

## **EVENT MARKETING IMPLEMENTATION IN IMPROVING BRAND AWARENESS OF INDONESIAN FOOD STARTUP**

**Aprilia Prabawati, Meliza, Chaerani Agustin, Muhammad Aras**

Communication Department, BINUS Graduate Program - Master of Strategic Marketing Communication, Bina Nusantara University, Jakarta, Indonesia

Email: [aprilia.prabawati@binus.ac.id](mailto:aprilia.prabawati@binus.ac.id), [meliza@binus.ac.id](mailto:meliza@binus.ac.id),  
[chaerani.agustin@binus.ac.id](mailto:chaerani.agustin@binus.ac.id), [maras@binus.edu](mailto:maras@binus.edu)

### **Abstract**

Culinary is not only a product consumed for daily needs, but it has become a lifestyle of the Indonesians. Many businesses in terms of culinary shows that culinary is a quite potential sector for local startups. PergiKuliner, engaged in food-related media based on website and application, provides directory information and reviews of places to eat. Intense competition with other food startups from abroad makes PergiKuliner as a local brand need to improve its brand awareness so that it is better known by the Indonesians for recommendations of good places to eat. This study aims to determine the Marketing Communications strategy of PergiKuliner in improving brand awareness through event marketing. The research approach used was descriptive qualitative. Research data were collected through direct observation and in-depth interviews with the CEO and Marketing Communication division of PergiKuliner. The results showed that the event marketing strategy was conducted by PergiKuliner to improve its brand awareness by holding offline events, such as PergiKuliner Festival (culinary bazaar) and PergiKuliner Berburu (restaurant hunting). The factors that need to be considered in implementing an event marketing were a selection of theme that is currently being discussed by the public, selection of tenants that are following the theme, selection of venue with good traffic, good marketing communications within the internal team, and gimmicks to attract visitors' attention.

**Keywords:** brand awareness, marketing communication, event marketing, offline event

### **Introduction**

The development of culinary industry in Indonesia's big cities has been increasing each year. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the culinary business continued to survive and many new culinary businesses emerged with high creativity and innovation to attract consumers. Culinary nowadays do not only consider a product consumed for daily needs, but also has become a lifestyle of the community.

In addition, culinary is one of the sectors that is quite potential for start-ups in Indonesia. One of the start-ups is PergiKuliner, an online media that provides information on the directory of places to eat with various features, including menus, opening hours, location, facilities, objective reviews, to halalness. Beginning with the

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difficulties encountered by the community in finding a good place to eat at the right price, PergiKuliner which has been officially operating since 2015 provides updated and complete information on many restaurants. Currently, PergiKuliner has more than one hundred thousand listings of places to eat spread across major cities in Indonesia with millions of visitors and reviewers who access both the site and application. The objectivity of reviews is one of the strengths of PergiKuliner to prove whether a restaurant is worth visiting or not.

In 2015, Pergi Kuliner was established and at that time, it was not the only culinary directory service provider in Indonesia. There are several competitors with similar businesses, namely Zomato, TripAdvisor, and Qraved. PergiKuliner, which is a local product, has managed to survive to this day and has the opportunity to become the main reference source with the most complete culinary data in Indonesia.

Therefore, this study aims to find out the strategy of Marketing Public Relations in improving the Brand Awareness of PergiKuliner to be better known by the Indonesian people through marketing events, namely PergiKuliner Festival, an offline event held since 2018, and Pergi Kuliner Berburu held since 2020.

PergiKuliner Festival is a culinary bazaar held in malls in the Jabodetabek area for seven days a month. This event gathers various types of contemporary food and beverages in one place. The tenants who participated are selected by PergiKuliner with a rating above 3.5. Meanwhile, PergiKuliner Berburu is an annual event that invites people to try various interesting restaurants in Jakarta while collecting digital stamps to get rewards. This event is held for free and for three months.

By utilizing Event Marketing, companies can attract many consumers, obtain potential customers, and deliver brand messages. Event Marketing is a form of product brand campaign to approach and build product brand interactions with customers through various activities, such as food festivals, entertainment, cultural event, social event, or other activities that attract public attention (Octa, 2018). Event Marketing has been widely implemented by companies. In marketing activities, Event Marketing is considered quite effective to boost brand marketing and increase brand awareness of a product. Furthermore, Event Marketing is also effective to help improve brand and product image, as well as increase sales and the number of customers.

### **Research Methodology**

The research paradigm or approach used in this study is a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is conducted to understand the phenomena of what is experienced by research subjects holistically and by describing the form of words and language in a special context and by utilizing various scientific methods (Moleong, 2021).

Qualitative research is carried out under natural conditions and has a characteristic of findings. In qualitative research, the researcher is the key instrument. Therefore, the researcher is required to have broad theories and deep insight to be able

to ask questions, analyze, and assess the object under study more clearly. This research emphasizes more on meaning and value more.

The essence of qualitative research is observing human interaction in their environment, trying to understand the language and interpretation of the world around them, approaching or interacting with people related to the research focus to try to understand and explore their outlooks and experiences to obtain information or data required.

### **Types of research**

#### **Exploration**

The type of research used in this research is exploratory research. According to (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012), exploratory research aims to collect preliminary information that will help in defining problems and formulating hypotheses. Exploratory research seeks to find general information about a topic or problem that is not fully understood by the research. Exploratory research is a type of research used to examine something (that attracts attention) that is not yet known, not understood, and not recognized as well.

This study aims to describe the brand of PergiKuliner, find out the implementation of the offline event at PergiKuliner, and formulate a marketing communications strategy for building brand awareness of PergiKuliner.

### **Research Methods**

#### **Case Study**

Based on the qualitative paradigm described previously, the research method used is a case study. A case study is conducted by examining a particular case or phenomenon in society to assess the background, circumstances, and the occurred interactions (Cresswell, 2017).

Meanwhile, Robert K. Yin (2012) states that a case study is carried out on a system that can be represented in the form of a program, activity, event, or group of individuals in certain circumstances or conditions. Yin also divides case study into 2 (two) types, namely case study using single case and multiple cases. In addition, a case study is also classified based on the number of units of analysis, namely holistic single-case study that uses one unit of analysis and embedded single-case design that uses several or multiple units of analysis.

The holistic single-case study method was used in this study to find problems from one case to obtain a comprehensive and in-depth overview of the Marketing Communications strategy implemented by PergiKuliner in building brand awareness through offline events. Generally, in the holistic case study, the number of units of analysis used is only one or even none as it is integrated with the case. In such a case study, the unit of analysis cannot be determined because the case is also the unit of analysis of the research.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Data Collection Technique**

The type of data used in this study was primary data. The primary data were collected through observation and key informant interviews. The observation method was considered a method of collecting data through direct observation of situations or events in the field. This technique was used to find out the inhibiting and supporting factors encountered by Pergi Kuliner during offline events.

The key informants in this study were the Coordinator and Executive Staff of Pekan Pergi Kuliner and Pergi Kuliner Berburu events, as well as the CEO of PergiKuliner to obtain information about the Marketing Communication strategy of PergiKuliner in holding offline events. The data were described in narrative form to make it easy to understand and answer the research questions.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

There were three stages of data analysis techniques used in this study, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion and verification.

Data reduction is simplifying, classifying, and removing unnecessary data in such a way that the data then produce meaningful information and make it easier to conclude. Large and complex data requires data analysis through the reduction stage. The reduction stage is carried out to determine whether the data is relevant to the final purpose.

Furthermore, data presentation is a technique used to analyze or interpret the data obtained in the study. Data presentation is also a stage of qualitative data analysis techniques. Data presentation is defined as an activity when the data are arranged systematically and are easily understood, thus providing the possibility of concluding. The presentation of qualitative data can be in the form of narrative text (field notes), matrix, graphs, networks, or charts. Through data presentation, the data are organized and arranged in a pattern, so that they will be easier to understand.

Lastly, drawing conclusions and verifying data are performed by reviewing the results of data reduction and referring to the analysis objectives to be achieved. This stage aims to find the meaning of the data collected by looking for connections, similarities, or differences to conclude the answers to existing problems. The initial conclusions are still temporary and may change if no supporting evidence is found at the next stage of data collection. However, if the initial conclusions are supported by valid evidence, the conclusions are considered credible. Verification is conducted so that the assessment of data compatibility with the purpose of the basic concept of the analysis is more appropriate and objective.

### **Discussion of Results**

PergiKuliner is a startup engaged as a food-related media based on websites and applications in Indonesia that has been operating since 2015. PergiKuliner provides information on places to eat from street vendors to five-star restaurants and has more than 100,000 registered eating places in the Greater Jakarta area, Bandung, and Surabaya. As a food-related media, PergiKuliner becomes a communication

intermediary between restaurants and users who require information or recommendations for places to eat. The website and application of PergiKuliner contain detailed information on places to eat, such as ratings, opening hours, menus, addresses, maps, facilities, and reviews from users who have tried the places to eat. The search results of Pergi Kuliner's work are based on reviews from reviewers and their personal opinions about the food. Therefore, its users are provided with honest and objective recommendations with more detailed ratings, such as price, taste, atmosphere, hygiene, and service, which makes it easier for the users to get recommendations for good places to eat.

The interviews were conducted with the team of Pergi Kuliner, including informant A (CEO of Pergi Kuliner), Informant B (Marketing Communications Coordinator of PergiKuliner), and Informant C (the Executive Staff of Marketing Communications of PergiKuliner). Based on the results, a Marketing Communication strategy to improve the Brand Awareness of PergiKuliner through offline events was carried out by holding Pergi Kuliner Festival and Pergi Kuliner Berburu.

At the beginning of its establishment, PergiKuliner's strategy to improve its brand awareness was carried out online through SEO. Consequently, in terms of the most search in Google search for places to eat, PergiKuliner has been ranked first based on the Top Websites Ranking for Restaurants and Delivery in Indonesia on similar web (<https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/indonesia/category/food-and-drink/restaurants-and-delivery/>). When people search for places to eat through Google search, people will find Pergi Kuliner's website appearing at the top of the search results, and they will be aware of PergiKuliner brand. As explained by informant A, the CEO of PergiKuliner, "What we have done from the very beginning is an online strategy with SEO and related to the most search in Google search for places to eat, we are already ranked number 1. That is why when people search for places to eat on Google, they will be aware of our brand."

Furthermore, Pergi Kuliner's strategy to improve its brand awareness nowadays is to provide offline exposure as much as possible. Pergi Kuliner implements an event marketing strategy by holding offline events to create a direct interaction with visitors, so it can find out the level of acceptance and feedback from the visitors. Two offline events are regularly held by PergiKuliner, namely Pergi Kuliner Festival and Pergi Kuliner Berburu.

Pergi Kuliner Festival is held for seven to ten days every month since 2019. The event gathers dozens of selected F&B tenants in one place which is usually a shopping mall with high traffic to support the event. The F&B tenants are adjusted to the trending themes to attract visitors, such as Festival Boba and Festival Jajanan Kekinian. PergiKuliner Festival was temporarily stopped in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and was held again in March 2021. This was explained by informant B, the Marketing Communications Coordinator of PergiKuliner, "We saw a lot of EOs holding offline events, so we were also considering what makes them different. For instance, because we have data on the trend and we also knew which restaurants are well based on high

ratings, we can choose popular themes and select restaurants that provide delicious foods.”

In contrast with the usual culinary bazaar, PergiKuliner Festival carries out other activities, such as various games, quizzes, cooking demos, and live music that makes visitors feel at home to stay longer at the event. At this event, PergiKuliner performs branding and promotes the programs of PergiKuliner in the form of standing posters, Videotron, and a special booth where the visitors can ask questions directly to the team of PergiKuliner at the event. Moreover, the visitors who download PergiKuliner application at the event will be given a free tester and merchandise, such as hand sanitizer, mirror, and key chain as additional branding of PergiKuliner. This was confirmed by informant A, the CEO of PergiKuliner, “As PergiKuliner is application-based, we create programs that benefit customers through our application. For instance, customers can get free testers from participating tenants by using our application.”

Furthermore, PergiKuliner Berburu is an event that invites people to try the foods from various interesting places to eat while collecting digital stamps in the PergiKuliner application to get rewards of meal vouchers that can be exchanged at participating restaurants. This event is held once a year for three months with different themes and list of restaurants each year. In 2020, PergiKuliner used the theme of "Berburu Kopi" and in 2021, the theme was "Berburu Tempat Nongkrong".

The restaurants listed in this event were also directly selected by the marketing communications team of PergiKuliner based on the taste and atmosphere ratings on PergiKuliner. At this event, PergiKuliner put up standing posters in each participating restaurant, not only to indicate that the restaurant is the participant, but also as a form of branding from PergiKuliner to be recognized by customers who come to the restaurant. On the standing poster, there is QR Code that can be scanned by the customers to download PergiKuliner application. This was explained by informant C, the Executive Staff of Marketing Communications of PergiKuliner, regarding the event of PergiKuliner Berburu "We select favorite restaurants for hanging out not only because of the high rating in terms of food and atmosphere, but also to attract regular customers to acknowledge the brand of PergiKuliner and to become the users of PergiKuliner after participating the event".

It takes two months for PergiKuliner to design an offline event and plan a strategy to improve its brand awareness. The main point to consider in holding an offline event is the theme and concept of the event. It must have a brand identity by highlighting the uniqueness and following the current trend to be different from existing offline events made by other companies and to attract many people to come to the event. The offline event must also be held consistently or continuously, as is the case with PergiKuliner Festival which is held once a month, to make people aware of the brand and helps the brand stick in the consumers' minds. This is stated by informant A, the CEO of PergiKuliner, "The most important point is the product. The offline event must be interesting and different from other events. The second thing, it must be done consistently so that the brand sticks in the people's minds.”

Before the offline event starts, PergiKuliner conducts Pre-Event activities, such as making videos and teaser posters containing information on event name, time, and place of implementation, as well as promos that will be provided during the event. Then, videos and teaser posters are posted on social media and articles on the official website of PergiKuliner one month before the event to attract people's attention and create large visitor traffic. This was explained by informant C, the Executive Staff of Marketing Communications of PergiKuliner. "Usually, 1 month before the event starts, we post the upcoming posters and teaser videos on social media and articles on the PergiKuliner website to announce to people that PergiKuliner will be holding an event."

PergiKuliner has a foodie community established in 2016 with the criteria of people who are consistently active in writing reviews on PergiKuliner. The foodie community of PergiKuliner participates in offline events held by PergiKuliner where they enliven the event by attending the event and spreading the event information on their social media accounts. To appreciate their contribution, PergiKuliner provides special privileges for the foodie community in the form of discount vouchers that can be used during the events. PergiKuliner also obtains additional exposure from media partners invited to broadcast the event and visitors who attend the offline event and take pictures on the wall of fame specially made by PergiKuliner. This was also conveyed by informant B, the Marketing Communications Coordinator of PergiKuliner. "We mainly use our reviewer community to enliven our programs. Furthermore, we also invite other media partners to come and broadcast our events."

Another strategy conducted by PergiKuliner to improve its brand awareness offline is obtaining exposure in restaurants by placing stickers and/or standing posters about PergiKuliner and QR Menu where customers can scan the QR Codes with their mobile phone to go directly to the restaurant's menu page on the site of PergiKuliner. This is in accordance with the statement of informant C, the Executive Staff of Marketing Communications of PergiKuliner, "another strategy that we have done offline is providing stickers and/or standing posters about PergiKuliner and QR menus."

## **Conclusions**

Based on the results of the discussion, it can be concluded that the event marketing strategy carried out by PergiKuliner to improve its brand awareness is by holding offline events, such as PergiKuliner Festival (culinary bazaar) and PergiKuliner Berburu (restaurant hunting). During the offline events, PergiKuliner obtained a lot of exposure both offline and online from various points, such as event venues, participating tenants, visitors, foodie communities, and media partners. In addition, PergiKuliner also performs gimmicks that can attract visitors' attention, such as providing vouchers, free testers, and merchandise that can be claimed through PergiKuliner application. The gimmicks were created so that the visitors could have a direct experience in using PergiKuliner application and acknowledge the brand of PergiKuliner. It took one to two months for PergiKuliner to design the offline events.

The main thing to consider in implementing Event Marketing is the theme and concept of the event that must be made unique and up to date to get viral because of its difference from other events. The selection of venue with high visitor traffic and interesting participating tenants are the factors that support the success of the offline event held by PergiKuliner. The offline events must also be held consistently or continuously so that the PergiKuliner brand sticks in people's minds. Pre-event activities, such as providing videos and teaser posters, need to be carried out to attract people's attention and create large visitor traffic during the event. PergiKuliner also mobilizes its foodie community to enliven the event and spread the event information by word of mouth and on social media. Additional exposure was obtained by PergiKuliner by inviting media partners to broadcast the event and creating a wall of fame for visitors to take pictures when they came to the event and shared the pictures on their social media. Furthermore, marketing communication from the internal team is also very important in Event Marketing where the brand is delivered through a series of unforgettable positive experiences and the trial and loyalty of visitors are created from good marketing communication of PergiKuliner's internal team.



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