

Harmonization of Tri Hita Karana: A Sustainable Tourism Branding Strategy (Grand Istana Rama Study)

I Gede Novara Krishna¹, Ragil Noviyanti², Shigit Januar Abrianjaya³

^{1,3}Faculty of Communication, LSPR Institute of Communication and Business, ²Faculty of Computer Science, Nahdlatul Ulama University of Sidoarjo

¹25375010008@lspr.edu, ²ragilnoviyanti.dkv@unusida.ac.id, ³25375010003@lspr.edu

Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the marketing communication strategy of Grand Istana Rama Hotel (GIR) in Kuta, Bali, and to address the research gap regarding local wisdom as a core strategic asset rather than mere ornamentation in sustainable tourism. Employing a qualitative single case study method and in-depth interviews with key management, this research analyzes how GIR radically integrates the Tri Hita Karana (THK) philosophy into its brand equity through the strategic transformation of cultural capital. The process involves examining three strategic pillars: Palemahan (environment), transformed into a 1.7-hectare "Green Oasis" USP defying high-density economic logic; Parhyangan (spirituality), leveraged for brand trust through ritual transparency and ethical boundaries; and Pawongan (social), fostering strong emotional bonds through a humanist service culture amidst industry automation. Netnographic data from guest reviews validates that the human-centric service and the tranquil atmosphere are the primary drivers of customer loyalty and positive perception. The results show that this fundamental THK integration functions as a counterintuitive competitive defense mechanism, effective against market saturation and the impending 2025 hotel moratorium. The conclusion is that fundamentally integrated local wisdom offers a resilient and authentic model, positioning THK as a strategic communication framework that generates superior functional, psychological, and ethical value for sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: *Ethical Commodification; Political Economy of Space; Tourism Branding; Tri Hita Karana*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi strategi komunikasi pemasaran Hotel Grand Istana Rama (GIR) di Kuta, Bali, serta mengatasi kesenjangan penelitian mengenai kearifan lokal sebagai aset strategis inti, bukan sekadar ornamen, dalam pariwisata berkelanjutan. Dengan menggunakan metode studi kasus tunggal kualitatif dan wawancara mendalam dengan manajemen kunci, penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana GIR secara radikal mengintegrasikan filosofi Tri Hita Karana (THK) ke dalam ekuitas mereknya melalui transformasi strategis modal budaya. Proses ini melibatkan pengujian tiga pilar strategis: Palemahan (lingkungan), yang diubah menjadi USP "Oase Hijau" seluas 1,7 hektar, menentang logika ekonomi high-density; Parhyangan (spiritualitas), yang dimanfaatkan untuk membangun kepercayaan merek (brand trust) melalui transparansi ritual dan batasan etis; serta Pawongan (sosial), yang menumbuhkan ikatan emosional yang kuat melalui budaya layanan humanis di tengah otomatisasi industri. Data netnografi dari ulasan tamu memvalidasi bahwa layanan yang berpusat pada manusia (human-centric service) dan suasana yang tenang adalah pendorong utama loyalitas pelanggan dan persepsi positif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa integrasi THK yang mendasar ini berfungsi sebagai mekanisme pertahanan kompetitif yang kontra-intuitif, efektif menghadapi kejenuhan pasar dan moratorium pembangunan hotel yang akan datang pada tahun 2025. Kesimpulannya adalah bahwa kearifan lokal yang terintegrasi secara fundamental menawarkan model yang tangguh dan otentik, memosisikan THK sebagai kerangka komunikasi strategis yang menghasilkan nilai fungsional, psikologis, dan etis yang unggul bagi pembangunan pariwisata berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: *Branding Pariwisata, Ekonomi Politik Ruang, Komodifikasi Etis, Tri Hita Karana.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The global tourism industry currently stands at a critical inflection point, a moment of transition demanding a fundamental redefinition of what constitutes "luxury" and "quality." Throughout the second half of the 20th century, the mass tourism paradigm

dominated the global market, relying heavily on visitor volume, standardized services, and hedonistic consumption. This model, often summarized as the "3S" model (Sun, Sand, and Sea), triggered massive exploitation of natural and cultural resources to meet market demand.

However, the third decade of the 21st century has brought a paradigm shift. Modern tourists, increasingly educated, critical, and digitally connected, are moving away from extractive holiday models toward a more responsible, meaningful, and transformative form of tourism, known as regenerative tourism.

This phenomenon was drastically accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic that swept the globe between 2020 and 2022. The global health crisis forced the hospitality industry to recalibrate its core values. Safety, health, and well-being are no longer sufficient; tourists now demand tangible evidence of contribution to environmental sustainability and local cultural preservation. A 2023 Booking.com survey found that 76% of global travelers expressed a desire to travel more sustainably, which signifies that sustainability has shifted from mere Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) jargon to a decisive factor in consumer purchasing decisions. Modern travelers are abandoning extractive holiday models for more responsible, meaningful, and transformative tourism, or regenerative tourism (Bellato et al., 2023). This phenomenon was dramatically hastened by the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated a total industry reset (Sigala, 2020).

The tourism sector in Bali, the backbone of the regional economy, suffered a severe blow from the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing hotels and restaurants to implement massive layoffs and causing a sharp decline in public mobility (Larasdiputra et al., 2021). Although the island is recovering, the pandemic's long-term impact has fundamentally reshaped the market demand landscape. Post-pandemic tourists, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, now prioritize health, safety, and authentic values that offer mental restoration and align with their personal ethics (Wen et al., 2021). This shift compels industry players to move away from high-density tourism models, which are vulnerable to external shocks, towards more resilient and sustainable alternatives. Ecotourism and culturally based tourism have long been discussed as potential development paths for Bali, offering viable solutions to environmental and sustainability issues (Budiarta, 2018). Therefore, this research argues that a long-term resilience solution requires a revitalization of branding rooted in local wisdom, one that is not merely sustainable (non-damaging) but fundamentally regenerative (restorative), to

address post-pandemic market dynamics effectively.

In the context of Southeast Asia, particularly Bali, this shift is not the discovery of a new concept, but rather a "rebirth" (renaissance) of long-established ancestral value systems. Tri Hita Karana (THK), the Balinese Hindu philosophy that teaches the balanced relationship between humans and God (*Parhyangan*), humans and fellow human beings (*Pawongan*), and humans and nature (*Palemahan*), now finds renewed strategic relevance in global business discourse. Nevertheless, the transition from an abstract philosophical value to a concrete, financially viable branding strategy faces the classic "Commodification Paradox": how to commercialize culture without exploiting its sacredness. This risk can erode brand equity if perceived as greenwashing (Akturan, 2018). This challenge becomes even more complex for properties located in ultra-dense tourism zones like Kuta, where commercial pressures to maximize land use often diametrically conflict with the principle of preserving green space.

To comprehend the significance of the strategy employed by Hotel Grand Istana Rama (GIR), the object of this study, a preliminary understanding of its spatial and historical context is necessary. The transformation of Kuta is a microcosm of the global tourism dilemma. Organically growing from a fishing village to a center of mass hedonism in the 1980s, Kuta experienced tourism gentrification that marginalized local identity. Prior to the pandemic, the area had reached a saturation point marked by congestion and noise pollution, prompting high-end tourists to shift to other areas such as Seminyak or Uluwatu. It is within this landscape that GIR's existence, maintaining traditional architecture on 1.7 hectares of land, becomes a historical anomaly. While competitors race to build vertically for maximum Return on Investment (ROI) per square meter, this property deliberately preserves Kuta's "memory" as a differentiation strategy.

The relevance of this strategy lies in the narrative of Bali's post-pandemic tourism resurgence. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Bali Province indicates an aggressive recovery trend in 2023–2024, yet with a qualitative shift from quantity toward quality tourism. Tourists now seek wellness and a sense of reconnection with nature. Amid this

surge in demand, the planned 2025 hotel development moratorium is expected to freeze supply. Statistically, this condition positions existing hotels with strong differentiation, such as GIR with its Tri Hita Karana concept, in a unique bargaining position, as they offer a scarce product that cannot be mass-produced due to spatial regulatory limitations.

Stemming from this urgency and context, this research focuses on answering how Hotel Grand Istana Rama integrates the Tri Hita Karana philosophy into its marketing communication strategy. Specifically, this study aims to analyze the process of transforming cultural capital in the *Palemahan*, *Parhyangan*, and *Pawongan* aspects into brand equity relevant to the global market. Furthermore, this study evaluates the strategy's effectiveness as a competitive defense mechanism against external challenges. Through this analysis, it is expected to formulate strategic insights regarding an "Ethical Commodification" model that enriches the tourism marketing communication literature and provides a practical guide for the hospitality industry in managing cultural assets for economic value without sacrificing preservation integrity.

The effort to address these issues led this research to formulate a branding strategy based on the local philosophy of Tri Hita Karana (THK). Derived from the words *Tri* (three), *Hita* (happiness/well-being), and *Karana* (causes), THK is literally translated as 'The Three Causes of Well-being' and constitutes a universal Balinese Hindu philosophy emphasizing cosmological balance through harmonization: *Parhyangan* (the vertical relationship between humanity and God), *Pawongan* (the horizontal relationship between human beings), and *Palemahan* (the relationship between humanity and nature). Sitohang and Purnomo (2023) caution that implementing THK in tourism is a 'double-edged sword'. While preserving culture on one hand, it is vulnerable to desanctification for the sake of tourist satisfaction on the other. Therefore, an ethical marketing communication strategy is required to capitalize on this philosophical asset.

In the context of marketing communication, Kotler and Keller (2016) define it as a company's effort to inform, persuade, and remind consumers about the brand it sells. In the current digital era,

communication is not only transactional but also emotional. Brand Image, the perception formed in the consumer's mind, is strongly influenced by memory associations and by how a hotel communicates its value to the public (Sri Mirayani et al., 2025).

Furthermore, this study utilizes the foundation of Experience Economy Theory by Pine and Gilmore (1999), which posits that the future commodity is not goods or services, but 'experiences.' Consumers are now willing to pay a premium for authentic experiences that resonate emotionally. This concept is reinforced by Suasapha (2024), who introduced Spiritual Capital, defined as the wealth of values and meanings rooted in transcendent traditions. By integrating THK, the hotel effectively converts this spiritual capital into a differentiating asset that positions it outside 'soulless' competition.

The adaptation of THK philosophy is highly relevant given the consumer behavior of new generations, such as Millennials and Gen Z, who are characterized as Experience Economy Natives. These two groups define luxury not by material ownership, but by access to meaningful experiences aligned with their personal values—including the desire to engage in humanistic service (*Pawongan*) and to mitigate *eco-anxiety* through a restorative environment (*Palemahan*) (Wen et al., 2021).

The *Palemahan* aspect is then analyzed through the lens of Attention Restoration Theory (ART), proposed by Kaplan and Kaplan (1989). This theory explains why natural environments, such as the 'Green Oasis' at Grand Istana Rama (GIR), have a powerful psychological impact: they offer Fascination (soft allure), allowing the brain to rest from the fatiguing directed attention of modern life. This concept aligns with Biophilic Design (Kellert, 2008), which views visual and physical access to vegetation not merely as aesthetics, but as a biological necessity that affects stress levels and emotional well-being.

Critically, the presence of this 'Green Oasis' amidst the density of Kuta is also analyzed through the perspective of the Political Economy of Space, referencing the ideas of Henri Lefebvre. Space, especially in tourist areas, is a social product that is contested and holds high 'exchange value.' The hotel's preservation of 1.7 hectares of green space is an economically 'subversive' act because it challenges the capitalist logic of profit

maximization through vertical development, which, ironically, creates new value through scarcity.

Finally, this communication strategy is tested for its ability to counteract the trend of Greenwashing. THK serves as an antithesis because it is an intrinsic value system rooted in cosmological obligation (*dharma*), not just external marketing certification (Szabo & Webster, 2021). Sitohang and Purnomo (2023) term this the challenge of Ethical Commodification: *Palemahan*, materialized in the physical evidence of the Green Oasis, and transparent *Parhyangan* rituals serve as Proof of Promise that mitigates the risk of greenwashing and builds brand integrity (Nguyen et al., 2022). Thus, the application of THK at GIR is not merely aimed at being Sustainable (not causing further harm), but has moved toward Regenerative Tourism (restoring and revitalizing socio-ecological systems).

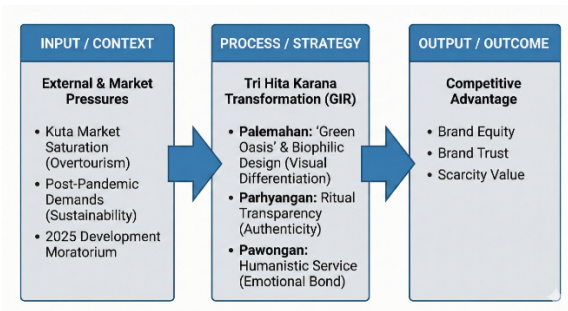


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework: The Transformation of Tri Hita Karana into a Competitive Advantage

Source: Researcher's Synthesis (2025)

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm and Design

This study employs the Constructivist paradigm, which posits that reality (in this case, the branding strategy) is not objective or singular but is constructed through social interaction and the subjective interpretations of its actors. The method utilized is Descriptive Qualitative with a Single Case Study approach. The single case study design was chosen based on Yin's (2018) argument that this method is appropriate for cases that are unique or revelatory. Grand Istana Rama represents a unique case due to its spatial anomaly (maintaining extensive green space in a dense zone) and its strategic anomaly (integrating the

General Manager and the THK Chairman into a single leadership figure).

The research was conducted at Hotel Grand Istana Rama (GIR), Jalan Pantai Kuta, Badung, Bali. The research object is the hotel's marketing communication strategy in implementing THK. The location was selected based on the hotel's strategic position in the center of Kuta's mass tourism, its status as one of the oldest properties that maintains traditional architecture, and its achievement in receiving the Tri Hita Karana Awards.

Data Collection Techniques

To obtain in-depth data ("thick data"), this research utilizes the technique of triangulation:

1. In-depth Interview: Conducted with Mr. I Ketut Darmayasa, the General Manager of GIR. His dual role as a business executive and an environmental activist/observer (THK Assessor) provides a holistic perspective that balances profitability and preservation. The interview lasted 60 minutes and was semi-structured.
2. Non-Participant Observation: The researcher observed the hotel's physical environment (gardens, sacred places, building layout) and daily ritual activities without direct involvement to capture the authentic atmosphere offered to guests.
3. Documentation Study & Netnography: The researcher analyzed internal documents (such as annual reports and promotional materials) and digital footprints (guest reviews on TripAdvisor, Traveloka, and Agoda) to validate management claims against actual consumer perceptions.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was performed using the model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes: Data Condensation: Selecting, focusing, and simplifying data from interview transcripts and field notes. Data Display: Arranging data into a logical narrative categorized according to the three pillars of THK. Conclusion Drawing: Seeking patterns, explanations, and cause-and-effect sequences to answer the research questions. Pattern Matching was employed to compare empirical patterns with theoretical predictions.

The data condensation process was systematically conducted through three stages of coding to transform raw data into meaningful findings:

1. Open Coding: The researcher read interview transcripts line by line to identify keywords and basic concepts, such as "trees," "oxygen," "ritual," "family," and "sincere service." Axial
2. Coding: The initial categories were then grouped and reconnected to form major themes aligning with the Tri Hita Karana theoretical framework (Palemahan, Parhyangan, Pawongan).
3. Selective Coding: The researcher integrated these categories to formulate the "Core Category," which is the Sustainable Tourism Branding strategy that serves as the central thesis of this research.

To clarify the flow of this analysis, Table 1 below presents the codification matrix mapping informant statements to strategic themes:

Table 1. Interview Data Coding Matrix

Interview Transcript (Verbatim/ Raw Data)	Open Coding (Keywords/Concepts)	Axial Coding (Strategic Themes/THK Pillars)	Branding Implications (Theoretical)
"Many investors say this is gold land... a waste if it becomes a garden. I say, these trees are the 'soul' that our neighbors do not possess. Guests buy oxygen here."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gold Land vs. Garden • Trees as the "Soul" • Selling Oxygen 	Palemahan (Environment)	Unique Selling Proposition (USP) via Visual Scarcity
"Parhyangan is about fear and respect. When staff perform mebanten (offerings/prayer), guests feel the 'Taksu' (spiritual energy/vibration). They believe we are honest because we fear Karma."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear & Respect • <i>Mebanten</i> Routine • Vibration / <i>Taksu</i> (Spiritual Energy) 	Parhyangan (Spiritual)	Brand Trust based on Spiritual Authenticity
"We educate our staff that the guest is 'Nyama' (family/sibling). A robot cannot use a heart. Our repeat guests are high because they miss the people, not the rooms."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guests as Family (<i>Nyama</i>) • Heart vs. Robot • Loyalty to People 	Pawongan (Social/Human)	Human-Centric Service as differentiation against Automation (High Touch over High Tech)

Source: Researcher's Synthesis (2025)

Key Informant Profile: The Dual Guardian

The validity of qualitative data depends heavily on the credibility of its sources. The key informant in this study is I Ketut Darmayasa. His profile is unique and essential to the research findings as he represents a hybridity between corporate professionalism and local wisdom.

1. Professional Background: As a general manager (GM) holding the CHT (Certified Hotel Trainer) certification, he possesses modern managerial competence, a deep
3. that every business decision does not violate customary and religious norms (*tata krama adat dan agama*).

This dualism in roles allows the researcher to extract non-biased data. He can explain how to dismiss an employee who violates regulations (the management side) while

understanding of revenue management, and adherence to international hotel operational standards. The excellent background ensures that the business perspective in the interview is grounded in sound economic rationality.

2. Cultural Background: His role as a chairman of the Tri Hita Karana Program provides moral legitimacy. This position is not merely a conventional structural post but a cultural mandate. He is responsible for ensuring simultaneously maintaining social harmony (the *Pawongan* side). Both roles provide depth of data on the internal negotiation between profit and philosophy.

Data Triangulation Process: A Concrete Illustration

To ensure data validity and trustworthiness, this research employs strict source triangulation. Below is a concrete illustration of the triangulation process applied to the claim of the "Green Oasis."

The convergence of these three data sources confirms that the *Palemahan* concept at GIR is an objective fact acknowledged by management (internal), physically evident (empirical), and experienced by consumers (external).

Table 2. Data Triangulation Process: A Concrete Illustration

Source	Description
Source 1 (Interview):	The GM stated, "If we look at it, everyone has a different perspective on business continuity. Here, it is not 40%; instead, we have up to 60% open space. So, the green area is 60%. We prioritize how green space is maintained, creating a space for vegetation. This space is meant to ensure the area's atmosphere remains green and fresh for visitors. Our concept is indeed different. While other hotels may focus on increasing the number of rooms, we focus on the quality we deliver to the customers."
Source 2 (Field Observation):	The researcher conducted a site visit and noted the presence of large shade trees with diameters exceeding 1 meter, the free roaming of a wild squirrel population, and a drastic reduction in noise level upon entering the lobby area compared to the main road. The researcher also verified that the open land area reaches 60% of the total area.
Source 3 (Netnography/ Guest Reviews):	The researcher took a random sample of 50 recent reviews on TripAdvisor and Traveloka. A consistent pattern was found where guests used phrases such as "hidden jungle," "escape from chaos," and "beautiful gardens."

Source: Researcher's Synthesis (2025)

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The Harmonization of Tri Hita Karana as a Radical Branding Strategy

This analysis presents an in-depth study of how the Grand Istana Rama Hotel (GIR) in Kuta internalizes the Tri Hita Karana (THK) philosophy, not merely as a cultural ornament, but as a core operational system and a radical strategy for sustainable tourism branding. Empirical findings from an interview with the General Manager GIR I Ketut Darmayasa, reveal three strategic transformations that substantiate the argument for sustainability.

Fundamentally, the concept of *Palemahan* (the environment) has been converted into a competitive asset. GIR consciously maintains 60 % green area, which defies the economic logic of high-density modern tourism. This decision represents an economic anomaly given the hotel's 1.7-hectare land area in the premium zone of Kuta Beach. An Opportunity Cost analysis demonstrates the radical nature of this strategy:

1. If GIR followed the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of competitors (70–80 % land utilization), the hotel would have the potential to add 200–300 standard rooms.
2. Assuming an Average Room Rate (ARR) of IDR 1,500,000 and a conservative occupancy rate of 70 %, GIR is forgoing

billions of Rupiah in potential revenue (foregone revenue) to preserve the gardens.

The refusal to intensify land use to retain 60% green space proves that THK at GIR is a fundamental commitment that prioritizes ecological balance and the genuine implementation of the Circular Economy concept (through the IBESTIE program) over short-term profit maximization, thereby confirming that the philosophy is not a mere gimmick.

Parhyangan: The Capitalization of Authenticity and Ethical Boundaries

The second transformation focuses on *Parhyangan* (spirituality), which is capitalized as a source of authenticity and *brand trust*, through a practice termed "Ritual Transparency," integrating it into guest experience education. However, GIR management implements strict ethical demarcation boundaries to prevent desanctification. The in-depth interview revealed an implicit policy of 'Non-Intervention in Rituals.' GM Darmayasa asserted that staff's *mebanten* (offering/prayer) activities must be driven by *Dharma* (religious obligation), not by Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Staff are not burdened with performative obligations, such as smiling for guest cameras during sincere prayer, and are given full autonomy to

refuse photography if their spiritual moment is disrupted. This policy is crucial within the concept of Ethical Commodification; it ensures that guests witness authentic piety rather than religious dramaturgy staged for social media (Nuraini & Sazali, 2025). This approach critically preserves the *Taksu* (spiritual charisma) and prevents its erosion by the *tourist gaze*.

Pawongan: High-Touch Service and Staff Retention

The third transformation, *Pawongan* (social relationship), is translated into a philosophy of *high-touch service* that maintains the human element amid the accelerating trend of industrial automation. This strategy significantly strengthens emotional bonds and staff retention. Overall, the implementation of Tri Hita Karana at the Grand Istana Rama Hotel functions as a robust brand defense mechanism, strategically shifting the business focus from room volume towards the quality of experience and holistic sustainability.

Palemahan (The Relationship Between Humanity and Nature)

The implementation of *Palemahan* (the human-nature relationship) at Grand Istana Rama is a pillar of sustainability that has been strategically leveraged as a branding asset amid the high density of Kuta tourism. Based on interviews, the General Manager explicitly rejects the logic of *high-density* development, maintaining an open land percentage of up to 60 % as green space, exceeding common expectations (Darmayasa, 2025). This decision underscores a business perspective that prioritizes the quality delivered to customers and the protection of the planet over short-term profit, a choice the GM acknowledged does not create a dilemma in managerial decision-making (Darmayasa, 2025).

maintains a horizontal layout with low-rise buildings (maximum three floors) and dedicates approximately 60% of its land to open green space.

Valuation Analysis of the "Green Oasis"

The decision to maintain this garden is not mere nostalgia but a clever differentiation strategy. Amidst the hot, congested, and noisy "concrete jungle" of Kuta, GIR positions itself as a "Green Oasis." In marketing theory, this is called the Blue Ocean strategy, in which a

This environmental aspect is then communicated as an experiential Unique Selling Proposition (USP), positioning GIR as a "jungle within the city" or a "Hidden Jungle" in the hot Kuta area (Darmayasa, 2025). The *Palemahan* concept is further reinforced by the iconic quote that the hotel "does not sell concrete, but sells oxygen" (Darmayasa, 2025). Furthermore, GIR implements innovative environmental management through the IBESTIE (Innovation of Green Hotel) framework, focusing on the Circular Economy and achieving "Zero Waste" status (Darmayasa, 2025). The status realized through a Waste Hub system, where organic waste (such as leaves and coffee grounds) is sorted, shredded, and processed into fertilizer, which is reused by the hotel and even provided to employees (Darmayasa, 2025). To ensure accountability, this waste management process is integrated with technology via an internal application that measures and weighs waste *in real time*, demonstrating a commitment to measurable operational sustainability (Darmayasa, 2025).

In the THK philosophy, *Palemahan* governs the harmonious relationship between humans and the natural environment. However, in the context of the property business in Kuta, the implementation of this pillar directly confronts a harsh political-economic reality: the high value of *land rent*. According to neoclassical economic rationality, the 1.7-hectare prime land owned by GIR (on Kuta Beachfront) is an "underutilized" asset. Market logic demands land intensification, specifically the construction of *high-rise* buildings to maximize the number of rooms and revenue per square meter.

However, the research findings show that GIR adopts a counterintuitive strategy. Instead of following the vertical trend pursued by competitors like Sheraton or Mercure, GIR

company creates a new market space untouched by competitors.

1. Unique Selling Proposition (USP): The hotel's promotional materials (Instagram and Website) consistently highlight visual contrast. Featured photographs are dominated by the green color of trees and the blue of the sky, starkly different from competitor visuals that emphasize modern glass and steel architecture.

2. Market Validation: A netnographic analysis of guest reviews on OTAs (Online Travel Agents) confirms the strategy's success.

Keywords such as "Garden," "Jungle," "Peaceful," and "Trees" appear dominant in 5-star positive reviews. International guests, particularly from Europe and Australia, perceive the hotel garden not as vacant land but as a luxury of privacy and tranquility that cannot be purchased at modern hotels nearby.

In relation to the Green Marketing discourse discussed in the Literature Review, the physical existence of this 1.7-hectare garden serves as a radical antithesis to Greenwashing practices. As feared by Sitohang and Purnomo (2023), many tourism entities are trapped in shallow sustainability claims without substantial proof. Grand Istana Rama breaks this trend by presenting undeniable Proof of Promise. Maintaining 60 % of the land as a water catchment area in a high-value economic

zone is not just a branding strategy, but a statement of spatial politics that defies the extractive logic of capitalism. Thus, *Palemahan* here transcends aesthetic function; it becomes a bastion of ethical legitimacy that shields the brand from consumer skepticism towards false environmental claims.

To validate the claim that the *Palemahan* (environment) concept functions as a compelling Unique Selling Proposition (USP), this research conducted a keyword frequency analysis on a random sample of 50 recent guest reviews on Online Travel Agent platforms (TripAdvisor and Traveloka). The following table summarizes the dominance of guest perceptions regarding the hotel's physical environment:

Table 3. Guest Review Keyword Frequency Analysis

Thematic Category	Dominant Keywords	Frequency of Appearance	Illustrative Verbatim Quotes
<i>Palemahan</i> (Environment/Nature)	Garden, Jungle, Trees, Green	38 reviews (76%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "It's like staying in a hidden jungle in the middle of Kuta." • "The beautiful gardens are massive, so much green space."
Atmosphere (Experience/Mood)	Peaceful, Quiet, Oasis, Escape	32 reviews (64%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "An absolute escape from chaos outside." • "Found a peaceful sanctuary right on the busy beach."
Authenticity (Culture)	Traditional, Authentic, Vibe, Bali Style	25 reviews (50%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Love the traditional vibe, not like a concrete box hotel." • "Feels like the real Bali from the past." ³
<i>Pawongan</i> (Social/Service)	Family, Home, Friendly, Staff Name	41 reviews (82%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Staff are like family, felt at home immediately." • "Pak Made was so kind..."

Source: Researcher's Data Compilation from TripAdvisor & Traveloka (2025)

The dominance of guest perception concerning the natural environment (76%) indicates a strong positive correlation between the green space preservation strategy and guest satisfaction. Keywords related to nature (*Palemahan*) appeared in 76 % of the review samples, dominating the narrative of the guest experience. Guest satisfaction objectively demonstrates that the "Green Oasis" is not merely a unilateral marketing claim by management but an empirical reality perceived by consumers. Specific phrases such as "hidden jungle" and "escape from chaos" underscore the hotel's positioning as an antithesis to Kuta's hustle and bustle, validating the success of the applied visual differentiation strategy.

The *Palemahan* strategy becomes increasingly relevant as the Bali Hotel

Development Moratorium is implemented in October 2025. This policy, which prohibits the construction of new hotels, will restrict room supply. Consequently, existing hotels will see their asset valuations rise automatically. GIR, with its extensive green area, will possess a unique bargaining position. When physical development is restricted for environmental reasons, GIR is already one step ahead with a concept harmonizing with nature. The hotel sells "oxygen" and "breathing room," which will become the rarest commodities in the future Kuta.

The description of the "Green Oasis" is insufficient when reduced to land area figures alone. GIR's competitive advantage lies in the multi-sensory experience it offers, serving as an

antithesis to the visual-centric experience in modern hotels.

Upon stepping in from the bustling Kuta Beach street, guests are greeted by a drastic atmospheric transition. Visually, eyes, fatigued by the reflections of asphalt and glass buildings, are recalibrated by the green spectrum of diverse tropical vegetation, ranging from the artistically twisted old *Kamboja* (*Plumeria*) trees to the *Beringin* (Banyan) trees shading the temple area, to the *Heliconia* shrubs bordering the pathways.

However, *Palemahan* at GIR works more deeply with other senses. Auditory, the roar of motor vehicles on Jalan Pantai Kuta is naturally muffled by the thick vegetation, replaced by the sound of rustling leaves carried by the sea breeze and the chirping of wild birds nesting in the hotel trees. Olfactorily, the air does not smell of exhaust fumes but carries the scent of damp earth and *Sandat* or *Cempaka* flowers, often used for prayers. It is this sensorial experience that cannot be replicated by vertical hotels, even if they boast artificial rooftop gardens. This strategy of maintaining green space aligns with Pimonsathean's (2021) findings on hotels in Thailand, which

The *Pawongan* pillar emphasizes inter-human harmony. In the current global hospitality landscape, the trend leans toward technological efficiency: contactless check-in, digital room keys, and AI chatbots for customer service. Many hotels in Kuta are beginning to reduce the number of front-office staff for cost efficiency.

The High-Touch Strategy in a High-Tech Era

GIR adopts an antithetical position. Instead of reducing human interaction, GIR intensifies it through the philosophy of *Menyama Braya* (we are all brothers/family). This approach aligns with the concept of Green Human Resource Management, which has been shown to increase employees' environmentally friendly behavior (Le et al., 2023). Interviews

concluded that environmentally based hotel management has a significant positive correlation with the intention to revisit.

"If we look at it, each person has a different perspective on business continuity... While other hotels may focus on increasing the number of rooms, we focus on the quality we deliver to customers... there should be plenty of vegetation space in a property, you know... The oxygen is more abundant" (Darmayasa, 2025).

Pawongan (The Relationship Between Human Beings)

The implementation of *Pawongan* (the human-human relationship) at GIR serves as a strategic counter-balance to technological efficiency, supporting the argument for *high-touch* service as a competitive advantage. Amidst the industry trend toward staff reduction and automation (*kiosk check-in*, AI), GIR consciously maintains a "human touch" approach (Darmayasa, 2025). GM Darmayasa emphasized that technology is necessary, but without the human touch, it will not be optimal because "the one who operates the technology is the human" (Darmayasa, 2025).

with the GM revealed that *Pawongan* translates into service SOPs that treat guests like family visiting a home (*Atithi Devo Bhava*). The analysis of guest reviews proves the effectiveness of this approach. Many reviews specifically mention staff names (e.g., "*Pak Made by the pool was so friendly*," "*The lady at the reception was so helpful*"). The unknowledge indicates the formation of emotional bonding. In the long run, as functional tasks are taken over by AI, the "humanity" and empathy offered by GIR will become a premium value that machines will find difficult to replicate.

To clarify the unique positioning of GIR's *Pawongan* strategy, this analysis presents a head-to-head comparison with a modern competitor business model (disguised as "Hotel X") operating within a 500-meter radius of GIR

Table 4. Comparison of Service and Facility Strategies

Dimensions		Grand Istana Rama (Traditional/THK Model)	Hotel X (Modern/Efficiency Model)
Architecture & Spatial Design		Horizontal, 60% green area, open-air access. Emphasizes Palemahan (Human-Nature relationship).	Vertical (High-rise), dominance of enclosed A/C spaces, maximum land efficiency.
Service Approach		High Touch. Lengthy personal interaction, staff using guest names, Menyama Braya (family/kinship) culture.	High Tech. Contactless check-in, app-based service, functional and rapid interaction.
Atmosphere		Tranquil, Sacred, Authentic. Positioned as a "Sanctuary".	Cosmopolitan, Busy, Trendy. Positioned as a "Lifestyle Hub".
Primary Value Proposition		Serenity, Authentic Balinese Culture, Extensive Gardens.	Interior Design, Rooftop Pool, High-speed Wi-Fi connectivity.
Market Response (Reviews)		"Staff are like family," "Feeling at home," "Traditional Vibe."	"Cool design," "Great sunset view," "Fast service."

Source: Researcher's Data Compilation (2025)

This comparison demonstrates that GIR does not attempt to win the competition on metrics mastered by Hotel X (such as new luxury furniture or advanced technology). Instead, GIR wins consumer hearts through emotional engagement rooted in *Pawongan*.

"If staff stay long in one place, it means there is comfort. They are treated like human beings... we constantly provide education... on how we can make the visiting guests happy... However, technology without the human touch will not be able to play its part either. Because ultimately, the one operating the technology is the human... We must be able to synchronize technology with the human touch... what we can offer is the experience" (Darmayasa, 2025).

This strategy serves as a robust defense against automation. While other hotels cut staff numbers for efficiency, GIR maintains a healthy staff-to-guest ratio to ensure the human touch remains dominant. The experience is the essence of the new luxury: genuine human attention.

***Parhyangan* (The Relationship Between Humanity and God)**

The implementation of *Parhyangan* (the human-God relationship) at Grand Istana Rama is strategically leveraged as a pillar to build cultural authenticity and Brand Trust. Unlike the practice of modern hotels, which tend to conceal spiritual rituals in the *Back of the House*, GIR adopts a "Ritual Transparency" strategy (Darmayasa, 2025). Staff are visibly seen performing *mebanten* rituals, and guests

are invited to participate in ceremonies such as communal prayers during major religious holidays or *odalan* (temple anniversaries) (Darmayasa, 2025).

This transparency effectively transforms spiritual activities into an educational asset that provides a "Balinese vibe" and "local knowledge," ensuring guests perceive Bali as a cultural destination, not merely for entertainment (Darmayasa, 2025). This *Parhyangan* commitment is also manifested through the inclusive spirit of *Pawongan*, where spiritual programs and budgets are allocated equally for all employee religions (Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist), fostering internal respect and harmony within the hotel (Darmayasa, 2025).

It is the integrated and consistent implementation of *Parhyangan* as a whole that has led GIR to consistently win various awards, including the THK Award, which is recognized as a "trigger" for industry awareness regarding the importance of this harmonization foundation (Darmayasa, 2025).

Pawongan is internalized as an organizational culture that generates human resource resilience; high staff retention (employees working for decades) is indicated because employees feel comfortable and are treated "like human beings," not just workers (Darmayasa, 2025). Furthermore, *Pawongan* is translated into four pillars of happiness that staff must achieve: making the guest, the owner, colleagues, and the environment happy (Darmayasa, 2025).

This *Menyama Braya* philosophy effectively fosters emotional bonding with guests, treating them as family, surpassing Western service SOP standards that merely treat guests as "kings." Therefore, *Pawongan* serves as a foundation for creating a unique experience, which the GM cited as GIR's most crucial strategy for competing over the next five years (Darmayasa, 2025).

The *Parhyangan* pillar relates to the relationship between humans and God. In cultural tourism, the religious aspect is often the most sensitive to commercialization. There is a risk of desanctification, in which sacred rituals become mere theatrical performances. GIR successfully executes a risky maneuver by making spirituality central to its Brand DNA.

Ritual as an Authenticity Marker

In the post-truth era, consumers are highly skeptical of advertising claims. Tourists seek something *authentic*. GIR addresses this anxiety through ritual transparency. Observation results indicate that *mebanten* activities (offering *canang sari* offerings) are routinely performed by staff in the morning and afternoon across all hotel areas, including at the *Padmasana* (hotel temple). This activity is conducted not as a *show* for tourists (unlike ticketed *Kecak* dances) but as the staff's own religious obligation. When guests see staff praying devoutly without minding tourist cameras, they perceive the presence of "Taksu" (spiritual charisma). The experience validates the hotel's "Soul of Bali" branding narrative.

The impact of this spiritual transparency is profound on consumer psychology. The perception arises: "If the hotel management and staff are so devoted to God and fear the law of *Karma* (*Karma Phala*), then they must be honest and sincere in serving me." This sense of security and trust is far stronger than what standard safety certificates can build. Guests feel served by moral human beings, not corporate robots.

The consistent attainment of the Tri Hita Karana Awards (Gold and Emerald categories) by GIR serves as external legitimization. This certification assures the market (especially European travel agents) that the cultural practices at GIR are ethically preserved, not exploited.

Theoretically, the phenomenon of ritual transparency at Grand Istana Rama provides empirical validation for the Spiritual

Capital concept proposed by Suasapha (2024). If Suasapha defines spiritual capital as the wealth of transcendent values owned by an organization, then this research operationalizes that concept into concrete marketing mechanisms. This finding confirms Suasapha's postulate that spiritual capital can be converted into brand trust. It also supports the finding by Bui and Kiatkawsin (2023) that spiritual well-being is a key factor in tourist loyalty in religious destinations. However, this study adds a new dimension: the transparency and visibility of rituals are key to this conversion. Without visibility—i.e., if rituals are conducted only privately in the back areas—this spiritual capital would remain merely an internal asset and fail to translate into valuable external brand equity.

The *Parhyangan* transformation at GIR is not merely about placing a statue of a deity in the lobby. It is about creating a living spiritual ecosystem. Field observations show that the hotel's operational rhythm is synchronized with the timing of *Panca Yadnya* (the five sacred offerings).

Every morning, before the influx of guest check-ins, the lobby fills with the aroma of incense. Staff performing *mebanten* (offering *canang sari* offerings) move reverently from one shrine (*pelinggih*) to another, even placing *canang* on work tools like reception computers and operational vehicles. The sound of *rindik* gamelan is played *live*, not as an MP3 recording, creating a calming air vibration.

"Here, the staff performing *mebanten* are clearly visible to the guests... and even during every *odalan* or major holiday, we always invite the guests to join the prayers... Actually, it's not a religious aura, but we are providing the Balinese vibe. So it's our culture, our local knowledge that we educate the guests about... They get to understand what Bali is truly like. It's not just a place for hanging out or a place for commotion; beyond that, culture remains number one" (Darmayasa, 2025).

Tri Hita Karana-Based Customer Journey Analysis

To dissect the effectiveness of GIR's marketing communication strategy, this research maps the Guest Experience Journey from arrival to departure, and how each touchpoint is orchestrated using THK values.

Phase 1: Arrival – The Spatial Culture Shock (The *Palemahan* Shock)

The first touchpoint occurs when the guest enters the main gate from Kuta Beach Street. A dramatic *Palemahan* intervention takes place here. The guest moves from the "Profane" zone (the congested, noisy road full of street vendors) to the "Sacred" zone (the hotel lobby). Observations noted a micro-temperature drop of about 2–3 degrees Celsius due to the canopy of banyan and *trembesi* trees shading the drop-off area. Semiotically, this transition communicates a non-verbal yet strong welcome message. Guests are not greeted by an automated parking ticket machine but by the *Candi Bentar* gateway architecture and security staff wearing *udeng* (Balinese headwear). That first impression is the Zero Moment of Truth (ZMOT), where the perception of the "Green Oasis" is instantly validated.

Phase 2: Check-in Process – The Human Touch (The *Pawongan* Touch)

At the reception desk, the *Pawongan* strategy takes over. Contrary to the trend of self-service *kiosk check-in*, GIR maintains a warm, manual process. Reception staff are trained to engage in meaningful small talk (e.g., asking about origins and holiday purpose) not as an SOP formality, but as an expression of *Atithi Devo Bhava* (The Guest is God). One

One of the most significant findings in this research is the dynamics of the decision-making process regarding the major renovation plan for October–December 2025. The renovation focus is the modernization of Buildings 6 and 9, including the addition of elevator facilities. This case serves as a real-world laboratory to observe the conflict between business logic and the THK philosophy.

Thesis (Business Logic): Management recognizes that the absence of elevators in the 3-story buildings is a major complaint from the silver market (elderly guests) and families with strollers. Competitors in the vicinity generally have full elevator access. Operationally, the lack of elevators also complicates *Housekeeping* and *Room Service*. Therefore, economic rationality demands the construction of modern, efficient external elevators.

Antithesis (THK/*Palemahan* Logic): The construction of external elevators potentially encroaches on the garden area and damages the traditional Balinese architectural façade, which is the building's hallmark. Furthermore, the

unique ritual observed is the serving of a Welcome Drink, often a traditional herbal beverage (such as *beras kencur* or *rosella*), not a commercially packaged juice. The ritual is a sensory marketing that introduces local flavor and wellness, aligning with the wellness narrative.

Phase 3: Duration of Stay – The Spiritual Resonance (The *Parhyangan* Vibe)

During their stay, guests are continuously exposed to *Parhyangan* elements. In the morning, as guests walk towards the restaurant for breakfast, they will cross paths with staff carrying trays of *canang sari*. The faint smell of incense, mingled with morning dew, creates a unique olfactory memory. Interviews with guests (secondary data from reviews) indicate that this moment often becomes a highlight of their experience. They feel they are part of the authentic Balinese village life. The absence of Western pop *background music* in the garden area, replaced by nature sounds or faint *rindik* music, reinforces the experience's immersion. The hotel does not need to post banners reading "We are Authentic"; the *Parhyangan* atmosphere speaks for itself.

Micro Case Study: The Dialectic of Building 6 and 9 Renovation

massive concrete structure would obstruct natural air circulation and visual sightlines to the garden, violating the principle of *Palemahan* harmony.

Synthesis (Compromise Solution): Based on the interview with the GM, the solution adopted is the "Middle Way." Lifts will be built, but with a camouflaged design.

1. Location: The lift is placed in a blind spot that does not dominate the garden's main view.
2. Material: The lift structure will not use striking reflective glass typical of office buildings, but will be clad with wooden or natural stone elements and covered by climbing plants (vertical garden).
3. Narrative: The renovation is not communicated as "Total Modernization," but as "Accessibility Improvement for Inclusivity" (part of *Pawongan* – caring for the elderly).

This decision shows the maturity of GIR's branding strategy. They understand that if they become too modern, they lose their USP.

However, if they reject modern facilities, they lose market relevance. The harmonization of THK here functions as a strategic decision filter.

Strategic SWOT Analysis in the Context of the 2025 Moratorium

To comprehensively map the strategic position of Grand Istana Rama, this research constructs a SWOT matrix (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) integrated with the Tri Hita Karana perspective and the Bali 2025 Moratorium policy.

Table 5. SWOT Matrix of Tri Hita Karana Integration and the 2025 Moratorium

POSITIVE (Aiding Objectives)		NEGATIVE (Hindering Objectives)
INTERNAL	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dominance of Green Space (Palemahan): A 1.7-hectare asset in a premium zone with a low building ratio, establishing a valuable and rare 'oxygen' feature. 2. Ritual Authenticity (Parhyangan): The transparency of spiritual activities builds strong brand trust and reinforces the 'Soul of Bali' image. 3. Staff Loyalty (Pawongan): High employee retention (>15 years) ensures the consistency of personalized service, which is difficult to replicate. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Aging Infrastructure: Buildings dating back to 1989 necessitate higher maintenance costs compared to newer hotels. 2. Perception of Antiquity: The classic interior design risks being perceived as less 'Instagrammable' by the visually-centric Gen-Z market.
EXTERNAL	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2025 Development Moratorium: The freeze on new hotel supply will significantly elevate the scarcity value of existing properties. 2. Slow Travel & Wellness Trend: The global market shift toward tranquility and well-being is highly aligned with GIR's product DNA. 3. Digital Nomad Market: A potential new market segment for "Work from Garden" remote workers, a phenomenon defined as a lifestyle of digital mobility (Hannonen, 2020). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Competitor Price War: Modern surrounding hotels (e.g., Sheraton, Beachwalk) are likely to engage in price dumping to fill large capacities. 2. Climate Crisis: The beachfront location is vulnerable to rising sea levels and extreme weather, which could damage the gardens. 3. Commodification Risk: Excessive exploitation of rituals for social media content may trigger a negative backlash.

Source: Author's analysis (2025)

Based on the mapping in Table 4.2, the primary strategy formulated is the Defense-Differentiation Strategy. Grand Istana Rama must leverage the strengths of *Palemahan* (extensive garden) and *Parhyangan* (authentic culture) as a moat against the threat of price wars from modern competitors. The marketing communication narrative needs to be reinforced: "You can get a cheaper room at the hotel next door, but you cannot buy the tranquility, oxygen, and peace of mind you find here." This strategy converts the weakness of aging infrastructure into a narrative of "historical legacy" with classical value, while simultaneously capitalizing on the rapidly growing post-pandemic wellness market opportunities.

4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the results of the analysis and discussion, this study concludes the following key points:

1. THK as a Strategic Asset: Grand Istana Rama Hotel successfully proves that the local wisdom of Tri Hita Karana is not merely a conservation cost burden but a high-value strategic corporate asset.
2. Differentiation Through Contradiction: GIR wins the competition by pursuing a Counter-Trend Strategy. While the market chases vertical modernity, GIR offers horizontal tradition (*Palemahan*). When the market offers technological efficiency, GIR offers human warmth (*Pawongan*). When the market offers physical luxury, GIR offers spiritual tranquility (*Parhyangan*).

3. Resilience Against the Moratorium: The integration of THK positions GIR advantageously ahead of the 2025 Moratorium. The "Green Oasis" concept and cultural authenticity serve as strong defense mechanisms, as the value of these assets will increase amid new development restrictions.

For Grand Istana Rama Management:

In the late 2025 renovation plan (adding the lift), it is highly recommended to use a Biophilic Design approach (architecture integrated with nature) to avoid damaging the *Palemahan* image. The lift should be designed to be transparent or covered with vegetation.

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- Leverage the momentum of the 2025 Moratorium in global marketing campaigns with taglines such as "The Last Authentic Sanctuary in Kuta" to emphasize scarcity.

For the Hospitality Industry:

Local culture must not be merely used as lobby decoration. Culture must be integrated into core values and business strategies. Sustainability must be viewed as a long-term investment to build brand loyalty, not just regulatory compliance.

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