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Abstract

The hotel industry in Indonesia has been rapidly growing. As the industry grows, competitive becomes more intense. In order to survive, hotels need to develop strategies to create competitive advantage. In this case, Aston Hotel Palembang adopts product differentiation strategy by being a halal-certified hotel. This strategy was adopted to optimize the market potential. The Hotel also manages to save a considerable amount of capital and operating cost from this strategy that further leads to their prime performance. The objective of this research is to analyze the variables that make the Hotel's strategy to be successful and to further analyze how Aston Palembang's strategy can be replicated to other hotels to maximize profit and to achieve Hotel Sustainable Performance (HSP). This research used qualitative approach by conducting interviews with the General Managers and the Head of Departments of the representative hotels and analyzed using content analysis method. The findings of this research shows that by adopting the strategy of non-alcoholic policy and being halal-certified, Aston Palembang has achieved a prime performance which lead to the achievement of firm performance and competitive advantage.

INTRODUCTION

The favorable rapid increment of Indonesia's economic performance has brought global attention to the country. Since the last decade, Indonesia's GDP has been growing from $285.869 to $861.934 billion (202% increment) since 2005 to 2015. Followed by the increment of the GNI (Gross-National Income) per capita by 182% from $1,220 to $3,440 (World Bank, 2016). Indonesia became the number 1 in ASEAN for real GDP growth according to OECD (2015) in comparison to the real GDP growth of the other selected ASEAN countries; Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand.

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Indonesia is considered as Southeast Asia's largest and best performers in 2017, due to the relatively low debt levels, positive credit impulse, and strong domestic consumption.

According to the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics (2016), the number of foreign visitors in 2016 reached 814,300, an increase of 3.6% compared to the previous year 2015. The statistical data also shows that the volume of tourism increases by 223% since 2010-2015. The percentage of occupancy of hotels in Palembang keeps increasing; from 33.33% to 39.49% in January-December 2014 for non star-rated hotels (average 32.91% in a year), and 41.57% to 48.38% in the same period for star-rated hotels (average 45.80% in a year). The average daily length of stay of foreign and domestic visitors in Palembang in 2014 was 1.88 for the starred hotels and 1.60 for the non-starred hotels. Total number of visitors in Palembang increased from 1,667,117 to 1,828,207 in 2013-2014. In 2014, there were 1,817,346 domestic visitors and 8,861 foreign visitors (Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2015).

Relevant facts regarding this study encompass cultural factor especially beliefs and religions. Palembang City has 1.558.491 population, Most of the populations in Palembang are Moslems; there are approximately 1,585,176 Moslems in Palembang. consequently, places with a halal certificate would be preferable in this area as it appeals most to the majority of the population. This will automatically create customer loyalty and institutions (hotels or restaurants) could naturally build positive relations with the customers.

CHANGE IN TOTAL ROOM SUPPLY (2009–2014)
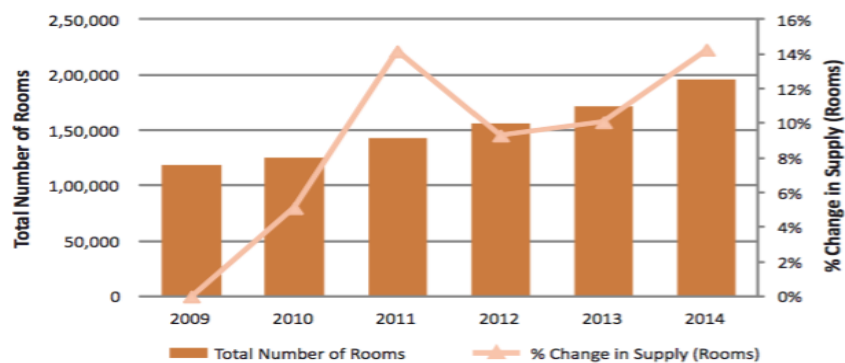
Source: Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia

The development of Palembang is increasing rapidly, the city is going to be hosting the next ASEAN games event in 2018, and this will attract many tourists, athletes, and supporters to Palembang. According to the ministry of transportation Sumadi (2017), the fast progress of infrastructure and events in Palembang will attract more tourists, both domestic and international, thus making it a good potential target for the hospitality industry to utilize this opportunity.

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Figure 1. Hotel Room Supply

The statistical report produced by the Indonesian Bureau of Statistics and HVS highlights the significance of the growth of hotel Industry in Indonesia, especially the star-rated and luxury hotels. The total rooms available in Palembang are 5,842. The star-rated hotels have a total of 3,838 rooms available and 2,204 rooms for non-star-rated accommodations. In total, there are 44 hotels existed in Palembang. Moreover, hotel industry in Palembang ranked the highest for number of establishment net (3,278), the highest workforce (14,290), the highest income (Rp. 12,022,300,765) in 2014 (Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2015)

As noted earlier, the growth in the hotel industry in Indonesia is rapidly increasing, creating a progressive and intense competition in the market (Indonesian Investment Coordinating Board, 2017; Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2015). Thus, hotels operating in Indonesia must be able to accentuate their values and core competencies. By developing a competitive strategy, hotels can create competitive advantage, which will help them to differentiate their products and services against their competitors, then gaining a better position in the industry. Referring to the demographic and culture in Palembang, with population mostly are moeslem are preserving their culture and tradition as value in their life, some hotels are implementing policy that tap to the culture. Halal orientation has become the widely implemented in hotels as well as restaurant.   The Halal policy has plays important role not only to attract customer it may as well perceived as competitive advantage that sustain the positive performance of the organization, in this case operate as chain hotels in Palembang.   Based on the research background, this research develops four main research objectives (1) to investigate the relationship between competitive strategy and strategic alliance? (2) to investigate the relationship between competitive strategy and Hotel sustainable performance (HSP)? (3) to investigate the relationship between the strategic alliance and HSP? And (4) to investigate the relationship between nonalcoholic policy and halal certification to business sustainability.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Competitive Strategy
Competitive strategy helps companies to develop competitive advantage, thus both competitive strategy and competitive advantage have equal importance towards business' competitiveness and existence (Hambrick, 1980). Zhao and He (2008) describe competitive strategy as the basic rules and policies used by companies to create a sustainable and profitable position against their competitors in the related industry, in order to achieve a sustainable and profitable position against the competitors in their respected industry.

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Strategic Alliance

According to Apostolopoulos & Sonmez (2000) the term strategic alliance is defined as a non-controlling, cooperative, shared decision-making relationship between two organizations (or more) in order to achieve competitive advantage. They believe that the only way to survive the pressure of globalization and changing demands is to engage in a strategic alliance. Doh (2000) argues that having a local partner through strategic alliance can help companies to better understand the market condition, the competitors, and political and regulatory knowledge. Strategic alliance as a mutual agreement between two (or more) firms to achieve competitive advantage in the market and to achieve a sustainable and profitable value for all of the party members (Winata, 2005).

Hotel Sustainable Performance (HSP)

Perrini & Tencati (2006) define company sustainability as a firm's capacity to continue operating over a long period of time in respect to their stakeholder relationship. Maintaining a sustainable performance is essential for business survival. According to Chung & Parker (2008) and Han & Yoon (2015), managers in hotel industry also emphasize on using financial indicators to measure and evaluate performance. Empirical evidence by research in chain-based UK hotels (Atkinson & Brown, 2001) and European hotels (Harris & Mongiello, 2001) found that General Managers rely more on financial indicators for decision-making and also for performance measurement tool.

Porter's Five Forces

Porter's five forces analysis is a framework that helps to analyze and determine the level of competitive intensity in an industry. The framework draws upon Industrial Organization (IO) economics to measure the level of "attractiveness" of an industry, which is measured by how the 5 elements of competitive forces in Porter's framework drives the profitability of an industry. Porter's framework is important for line-of-business industry; at least one of the five forces should be developed to reassure the existence or the sustainability of the company (Porter, 1980). The Five Forces mentioned in Porter's concept are includes; (1) threats of new entrance, (2) threats of substitute, (3) bargaining power of customer, (4) bargaining power of supplier, (5) industry rivalry.

Consumer Religiosity

Said, Hassan, Musa & Rahman (2014) defined religiosity as the extent of commitment from individual towards their religion, their actions and behavior reflects their commitment towards their religious belief. The resurgence of Islamic teachings have led to the increase of awareness on the content of food consumption regarding; the source, materials, process and other determinants of consumer products that they are willing to consume (Hearty, 2007).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research used qualitative research method. The qualitative data will be acquired via interview and quantitative data via the financial report of the company (which would be acquired post the interview). The method of data collection will largely base on in-depth interview with respondents hold

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decision making position in the organization. The data or insight from the interview is then analyze by using content analysis method.

The purpose is to describe situation and gain insight into particular practice (Kardos and Smith, 1979; Neskovic, 2014). The sampling would be described in the following. There are 50 hotels in Palembang, 17 of them are 4-starred hotels and there is only one Aston Hotel in Palembang under Archipelago International's management (Archipelago, 2015). The number of sampling in this research is 7 respondents from hotels in Palembang and Lampung. The purpose of cover Aston Palembang and Aston Jambi or Lampung is because Jambi and Lampung have identical demographic condition, has similar economic activities and condition, and located the closest to Palembang Geographically. Since Jambi and Lampung is also in South Sumatra Province hence under the same governor administrative and policy. Respondents are the Hotel General Managers as persons who hold the highest position in the management structure and has the authority for organization decision making

To further understand the data collected from in-depth interview, this research will use *content analysis* as the qualitative study design. The type of analysis that will be used is *interpretative content analysis*, where the goal is to classify and summarize the information, which was obtained, and analyze what is the meaning of the data (Neskovic, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data is collected from the interviews conducted with the managers or general managers of the hotel. The purpose of this arrangement is to gain a reliable and accurate data from the person who is on the top of the hierarchical management level, whose decisions has a direct or indirect influence to the hotel. Steps of this content analysis will be as following. Using the coding technique, (Step 1) some nodes are identified based on the interview results. This technique identifies the nodes by looking at common words mentioned by the respondents. (Step 2) The results of the coding are grouped as nodes that are used to develop subcategories, categories/ themes, and super category. (Step 3) The nodes consist of positive and negative influences on Hotel Sustainable Performance (HSP). These can be explored to propose a comprehensive solution for hotels to create a strategy that can maintain or develop their HSP that should be developed from both positive and negative nodes. The data analysis in this research are described in following. The Coding results consist of the nodes that are developed using the respondents' words. These nodes then are used to form the sub-categories. The sub-categories are grouped to develop 3 categories; *Competitive Strategy, Strategic Alliance, and External Factors*. These categories are adopted and adjusted based on the original study conducted by Sitawati and Winata (2013) on "*The Role of Competitive Strategy, Strategic Alliance, and Managerial use of MAS Information in Hotel Sustainable Performance: Evidence from Indonesia*". The mapping of the nodes is presented in the figure below:
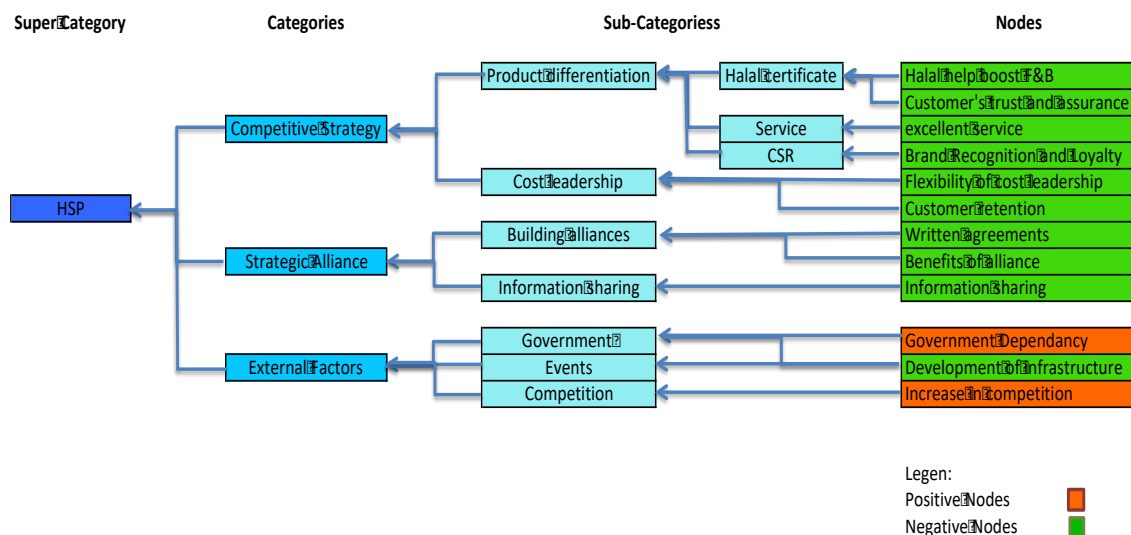
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Figure 2. Data Analysis & Mapping

The significance of each node is based on how often the keywords relevant to each node are repeated by the respondents. This mapping represents the summary of the findings. As noted, the map consists of nodes, sub-categories, categories and super category. The map is structured to be red from right to the left, from the nodes to the sub-categories, then to the categories, finally to the super category, hence the arrow sign. The nodes were highlighted with green colour and orange colour that represent positive nodes (green) and negative nodes (orange). The nodes were generated from the most common words repeated by the interviewees or from the words that is highly emphasized as important by the interviewees. These nodes then are used to form the sub-categories. The sub-categories are grouped to develop 3 categories; Competitive Strategy, Strategic Alliance, and External Factors. Note in the nodes there are words that mostly repeat by the interviewee; halal, customer trust, excellent service, brand recognition, cost leadership, customer retention, alliance, information sharing, and development of infrastructure. The significance of each node is based on how often the keywords relevant to each node are repeated by the respondents. For example in node "benefits of alliance" 5 of 7 respondents claim that building alliances with other parties has been very beneficial for them.

The map then shows how the nodes can affect the sub-categories, which then can influence the categories and finally the super category. The colour of green and orange is used to highlight the separation between the nodes and the categories. The categories are highlighted in blue colours, from light blue to dark blue. the darker the colour the more important that category becomes. As displayed in Figure 2 the most important variable is HSP, which is Hotel Sustainable Performance or the sustainability of the hotel itself. Followed by the Competitive Strategy, Strategic Alliance and External Factors that can directly affect the HSP. Then followed by the subcategories that can directly affect the categories, but indirectly affect the HSP. Then followed by the nodes, which can directly affect the subcategories, but indirectly affect the categories and super categories. The significance of each nodes is based on how many of the key words were repeated by the respondents and how many respondents mention the same topic for that node.

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This research aim to investigate (1) whether halal certification would bring profitability to the hotel, (2) does competitive strategy have significant effect on HSP, (3) does competitive strategy plays a huge role in maintaining and developing HSP, (4) does competitive strategy affect strategic alliance, and (5) is adapting the business operation to local culture would bring significant advantage to the business. Base on the data analysis it is found that all the above questions have been clearly answered. The hotel manages to save cost of installing chiller to store alcoholic beverages and does not have to spend on purchasing and paying tax on alcohol. Instead, the management utilizes the areas that should be used as the storage compartment for alcohols and chiller to create a larger kitchen and larger restaurant. This initiative has brought significant profit to the hotel; the evidence of their success can be seen through their accomplishments and awards. The hotel received the best GOP (Gross Operating Profit) award (2016) from the holding company Archipelago International. Best GOP means that Aston Palembang has earned the biggest percentage in gross operating profit compared to all Aston Hotel in Indonesia. This is due to their non-alcoholic policy, as noted previously; they safe cost from not having to purchase or pay tax for alcohols and save cost in not having to install chiller and spend cost for the maintenance. Instead, utilizing it for kitchen and restaurant area; allowing them to accommodate a larger number of customers, held bigger events and earn more profit from there. In other words, they save a considerable amount of capital and operating cost, able to take more customers, and can compete by giving a competitive price with large margins for profit. This study also reveals interesting findings to be concluded (1) Hotels in Palembang sales is largely came from government segment and local market segment. The interview with the General Managers and the Head of Departments of Aston and other hotels stated that 40% of their room revenue was acquired from government officials, activities, and events. (2) in addition to point one, Palembang is not a popular tourist destination, rather a site for business, hence the effect of occupancy from foreign customers to the hotel is insignificant. (3) Even though events can help the hotel to boost their revenue significantly, it usually only lasts for 15 days. As it is quoted:

"The pie is becoming more divided" – *Budiarto (Financial Controller Aston & Fave)*

Discussion

Looking at the findings from this research Aston Palembang has been very successful in 4 of the dimensions, which are; (1) the bargaining power of suppliers, (2) bargaining power of buyers, and (3) threat of substitudes (4) industry rivalry. (1) Aston Palembang has a very good relationship with their suppliers, as they always pay them on time. Their performance is awarded by the Archipelago International as the "beset payer" 2016. "Suppliers would prefer to hold events and offer us discounts and packages since we always pay them on time, we have a really good relationship with our suppliers" – Budiarto (Financial Controller). (2) The buyers are always satisfied with the product and services are given by Aston Palembang. The hotel was awarded "certificate of excellence 2016" from TripAdvisor" (prove that the hotel provides excellent service), "green hotel award" from the local government

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(environmentally friendly), and "gold circle award". (3) In Palembang, Aston is the only hotel in its level (4-star) to hold a halal certificate beside Fave (3-star). This creates dependency for some consumers who have a high degree of religiosity. (4) The competitiveness of Aston Palembang is relatively high, other than the factors noted above; Aston Palembang has a very strategic location that is very close to the airport.

"Halal certification will definitely add value to our service, however at the moment, serving traditional food is the best option to reassure our customer that the food is halal, because traditional food commonly do not contain pork or other non-halal materials" – Sarjuri, Peninsula Hotel Palembang

They are also a pioneer, as a 4-star hotel that the first one which register for halal certification in Palembang, creating the first-mover advantage and help them to create brand loyalty. This is due to the complexity of registering for halal certification. "We are planning to move towards that direction, we are still negotiating with the holding company to register for halal certification, we believe that this could add value to our brand in Palembang" – Sarjuri (General Manager at Peninsula). The process of registering for halal certification is so complex that it could take more than a year for the process. As it is quoted:

"F&B in Fave reach 10,000 customers during the fasting month, we believe that this due to the influence of our halal certified product" – Oesman, Aston Jambi

CONCLUSIONS
(1) The relation of Competitive Strategy towards Strategic Alliance.

 Value: When the hotel offers a unique product, it can affect the possibility of its alliance with other parties. Being Halal certified can expand the alliance with other travel agents. Other than making an alliance with the most common agencies such as; Traveloka, TripGo, and TripAdvisor, expanded to agencies such as The muslim tourist and Muslim guide.

(2) The relation between Competitive Strategy and Hotel Sustainable

 Performance. In this case, being halal certified helps the hotel to limit their budget. The hotel manager claims that they can utilize the storing area for alcohol by converting it into the kitchen and restaurant area, which helps them to hold bigger events, provide more seats to attract a larger audience and to gain more revenue. Being halal certified also helps to improve brand image to the local community. One of the customers claims that it makes the hotel to become a more family-friendly, as it does not provide alcoholic beverages. The other customer may claims that she would be happier and feel safer if her husband stays at the hotel.

(3) The relation between the Strategic Alliance and Hotel Sustainable performance.

 General Manager of Fave hotel claimed that 60% of their clients were obtained via online and 40% of Aston's customers came from online

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agencies. Therefore strategic partnership or alliance with both online and offline agencies have significant effect to their sustainability and profitability.

"Contribution from our alliance is very significant for our hotel" –
Aidil, Fave Hotel

(4) The relation between implementing non-alcoholic policy and halal certification towards business profitability and sustainability.

Implementing nonalcoholic policy can help hotels to save budget and utilize their space as noted earlier. The strategy proved the hotel to boost profitability and sustainability. Even their competitors are admitting that having a halal certification in Palembang would help them to become more competitive.

Taking into consideration the clear beneficial impact of the halal certification towards the company's profitability and also the company's superior brand image; the writer would like to suggest a few managerial implication.

1. The hotel should ensure that the halal certification is maintained; in terms of the regular halal certification renewal and also the execution and implementation of the established halal standard operating procedure. This is to ensure that the reputation and higher profitability for the company.
2. The hotel should take advantage of its halal-certified hotel and also the social media marketing. To ensure the business success, companies need to acquire new customers while maintaining the current customers (Chen, 2008).
3. The management team can work to be enlisted to the halal travel directory. Halal oriented travelers would seek information from Muslim travel guide (Alami, 2011) as to convince the prospective customer to choose Aston Palembang as their preferred hotel.
4. As a supplement to the halal certification, Aston should also consider getting a certification in environmentally friendliness. In whichstudy from Han & Yoon (2015) revealed eco-friendly hotels enjoy higher customer retention rate as an effect of the customer's positive emotional experience.

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