was well informed.

## 5.2 The Review of the Customers Based on The Strategy implemented

Table 2. Online review data in Bengkulu city

<i>Hotel</i>	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Very Good</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Terrible</i>
Santika	21	71	25	2	2
Sinar Sport	111	41	15	1	1
Mercure	9	6	1	1	0

Source: TripAdvisor (2021)

Based on Table 2, it is known that there are 304 consumer reviews on TripAdvisor. Based on Table 2, it can also be seen that the online rating system on TripAdvisor is classified into five types, namely excellent, very good, average, poor, and terrible. Rating is the result of a reliable assessment for research because consumers can evaluate the entire length of their stay at a hotel and provide an assessment review of a hotel. According to a study (Jiang & Wen, 2020), positive reviews that fall into the "excellent" category are defined as reviews that show satisfaction, and negative reviews that fall into the "terrible" category are defined as reviews that show dissatisfaction. This study only uses terrible and excellent reviews on the TripAdvisor site. This study only uses terrible and excellent reviews on the TripAdvisor site. Table 2 shows the total reviews that represent customer satisfaction with the excellent category on the TripAdvisor site, amounting to 136 reviews, while the total reviews that represent dissatisfaction with the terrible category on the TripAdvisor site are 3 reviews based on data taken in April 2021.

This study uses content analysis techniques intending to know the responses of hotel visitors with the application of the standard COVID-19 protocol. Content analysis is an approach and method in qualitative research that makes the

text the object of study or the unit to be analyzed, to find the meaning or content of the message conveyed (Dr. Ibrahim, 2015) Content analysis is used to study and draw conclusions on a phenomenon, by utilizing documents on the content of printed and electronic. There are five steps in content analysis carried out in this study. The first step is to determine the text to be studied, namely reviews on TripAdvisor. The second step is to determine the text that is interesting, special, extraordinary, controversial, that is, a review that only remains in the new normal category. The third step is to categorize the text, which is to determine the satisfaction and dissatisfaction factors based on the literature review of previous studies. The fourth step is to classify visitor reviews where the author uses verification of how to apply the protocol directly to each hotel. The fifth step is to interpret, interpret and draw conclusions from the results of the review verification.

Table 3. Online hotel reviews

<i>Hotel</i>	<i>Platform</i>	<i>Satisfy</i>	<i>dissatisfied</i>	<i>Rating</i>
Santika Hotel Bengkulu	TripAdvisor	21	2	4.0/5.0
Sinar Sport Hotel Bengkulu	TripAdvisor	111	1	4.5/5.0
Mercure Hotel Bengkulu	TripAdvisor	9	0	4.5/5.0

Source: TripAdvisor (2021)

An online review can help the continuity of the hotel business in a crisis pandemic to adapt to existing policies (Hu & Chen, 2016). This is a form of response to business continuity with an unpredictable nature of incidents, which can result in unprecedented results that cannot be predicted in the end. customer review requirements can create strategy formulations at a rapid rate to address or reduce the effects of threats. In this study, researchers analyzed guest reviews of the three research objects 3–4-star city hotels in the city of Bengkulu are Santika Bengkulu, Sinar Sport Hotel Bengkulu, and Mercure Bengkulu.

Table. 3 describes the results of calculating the satisfaction and dissatisfaction measurement of guest reviews in nominal and percentage form as well as overall ratings which are then used as data in this study. Based on the TripAdvisor platform, the Sinar Sport hotel received 170 reviews, which are divided into 111 satisfied or around 99.1% and 1 or 0.9% dissatisfaction while obtained and 4.5 / 5 overall rating. While Santika has a total of 121 reviews divided into 21 satisfied or 91.5% satisfaction reviews and 2 or 8.6% dissatisfaction reviews and an overall rating of 4.0 / 5. Therefore, Mercure Bengkulu has 17 total reviews with 9 or 100 % satisfied reviews and 0 or 0% dissatisfied reviews with an overall rating of 4.5/5.

The online review of customer satisfaction for city hotels in Bengkulu city based on data on TripAdvisor showed that a satisfactory rating was 96.3% although the situation during the pandemic COVID-19 with new-normal conditions and standard protocol applied. The result describes that during the pandemic crisis customer was able to support the business continuity during the pandemic crisis in hotel Bengkulu City while encouraging the reviewer based on the experience. The positive feedback during the pandemic allowing the researcher to estimate that the new adaptation model and the implementation of SOP were excellent and created the best level of satisfaction toward the pandemic conditions.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the above discussion and the results of research conducted by the author, it can be concluded that at this time the impact of the spread of the coronavirus or COVID-19 is strongly felt by the public, including by operators in Indonesia. The WHO and the government in the implementation of social distancing changing the culture of today's society and are also negatively impacting the business continuity of each company, especially in Bengkulu City. The COVID-19 crisis condition requires the cooperation of all stakeholders to be able to effectively manage this public health emergency, especially the hospitality world which has been very critically affected. Governments, the hotel industry, universities, citizens, and the media to stem the spread of the virus, help patients and fight an economic collapse that has yet to show its end. This requires a series of strategies on existing opportunities consistently through Product, Price, Promotion and the process must adopt new-normal based on SOP and be customer-centric.

Accordingly, the online review was able to provide a benchmark based on customer experience to forecast the hotel services without direct contact. Although it was critical to be applied for hotel business in the city of Bengkulu the control of stakeholders should be evaluated to maximize the opportunity through operation safely and comfortably

customer experienced staying at the hotel. However, there may be several efforts that can be made to support business continuity, one of which is by making an effective marketing strategy in this era of COVID-19. Recommendations for further research are the opportunity and challenges for the application of the COVID-19 standard for new normal adoption in Indonesia.

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## Biography

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