



UNIVERSIDADE
CATÓLICA
PORTUGUESA

**THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN CRAFTING AND
COMMUNICATING THE LUXURY IMAGE IN THE
HOSPITALITY SECTOR**

**AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF CONSTANCE HOTELS &
RESORTS**

Internship report to Universidade Católica Portuguesa
to obtain a Master's degree in Communication Sciences –
Strategic Communication and Leadership

By

Margaux Wouters

Universidade Católica Portuguesa

September 2024



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Abstract

This internship report presents a study on the role of public relations in crafting a luxury image in the hospitality industry, using the example of Constance Hotels & Resorts, a renowned brand in the Indian Ocean.

The theoretical framework includes a detailed analysis of the evolution of public relations in a digital context to understand the challenges posed by this new environment, along with an examination of key elements such as content creation and storytelling. The second part provides an overview of the luxury sector, highlighting issues and opportunities discussed in the existing literature.

To address the research question, "How do employees from the Communications and E-Business departments at Constance Hotels & Resorts perceive their roles in crafting and maintaining the brand's luxury image in the hospitality industry?", a qualitative method was employed. This approach involved an internship at Constance Hotels & Resorts and interviews with six carefully selected employees from the Communications and E-Business departments to gain insights from both traditional and digital perspectives.

The findings of this research offer valuable insights into how the company's vision of luxury is deeply embedded in its PR strategies, which emphasize originality, service quality, and brand personality. The research highlights the successful integration of both traditional and digital PR approaches through the brand's strategic focus on content curation, brand positioning, and relationship-building, all of which are key to a strong brand identity. The study also illuminates the role of interpersonal relationships, demonstrating that trust-based interactions with stakeholders positively affect the brand's image and reputation. Overall, this research contributes to the understanding of how Constance Hotels & Resorts effectively balances PR efforts to achieve and maintain its luxury status in a competitive market.

Key words: Public relations, Hospitality industry, Luxury branding, Corporate communication, Content creation

Resumo

Este relatório de estágio apresenta um estudo sobre o papel das relações públicas na construção de uma imagem de luxo na indústria hoteleira, utilizando o exemplo da Constance Hotels & Resorts, uma marca de renome no Oceano Índico.

O enquadramento teórico inclui uma análise detalhada da evolução das relações públicas no contexto digital, com o objetivo de compreender os desafios colocados por este novo ambiente, juntamente com a análise de elementos-chave como a criação de conteúdos e o storytelling. A segunda parte oferece uma visão geral do setor do luxo, destacando questões e oportunidades discutidas na literatura existente.

Foi desenhado um estudo qualitativo para responder à questão de investigação: "Como é que os colaboradores dos departamentos de Comunicação e E-Business da Constance Hotels & Resorts percecionam os seus papéis na criação e manutenção da imagem de luxo da marca na indústria hoteleira?". Esta abordagem envolveu um estágio na Constance Hotels & Resorts e entrevistas com seis colaboradores selecionados dos departamentos de Comunicação e E-Business.

Os resultados desta investigação oferecem resultados de relevo sobre como a visão de luxo da empresa está profundamente enraizada nas estratégias de relações públicas, que enfatizam originalidade, qualidade de serviço e personalidade da marca. A pesquisa destaca a integração bem-sucedida de abordagens tradicionais e digitais de relações públicas através do foco estratégico da marca na curadoria de conteúdos, no posicionamento da marca e na construção de relações, todos eles essenciais para uma identidade de marca forte. O estudo também ilumina o papel das relações interpessoais, demonstrando que as interações baseadas na confiança com as partes interessadas afetam positivamente a imagem e a reputação da marca. Em suma, esta investigação contribui para a compreensão de como a Constance Hotels & Resorts equilibra os esforços de relações públicas para alcançar e manter o seu status de luxo num mercado competitivo.

Palavras-chave: Relações públicas, Indústria hoteleira, Branding de luxo, Comunicação corporativa, Criação de conteúdos

Introduction

The internship report aims to understand the role of public relations in crafting a luxury image within the hospitality industry, with a focus on Constance Hotels & Resorts, a renowned hospitality brand in the Indian Ocean, based in Mauritius.

First, it is important to note that this research includes both the Communications and E-Business departments of the company. This approach aims to consider the company's overall strategy, incorporating both traditional and digital methods. The Communications department primarily focuses on offline communication, utilizing traditional media, while the E-Business department is dedicated to online strategy through social media and websites. This division became evident after completing the literature review, where public relations are defined as 'the management of communication between an organization and its publics' (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p.6). According to this definition, public relations are not confined to specific communication channels but are instead driven by the communication objectives.

The relevance of this internship report lies in its comprehensive examination of how Constance Hotels & Resorts, a leading luxury brand in the Indian Ocean, strategically integrates public relations across both traditional and digital platforms to maintain its luxury image. By exploring the roles and perspectives of the Communications and E-Business departments, this study offers critical insights into the company's holistic approach to brand management. In an industry where digital evolution is reshaping consumer expectations, managing brand interactions and understanding the nuances of PR strategies is essential. This focus on both traditional and digital PR efforts not only contributes valuable insights to the literature on luxury branding and public relations but also addresses a significant gap in existing research regarding the importance of integrating both approaches. Ultimately, this study enhances our understanding of effective PR practices in the luxury hospitality sector and can serve as a reference for other companies aiming to establish themselves in an increasingly competitive luxury market.

The first part of the paper is composed of the literature review, which aims to contextualize the research and highlight what has already been studied. This allowed me, for the actual research, to define objectives that seek to address the gaps and issues not raised in the existing literature. The two main focuses of this research that guided both the literature review and the interviews are public relations and the luxury hospitality industry.

The first chapter of the literature review examines the evolving landscape of public relations in the context of technological advancements. It defines public relations within the current digital environment by tracing the evolution of PR and highlighting how key figures have reshaped traditional practices, particularly the opportunities and challenges posed by social media. It also delves into the importance of storytelling and content creation in building and maintaining a brand's image. Additionally, it addresses ethical considerations in PR, discussing the challenges of setting standards and introducing the concept of two-way symmetrical communication as a method to ensure ethical practices. This chapter lays a crucial foundation for understanding the strategies employed by Constance Hotels & Resorts and identifies gaps in existing literature that are further set as objective

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The second chapter focuses on the concept of luxury in the hospitality sector. It begins by defining the characteristics and elements that distinguish luxury brands, emphasizing the importance of quality and service. The chapter then explores strategies for building and managing a luxury brand image, detailing how PR efforts are essential in maintaining a brand's exclusive reputation. It examines the role of customer experience and reputation management, highlighting the significance of personalized service and consistent brand messaging in enhancing customer perceptions and loyalty. Additionally, the chapter addresses sustainability and crisis management, as well as partnerships and collaborations, illustrating their relevance in the current luxury environment. This chapter provides valuable insights into PR practices within the luxury hospitality market and underscores their importance for Constance Hotels & Resorts, bridging theoretical insights with practical application. The chapter is followed by the internship descriptive narrative to present the organization studied through the research, while providing context and explaining its specific structure.

Based on the theoretical framework, the research question "How do employees from the Communications and E-Business departments at Constance Hotels & Resorts perceive their roles in crafting and maintaining the brand's luxury image in the hospitality industry?" aims to understand PR practices in the luxury hospitality industry, looking at the specific case of Constance Hotels & Resorts. To answer this question and the specific objectives of the research, a qualitative method was used, which allows for an internal perspective from the company and the creation of a space for participants to express their own thoughts. The six interviews were conducted within the Communications and E-Business departments and further coded to organize the findings and answer the various objectives of the research.

The empirical component of the dissertation includes a chapter explaining the methodological choices and techniques, followed by a chapter devoted to the findings and discussion, where I clarify the results and analyze them critically. This chapter allows me to make connections between the literature review and the results of the research.

The objective of this research is to contribute to academic research in the field of public relations. The goal is to deepen the understanding of the role this discipline plays in shaping and maintaining a luxury image within the hospitality industry, with a particular focus on Constance Hotels & Resorts. This study contributes to academic knowledge by exploring how traditional and digital strategies are intertwined with the company's brand identity and positioning. This paper offers a comprehensive view of how PR practices can reinforce a luxury brand's image in a competitive market, providing a valuable reference for both scholars and practitioners in the field.

Part I – Theoretical framework

Chapter 1 - Public relations in the digital era

1.1 Evolution of PR

As Bowen (2010) highlighted, defining public relations in terms of its broad scope is very difficult. Given the complexity of this concept, Grunig and Hunt proposed a widely used general definition, which presents public relations as “the management of communication between an organization and its publics” (1984, p.6). This definition encompasses all aspects of communication: management, which achieves effectiveness; communication, which facilitates the understanding of messages; organization, which refers to the organized group with a common purpose; and publics, which are groups held together by shared interests (Bowen, 2010).

The definition provided by Grunig and Dozier (2003) also captures the depth of the concept. According to these authors, public relations and communication management encompass more than just communication techniques or specific public relations programs like media relations or publicity. They involve overall planning, implementation and assessment of an organization’s communication strategies with both external and internal stakeholders, impacting the organization’s ability to achieve its goals.

Building on the idea of strategy, Heath & Coombs (2006) spotlight five functions of public relations management: strategic planning (efforts to respond to the needs, wants, and opinions of others), research (defining threats and opportunities around the organization), publicity (efforts to capture attention and provide information regarding a particular aspect or feature of the organization), promotion (a sequence of promotional endeavors unfolding over time aimed at attracting customer interest and providing them valuable information), and collaborative decision-making (involvement of counseling leaders and fostering a decision-making approach that considers the concerns of various publics).

Given the lack of a universally accepted definition, Baines et al. (2004) attempted to articulate its primary objective. They argue that there is a general misunderstanding

regarding the purpose of this discipline, suggesting that public relations is intended to achieve understanding rather than mere approval (Baines et al, 2004). Their model illustrates a public relations program that aims to shift public opinion from initial hostility, progressing through stages of prejudice, apathy and ignorance, towards eventual interest, acceptance, sympathy and ultimately empathy (see figure 1).

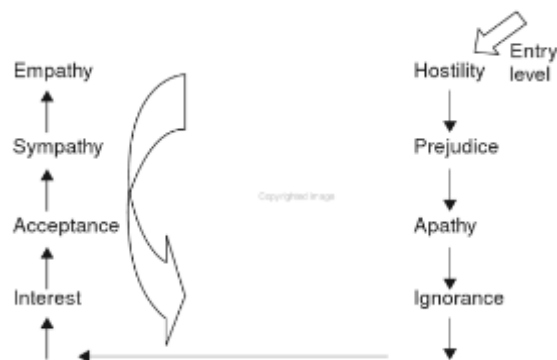


Figure 1- The public relations transfer process (Baines et al., 2004, p.11)

Public relations has existed and developed for centuries, employing various techniques. Over the past century, significant societal shifts, such as globalization, the decline of communism, intensified market competition, heightened consumer awareness of its significance, and the simultaneous fragmentation and globalization of mass media, among other factors have influenced the development of this discipline (Baines et al. 2004). In recent years, public relations has even emerged as a distinct discipline, with professional organizations such as the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) in the UK and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) in America (Baines et al., 2004).

The concept of public relations began to take shape in the early 20th century, thanks to pioneers such as Ivy Lee (Olasky, 2019) and Edward Bernays (Garner, 1998, St. John & Lamme 2011, Olasky, 2019). Public relations evolved through the contributions of numerous practitioners throughout the 20th century. Their lessons and principles gave rise to individual and social movements that continue to influence the field today. Four main

traditions have shaped the historical development of public relations: the journalistic and publicity tradition, the persuasive communication campaign tradition, the rhetorician and press-agent tradition, as well as the relationship-building and two-way communication tradition (Olasky, 2019).

First, Edward Bernays, often referred to as the 'Father of Spin', emerged as one of the most outspoken proponents of public relations. His notable impact on American society, as emphasized by Garner (1998), was significant. Bernays identified himself as a “public relations counsel,” as noted by Olasky (2019, p. 17). He published *Crystallizing Public Opinion* in 1923. According to St. John III & Lamme (2011), in his book, Bernays suggested that public relations could identify latent interests within the public to better control them. He believed that the power of mass media could be harnessed by public relations practitioners to shape public perception and persuade individuals to alter their actions (Garner, 1998).

Edward Bernays’s seminal book *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, published in 1923, sheds light on a fundamental function of public relations: persuasion as a crucial element in a democratic society. Bernays defined persuasion as “the use of communication in an attempt to shape, change and/or reinforce perception, affect (feelings), cognition (thinking), and/or behavior” (1923, p.173). He argued that public relations practitioners could engineer consent by creating symbols that resonate with the public and adapting communication strategies accordingly (Bernays, 1923). Pfau & Wan (2006) further emphasize this perspective, noting that Bernays’s insights underscore the integral role of persuasion in public relations. They argue that Bernays’s pioneering work laid the foundation for recognizing persuasion as a central strategy in public relations, a notion widely acknowledged in the literature (Bakir et al., 2019, Moloney, 2006). Indeed, Bernays’s concept of persuasion aligns with the broader understanding of public relations as a strategic communication process for shaping public opinion and behavior (Pfau & Wan, 2006).

In 1928, Edward Bernays published *Propaganda* with the idea that it “could move masses toward the acceptance of good causes” (St John III & Lamme, 2011, p.223). He also argued, as exposed by St John III & Lamme (2011), that propaganda was essential in preventing societal stagnation and resistance to advancement. These techniques were first extensively used in World War I, serving as the third pressure after economic and military pressures (Idris, 2020). However, public relations were often perceived by popular opinion as synonymous with propaganda and spin. This dismissive labeling associates public relations with the pejorative connotation of propaganda, equating it with deception, in contrast with truth (Weaver et al., 2006).

As exposed by St John III & Lamme (2011), Harold D. Lasswell, who shared the same vision as Bernays in terms of propaganda, published the book *Propaganda Technique in the World War* in 1927. This work was centered on the psychological aspects of shaping public opinion and outlined the technical aspects of propaganda employed during the war, complementing the technical approach of Edward Bernays. As explained by Idris (2020), Lasswell wrote that successful propaganda relies on the adept use of resources in favorable circumstances. In this context, a means is anything that the propagandist can control or influence and a condition is anything that requires the propagandist to adapt. As an example, during World War I, the use of mass media was already observed as an effective way to reach a wide range of people for mass manipulation (Idris, 2020).

To illustrate this concept of propaganda, Brandt exposed in 1996 the “Torches of Freedom” campaign of Edward Bernays as a great example of propaganda techniques and the concept of engineering of consent. In fact, through his public relations campaign, Bernays managed to create demand and engineer consent for women as smokers. He contributed to the effective recruitment of women to cigarette smoking, seizing opportunities to target women in its advertising so that smoking could become a mass behavior. For example, he promoted smoking among women by associating cigarettes with beauty, style, and independence, and orchestrated events and campaigns to challenge traditional taboos against women smoking in public, ultimately reshaping cultural perceptions of smoking. In this context, the “engineering of consent” refers to the deliberate shaping of public opinion,

values, and beliefs to influence behavior. It involved manipulating societal attitudes towards smoking, particularly among women, to create demand for cigarettes. This process highlights the power of advertising and public relations in shaping consumer behavior and cultural norms, characterized by skillful manipulation of public opinion, interest, values, and beliefs (Brandt, 1996).

In 1952, Edward Bernays published another book, *Public Relations*, in which he argued that the term covers three fields of activity: sharing information with the public, efforts aimed at persuading the public to change attitudes and behaviors, and efforts to align the attitudes and behaviors of an organization with its stakeholders and vice versa (Bernays, 1952). As most of his experiences were focused on propaganda, his perception of public relations was largely influenced by his works. In fact, as exposed by Idris (2020), Edward Bernays often used the term 'propaganda' to describe the activities of public relations, or he used 'propagandist' to denote a PR counsel. His idea of the engineering of consent, which he used in his propaganda works was also part of his PR terminology. He argued that public relations professionals can shape public opinion by challenging existing beliefs or introducing new ones, which is closely related to the idea of propaganda, where shaping and manipulating perceptions play a central role (Idris, 2020). Idris (2020) claims that public relations has inherited consequences from propaganda: these include the manipulation of the intended message, the use of one-way communication, and use of symbols and themes to evoke public emotions rather than relying on factual content.

Ivy Lee, considered the father of modern public relations, as exposed by Hiebert (1966), was another important figure in the field. For this rhetorician, public relations constituted the art of conveying one's ideas and objectives to the public, or the practice of elucidating one societal group to another. He used the word "publicity" to denote effective means of communication and the workable relationship between two groups. Ivy Lee's *Declaration of Principles*, published in 1905, has been praised as the starting point of contemporary public relations, as discussed in press forums of the early 20th century, establishing publicity as a transparent and truthful aspect of corporate operations (Russell & Bishop, 2009). While hired by several companies including the Anthracite Coal Roads and Mines

Company, the Pennsylvania Railroad, and the Rockefellers, Lee played a significant role in helping them navigate various scandals, contributing to his recognition as one of the most prominent figures in the field of public relations (St John III, 2006). He is credited with establishing one of the first public relations firms (Basen, 2014).

His *Declaration of Principles*, published in 1906, embodied principles such as transparency, accuracy and truthfulness (Zoch et al., 2014). Contrary to Edward Bernays, Ivy Lee held a different state of propaganda. He believed in the propagandist's capacity to comprehend and leverage the beliefs and ideals of the masses, strategically introducing ideas based on this understanding, although without resorting to simplistic emotional appeal (St John III, 2006). As elucidated by Basen (2014), the theories introduced by Ivy Lee transitioned public relations from a model of publicity from one to two-way communication, in stark contrast to the manipulative practices of early theorists. This shift emphasized the importance of informing the public.

St. John III (2006) analyzed Ivy Lee's railroad campaign for the Pennsylvania Railroad (1913-1914) as a notable example of his dedication to transparency and honesty in public relations. Faced with economic challenges due to government regulations and rising costs, the company turned to Lee to devise a campaign strategy rooted in factual transparency. Lee's approach aimed to educate the public about the railroad's economic woes. He ensured the dissemination of accurate information to various stakeholders, including the press, government bodies, railroad employees, and opinion leaders. Through meticulous communication efforts, including speeches, articles, and leaflets, and through his ethical conduct, Lee succeeded in upholding public trust in the company. His engagement with diverse audiences and commitment to factual appeals, advocacy and transparent communication exemplified how propaganda could be used ethically.

In the realm of US public relations history, Arthur W. Page is considered as one of the pioneers in corporate public relations, with a strong emphasis on the management function (Russell, 2014). Serving as the first vice president of public relations for the American Telephone & Telegraph Company, he successfully upheld the company's positive

reputation through strategic rhetoric during the period of the Great Depression, thus contributing significantly to the professionalization of public relations (Russell, 2014).

Despite the lack of research on Arthur W. Page (Lambert & Landau, 2015, Russell, 2014, Griese, 2001), Lambert and Landau (2015) shed light on Page's seven principles, regarded as a formulation of ethical corporate public relations perspectives reflecting his beliefs about the workplace. These principles include "Tell the truth; Prove it with action; Listen to the customer; Manage for tomorrow; Conduct public relations as if the whole company depends on it; Realize a company's true character is expressed by its people; Remain calm, patient, and good-humored" (Lambert & Landau, 2015, p.203).

Through a rhetorical analysis of Page's speeches, Lambert and Landau (2015) unveil his strategic construction of AT&T's image. They assert that Arthur Page effectively communicated the company's capabilities, fostered connections with society, distinguished AT&T from competitors, influenced public opinion, and adapted the purpose of public relations. Page employed various techniques in his speeches to build trust and engage his audience, such as crafting compelling narratives. This exemplifies his early contributions to the development of relationship-building and two-way communication traditions in the field, leveraging emotional appeal and prioritizing customer service.

While Arthur W. Page's pioneering work laid the foundation for two-way communication practices, Grunig and Hunt (1984) later refined this concept with the development of his four models of public relations. Litwin (2009) delineates these models, each differing in purpose and nature of communication, providing valuable insights into the field. These models include press agentry/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical or scientific persuasion, and two-way symmetrical, each serving distinct organizational goals and communication approaches.

Grunig's (1993) seminal contribution to the public relations field lies in the two-way symmetrical model, which prioritizes communication for resolving conflicts with strategic publics. Grunig argued that this model, by raising questions about negotiability rather than

merely judging ethical rightness, holds the potential to render organizations more effective from an ethical standpoint (Grunig, 1993). Theunissen and Rahman (2011) draw parallels between two-way communication and two-way symmetrical communication, linking them to terms such as ‘dialogic’ and ‘dialogue’, concepts that will be further explored in the section addressing ethics in public relations.

Expanding on this dialogical theory, Theunissen and Rahman (2011) underscore the importance of relationship management. As elucidated by Ledingham (2006), shifting the focus of public relations from communication to relationships suggests that maintaining a balance between the organizational interests and public concerns requires active relationship management. This relational perspective of public relations as a management function finds application in issues management, crisis management, community relations, media relations and public affairs, among other areas. Consequently, this theory implies that the efficacy of public relations efforts can be assessed by their impact on the quality of relationships between an organization and its associated publics (Ledingham, 2006).

Another pivotal concept advanced by Grunig (1993) is the strategic management of public relations, a foundation of the theory of excellence. By building relationships with pertinent publics, public relations contribute to the broader strategic management of an organization. Through the pursuit of its mission, the organization identifies strategic publics, whose responses can significantly affect its capacity to implement public relations initiatives. Indeed, involvement in strategic management has been identified as a key characteristic of excellent public relations by the IABC research team, in relation to organizational effectiveness (Grunig, 1993).

Building on this legacy, Harold Burson, another significant figure in the field, continued the tradition of ethical leadership and innovation (Smith, 2010). Named “the century’s most influential PR figure” by *PRWeek* in 1999, he is also renowned for founding Burson-Marsteller, which became one of the major public relations firms worldwide. Barnum et al. (1999) examined Harold Burson's perspective on his agency’s success, identifying four key strategies: hiring a dedicated team of long-term employees; fostering a

collaborative atmosphere with a family mindset; developing a corporate culture by establishing new offices for local recruitment and training; and positioning the firm as an industry leader through mastering multimedia, crisis simulation, healthcare practice, and adopting personal computers.

As explained by Smith (2010), Burson-Marsteller experienced both national and international expansion, partly due to its crisis management expertise. By consistently handling crises with meticulous care, the company established a strong reputation for adeptly managing its clients' crises. Additionally, Harold Burson has often been recognized as the founding father of crisis management, drawing from his extensive experience within the company. When facing crises, he emphasized the importance of maintaining a good reputation and demonstrating honesty and integrity, believing these qualities would encourage customers to forgive and remain loyal to the company. He understood the critical role of establishing a strategic approach to crisis communication. Furthermore, Burson prioritized ethics, setting benchmarks for ethical conduct, integrity, and values within the realm of public relations. He distinguished himself as a leader in ethical practices, expecting everyone within the organization to adhere to those same high standards.

A notable example of Harold Burson's adept crisis management is the case of Coca-Cola, where he served as personal counselor to the chairman, Earl Leonard. In an attempt to modernize, Coca-Cola introduced New Coke in 1985. Despite an extensive advertising campaign, the new product was immediately rejected by the consumers. To assist the company in restoring its image after this setback, Harold Burson advised Coca-Cola to listen to consumers' voices and respond to their desires by reintroducing the classic Coca-Cola to the market. This experience underscored the importance and effectiveness for a consumer product company of listening to and responding to consumers (Smith, 2010).

1.2 PR and the advent of technology

In recent years, businesses and organizations have increasingly recognized the potential of technology to enhance their innovation and efficiency. Technology is now integrated into

strategic planning rather than being merely an after-the-fact enabler (Berman & Hagan, 2006). New businesses are embracing a so-called technology-driven business strategy, which fosters innovation. In today's society, successful businesses understand the importance of innovating and integrating technology into their strategies (Berman & Hagan, 2006). As highlighted by Bower and Christensen (1995), technology-driven businesses are often considered as disruptive innovators, although it is worth noting that is not always the case. Disruptive innovations refer to emerging technologies that can create new markets and potentially disrupt existing ones (Bower, Christensen, 1995).

Permatasari et al. (2021) emphasize the gradual evolution of public relations from what is termed as Public Relations 1.0, the traditional era, to the digital era known as Public Relations 4.0. Indeed, the field has undergone significant transformation across its various stages. Public Relations 1.0 was characterized by one-way communication from a single source to many publics. Public Relations 2.0 marked a transition with the emergence of online media, facilitating horizontal or interconnected communication, aiming to foster liaison. This era represented the initial shift towards digital platforms. Public Relations 3.0 witnessed the rise of social media, enabling the proliferation of diverse forms of journalism, including citizen, corporate, and employee journalism. Public Relations 4.0 is defined by the advancement of AI and big data, with robots capable of replacing some practitioners' tasks. This evolutionary process directly impacts the roles, functions, and tasks within the field.

The new technologies exert a clear influence on how public relations practitioners conduct their work. This evolution in the public relations field compels practitioners to acquire a new set of skills, as various institutions transition to a more digital environment (Permatasari et al., 2021). Digital platforms have become another storytelling and message communication tool at the disposal of the industry, alongside traditional communication and analytical skills. Digital and online platforms are not intended to replace traditional tools and techniques but rather to complement them (Permatasari et al., 2021).

Indeed, as outlined in the article “Digital Public Relations: Trend and Required Skills” (Permatasari et al., 2021), the skills demanded of public relations practitioners are diverse and extensive. While traditional communication remains dominant over digital tools, competencies such as analytical and interpersonal skills persist, as they cannot be replaced by digital platforms. Foremost among these competencies are communication skills, which are crucial for involvement in the planning process, encompassing execution, monitoring, crisis management, and coordination with nearly all divisions of the company. This communication proficiency encompasses both written and oral abilities (see Figure 2). Analytical skills are also essential in public relations, contributing to the formulation and determination of the right strategies to achieve desired outcomes. Additionally, interpersonal skills are requisite, as public relations practitioners frequently collaborate in teams. This entails leadership, people management, and emotional management. Other soft skills, including self-confidence, creativity, and flexibility, among others, are also essential. Finally, practitioners are expected to possess digital skills to maximize their strategic plans through the production of digital content.



Figure 2- Communication skills needed by public relations practitioners (Permatasari et al., 2021, p.382)

In her work *The Public Relations Handbook*, Theaker (2013) highlights the advantages that digitalization and technological tools, such as email and data management systems, bring to public relations practitioners. These tools are designed to facilitate personalized

communication and efficient information management. To be effective, online PR activities must be considered within a holistic organizational approach, with digital public relations objectives integrated into broader organizational and operational strategies. The ease of uploading and updating information through online search engines, smartphone applications, or the websites of established media organizations has led to significant developments. Today, we have constant access to information, and receive immediate notifications of news or updates via online tools, including RSS feeds, emails, or social media updates. Furthermore, the public has access to pictures, experiences, comments or personal reports.

The emergence of social media in the 21st century has also unsurprisingly changed the way public relations practitioners achieve their communication objectives (Verma, 2015). This shift has allowed public relations professionals to find inventive ways to accomplish successful campaigns (Verma, 2015) and expand strategic communication into digital space (Langett, 2013). Today, the long-term success of public relations campaigns is influenced by the effectiveness of information communication technologies and the Internet, offering instant international reach and providing valuable real-time feedback. In fact, by virtually being at the center of all communications, the use of the web offers the opportunity to reach millions of people (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012).

In 2010, Kent defined social media as “any interactive communication channel that allows for two-way interaction and feedback” (p.3). Its emergence has transformed how actors interact and build relationships in the communication world. Companies and organizations have moved beyond traditional promotion and transactional purposes; they now aim to engage with customers, transitioning from one-way to two-way communication (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012). This phenomenon has also led to the emergence of new actors within the social community, such as influencers and bloggers, with whom organizations need to cultivate relationships through dialogue (Langett, 2013). From the perspective of relationship culture, social media embodies a two-way communication model, emphasizing dialogue and the fostering of interactions among organizations, the media, consumers and products through innovative public relations approaches

(Papalosomou & Melanthiou, 2012), ultimately leading to engagement with various publics (Valentini, 2015).

In the past decade, social media has gained significant relevance in the field of public relations, being viewed as part of the new channels (Valentini, 2015, Krishan, 2015). However, it has also reshaped the landscape of modern society (Krishan, 2015). Public relations, traditionally governed by three elements: informing, persuading, or integrating people with people, has undergone rapid developments, largely due to the information technology revolution, especially in communication activities (Krishan, 2015). For instance, Krishan (2015) examined the impact of social media adoption among public relations practitioners. The majority of respondents agreed that social media has altered the way of working within the PR industry and has influenced operations of other departments.

Through social media, organizations can now focus on engaging with their audiences by building and maintaining relationships with different stakeholders, as explained by the engagement theory (McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2014). However, Taylor and Kent (2014) highlight a lack of clarity around the principle of engagement in the public relations literature, characterizing it as part of dialogue and playing a significant role in facilitating decision-making processes that foster social capital. Johnston (2023) delves into the complexities of the theory, considering it a multifaceted psychological state or disposition occurring via relational processes within communication systems. He also emphasizes the contextual nature of the interaction, influenced by factors such as shared interests, collective meaning, and social benefits. Furthermore, Johnson (2023) points out the pivotal roles of stakeholders, including consumers, employees, community members, and organizations, all contributing to the engagement process through their power, perspective, voice and agency.

In the realm of digitization, the lack of clarity surrounding the concept of digital engagement poses a significant challenge in examining the process and its results. Johnston (2023) identifies digital engagement as a multidimensional process involving user motivation and intention, platform capabilities for communicative interaction, and

measurable outcomes through value co-creation in digitally mediated environments. This definition underscores the interplay within digital engagement, involving human agency, technological affordances, and outcome-oriented interactions in the digital context.

As part of the digital conceptualization, social media engagement is viewed as communicative interaction, ranging from passive consumption of messages to active conversation, participation, or online recommendation, characterized by clicks, likes, comments, etc. (Dhanesh, 2017). An important consideration of social media engagement is the dichotomy of “engagement as control and engagement as collaboration” (Dhanesh, 2017, p.4). Public engagement is implemented at two levels: online public communication, considered engagement as control, aiming for a one-way transfer of information from organizations to stakeholders; and public participation, considered engagement as collaboration, aiming for a two-way conversation with stakeholders (Dhanesh, 2017). However, research indicates a lack of capitalization from organizations on the two-way dialogic potential, mainly focusing on the public information model and using social media solely as a one-way promotional channel (Dhanesh, 2017, McCorkindale & DiStaso, 2014) to disseminate organizational messages and general information (Dhanesh, 2017).

Alongside the dichotomy between engagement as control and engagement as collaboration, Dhanesh (2017) presents the passive-active continuum from the public’s perspective: based on motives and interests in specific issues, online users vary from passive readers to active, engaged individuals who generate information or create content and organize communities online and offline to take action. Research shows a higher percentage of passive than active online content consumption. When engaging with organizations over social media, consumers tend to engage if driven by interests in specific issues or if they see personal advantages in connecting with communities and organizations. For example, in the study “Smartphones, publics, and OPR: Do publics want to engage?”, Avidar et al. (2014) researched public desire to interact and engage with organizations through their smartphones. They found out that smartphones are mostly used for interactive purposes, including communicating with family and friends, browsing the Internet and

entertainment, with minimal interaction between users and organizations and a low engagement rate with messages sent by businesses or organizations.

Dhanesh (2017) also exposes the Pareto Principle, based on the 80/20 rule, stating that approximately 80% of outcomes stem from 20% of factors. This implies that a small group of active users can have more influence on organizations than a large group of passive readers, leading companies to interact more online with influencers, opinion leaders, or active publics in general.

In the context of the engagement theory, another relevant perspective within the social media spectrum is the dialogic theory. In public relations, dialogue primarily focuses on the attitudes of each party in an interaction, encompassing trust, risk and vulnerability (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2018). Consequently, dialogue also transforms the nature of the organization-public relationship, by emphasizing the relationship itself (Kent & Taylor, 2002). This concept entails five key features (see Figure 3): mutuality, which involves acknowledging relationships between organizations and the public; propinquity, referring to the timing and spontaneity of interactions with the public; empathy, encompassing the support and validation of public objectives and interests; risk, indicating the willingness to engage with individuals and publics on their terms; and lastly, commitment, reflecting the extent to which an organization devotes itself to dialogue, interpretation, and comprehension in its interactions with the public (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

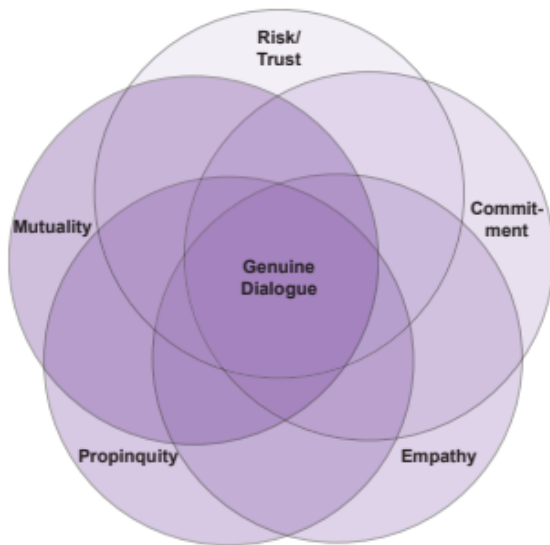


Figure 3- The dialogic model (Kent, 2017, p.5)

As outlined by Kent (2017), in comparison to other theoretical approaches, the dialogic theory of public relations places particular emphasis on the needs and relationships with stakeholders. This approach, centered on relationship management, prioritizes the welfare of others rather than solely focusing on the organization’s interests. Unlike theories such as OPR (organization to public relations) or symmetrical, dialogue revolves around the cultivation and nurturing of relationships, with organizations steering relationships rather than merely controlling communication. In essence, this theory posits that the objective of dialogic organization-public relationships is to foster connections, but in a manner that is neither manipulative nor self-serving. The goal is to benefit both organizations and the public, with organizations striving for social responsibility, or at the very least, aiming for improvement.

In the context of engagement and dialogic theories, stakeholders and relationships play a crucial role in shaping the landscape of digital communication. Social media influencers, in particular, have emerged as significant stakeholders in this realm, serving as a connection between organizations and publics they engage with, while also presenting new opportunities and challenges for the public relations sector (Davies & Hobbs, 2020). Enkel and Borchers (2019) define these influencers “as third-party actors who have established a

significant number of relevant relationships with a specific quality to and influence on organizational stakeholders through content production, content distribution, interaction, and personal appearance on the social web” (p.1). According to Lee et al. (2020), individuals are captivated by influencer content for various reasons, including creative inspiration, consumerism, authenticity, and envy.

With the ascent of these influential professionals, e-marketing has become a trusted method, focusing on the impact of influencers on individuals. Bognar et al. (2019) define e-marketing, or influencer marketing, as the “art and science of engaging people who have influence on the Internet (Influencers) to spread the message of a brand and its target audience in the form of a sponsored content” (p.302). As highlighted by Biaudet (2017), with the rise of social media platforms like Instagram, people tend to favor these channels over traditional media, seeking communication channels that align their tastes and preferences. Influencer marketing is perceived as authentic, credible, and likable, fostering trust around a product or brand through the creation of tailored communication spaces.

1.3 Storytelling and content creation

The power of narrative form, as emphasized by Kent (2015), has garnered widespread recognition in the realm of public relations and is now firmly established in marketing, branding, and crisis communication. Myths and stories have consistently demonstrated their efficacy in conveying histories, goals, heroes, and information through persuasive communication. By adopting a narrative structure, organizational messages can evoke empathy, foster identification, and create memorable situations and experiences. Storytelling incorporates several elements crucial for narrative transportation, including emotion, cognition, and behavioral dimensions. Recipients interpret stories based on their “prior knowledge, attention, personality, demographics” (Pera & Giampaolo, 2016, p.1143).

Building on this understanding of storytelling, Kent (2015) delves into five key storytelling concepts. Through the definition of these components, Kent offers valuable insights into a structured framework for crafting compelling narratives. Firstly, emplotment involves the

meticulous assembly of a series of events into a narrative with a coherent plot, carefully tailored to resonate with a specific audience. Secondly, narrative theory suggests that humans are storytelling animals, with verbal expressions influencing the actions of others through symbolic actions. Thirdly, identification occurs when the audience perceives commonalities or disparities with someone or something else, serving as a technique for establishing relational connection. Furthermore, form significantly influences the interpretation of information, as our understanding of facts is contingent upon context, which plays a crucial role in structuring a cohesive story. Lastly, the uniqueness and exclusivity of the narrative plot offer organizations a means to establish connections with others through the telling of their own story.

With the advancement of technology, storytelling has evolved beyond traditional forms to embrace digital platforms. Digital storytelling, defined as the incorporation of multimedia software tools (video, audio, graphics, animation, Web publishing) to craft individual stories that can be shared globally, represents a significant evolution in narrative communication (Mellon, 1999). Within this digital landscape, storytelling takes on new dimensions, offering enhanced opportunities for engagement, interaction, and relationship-building. This shift to digital storytelling underscores the dynamic nature of narrative communication in contemporary society. Within the value co-creation framework, digital storytelling is interpreted as an encounter communication practice where consumers adopt the role of storytellers and story receivers (Pera & Viglia, 2016).

Furthermore, the effectiveness of storytelling as a tool for nurturing the relationship between organizations and customers is evidenced by Pera and Giampaolo (2016). Through their research, they investigated the impact of video stories on relationship dynamics. Their findings reveal that storytelling, particularly in the digital realm, facilitates rational, emotional, and relational experiences among participants within social media communities. In fact, a relationship experience occurs when members of peer-to-peer communities are not only emotionally and intellectually engaged by the story but also motivated to take action, moving beyond a mere observation of the narrative. The implications of these findings underscore the importance for companies to harness the

power of storytelling by encouraging consumers to create and share their own videos, while also integrating these narratives across various social media platforms.

Building on storytelling's role in modern public relations, the rhetorical theory highlights how the public relations process is enhanced by the collaborative creation of shared meaning, which serves as a fusion of individual thought and collective identity within society. In fact, the rhetorical tradition of public relations assumes that effective communication and robust relationships rely heavily on reasoned argument, factual evidence and ethical judgment (Heath & Coombs, 2006).

In his paper “Re-evaluating the Role of Rhetoric in Public Relations Theory and in Strategies of Corporate Discourse”, Andrej Skerlep (2001) presents a rhetorical perspective on discourse, arguing that rhetoric functions both as a theory of persuasive discourse and a general theory encompassing discourse and genres within public relations. The narrow understanding of rhetoric, or persuasive discourse defines persuasion as synonymous with argumentation, which equates to logos or rational argumentation. The broader understanding of rhetoric discourse and genres in public relations, on the other hand, encompasses all forms of discourse, whether written or spoken, including persuasive, literary, and scientific discourses. This broader conception embeds argumentation and persuasion within a wider definition but does not exclude them from other types of discourse. The article underscores the importance of rhetoric in public relations. In fact, rhetoric should be regarded as the foundation of business ethics and corporate social responsibility.

This all highlights the recognition of the power of narrative in the field of public relations and its integration into marketing, branding, and crisis communication. Storytelling is widely recognized as an effective tool for information dissemination, with professionals understanding how to craft stories that serve the interest of stakeholders, publics, and clients. Myths and stories are proven effective in communicating histories, goals, heroes or in delivering informational and persuasive messages by evoking empathy, fostering identification, or creating memorable situations and experiences (Kent, 2015).

1.4 Ethics in PR

Ethics in public relations, as defined by Bowen (2007), involves the systematic analysis of actions and decisions to distinguish between right and wrong, and determine what should be valued. It “includes values such as honesty, openness, loyalty, fair-mindedness, respect, integrity, and forthright communication” (Bowen, 2007, p.1). The central ethical dilemma within the public relations field lies in the divided ethical identity. Fawkes (2007) proposes a Jungian approach, which introduces saint/sinner models to represent the duality between “pro” and “anti” ethics. This model depicts an archetype with, on one side, the saint or ethical guardian, and on the other, the sinner or amoral advocate, the latter being more commonly embraced by practitioners. This approach does not place blame on any group but seeks homeostasis rather than homogeneity. Fawkes (2007) advocates for reflexivity and dialogue between these dual identities to achieve social harmony, prioritizing loyalty to the client and employer while acknowledging the tension with the broader social good.

While each organization’s relationship with ethics varies, as demonstrated by the saint/sinner model proposed by Fawkes (2007), it has been necessary since the inception of public relations to establish ethical codes by professional associations. These codes serve as a foundation upon which practitioners can rely to make ethical decisions. As outlined by Watson (2013), the first international code of public relations ethics, known as the IPRA Code of Athens and authored by Lucien Matrat, was implemented in 1965 and widely promoted at the time. Even then, this code emphasized that the use of communication techniques enabling outreach to a large audience imposes upon practitioners a responsibility to adhere to a stringent moral code. The key principles advocated by the code include the value of helping others and being trustworthy, the importance of respecting human rights and treating everyone fairly, and the relevance of providing true information while avoiding tricks and lies. This code continues to govern the profession, which remains largely influenced by these early guidelines.

As discussed earlier, with the evolution of the discipline of public relations, the standards have also changed and evolved. For instance, concepts such as dialogue and two-way

symmetrical communication have emerged, introducing new ethical challenges to the field. Theunissen and Noordin (2011) explore the concept of two-way symmetrical communication, which involves both parties in open discussion. This model is often regarded as more ethical than one-way communication because it respects all parties involved and promotes mutual understanding. However, the authors critique this perspective by highlighting how public relations practices still focus on controlling messages and achieving desired outcomes, which can hinder genuine dialogue. Their argument suggests that two-way communication is not synonymous with dialogue; true dialogue requires giving up some control and accepting that outcomes may not always be predictable. In fact, the two-way model does not always imply dialogue but rather encompasses publicity, persuasion, and dialogue depending on the situation.

The concept of persuasion, which holds an important place in the ethics discussion, is often perceived negatively and equated with propaganda by theorists, as analyzed by Fawkes (2007). However, the critical issue is not about engaging in persuasion, but rather whether it is done in an ethical way. In fact, Messina (2007) argues that persuasion is inevitable and has its place when it comes to informing, raising awareness, educating or even influencing attitudes. With concerns regarding ethics in public relations, the concept of ethical persuasion has emerged to establish boundaries within the realm of ethics, which can easily be conflated with the pessimistic term “propaganda”. In this line of thought, Messina (2007) defined ethical persuasion as an effort through communication to shape knowledge, attitudes or behavior of an audience through presentation of a perspective, enabling the audience to make voluntary, informed, thoughtful decisions.

Although ethical persuasion is widely recognized, practitioners may still find it confusing to determine its standards. The TARES test, which was first elaborated by Baker and Martinson (2001), proposes standard ethical factors. This test stands for “truthfulness of the message, authenticity of the persuader, respect for the persuadee, equity of the appeal, and social responsibility for the common good” (Lieber, 2005, p.288). In his empirical analysis of the TARES test, Lieber (2005) demonstrates the relevance for practitioners of

measuring ethical considerations when facing difficult communication decisions aimed at achieving the common good.

The concept of communal good is also challenged by the recent advancement of artificial intelligence, particularly generative AI, which is gaining traction in public relations. Sætra (2023) proposes an analysis of its implications at societal (macro), organizational (meso) and individual (micro) levels (see Figure 4).

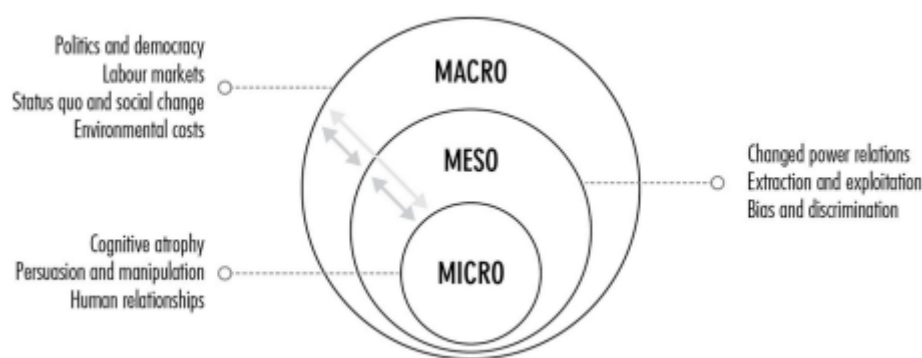


Figure 4- Dangers on the micro, meso, and micro levels (Sætra, 2023, p.4)

On a macro level, Sætra highlights concerns about democracy and political stability, arising from the dissemination of AI-generated political content. These include fake news in the form of deepfakes, described as “both text and generated videos where real people or situations are presented in new and imagined ways “ (Sætra, 2023, p.3); the erosion of democracy; job displacement; the risk of maintaining the status quo hindering societal change; and lastly, the increased carbon footprint of AI. On a meso level, the author exposes risks such as changes in professions and power dynamics caused by AI’s ability to produce content done by humans; the use of human-generated content without consent; and the exacerbation of biases and discrimination due to inequalities in access to AI systems. On a micro level, the main impacts include the risk of cognitive decline due to the lack of practice in tasks; the threat of AI manipulation; and ultimately, the danger of human interaction being replaced by AI companionship.

Chapter 2 - Public relations in the luxury hospitality

2.1 Characteristics and elements of luxury

Luxury being subjective, there is no established definition of this concept in the industry (Ko et al., 2019, Brun & Castelli, 2013, Jain et al., 2023). Indeed, the conceptual and symbolic dimensions of luxury leave little room for a reliable categorization of goods and products (Brun & Castelli, 2013). Drawing from his literature review, Heine (2019) attempted to define this concept by utilizing a taxonomy of luxury. Taxonomy refers to the categorization of items as luxury or non-luxury, as well as the organization of groups of organisms based on their differences and similarities. Through the definition of “luxury products” and “luxury brands”, Heine (2019) facilitates the categorization of products and terms within the luxury domain or outside of it.

The necessity-luxury continuum proposed by Heine (2019) allows luxury to be defined as something surpassing necessity, with the differentiation between necessity and luxury depending on the accessibility or exclusivity of resources. The necessity-ordinary-luxury scale proposes a more contemporary definition, tailored to today’s consumers, where luxury encompasses anything beyond what is essential and commonplace. Moreover, desirability plays a crucial role and is inherent to the luxury experience; the degree of luxury attributed to any resource is determined not only by its availability but also by the demand for it among people.

Furthermore, concerning the relativity of luxury, the classification of what constitutes luxury depends on the perspective (see figure 5): regional relativity involves categorizing resources along the necessity-luxury continuum based on their local accessibility. Goods become increasingly regarded as luxurious in regions where they are rare due to their scarcity. Temporal relativity refers to shifts in the perception of the resource luxury over time, influenced by changes in accessibility and desirability driven by technological progress and societal trends. Economic relativity encompasses differences in individuals’ perceptions of luxury based on their access to resources, as well as disparities between countries with varying levels of economic development. Cultural relativity involves the

appeal of resources to individuals based on their cultural background rather than the availability of these resources within the culture. Finally, situational relativity suggests that the classification of the same resources as necessary, ordinary or luxurious may vary depending on the circumstances (Heine, 2019).

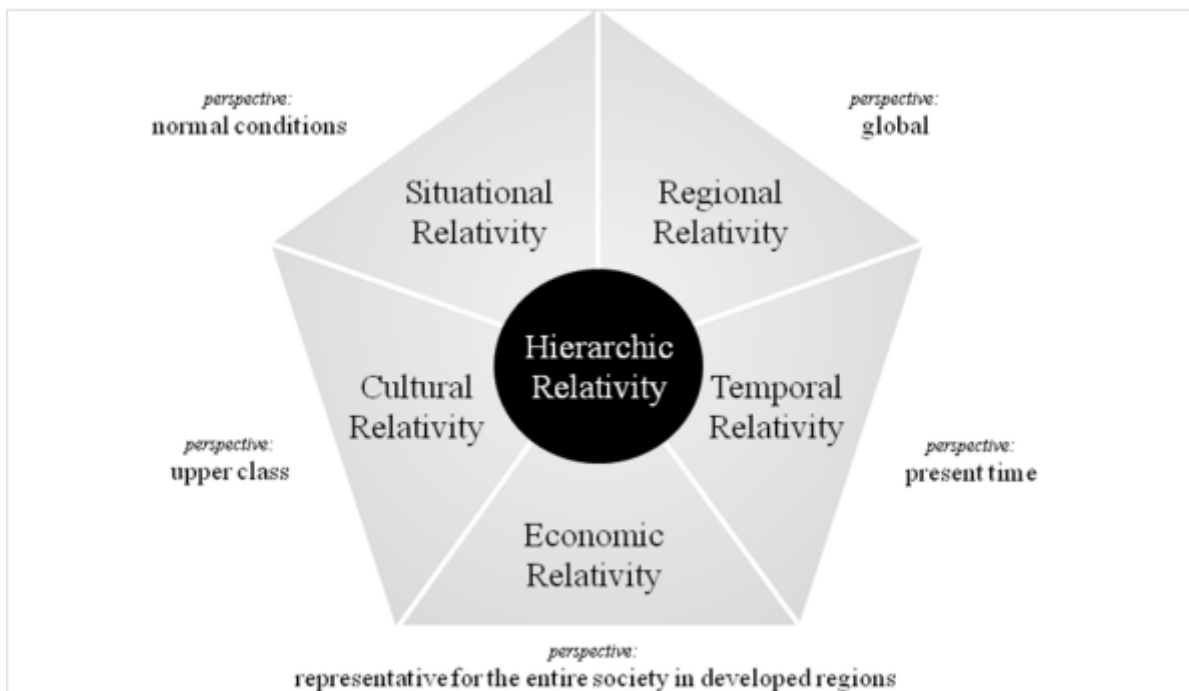


Figure 5- Types of relativity (Heine, 2019, p. 67)

Similarly, Becker et al. (2018) define luxury brands as characterized by the unique social and cultural meanings they convey, which consumers use to express their personal and social identity. This definition encompasses how individuals relate to the brand and their social standing to others.. Indeed, individuals' perception of their experiences with brands or products can significantly influence the meaning they attribute to their lives. Luxury brands communicate social and cultural significance, enabling individuals to fulfill their social objectives, which may involve social adjustment, value expression, or a combination of both. This focus on fulfilling psychological needs rather than functional benefits distinguishes luxury brands from non-luxury ones.

Hanse and Wänke (2011) take a deeper dive into the concept of luxury by linking it with the abstractness of mental representations. They argue that luxury goods may be seen as psychologically more distant than ordinary ones. Through various studies, they have concluded that consumers tend to use more of an abstract language when describing luxury goods, which in turn is perceived as more abstract language when describing luxury goods. These findings have significant implications for advertising: products described in abstract terms are perceived as more exclusive, luxurious, and expensive.

In their study about luxury trends, Atkinson and Kang (2022) differentiate between traditional luxury and new luxury, shedding light on evolving trends in the luxury sector. With millennials becoming prominent consumers in this market, understanding personal consumption values is crucial for companies to adapt their PR and marketing strategies. Traditional luxury emphasizes craftsmanship, high quality, exclusivity, hedonism, and self-identity through consumption. On the other hand, new luxury focuses on attention capital, through the attention and visibility serving as the basis of the new luxury social, inconspicuous consumption, intrinsic experiential value, life enrichment, self-directed pleasure, and sustainability. This distinction reflects changes in consumer preferences and societal values, shaping the dynamics of the luxury market.

In the realm of luxury hospitality, Luna-Cortés et al. (2022) propose a definition that underscores the distinct perspectives of consumers and companies, each shaping a unique understanding of luxury. From the company's point of view, luxury hospitality is defined by its provision of high-quality accommodations, achieved through factors such as prime location, high-quality materials, and distinctive architectural design. The uniqueness of these design elements is cultivated through a blend of rarity, extraordinariness, and authenticity. Moreover, a defining characteristic of luxury hospitality services is their premium pricing. Conversely, from the consumer's viewpoint, considerations often revolve around star ratings and the reputation of hotel chains. Guests also expect exceptional service quality and exclusive supplementary amenities. In contrast, Jain et al. (2023) propose additional factors concerning both tangible and intangible aspects of luxury

hospitality, including ambiance, guest-staff interactions, employees' stylish appearance, and personalized service interactions.

2.2 Building and managing the luxury brand image

Developing a distinctive brand personality, which can be done through public relations, is an effective strategy for building robust service brands. It is an efficient way for a company to show characteristics of differentiation with other brands (Ghantous, 2016). Brand personality was first defined in 1997 by Aaker as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (p.347). Branding rather than innovation is a long-term competitive advantage, brands' symbolic values being more difficult to copy than functional attributes (Ghantous, 2016).

Ghantous (2016) identifies four areas where brand personality is pertinent in services branding. Firstly, it serves as a means to differentiate service brands in competitive markets, providing a lasting advantage. Secondly, brand personality resonates with consumer emotions by addressing their needs. Thirdly, brands can convey their ethical, social and environmental values through marketing efforts to various stakeholders. Lastly, it fosters the establishment of enduring consumer-brand relationships crucial for sustained success. These attributes have been linked to positive outcomes such as enhanced brand trust, equity, attitude, and purchase intentions among consumers.

In fact, brand personality benefits both marketers and consumers alike. From the marketer's viewpoint, brand personality has the potential to establish a strong connection with consumers, particularly when it embodies distinctiveness, strength, desirability, and consistency. For consumers, developing self-brand connections based on their self-concepts and brand images helps them meet their needs, thereby impacting brand equity and fostering long-term consumer-brand relationships. Moreover, brand personality, by fostering heightened emotional connections, enables consumers to define their self-concept in various social contexts (Sung, Kim, 2010).

The example provided by Gilbert and Hewlett (2003), analyzing the brand strengths and weaknesses of British tour operators, offers valuable insights into the tourism industry. During the 1980s, tour operators faced challenges in establishing a distinct brand equity, resulting in a lack of personality and branding efforts. As a consequence, companies struggled to create an appealing image and cultivate strong customer-brand relations. The authors argue that the absence of brand loyalty stemmed from a lack of differentiation in their products. Consequently, consumers prioritized factors such as price and airport location over the tour operator itself, with the destination holding greater significance for consumers than the tour operator.

Expanding on the importance of brand loyalty, Sung and Kim (2010) also expose the correlation between brand personality dimensions and brand trust or brand affect.

Brand trust is defined as “the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function” (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001, p. 82). Trust, known as the cognitive aspect of the brand, directly influences how service quality, loyalty, communication, and cooperation are perceived. It encourages companies to invest in a long-term relationship (Sung, Kim, 2010). Brand affect is defined as “a brand’s potential to elicit a positive emotional response in the average consumer as a result of its use” (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001, p.82). Indeed, the mental representation of a brand, or the brand experience, can be significantly shaped by the emotional attributes or personality associated with the brand. Furthermore, it can have a crucial impact on the retrieval of brand memories (Sung, Kim, 2010).

From that perspective, Sung and Kim (2010) examined five brand personality dimensions and researched their impact on brand trust and brand effect, which can in turn affect brand commitment. The Big Five Personality structure, which includes the following factors: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness, can be compared to the five-factor structure of human personality, which are neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Sincerity, excitement and competence can be compared to the agreeableness, conscientiousness and extraversion dimensions of the big-five human personality model. However, sophistication and ruggedness are not

consistent with the human model. This comes to prove that brand personality can not totally be associated with human personality (Sung, Kim, 2010).

In addition to these concepts, brand loyalty is crucial to brand personality. According to the study conducted by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), brand loyalty encompasses two aspects: behavioral, or purchase loyalty, which involves repeated purchases of the brand; and attitudinal brand loyalty, where customers are emotionally committed to the brand due to its unique value. The study shows that a combination of brand trust and brand affect influences behavioral loyalty, leading to increased market share, and attitudinal loyalty, resulting in a willingness to pay higher prices for the brand.

Ghantous (2016) finally demonstrates the ultimate purpose of a well-defined brand personality: a high-quality consumer-brand relationship. Brand personality serves as a significant determinant of consumer-brand relationships in the service sector, particularly influencing factors such as brand credibility, self-congruity, cumulative satisfaction and brand loyalty (see Figure 6).

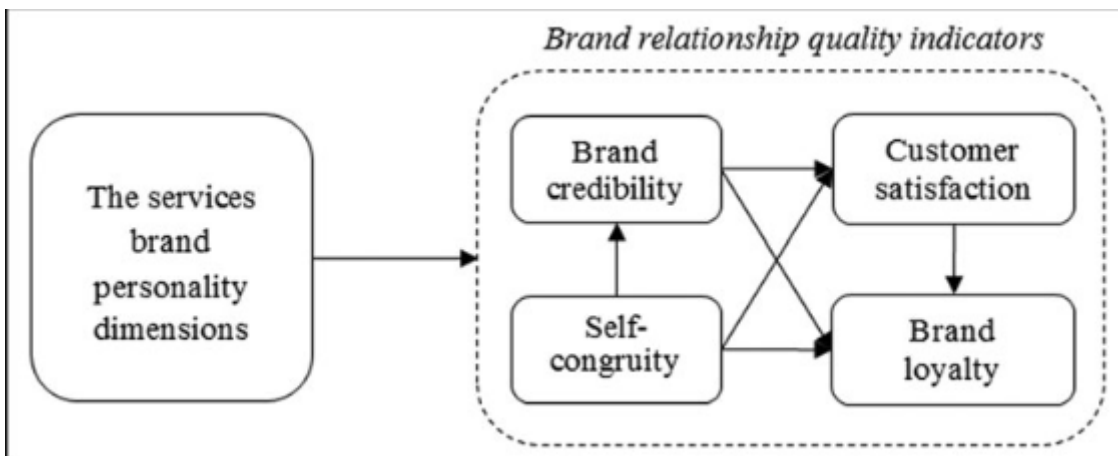


Figure 6- The research model of services brand personality’s impact on consumer-brand relationship quality (Ghantous, 2016, p. 187)

This notion of a consumer-brand relationship can be explained through the process of meaning transfer, “which is based on the assumption that a brand is a proxy in a dynamic

relationship with the customer” (Becker et al., 2018, p.53). In fact, Becker et al. (2018) developed the BECKER framework, also known as the BECKER Model of Consumer Luxury Brand Relationships, which explores how the three aspects of the customer luxury brand relationship work. It considers that the relationship between the consumer and the brand is characterized by satisfaction at the cognitive level, prestige at the extrinsic level and commitment, loyalty and intimacy at the intrinsic level (see figure 7).

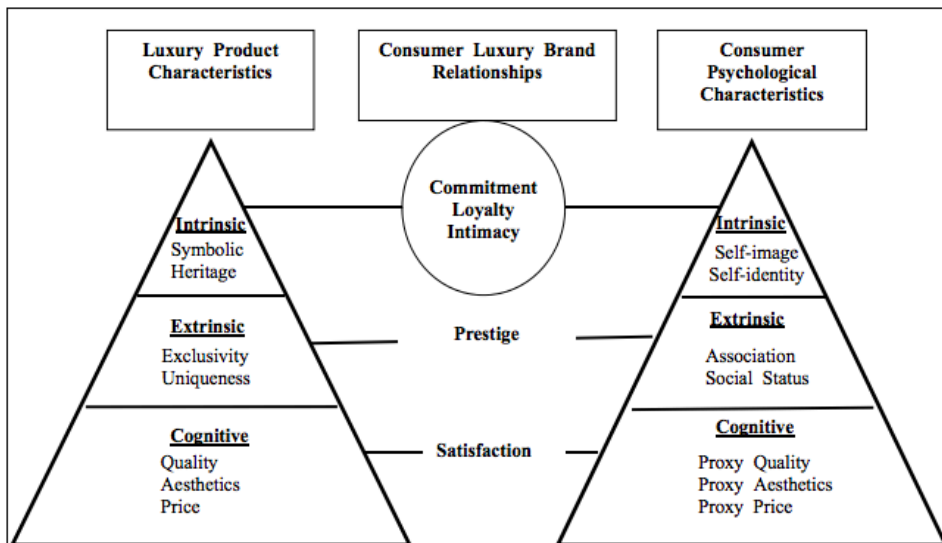


Figure 7- The BECKER Model of Consumer Luxury Brand Relationships (Becker et al, 2018, p. 59)

The base level of the framework, known as the cognitive attributes considers the consumer psychological characteristics. Quality, aesthetics and price are inferences to the global evaluation of the customer, which results in satisfaction. Aspects of dependability, reliability, trust and accountability are elements that contribute to the proxy-quality. The secondary level concerns extrinsic attributes, such as exclusivity and uniqueness. Luxury brands and products are perceived as extrinsic signals of higher social status and association with particular consumers’ social groups. This creates a self-connection: the establishment of profound and robust connections through actions that trigger the individual's sense of identity. The identification as a higher social group member and the positive perception from others allows the consumer to develop a sense of self-identification as well as togetherness to the luxury brand. Finally, the advanced level concerns intrinsic attributes, concerning the product’s physical and psychological

characteristics, which raises the value to the consumer. This rare stage implies knowledge from the brand about the customer to personalize the experience and encourage the customer to share personal information (Becker et al., 2018).

Another model, which was originally developed in the information system field and is now widely used in the management field, is based on the Critical Success Factors (Luo et al., 2022). Rockart (1979) defined Critical Success Factors as “the limited number of areas in which results, if they are satisfactory, will ensure successful competitive performance for the organization” (p.85). He also argued that different companies within the same industry tend to use different Critical Success Factors in terms of strategies. These factors, adequately executed, are the key to success in management.

Brun and Castelli (2013) developed the Critical Success Factors as an important aspect of the luxury experience. This non-exhaustive list includes factors such as exclusivity, the brand, emotional appeal, style and design aspects, quality and performance, among others. A luxury product does not need to possess all these qualities to be considered luxurious but should have 4 to 5 of these qualities to have an effective luxury marketing strategy.

Luo et al. (2022) analyzed these Critical Success Factors in the context of entertainment tourism destinations with the belief that these factors can be really beneficial to this industry. They found out a positive relationship between these factors and the development of the entertainment tourism industry. Through their interviews, they identified eight Critical Success Factors within the industry, “namely, product, financial and economic support, service quality, planning and policy, facility and transportation, marketing, human resources and security” (Luo et al., 2022, p. 1168). This shows these factors are relative to the industry or sector, which practitioners must take into account (Luo et al., 2022, Marais et al., 2017).

2.3 Customer Experience and Reputation Management

There are numerous consumer trends regarding motivations and behaviors when it comes to luxury. In their literature review, Gupta et al. (2023) use theories from different

disciplines which are relevant in the context of luxury consumption in order to understand consumer motivations to engage with luxury brands (see figure 8).

Theory	Author	Definition
Veblen's theory of conspicuous consumption or Veblen's effect	Veblen, 1999	Consumers often invest significantly in luxury items to get recognition from their peers and gain elevated social standing.
S-O-R (Stimulus-Organism-Response)	Jacob, 2002	When you encounter something (stimulus), it affects how you feel internally (organism), which then leads to your actions (response). In the context of luxury consumption, it means that stimulus like values, emotions or attributes related to a product or service can influence internal evaluations and attributes of the consumer, which in turn can affect responses or behaviors, such as word-of-mouth for example.
Social comparison	Festinger, 1954	The innate urge of individuals to define and assess themselves through comparison with others.
Use and gratification	Katz et al., 1973	Individuals actively choose and engage with media to satisfy various needs such as information, education, entertainment, personal identity, integration, social interactions, and escapism.

Planned behavior	Ajzen, 1985	Individuals make thoughtful and rational decisions to participate in certain behaviors, guided by the information available to them.
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Table 1- Main theories concerning luxury consumer behavior (Gupta et al., 2002)

From their comprehensive framework, Gupta et al. (2023) made a few conclusions relevant to the scope of research of the present study. First, the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the luxury industry gives rise to revenge spending, described as the way consumers invest a significant sum in luxury goods to uplift themselves during times of uncertainty. Furthermore, there is a noticeable focus on sustainability, with a shift from conspicuousness to conscientiousness and an increased attention to luxury brands' values and beliefs. Finally, the authors highlight opportunities for new technological innovations for consumers' experiences and engagement.

Walls et al. (2011) studied the experience perceptions of consumers within the luxury hotel industry. They found out that both trip-related factors and consumers' personal characteristics have an impact on the hotel guest experiences. This study also exposes how hotel guests' consumer experiences are influenced by both personal characteristics (each participant's set of experience dimensions was distinct from that of other participants, even though they shared similar or nearly identical experiences) and trip-related factors (trip purpose, hotel product characteristics, travel party nature, and experience spectrum).

Physical environment dimensions were reported as environment, engaging multiple senses, spatial design and function, cues, symbols, and objects. Consumers are more likely to spend money and time in places that elicit feelings of pleasure. However, the study points out consumers' attention to congruence, a concept being defined as "the environment in which all cues (ambient, design, and social) are compatible with each other and with the service provider's overall image" (Walls et al., 2011, p.180). These dimensions involve the five senses and elicit internal reactions from participants, including emotional and

cognitive responses. Human interaction dimensions were also reported to be key to the experience. The main dimensions when human interactions with employees were cited as attitude, professional conduct, proactive assistance, and appearance and with fellow hotel customers, dimensions were cited as demeanor, conduct, looks, and interaction.

In an era where brand reputation management is at the forefront of most companies, word-of-mouth is a direct consequence of the customer experience and behavior. The word-of-mouth communication concept was defined by Westbrook (1987) as “information communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their sellers” (as cited by Yang & Mattila, 2017). It has been shown to be one of the most influential means of communication in today’s market when controlled and managed effectively (Gildin, 2003). In fact, in an informational age where people are surrounded by a copious amount of information, we can observe increased noise, skepticism, and connectivity from consumers (Gildin, 2003).

The main characteristics of word-of-mouth allow us to understand the power of this tool for the reputation of the brand. First, the credibility of personal sources who know the product or service as they have already used or tried it. These communications stem from individuals who do not have commercial interest in influencing others into using or buying a particular product. Hence, they lack any incentive to distort the truth in favor of a particular product or service. Then, the experience delivery mechanism, through the delivery of an experience, makes people feel comfortable to try it. Furthermore, the customer driven form of communication means it is a live communication. Finally, it is a time and cost-effective solution for consumers (Gildin, 2003).

Society has constantly new tools to share information, which makes people more and more dependent on the power of word-of-mouth. We can observe four reasons why people decide to engage and talk about a product or service: product involvement, people feel the need to speak about pleasurable or unpleasurable things so that they can share their excitement or discomfort; self-involvement, as a way to seek validation or confirmation of the decision, as well as to satisfy emotional needs; other involvement, as a need to give

something, opinions leaders want to help others by sharing their opinion; finally, message involvement, deriving from the nature of advertising, in which case opinion leaders think they can speak as critics (Gildin, 2003).

As mentioned above, not only satisfied customers tend to share their experience. We can not deny the powerful impact of a positive word-of-mouth for companies to promote their business, but we should also consider the disastrous impact on a company's image of a negative word-of-mouth. In fact, people tend to share their negative experiences more than their positive ones. The emotional involvement plays a role in the way people share the experience they lived: people tend to speak about the extraordinary, unexpected things rather than the ordinary, satisfactory things. The level of expectation, the privacy of the experience and the employer behavior are other aspects that come to play in the word-of-mouth (Gildin, 2003).

Regarding the luxury hospitality industry, Yang and Mattila (2017) find a correlation between status seeking and WOM communication. The authors make a distinction between the Patricians and the Parvenus based on their wealth and status. Patricians have a low desire for status associated with consumption, they could be compared to the lower-class. Parvenus seek status by engaging in luxury consumption, they could be compared to the upper-class. These latter are highly in need of status, they tend to display their consumption objects in an attempt to enhance their social status. In fact, parvenus are more inclined to share positive WOM about their luxury purchases compared to patricians.

Yang and Mattila (2017) also suggest that consumers are happier if they spend their money on life experiences rather than material possessions, as life experiences are part of one's self concept and are closely related to the self, through the creation of memories. This concept of consumers' self-identification has a close connection with word-of-mouth intention and behavior. Consumer identification can be defined as the "overlap between one's self-schema and an organization's schema" (Yang, Mattila, 2017, p.8) and impacts positively positive word-of-mouth communication.

Hospitality experiences are closely linked to the consumer's sense of self, leading them to readily share their luxury hospitality experiences with others. This holds true for both parvenus and patricians, as such experiences play a significant role in shaping their identities and supporting their self-evaluations. Parvenus tend to prioritize highly visible luxury products over luxury services, as they seek items that garner attention. In contrast, patricians are more inclined towards memorable luxury experiences, finding them more enjoyable and satisfying (Yang, Mattila, 2017).

In order to illustrate this topic, Gil and Yan (2013) gave insight into the luxury hotel industry on the Chinese market, analyzing the customers' word-of-mouth on hotel staying experiences. In this study, they refer to electronic word-of-mouth, which is defined as the same interpersonal communications as word-of-mouth, but occurring through electronic platforms, typically over the Internet. In fact, it offers a direct solution for consumers to know about a hotel before trying it as online travel reviews are often seen as more likely to give up-to-date and accurate information compared to reviews posted by travel service providers.

From the management perspective, social media offers an opportunity for electronic word-of-mouth to be developed within the field of hospitality and tourism. Despite being composed of the same components as traditional word-of-mouth (source, message, and receiver), it differs when it comes to the level of influence. In fact, electronic word-of-mouth allows for a wider audience to access reviews, with sources often being anonymous, which forces practitioners to adapt in order to maintain the customer relationship (Chen, Law, 2014).

2.4 Sustainability and Crisis management in luxury hospitality

Sustainability is becoming a popular term in today's society. The concept benefits from many different definitions. In the context of the study, we consider the comprehensive description proposed by Barber and Deale (2014). The authors expose three dimensions to the concept, known as the "triple bottom line": economic, social and environmental. Based on this logic, sustainable consumers' buying choices are guided by one or more of these

three dimensions. These three dimensions are what can attract a sustainable consumer. On the other side, a sustainable hotel also conducts its operations with consideration for the environmental, economic, and social impacts.

Within the context of the rise of sustainable and mindful consumers, Barber and Deale (2014) define mindfulness as “the process of drawing novel distinctions when evaluating new information” (p. 102). They argue that environmental awareness can lead individuals to become more attuned to their environment, more receptive to new information, and the formation of new frameworks for organizing perception.

With the development of that new environment, Amatulli et al. (2021) researched the impact of a sustainability-focused luxury hotel communication on the brand's perceived integrity, which is described as the degree to which consumers see a brand as being loyal and genuine to both itself and its customers, as well as supporting customers in being true to their own values, and consumers' willingness to book a room (see Figure 8). They compared a customer service-focused message with a sustainability-focused communication message and came to the conclusion that the latter strategy activates a higher integrity perception among consumers who have a greater degree of environmental awareness, which, in turn, motivates consumers to reserve a room at the local hotel. The point is that aware consumers can be more receptive to meaningful messages and signals obtained from sources that address the hotel's sustainability practices and its impact on the local community. Therefore, the authors point out the importance of reaching out to this category of mindful customers through appropriate communication channels.

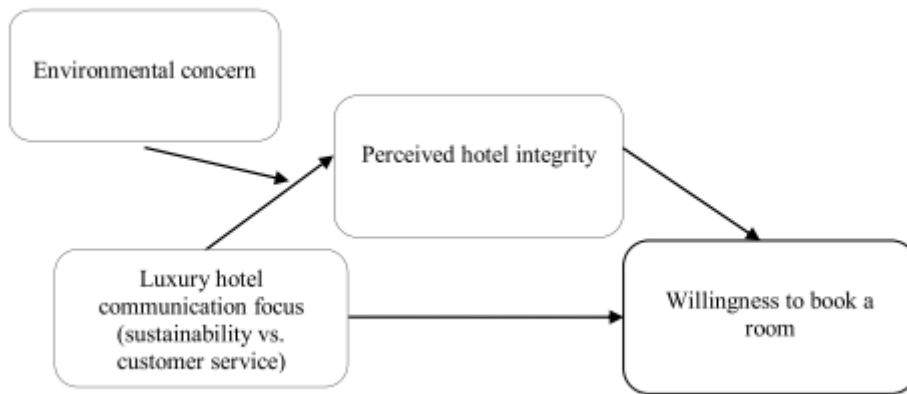


Figure 8- Conceptual model (Amatulli et al., 2021, p. 5)

Nevertheless, many studies support the idea that the sustainability-focused approach could negatively impact the perceived value of luxury hotels (Jain et al., 2023, Baker et al., 2014). Jain et al. (2014) point out an incompatibility between luxury hospitality and sustainable practices. In fact, the intention of consumers to book and their willingness to pay extra have been demonstrated to decline when luxury hotels implement environmentally friendly practices.

Despite the ongoing debate about the compatibility of sustainability practices and luxury hospitality, Osburg et al. (2022) believe that perceptions of (in)compatibility emerged based on the way sustainable luxury signals are conveyed, which influences consumer decision making in a direct way. In fact, as customers can not verify luxury and sustainability features before consumption, they must rely on signals, which are presented as both certifications from independent organizations and electronic word-of-mouth from previous customers.

Behaviors can be impacted by sustainability-related online reviews or third-party certifications, through social influence. Whether that be online reviews and sustainability ratings or sustainability and luxury certifications, they are all positively related to credibility customer satisfaction. However, when communicating on both high levels of sustainability and luxury, consumers perceive them as contradictory, a sustainability signal is expected to diminish the positive impact of a high luxury rating (Osburg et al, 2022).

Building upon the considerations of sustainability in luxury hospitality, it is relevant to also address crisis management strategies within this sector. As sustainability practices gain prominence in the industry (Barber, Deale, 2014), practitioners must navigate potential crises that may arise, whether related to environmental issues, social responsibility, or other unforeseen events (Marsen, 2020).

A crisis, as defined by Millar and Heath (2004), is characterized as “an untimely but predictable event that has actual or potential consequences for stakeholders’ interests as well as the reputation of the organization suffering the crisis” (p.64). Such events disrupt the functioning of the organization and can significantly damage its relationships with stakeholders (Millar, Heath, 2004, Marsen, 2020). Crises may be preventable or unpreventable, arising from internal or external sources, and may be intentional or unintentional in nature (Marsen, 2020). Given their unpredictable nature, crises can manifest in various social contexts, organizational structures, and industries. The nature and context of a crisis directly influence the response and actions of the organization and its practitioners (Marsen, 2020). Additionally, crises can be perceived as a struggle for control, necessitating prompt action from the organization (Millar, Heath, 2004).

Organizations adopt different approaches to crises, encompassing ethical considerations, strategic planning, problem-solving strategies, and interpersonal communication (Marsen, 2020). Typically overseen by the public relations department, crisis communication involves the actions taken by an organization during or after a crisis event, spanning the crisis and post-crisis stages. Organizations must address all stages of a crisis to provide appropriate responses, including, pre-crisis planning, crisis response strategies, and post-crisis efforts (Millar, Heath, 2004).

Regarding the use of social media, the literature highlights a heightened focus on its use in crisis management, showing its transformative impact on communication strategies within businesses (Yin et al., 2014, Apuke, Tunka, 2018). Both organizations and the public actively engage with social media during times of crisis, emphasizing the need for public

relations practitioners to leverage digital tools for effective crisis communication. Social media platforms serve as an essential source of emotional support for the public during crises, with their coverage now perceived as more credible than traditional mass media channels. Consequently, integrating these digital tools into public relations crisis strategies has become imperative for organizations to meet the evolving expectations of stakeholders (Yin et al., 2014).

Yin et al. (2014) show the significance of social media in managing public emotions during crises, as individuals seek emotional support, which in turn shapes their perception of crisis response strategies. The authors distinguish between two types of emotions: attribution-dependent emotions, such as anger, which arise from the attribution process when the public perceives wrongdoing by the organization typically in internal crises; and attribution-independent emotions, such as fear, which emerge when blame cannot be clearly attributed to the organization, often in external crises. This underscores the link between high crisis responsibility and negative public emotions, as well as the association between crisis engagement and the full spectrum of public emotions. Publics are more inclined to accept the organization's defensive response during external crises, perceiving the organization as less responsible for the situation (Yin et al., 2014).

In the hospitality industry, Sellnow and Sarabakhsh (1999) emphasized the necessity of well-developed communication systems, commonly referred to as crisis management, particularly when faced with a crisis. This implies effective communication with customers, employees, government officials, and the press. It is essential for hospitality managers/owners to articulate their perspective and uphold their image as competent, compassionate, and socially responsible individuals (Sellnow, Sarabakhsh, 1999).

2.5 Partnerships and collaborations

In the context of the branding strategy, partnerships and collaborations are key assets to a company's success (Tasci, Guillet, 2016, Moon, Sprrott, 2016) by enhancing the consumer-based brand equity (Tasci, Guillet, 2016) and market competitiveness (Moon, Sprrott, 2016). Cobranding was first defined by Stewart (1995) as "multiple business

alliances cooperating in marketing, space sharing, and production while maintaining their independence as a separate brand” (as cited by Kim et al., 2007, p.3).

Regarding hospitality industry context, Tasci and Guillet (2016) researched the impact of hospitality cobranding on the consumer-based brand equity of parent brands. As part of this study, the authors conceptualize the consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) as both financial and marketing motivations, know as “the total of meanings of a brand for consumers including associations, awareness, familiarity, quality, and value perceptions, which induce consumer loyalty and boost revenues through higher price premiums” (Tasci, Guillet, 2016, p.398).

Cobranding is considered a strategic decision for companies aiming to enter and compete in emerging markets. This is because it has the potential to surmount cultural barriers that might otherwise hinder market entry. By partnering through a cobranding strategy, the synergy effect of the two brands adds an extra value rather than just the sum value of the individual brands, which can be either positive or negative. A transfer of meaning or spillover effect to the cobrand can be expected to happen. In fact, strong parent brands tend to exert greater influence on the perception of cobrands and are less influenced by attitudes toward the cobrand compared to weaker parent brands (Tasci, Guillet, 2016). Concerning the brand equity of parent brands, Tasci and Guillet (2016) also observe brand equity erosion in most equity dimensions. That type of competitive strategy is described as a change in the original brand that diminishes consumer confidence and raises perceived risks associated with the resulting new product, thus decreasing loyalty toward it.

Looking at the restaurant industry, Kim et al. (2007) argue that cobranding can be beneficial in terms of sales, brand image and marketing or advertising costs. In fact, they identify three joint-promotional strategies: price benefits, which are shown to lead to more customer satisfaction, but not necessarily brand loyalty; post-purchase services, for example mileage accumulation and electronic newsletters, which have a significant impact on both customer satisfaction and brand loyalty; and finally, premium promotion, for example samples or catalogs, which do not impact either customer satisfaction or brand

loyalty. In conclusion, joint-promotion can be a short-term strategy but it needs to consider the customer preferences in order to support brand loyalty (Kim et al., 2007).

Ingredient branding partnerships are another strategy presented by Moon and Sprott (2016), which are described as the integration of a branded ingredient into the product(s) of another brand, which serves as a great asset for market competitiveness and relationship benefits, such as knowledge sharing and mutual cooperation. Consumers' attitudes are significantly influenced by the perceived fit between the host and branded ingredient. In fact, a good fit, described as capturing the likeness between two brands, between the parent brand and its extension results in positive consumers' attitude toward the extension.

From a global perspective within the luxury field, Moon and Sprott (2016) support the complexity of finding a good fit between the host and the ingredient brand, which can lead luxury brands to partner with non-luxury brands. The authors point out the importance of a good fit between the partner brands despite the dissimilarities, but also the product category fit, with an alignment between the two brands. They suggest both brands to look for the brand image of the partner to be aligned with their own brand's image.

Chapter 3 - Internship descriptive narrative

The internship was carried out at Constance Hospitality Management Limited in Mauritius for a duration of 4 months - from 15 August to 15 December 2023. As a trainee in the Communications department, I was responsible for participating and assisting employees in developing the company's public relations.

3.1 The company

Constance Hospitality Management Limited is a renowned luxury hospitality company in the heart of the Indian Ocean, headquartered in Mauritius, known for its diverse portfolio of hotels and commitment to excellence in hospitality. The group owns and operates several brands (see Figure 9), all providing unique experiences to its guests.

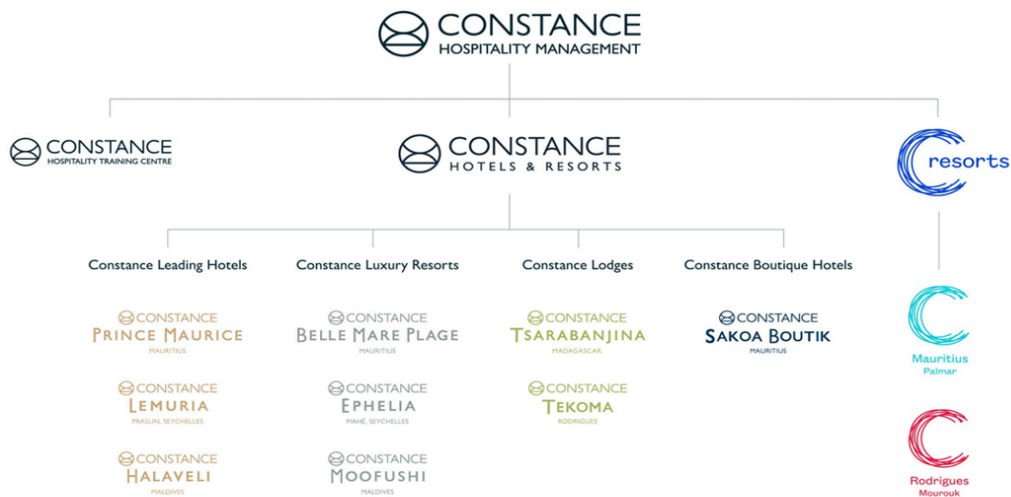


Figure 9- Brand architecture of Constance Hospitality Management (internal source)

The flagship brand of Constance Hospitality Management Limited is Constance Hotels & Resorts. This brand offers a collection of luxury hotels in Indian Ocean destinations, including Madagascar (Constance Tsaranbanjina), Mauritius (Constance Belle Mare Plage, Constance Prince Maurice and Constance Sakoa Boutik Hotel), Rodrigues Island

(Constance Tekoma), Seychelles (Constance Lemuria and Constance Ephelia), and the Maldives (Constance Halaveli and Constance Moofushi). The brand also owns three golf courses: in Mauritius (the Legend & the Links) and in the Seychelles (the Lemuria). Constance Hotels & Resorts has won numerous awards over the past 20 years and proudly belongs to the 'Leading Hotels of the World'.

In parallel, the group also offers C Resorts, an upper upscale lifestyle brand offering all-inclusive hotels. Currently, this brand includes two hotels: C Mauritius Palmar in Mauritius and C Mourouk in Rodrigues. These properties provide a relaxed atmosphere, diverse culinary experiences, and a range of leisure activities for travelers seeking an all-inclusive getaway. Furthermore, Constance Hospitality Management Limited invests in training and talent development within the hospitality industry through its Constance Hospitality Training Centre. This academy offers high-quality training programs for hospitality professionals, contributing to the evolution of the industry and the education of the next generation of hospitality leaders.

At the headquarters located in Mauritius, Constance Hospitality Management Limited efficiently coordinates its operations and manages the C Resorts and Constance Hotels & Resorts brands. That is why this chapter will not focus on the Constance Hospitality Training Centre.

The headquarters comprises ten strategic departments, including communication, revenue, marketing, groups and incentives, e-business, central reservation, IT, purchasing, finance, and human resources. This robust structure supports the group's continued growth and its commitment to customer satisfaction and exceptional quality.

My internship was conducted solely in the Communications department, which will be presented in the next sections. However, I had the opportunity to interact with various departments within the head office. I quickly developed an interest in the E-Business department because they were carrying out work that would typically fall under the Communications department in other companies. In fact, public relations and social media

are often grouped together. During my research, I made a bold decision to consider E-Business as a part of public relations. This is because public relations are considered the means by which a company communicates with its audiences, and the E-Business department shares the same goal as the Communications department. Therefore, in my research, I decided to investigate both.

The E-Business department focuses on marketing strategy and digital communication to achieve three distinct objectives: prospecting, conversion, and retention. The department is structured into three clusters, each assigned to a specific specialization, unlike other markets where tasks are divided based on hotels or markets.

The social media cluster handles social media strategy through community management, paid advertising, digital partnerships, and more, aiming to develop the prospecting aspect by improving the brand's visibility. By getting people talking about the company, it helps increase the conversion rate. The web cluster manages the development of the website and its entire marketing strategy to generate traffic to the website. Through various online tools and methods, this cluster facilitates both traffic and conversion, encouraging customers to take the step of making reservations if they wish. Finally, the CRM cluster handles the more technical aspect, managing all customer big data. Gathering all this information enables later segmentation of the data for relevant B2B or B2C marketing actions. For instance, it allows sending a specific newsletter only to individuals who meet certain criteria. This cluster contributes to developing the retention aspect.

The department's role is to manage the digital customer experience throughout their journey by implementing marketing and communication actions tailored to their position in the journey. Each action has a specific goal and context. From my position within the Communications department, I frequently collaborated with different clusters within the E-Business department, depending on the project. For instance, when organizing corporate events and compiling the guest list for journalists, we often found it relevant to invite social media influencers for online event promotion. As social media falls under the

purview of the E-Business department, I had meetings with the manager to discuss our expectations or goals.

3.2 Mission, vision and values

The mission of Constance Hospitality Management is to share their idea of luxury through quality experiences like timeless adventures, spa treatments or relaxation moments to all guests. In expanding into new destinations in the Indian Ocean, the group's vision is to remain a leader in luxury hospitality while upholding their core values, which include generosity, sincerity, excellence, inventiveness, and respect. Speaking of respect, one of the group's biggest commitments is sustainability. Indeed, the group has been actively involved in environmental sustainability efforts since 2013 and has implemented ecological measures, earning them the status of a Gold member of the Green Globe certification, as promoted on the website of Constance Hotels & Resorts.

The philosophy of Constance Hospitality Management is to provide exceptional luxury hospitality experiences while simultaneously preserving and celebrating the natural beauty and culture of the locations. That is why sustainability actions are not just a part of the operations; they are at the core of the organization and guide all of the actions. The four key areas of focus are the following:

- Environmental: Resource conservation, pollution reduction, biodiversity conservation, etc.
- Socio-cultural: Corporate social responsibility actions, community development, local employment promotion, fair trade, local entrepreneur support, etc.
- Quality: Contribution to the local economic well-being through local ownership, employment, buying local products, etc.
- Health & Safety: Established occupational Safety and Health legislation & regulations compliance and people protection.

3.3 Description of the internship activities

The internship was described by the company before the start of the activities as “the assistance to the team in the daily jobs in order to strengthen and promote Constance Hotels and Resorts (5 star luxury brand) and C Resorts (new upper upscale lifestyle brand) images”. As a Communications trainee, the tasks were all related to public relations, particularly press relations, content production, brand promotion, and corporate event organization.

The tasks were numerous and diverse, providing me with an overview of the functioning of an international company. However, I was surprised to learn that everything related to digital content and social media is managed by the E-Business department. Therefore, I consider both departments to be complementary and contributing to the brand's public relations efforts. I collaborated extensively with the E-Business department to ensure consistency in the company's communication strategy. The tasks I was assigned, which I will detail below, fell under the umbrella of communication and public relations, but they were all interconnected and complemented each other within the company's overall communication strategy.

During the first weeks, I had to understand the company's communication strategy, familiarize myself with the various techniques and tools used within the Communications department. Since it was my first experience in public relations and I knew nothing about the group, I felt like I was jumping into the unknown, especially considering it was also my first internship. It was crucial to grasp the role I needed to take within the department. This initial observation allowed me to integrate into the team and demonstrate my usefulness, ensuring that I would be given tasks. At the same time, I maintained the stance of a newcomer ready to learn, understanding that I did not have all the answers. This experience was particularly valuable in public relations, as it provided me with the opportunity to establish relationships in an unfamiliar environment with a culture different from the European culture I am accustomed to.

3.3.1 Content creation and production

The creative aspect of my role involved creating and producing content for the Constance Hotels & Resorts and C Resorts brands. I assisted the team in writing, formatting, and updating communication materials such as brochures, press kits, advertorials, press releases, etc. I also helped the department proofread documents, whether they were written internally or externally, as my external perspective allowed me to notice errors or areas that needed improvement.

Being a Mauritian company, at Constance Hospitality Management we primarily work in French and English. Therefore, most of the content is initially drafted in these languages but needs to be translated into various languages to reach a global audience, primarily in Italian, German, and Spanish. For translations, the department uses artificial intelligence tools to generate an initial translation. To ensure a flawless translation, we also make sure to share it within the department to have multiple perspectives and identify minor errors. Lastly, for translations, it's essential to verify them with the PR offices and sales offices in each country to get their approval.

I also had the opportunity to coordinate and support photo and video shoots. Since I didn't have prior experience, I mainly observed rather than actively participated in the shoots so that I could gain an understanding of the processes involved.

CONSTANCE
HOTELS, RESORTS & GOLF
True by Nature

CONSTANCE
HOTELS, RESORTS & GOLF
True by Nature

CONSTANCE
HOTELS, RESORTS & GOLF
True by Nature

On Saturday, February 4, the festive week culminated in a gala dinner at Archipel, one of Constance Prince Maurice's exceptional restaurants, where the multi-sensory experience continued with the renowned French pianist, Michel Amselem and singer Sofia Essadi.

[Click here to download pictures selection in HD](#)

7th February 2023
For immediate release

4th edition of Music & Wine: The epicurean gathering in Mauritius.

Wine and Music lovers had the pleasure of attending the 4th edition of Music & Wine at Constance Prince Maurice and Constance Belle Mare Plage. This unique festival hosted some of the very best French winemakers. Guests were invited to sip a glass of wine while listening to beautiful live music from renowned local and international artists in an idyllic setting on the white sand beaches of Mauritius.

Constance Hotels & Resorts, an Indian Ocean expert

Constance Hotels & Resorts is a Mauritian hospitality brand with seven eco-chic resorts across Mauritius, Seychelles, Maldives and Madagascar, and three championship golf courses (one in Seychelles and two in Mauritius). With Mauritian roots, warmth and smiles are in the brand's DNA. A sense of place and nature is the inspiration behind selecting properties that preserve their environment's natural beauty. High flying gastronomy and fine wine is integral to the brand's proposition, with 96 sommeliers working across seven properties. Guests' wellbeing is the focus with a Constance Spa in each resort combining treatments, fitness and nutrition. Constance Hotels and Resorts is an Indian Ocean expert offering guests unique experiences in each location.

For more details: www.constancehotels.com

Figure 10- Example of a press release from the communication department

3.3.2 PR activities coordination and follow-up

This was the biggest part of my internship, and the one I preferred, as it required no creativity but rather logic and, most importantly, a lot of organization. In communication, we handle a lot of emails as it is our most widely used communication tool internally and externally. We need to communicate with those who work in outsourcing, with other departments, and even within the department itself.

I worked on various projects with my colleagues who delegated certain tasks to me, which allowed me to have an overview of all types of projects rather than working on just a few. On one hand, I worked extensively on coordination. I had to write numerous emails to request layouts, translations, have collateral materials checked, and obtain information about press trips to our hotels. These tasks were purely administrative. On the other hand, I also had to handle all the follow-up for these tasks. It's essential to ensure that everything happens within the agreed-upon deadlines. Being organized and not forgetting to follow up with interested parties when they exceed the given deadlines is crucial. It is important to check everything we receive, as errors are not uncommon. Checking collaterals, layouts, etc. This coordination and follow-up work allows the department to deliver everything on time and with the expected quality.

3.3.3 Department support

I was also assigned some individual projects on which I could work independently. These were more challenging because I had to rely solely on myself. I often had to create PowerPoint presentations for significant communication department meetings or even for the management team. There were also many short-term tasks, such as designing greeting cards or drafting the CEO's speech for a press conference. The assignments were diverse and required a high level of responsibility and autonomy.

My favorite task was creating the monthly communication report. Every month, I had to prepare a report within the department to showcase the work done by the team to the

management and hotel managers within the group. This report included an overview of PR activities, brand-related events, corporate events, as well as local and international press coverage. It was also an opportunity to demonstrate our target audience reached through our communication efforts and how we managed our budget effectively. This task was quite repetitive as I had to fill in the same information each time, following the same format. However, I enjoyed working on it because I could see that over the months, it became easier as I knew where to find the information and do it more efficiently.

3.3.4 Event organization

The least important, or at least less recurring, part of my role was the organization of corporate events. These events allow the brands to reinforce their visibility and credibility, as well as to generate media coverage. These corporate events have a significant impact on the positioning of the brands, which can justify the experiences they offer, such as golf, gastronomy, wine, etc.

For the organization of corporate events, there is a detailed process to follow that includes many tasks. First, we need to identify and invite media outlets that are relevant to the event's theme. For example, for the Festival Culinaire, it's important to invite media that cover gastronomy-related topics. Then, we must identify journalists from these media outlets who are interested in attending the event. We handle the booking of flights and hotel rooms for them.

Next, we prepare a program that caters to the journalists' interests since corporate events often span a week, allowing them to explore both the event and the hotel. Finally, there is the actual public relations work, which involves our physical presence with the press, creating a connection to ensure they have a great time. As representatives at the event, we must maintain a professional demeanor and embody the brand's image.

Corporate events are crucial for Constance Hotels & Resorts and C Resorts. As mentioned earlier, they provide a platform to showcase the various experiences offered by the hotels. The Constance Festival Culinaire highlights gastronomy, La Paulée and Music & Wine

focuses on wine, Golf & Wine and MCB TC showcase golf, and the C Kite Festival emphasizes kite surfing. These events attract enthusiasts and journalists from all over the world, garnering significant media coverage and enhancing the group's reputation.

Part II – Empirical Research

Chapter 4 - Methodology

4.1 Research relevance

The purpose of this research is to investigate and understand the role of public relations in crafting and communicating the luxury image within the hospitality industry. To apprehend the common PR strategies employed in this sector, I am examining the specific case of Constance Hotels & Resorts, located in the Indian Ocean.

The digital transformation of recent decades has introduced a new environment, compelling luxury hospitality to adapt to evolving standards and requirements. Based on this observation, it is pertinent to explore this new context and how luxury hotels adjust to effectively achieve their public relations objectives. Furthermore, the literature review reveals a lack of correlation in previous research regarding public relations and the luxury industry.

Given that Constance Hotels & Resorts is based in the Indian Ocean region, it is also relevant to analyze this case as it could potentially serve as a model for the European market. Mauritius is recognized for its expertise in luxury hospitality, featuring well-developed tourist infrastructure, luxurious resorts, and high-quality services.

4.2 Research question

In defining the scope of this research, formulating clear and precise research questions is crucial. Well-defined research questions not only guide the study but also determine the most appropriate methodological approach. In that context, two research questions are stated:

“How do employees from Communications and E-Business departments at Constance Hotels & Resorts perceive their roles in crafting and maintaining the brand’s luxury image in the hospitality industry?”

This research question aims to explore, from an internal perspective, the various PR practices in the luxury hospitality sector by examining their influence on brand perception and customer engagement. The question is intentionally broad to encompass multiple aspects within the field. Consequently, no sub questions are defined.

“How do interpersonal interactions at Constance Hotels & Resorts influence the perception of the hotel's luxury brand, and what are the key elements of these interactions that contribute to a positive luxury experience?”

This second research question focuses on interpersonal communication, looking at the different dynamics and how specific behaviors, attitudes and communications styles enhance the luxury perception.

4.3 Research objectives

Considering the research question, the primary object of this study is to investigate the role of public relations in building and maintaining a luxury hospitality image at Constance Hotels & Resorts. This object is broken down into three specific objectives.

The first objective is to examine the internal perception of luxury within the company and the challenges associated with it. By investigating from an internal perspective, including the viewpoints of the employees, the research aims to identify the elements and attributes that contribute to the company's luxury image in the realm of public relations. It also considers the challenges that arise in maintaining that image, especially in the context of the evolving digital environment that companies now face.

The second objective focuses on identifying the PR efforts implemented by the Communications and E-Business departments. Through a comprehensive analysis of various PR activities, the research aims to understand how those working in these departments perceive their own levels of achievement and the effectiveness of their strategies in enhancing brand perception and customer engagement.

The final objective is to explore the role of interpersonal relations in shaping the luxury image. By examining relationships and interactions with guests, stakeholders, and staff, the research aims to uncover the interpersonal dynamics that contribute to the overall perception of luxury and how these interactions complement formal PR efforts.

4.4 Methodological choices

To comprehend the role of public relations in the luxury hospitality industry, specifically focusing on Constance Hotels & Resorts, this study employs a qualitative approach. Qualitative research seeks to delve into the “how”, “why”, and “what” questions of a phenomenon (Haven, Van Grootel, 2019). Typically, an emergent design guides such research efforts, allowing researchers to conduct data analysis, preliminary inspections, and collection (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019). The primary aim of qualitative research is to attain a deep understanding of the essence or character of a subject matter by closely observing and interacting with the individuals involved (Xuehong, 2002).

This research aims to understand the role of public relations at Constance Hotels & Resorts to distinguish itself in a competitive market while establishing itself as a provider of luxury services within the industry. To achieve this, the research proposes conducting interviews with employees from pertinent departments, namely Communications and E-Business, to gather their insights. The goal of the research is to provide an internal perspective to the topic.

I aimed to create a safe environment where participants felt free to express their thoughts and expertise spontaneously. To avoid scripted responses, I did not share the questions with the participants before the interviews. Additionally, I conducted the interviews at the end of my internship, as I had already established a rapport with the participants, enabling them to feel comfortable and unafraid to express potentially compromising thoughts.

As an interviewer, my role was to facilitate the research process with some guidance and to provide a space where participants could freely express their opinions. My primary goal

during these interviews was to maintain a neutral role and remain unbiased. Through empathy, I strived to create an environment where participants felt respected and valued. For example, when participants struggled to answer a specific question, I asked them sub-questions to guide them instead of pressuring them to answer quickly.

I conducted all interviews in an isolated room where I was alone with each participant, ensuring there were no distractions and establishing the best possible connection with each individual. At the beginning of each interview, I clearly explained my primary research question. It was also important to reassure the participants that there were no right or wrong answers, and they should not be afraid of responding in any particular way. For instance, I noticed that participants #3 and #4 were initially stressed about participating in my research. Being younger and having less experience within the company compared to the other four participants, they did not feel confident in expressing their views and were afraid of the consequences of their words. To make them feel more at ease, I maintained positive body language throughout the interview to convey that everything was going well and that they were doing a good job.

Regarding recording the interviews, I preferred not to take any notes but rather to record audio to fully focus on the exchange. It was crucial for me to demonstrate to each participant that I was giving them my full attention so they could always feel understood and confident. This undivided attention also allowed me to adapt my questions or ask follow-up questions when participants were unsure how to respond to my inquiry. Each interview was more of a conversation for me rather than an interrogation.

Another personal choice I made was to transcribe all the interviews on my computer without using any software after completing all my interviews. This strategy, although time-consuming, allowed me to listen to all the interviews again, understand the topics discussed, and create connections between interviews. Additionally, since the interviewees were mostly Mauritians, they expressed themselves in a mixture of English and French, which I don't think any software could fully understand. My own transcription allowed me to accurately understand each term and avoid errors in the transcription process.

4.5 Data collection procedure

The research process incorporates interviews from employees working either in the Communications or E-Business departments, as both these departments contribute to the company's public relations in different ways. In the context of my internship for Constance Hotels & Resorts, the interviews were a means to gain an in-depth understanding of the company's public relations strategy in the luxury hospitality sector. By choosing this method, I also aimed to understand the personal point of view of each employee interviewed, which allows for interpreting the various comments and comparing different answers to identify trends as well as divergent opinions.

It was a deliberate choice to solely utilize interviews for my research. Combining this method with others did not seem pertinent because the aim of my study is to understand the mechanisms implemented by Constance Hotels & Resorts in the realm of public relations to be regarded as luxury. The objective is to give voice to employees to elucidate all strategies in place and comprehend how public relations are managed. This analysis may provide inspiration to other environments or companies.

As previously mentioned, the interviews were conducted towards the end of my internship. This timing enabled me to engage with the participants in person, eliminating any potential discomfort associated with online communication. The questions and responses were conducted in French to mitigate any language barriers. Scheduling the interviews during the final week of the internship allowed me to leverage my four-month immersion in the company, which provided insights into the company's functioning and the preferences of the employees. Although all employees are proficient in both English and French, they primarily communicate in French. This led me to believe that participants would feel more at ease expressing themselves and sharing their opinions in French.

I chose to conduct the interviews face-to-face to avoid digital barriers or technical problems. This type of interview allowed me to be flexible and adaptable in my approach, based on the dynamics of each interaction. By building a personal relationship with each

participant, I was able to create a comfortable and trusting environment, encouraging interviewees to share insights into the topic. This approach allowed for in-depth interaction, by asking follow-up questions or for clarification for example. Finally, in person interviews allowed me to spot non-verbal cues and understand when participants were feeling lost, uncomfortable, or distracted, which helped me guide them effectively.

Given that I have chosen interviews as the main method for my research, it is important to select participants who have the knowledge and expertise to provide relevant answers to my research question. That is why I decided to interview six employees: four from the Communications department and two from the E-Business department. It's crucial that each participant brings added value to the research, so that relationships and conclusions can be drawn from their responses.

The selection of interviewees was based on their knowledge and ability to provide relevant information regarding public relations within the luxury hospitality industry. I ensured all participants were keen on the topic and could provide detailed insights. Given that I am relying solely on interviews, I preferred to interview only six confident and knowledgeable individuals rather than a large number who might not be as relevant to my research scope. Initially, I conducted seven interviews but later decided to exclude one interview, as the participant did not feel comfortable with the topic. All participants were selected based on different criteria:

- Communications department: Recognized as the department in charge of public relations within the company, it made sense to select employees from within it. The Group Communications Manager, responsible for overseeing the department and coordinating various projects, brings essential expertise and mastery of the subject to understand the mechanisms implemented under her direction. The PR & Campaign Manager and the Communications Executive, both specialized in branding and campaigns, possess the knowledge to explain in detail the strategies implemented from a promotional standpoint. The Communications Coordinator, an expert in production materials, provides insights from a more creative and event-focused perspective on public relations.

- E-Business department: Responsible for all digital aspects, it was evident to also consider the voices of two key employees of this department. This allows for understanding the digital strategies as well. Through the analysis of the strategies of both departments, this helps to understand the overall PR strategy of the company, whether traditional or digital. The E-Business Manager oversees all operations of the department and is in constant communication with the Communications department to develop a coherent strategy. With expertise in the digital domain, their input provides theoretical foundations on a topic that may seem objective. The Digital Content Manager has developed numerous campaigns in collaboration with the Communications department and, with her experience, has witnessed the department evolve and adapt to emerging digital trends.

The following table presents the information regarding the selected individuals for the interviews. Names have been deliberately replaced with a number assigned to each participant to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

Department	Participant	Date of interview	Role
Communication	Participant #1	14/12/2023	Group Communications Manager (2 years) - Manages the Communication department and oversees the 8 employees who are part of it
Communication	Participant #2	14/12/2023	PR & Campaign Manager (11 years) - Manages overall branding, press relations on her designated markets & corporate advertising campaigns
Communication	Participant #3	11/12/2023	Communications Executive (3 years) - Coordinates various campaigns and branding under the supervision of the PR & Campaign Manager, tracks press trips, and manages assigned markets

Communication	Participant #4	12/12/2023	Communications Coordinator (1 year) - Handles press inquiries and oversees production (content, collaterals, photoshootings)
E-Business	Participant #5	11/12/2023	Digital Content Manager (6 years) - Develops digital campaigns and manages social media
E-Business	Participant #6	06/12/2023	E-Business Manager (8 years) - Manages and oversees the E-Business department

Table 2- Description of participants including their department, date of interview, job title and role description.

All interviews followed a semi-structured approach with the aim of obtaining an in-depth analysis of the topic. Questions were tailored to each interviewee's role to gather the most relevant information and facilitate correlations between the responses. First, the interviews consisted of seven standardized questions that were uniform for all participants. The objective was to compare all responses and identify both similarities and differences in opinions.

Below is a list of the standardized questions that were asked to each participant:

- 1 - How do you define the 'luxury image' in the context of Constance Hotels & Resorts?
- 2 - Can you describe the key strategies used in your department to promote the luxury image of Constance Hotels & Resorts?
- 3 - In what ways do public relations activities contribute to the overall brand image and reputation of Constance Hotels & Resorts?
- 4 - How do you measure the effectiveness of your public relations efforts in promoting the luxury image?
- 5 - Could you share an example of a successful campaign or initiative that significantly enhanced the luxury perception of Constance Hotels & Resorts?
- 6 - How do you ensure consistency in the luxury image of Constance Hotels & Resorts across different platforms and communications?

7 - Can you discuss any challenges you face in maintaining or enhancing the luxury image of Constance Hotels & Resorts through PR activities?

The second part of the interviews was more personalized and adapted to each individual, with three questions tailored to each participant. These questions were related to their specific role within the company, the content creation process, the challenges they faced, etc. This part allowed each participant to express their own expertise and provided an opportunity to gather qualitative information, as each participant felt legitimate and competent to respond to the questions posed.

4.6 Data analysis and interpretation

The data analysis for this research involves a systematic and iterative method, using the software MAXQDA to interpret the interview transcripts. By establishing a structured approach, different themes and patterns can be identified, categorized and interpreted. This section highlights the steps undertaken to interpret the final results.

The research process follows an inductive coding approach, also known as emergent coding. This technique involves deriving codes directly from the text, as opposed to deductive coding, where codes are predefined (Blair, 2015). The rationale behind this choice is to ensure that coding in this research serves as a means of discovery, without imposing preconceived categories or codes. This approach maintains neutrality through the use of open coding.

The first steps of the process consisted of familiarizing myself with the data and conducting an initial coding. An initial reading was essential to understand the context, which helped in further comprehending the data and assigning descriptive labels or codes to represent the content. The inductive coding approach allowed for the capturing of language and perspective of the different participants. These first two steps facilitated the identification of preliminary themes.

The coding was deliberately carried out selectively. Some interviews were coded much more extensively than others because certain participants provided much more important information relevant to the research. The goal was not to code the entirety of the interviews just for the sake of it, but rather to sift through and select the important information.

Once the different codes were created, the third step involved elaborating categories based on these codes. The research questions and objectives defined in the first part of the paper guided the creation of categories that would help answer the original research question.

The table below presents the categories that were created based on the codes extracted during the analysis of the transcripts. For each category, five examples of codes are provided to give an insight into the analysis conducted using MAXQDA software.

Categories	Subcategories
Definition of luxury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attention to detail - Personalized service - Concept - Outstanding venues - Expertise
PR strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tone of voice - Tagline - Diversity - Visuals - Storytelling
PR actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Corporate events - Eco-friendly actions - Press trips - Barter deals - PR events
Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Natural attitude - Passion - Relations with media - Trusting relationships - E-mail follow-up

Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trend evolution - Competition - Crises - Digital evolution - Budgets
Measurement of results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communication reports - Reach - PR offices reports - Tone of voice of the journalists - Media coverage

Table 3- Summary of coding categories and example codes

Next, I refined the themes through re-examination of the data. To capture the nuances, an iterative process was employed, involving merging, redefining and splitting codes. This step ensured the validity of the final step, which was the interpretation of the data. By revisiting the research question and defined objectives, I was able to use the results to provide a comprehensive understanding of the PR practices at Constance Hotels & Resorts.

4.7 Ethical considerations

Any research process must consider ethical implications to uphold the standards of integrity and respect towards the participants and the involved company. By adhering to ethical principles, this research aims to demonstrate responsibility and ethics.

First, all participants were involved voluntarily. It was crucial to ensure that their participation was based on informed consent. They were provided with detailed information about the purpose of the study, the aim of their participation and the use of the data. They were also reminded that they could withdraw from the research process at any time.

Ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of participants was another priority. After discussion with the participant, names were removed from the transcripts and results, and were replaced with numerical identifiers. They were reassured before and after the interviews that the data would solely be used for the purposes of this research and not be

shared within the company. They were informed that the results would be presented in a way that they could not be individually identified.

The interviews were conducted in a safe and comfortable environment. A private and isolated space in a meeting room was arranged to protect participants' well-being and encourage them to express their thoughts freely. As a researcher, my role was to facilitate the discussion and actively listen to the participants. Some participants were initially hesitant to answer certain questions due to fear of misunderstanding the question, giving a wrong answer, or facing repercussions. It was important to reassure them that there were no right or wrong answers and that they were free to express their genuine thoughts. Through the interviews, I maintained a neutral stance to avoid any judgment influence on their responses.

Chapter 5 - Findings and discussion

As explained in chapter 4, the research process follows an inductive coding approach through the use of MAXQDA. In the context of this research, I have analyzed the six interviews by systematically coding the transcripts. This way, I was able to observe the similarities and differences between the viewpoints. Initially, I created categories related to my research questions. These categories allow me to organize my codes and classify the information to draw connections.

5.1 Definition of luxury

Luxury emerged as a central theme from the interviews, with participants highlighting its crucial role in shaping the identity and positioning of a brand within the hospitality industry. This category encompasses elements that distinguish luxury establishments, serving as a benchmark for hotels aspiring to be perceived as such by their clientele.

5.1.1 Originality and concept

A recurring theme across the interviews is the significance of originality and a unique concept in defining a luxury hotel. According to all participants, a truly luxurious hotel distinguishes itself through its originality and unique concept, offering a value beyond the ordinary, an added value that deeply resonates with guests. It's about providing a distinct experience, often through an exceptional location, which was frequently cited as a critical element. This unique aspect allows the hotel to stand out in the minds of guests.

For example, Participant #2 specifically mentions that at Constance Hotels & Resorts, they “provide experiences in exceptional locations in dream destinations on preserved islands”, which sets them apart from many competitors abroad. The location itself becomes a luxury, offering guests an escape to a secluded paradise that is both rare and unique.

The brand also positions itself within the luxury sphere by offering moments of quality. Ultimately, what clients seek in luxury is an escape from daily life to recharge. According to Participant #5, given the current climate of wars, economic crises, work environment, and daily stress, in her words, “a world that can erupt at any time”, the simple act of

spending time with family in a peaceful place is considered a luxury. According to Participant #3, a luxury hotel must offer the intimacy and exclusivity that clients highly value.

5.1.2 Personalized service and attention to detail

A dominant theme among the participants is the importance of personalized service and meticulous attention to detail. These interwoven aspects, considered the essence of luxury, enhance each other. Participant #1 believes that what differentiates various hotels in exceptional locations is the attention to detail in service. This is achieved through attentive service that guides the guest throughout their journey. The higher you go in the luxury segment, the more there are standard criteria, such as the expectation of service at the bar.

Participant #1 articulates this by saying “The details of the offerings, the little touches, everything is in the details in luxury. It's really the little extra things, the well-thought-out touches, every detail is anticipated for the guest. The service is very immersive.” This reflects the belief that luxury is not merely about grand gestures but about the careful attention to every small element, making each service and interaction feel bespoke.

Through personalized service, guests feel truly understood and valued, not just accommodated. To deepen their connection with guests, and foster loyalty and satisfaction, the brand prioritizes tailored experiences, where every preference and expectation is anticipated and met. This allows customers to feel a sense of exclusivity and privilege.

5.1.3 Quality and expertise

Participants also define luxury as an unwavering commitment to quality. This commitment applies to every aspect of operations, with standards significantly higher than those in traditional hotels. Participant #1 illustrates this by giving the example of a three-star hotel, where “a server might be required to attend to a guest within three minutes instead of one, and there might not be complimentary peanuts or coasters with drinks.” This example underscores the importance of every meticulous detail in luxury hospitality, ensuring an elevated guest experience.

Expertise is another crucial component, where the knowledge and skills of the staff are of utmost importance. As Participant #1 notes, this expertise can be acquired through education and practice, but it also demands an inherent ability to intuitively understand and anticipate the needs of guests. The true art of luxury service lies in the ability to place oneself in the guest's shoes, crafting interactions that are imaginative, creative, and perfectly aligned with the guests' desires. This empathetic approach allows the hotel to offer not just a service, but a memorable experience that resonates on a personal level with each guest.

In fact, the quality of staff training has a significant impact on the quality of service. For instance, Participant #4 cites the example of a skilled sommelier. If the sommelier is well-trained and knowledgeable, he can effectively advise clients on wine selections. This is also characteristic of luxury, where there must be enough staff so that each person can be an expert in their specific service rather than being a generalist. Participant #2 also explains that the expertise of the specialists is highlighted in their hotels because it demonstrates added value. For example, sommellerie is showcased through events organized by the sommeliers themselves in the various hotels.

In summary, the definition of luxury at Constance Hotels & Resorts is complex, encompassing originality, personalized service, attention to detail, quality, and expertise. Each of these elements plays a crucial role in crafting a luxury experience that not only meets but exceeds guest expectations. The integration of these aspects ensures that the brand maintains its prestigious position within the luxury hospitality sector. As we move forward, it is key to understand how these aspects translate into strategies and actions employed by the PR departments to further shape and communicate the brand's luxury image.

5.2 PR strategies

The primary focus of this analysis revolves around PR strategies, as effective strategies are essential for crafting effective brand image. The PR strategies of Constance Hotels & Resorts are centered around key areas to create a powerful impact on diverse audiences and

to communicate effectively within the luxury hospitality sector. Indeed, they are numerous and varied, allowing the brand to achieve its different objectives related to its image.

5.2.1 Brand positioning and image

A central aspect of Constance Hotels & Resorts' PR strategies is its focus on brand positioning and image. These strategies are meticulously designed to build and maintain a consistent and engaging brand presence.

The brand's communication must remain consistent and coherent across all channels and platforms to create an environment that customers can identify with. Various elements discussed by the participants highlight the importance of this image, through different elements. As described by Participant #2, the brand guideline serves as a crucial reference for all employees, ensuring uniformity in both visual and linguistic elements. This consistency allows Constance Hotels & Resorts to address different audiences effectively. For instance, their C Resorts brand adopts a different brand guideline to cater a lifestyle-oriented communication.

The tone of voice is a vital component of public relations. Participant #1 describes it as a standard of writing that reflects the brand's criteria of quality, excellence, and elegance. Although the tone must remain consistent, the angle of communication can vary based on the objective, enabling the brand to address different topics effectively.

The brand's image is equally crucial as its tone of voice. According to Participant #4, the consistency of vocabulary and image is paramount, "whether it's in advertorials, images, posters, or press releases. It's crucial that across all content, whether traditional or digital, there is consistency in both the image portrayed and the vocabulary used."

Vocabulary plays a key role in conveying the luxury image. Participant #5 highlights the importance of choosing the right words, such as using 'complimentary' instead of 'free' to maintain a luxurious tone. For the C Resorts brand, which focuses on lifestyle, the term 'free' aligns with its brand voice and is appropriate for various communications.

This emphasis on image is closely related to the attention to detail discussed in the luxury definition section. Participant #1 explains that every detail, whether in writing, speech, photos, videos, contributes to the brand's image. For example, "Luxury standards dictate that responses must be within 24 hours; you can't keep someone waiting for 48 hours. This requires a certain level of diligence."

Hero pictures, such as those featuring blue skies and white sandy beaches, play a significant role in engaging audiences, especially those from European markets. According to Participant #5, those images attract people by showing the idyllic aspects they may not have access to locally.

In line with these strategies, the brand's tagline, 'True by Nature,' is well-known within the company and ensures that all communications are aligned with the same direction. Through the effective use of brand guidelines, tone of voice, vocabulary, and visual elements, Constance Hotels & Resorts creates a cohesive and recognizable brand identity. These tools collectively help the brand distinguish itself in the competitive luxury market, reinforcing its commitment to delivering a consistent and luxurious image.

5.2.2 Communication and content

It is also important to choose strategic moments for these communications to target audiences who are likely to book a stay at Constance Hotels & Resorts. To achieve this, it is important to conduct market research to understand current trends, as they evolve quickly.

This approach allows for the development of targeted and tailored strategies while staying aligned with the brand's values and objectives. Participant #2 emphasizes the importance of not straying from what the brand represents in order to maintain its DNA while creating content that interests and engages the audience. In the realm of communication, PR strategies rely heavily on the creation and dissemination of compelling content to keep the public engaged and stimulate their minds and imagination. This involves elements like storytelling, which plays a crucial role in crafting narratives that captivate and engage the

audience, making the brand's message more relatable and memorable. As explained by Participant #2, it is an efficient way to highlight the areas of expertise of the hotels, such as gastronomy, sommelier services, or wellness.

All year long, this storytelling approach is directly embedded in press releases to sell a dream and evoke an imaginative world. These press releases enable the brand to promote itself and showcase new events, products, services, or collaborations. By utilizing storytelling, the brand generates engagement, as it captures the reader's interest and makes them feel connected to the narrative being shared.

Participant #2 illustrates this idea: "For example, we often focus our efforts during January and February, when people feel the winter blues and are eager to escape. We showcase sunny skies, beaches, and dreamy destinations to inspire them to plan their next vacation at our hotels."

At the digital level, Participant #6 also emphasizes the importance of targeting different audiences with tailored approaches to engage as many people as possible. He explains the company's target audience funnel, which is used to distinctly address the mass audience or cold audience, who are unfamiliar with the brand- and the warm audience, who have already engaged with the brand. This approach allows departments to allocate the budget strategically based on the funnel and optimize conversion.

Media presence in general is also of paramount importance for maintaining a significant position in the market. As Participant #2 highlights, it ensures that the brand remains visible in the eyes of the public and the media. This visibility also provides an opportunity for the brand to showcase its assets, expertise, specialties, and even products, all with the goal of standing out from its competitors.

Participant #1 connects this idea of media presence to the concept of targeting discussed earlier. As she points out, it is crucial to maintain media visibility, but it only makes sense if it's done through the right communication channels and relevant media, targeting the appropriate audiences to reach potential future clients.

In summary, the participants show how Constance Hotels & Resorts fosters a strong brand identity and engages a diverse audience through relevant communication and content strategies. By leveraging storytelling, strategic timing, and targeted messaging across various media channels, the brand not only engages its audience but also ensures consistent alignment with its core values and objectives.

5.2.3 Digital engagement and partnerships

With the growing importance of digital platforms, Constance Hotels & Resorts' PR strategies place a strong emphasis on their digital presence. Participant #5 underscores the importance of a digital strategy in today's landscape, arguing that the majority of people engage with brands through their websites. She asserts, "If you are not present digitally, then nobody sees you."

It is crucial for Constance Hotels & Resorts to have comprehensive and high-quality digital platforms, as Participant #5 emphasizes, with E-business and online presence contributing 80 percent to the brand's image. She explains that the website is developed in four languages: French, English, Italian, and German. They are also active across all major social media platforms and have created individual Facebook accounts for each hotel.

Regarding social media, Participant #6 highlights the importance of a tailored and personalized strategy on each platform. In fact, "people look for different content on each platform, so we conducted an analysis to understand what type of information people seek on each platform and what works best to develop coherent strategies."

This digital presence also enables the organization of online giveaways to attract new audiences. It allows guiding these individuals to desired destinations, such as the website or other platforms for cross-selling, and significantly boosts engagement.

As previously discussed, targeting in campaigns is crucial for Constance Hotels & Resorts' public relations. Consequently, Participant #5 explains that the E-Business calendar is developed annually to explore various digital communication angles throughout the year.

For instance, the department is aware that December is a festive period, with many regular clients. They will therefore develop content based on the festive theme during that period.

Another strategy, which is the most relevant one according to Participant #3, is the use of partnerships. She believes in the importance of the development of luxury partnerships. By this, she means that by partnering with luxury brands, they create an opportunity to enhance their luxury image. For instance, by partnering with the French chocolate brand Valrhona, the brand demonstrates its luxury status and engages with its target consumers through strategic collaborations and tailored communication efforts.

When it comes to partnerships with influencers, it is crucial to select them carefully to ensure alignment with the brand's values and to positively represent the brand. Participant #6 highlights that influencer partnerships are managed both proactively and reactively due to the growing visibility and recognition of the brand. Therefore, a thorough reputation analysis is necessary before collaborating, both qualitatively and quantitatively, to maximize the chances of enhancing brand awareness. According to Participant #5, it is also important for Constance Hotels & Resorts to give influencers the freedom to communicate their own way; they are only guided in terms of the angles the brand wishes to highlight.

To further enhance media visibility, Constance Hotels & Resorts also focuses on media buys, which involves purchasing space in relevant media outlets. Participant #2 also highlights the importance of building relationships with these media outlets to facilitate negotiations and ensure more frequent coverage of the brand.

5.2.4 Diversity and staying up-to-date

The various industry trends and societal shifts make it more and more challenging for brands to ensure that their communications resonate with a broad and varied audience. That is the reason Constance Hotels & Resorts prioritizes staying on top of things to remain up to date and adapt to the market evolutions.

Participant #4 highlights the importance of staying up-to-date with all information, even the smallest details. As previously discussed, in the luxury sector, every detail, no matter

how minor, holds significance and can greatly influence the consumer's final choice. While products may appear similar, it is in the details that brands can differentiate themselves.

This necessitates ongoing innovation to continuously reassess and evolve. For instance, it is crucial for the brand to ensure diversity in its various content. While their criteria may depend on aesthetics, their priority, as noted by Participant #4, is "to avoid portraying luxury as reserved for only a certain type of people."

5.3 PR actions

Public relations actions at Constance Hotels & Resorts are meticulously crafted to reflect the brand's strategic objectives and core values, while also engaging with target audiences in meaningful ways. These specific actions must be aligned with the brand's goals and contribute to its overall image in the luxury hospitality sector.

5.3.1 Alignment with strategic objectives and brand values

Each action at Constance Hotels & Resorts is carefully designed to align with the company's strategic objectives and brand values. PR actions, through concrete and specific tasks, enable the achievement of short-term objectives. The example of eco-friendly actions illustrates the dynamic behind these PR actions. As Participant #2 explains, eco-friendly actions allow the brand to stay current because it recognizes the importance of staying up to date and continually innovating, as highlighted in the PR strategies section. The brand acknowledges the importance for customers that it makes ecological efforts, which in turn allows it to be recognized in press releases or in the media in general. This gives the opportunity for the brand to reinforce its identity and long-term vision.

5.3.2 Events and experiences

Constance Hotels & Resorts primarily focuses its PR actions on event organization to best promote the brand to both the public and the media. Indeed, corporate events are highlighted by all participants from the Communications department as a key action to achieve the main visibility objectives, offering an opportunity to position the brand and create engagement within the luxury sector.

As Participant #3 explains, corporate events play a crucial role in raising brand awareness. Through these events, Constance Hotels & Resorts invites renowned personalities who are experts in the experiences promoted by the event, such as gastronomy, sommelier services, and wellness. Participant #4 adds: “By bringing in new collaborators while maintaining the core concept, such events showcase the experiences within our hotels.” The presence of journalists from various markets allows the brand to reach a wide range of audiences.

For example, Participant #3 highlights the Festival Culinaire. She believes bringing international renowned Michelin-starred chefs generates buzz, as they represent prominent figures in specific markets. “The Festival Culinaire has a strong French influence due to the celebrity involvement, whereas the MCB TC Golf Championship has a strong English influence with many British golfers.” On one hand, this approach promotes the luxury aspect of the brand; on the other hand, it allows for the creation of content for the brand, such as press releases or media coverage generated by the journalists attending the event.

Participant #1 shares the same view as Participant #3, adding, 'These major events showcase the brand across different segments.’ According to her, the Festival Culinaire is also a perfect example of the relevance of such an event, arguing how it conveys the brand’s values and essence. The renowned chefs and notable personalities become associated with the brand, positioning the hotels in terms of gastronomy for example. The communication campaign surrounding the event generates buzz, and positions the brand “at a high level of excellence, demand, sharing, and training”.

In parallel with the selection of influencers, as mentioned in the PR strategies section, the choice of journalists attending these events is also of paramount importance in ensuring the brand’s reputation. Constance Hotels & Resorts takes a deliberate approach to carefully selecting reputable and sophisticated media outlets that align with the brand's image. This strategy allows the brand to engage with committed media, thereby maximizing media coverage after the event. If the journalists are impressed by the hotel, there is a possibility that they will produce more content than initially agreed upon.

Constance Hotels & Resorts also organizes PR events targeted at specific markets, which are generally smaller in scale compared to corporate events. These events help increase

brand awareness within the targeted country through local collaborations. For instance, if the brand partners with an Italian company, hosting a PR event in Italy would be beneficial to reach consumers familiar with that brand. However, Participant #2 notes that these PR events can be more challenging to organize than corporate events due to logistical complexities, especially when held on different continents.

5.3.3 Partnerships and collaborations

In the same vein, partnerships and collaborations at Constance Hotels & Resorts are carefully chosen to align with the values and objectives of the brand, as they maximize reach and visibility. These partnerships include collaborations with influencers and journalists, as mentioned earlier.

Constance Hotels & Resorts goes a step further by implementing additional actions within these collaborations to maximize their impact. Participant #2 highlights the brand's use of press trips, organized with selected journalists and influencers. The brand conducts two types of press trips to generate diverse content. Thematic trips focus on showcasing a specific experience at the hotel with a program centered around the theme, providing a particular angle for the resulting content. Additionally, there are general experience trips that offer a broader view of the hotel's offerings throughout the year, allowing for a more comprehensive discovery of all the hotel's experiences. This can be arranged through barter deals, as Participant #4 explains, which involve an agreement between the brand and the partner to produce specific content in exchange for complimentary hotel stays.

Continuing with the idea of collaboration, Participant #5 provides an example of Constance Art Love, an annual campaign launched by the brand in partnership with prominent artists, demonstrating the power of such partnerships. This initiative aims to highlight the intangible luxury associated with Constance Hotels & Resorts. The concept involves inviting artists to the hotels with the idea that "our hotels will be their muse and they will be able to create a masterpiece." Furthermore, the brand has chosen to donate the proceeds to charity. This dual collaboration with both artists and charitable organizations enhances the brand's image by extending its impact beyond the traditional luxury experience.

5.4 Relationship building

Building and nurturing relationships is a cornerstone of effective public relations, particularly in the luxury hospitality sector. The interviews reveal several key areas where Constance Hotels & Resorts focuses its efforts to establish and maintain strong relationships with stakeholders.

5.4.1 Establishing trust-based relationships and reputation

A fundamental aspect of public relations at Constance Hotels & Resorts is the cultivation of trust-based relationships with publics and partners. Building this foundation provides the credibility needed to engage with stakeholders, including the media, in a meaningful way.

Effective trust-based relationships are primarily built through face-to-face meetings, which help establish trust between the brand and journalists. These interactions allow the brand's image to be conveyed physically, reflecting its essence and identity. It's crucial to represent the brand with both elegance and a sense of warmth, as Participant #1 explains. Such presence at events, for example, reinforces the brand's image and encourages journalists to write positive articles. Participant #2 argues the importance of staying natural for the journalist to live the Constance experience, rather than just hearing factual information.

Participant #2 believes authenticity is key in the public relations profession. She adds “We genuinely believe in our products and services, and when we convey our passion and confidence, journalists can sense it. This authenticity influences their overall experience and how they portray it in their writing”. She believes that public relations play a crucial role in boosting brand visibility and establishing trust. They help create a positive connection with the public and have a major influence on the brand’s reputation.”

5.5 Measuring results

In the realm of public relations, accurately measuring the impact and success of strategies is crucial for continuous improvement and ensuring that the brand's goals are met. At Constance Hotels & Resorts, several methods are implemented to evaluate the effectiveness of its PR campaigns.

5.5.1 Monitoring performance and media reach

Overall, to understand the impact of public relations messages, reach is a valuable indicator to assess how many people are affected by these messages and to further analyze the specific target audience reached by each message. The target audience varies depending on the media outlet used.

As Participants #2 and #3 point out, it is challenging to quantify results in traditional press. The evaluation often relies on intuition and assessing the media coverage to understand its value. In contrast, measuring results online is easier, as metrics like likes, clicks, and engagement provide more tangible data.

Another valuable metric, presented by Participant #4, is media enquiries. Collaboration requests from various media outlets demonstrate their interest in the brand. This metric helps understand the effectiveness of PR efforts in driving brand visibility.

The monitoring of the results can also be calculated through KPIs, also called Key Performance Indicators. This digital tool allows companies to set objectives and get results after a campaign through numbers and percentages. By systematically tracking results, you can easily see what worked or not and adjust the future campaigns. Participant #6 argues that “people want to see dynamic, unique content that captivates them. Our task is to maintain that allure and keep our audience engaged. Posting identical content everywhere leads to poor engagement.”

5.5.2 Assessing the quality of media interactions

Beyond just measuring the reach, it's key to evaluate the quality of interactions with the media. This involves analyzing the journalist tone of voice. This allows the brand to understand if it is portrayed in a positive, neutral or negative light. By monitoring the tone used, the PR departments can also have an overview of the reception of their messages, as well as their alignment with the desired brand image. As Participant #4 describes, this allows them to understand what the journalist thought of their stay at the hotel.

5.5.3 Internal reporting and evaluation

To ensure a thorough evaluation of PR strategies, internal tools and reports are key. Indeed, from an internal perspective, communication reports provide a detailed analysis of campaign effectiveness. These reports compile information on various performance metrics, offering a holistic view of the success of PR activities. Based on the coverages, the communication report is drafted at the end of each month and presented to the management team. This provides an overview of the month's activities and allows the measurement of the value of the coverages. Through these reports, Constance Hotels & Resorts can maintain a proactive approach to its PR efforts and adapt them accordingly.

5.6 Challenges within the luxury hospitality industry

In the highly competitive and ever-evolving luxury hospitality industry, various challenges arise that require constant adaptation and strategic thinking. Indeed, understanding these challenges ensures the delivery of quality services that align with the expectations of luxury consumers.

5.6.1 Adapting to digital evolution and trends

The rapid pace of digital evolution and the emergence of new trends present significant challenges for luxury hospitality brands. Participant #1 highlights the digitalization of public relations, including traditional print media. Therefore, Constance Hotels & Resorts favors a mixed marketing approach.

Another challenge that comes with this digital evolution is adapting to emerging trends. As Participant #5 points out, with the evolution of platforms, it can be tempting to follow what competitors are doing. However, according to Constance Hotels & Resorts, the key is to adhere to its own strategy and not create a Threads account, for example, just because other companies are doing it. She says “The entire company is moving towards making all tools more user-friendly, ensuring it is easy for the client to find information and communicate with us.”

Indeed, gaining visibility across various social media platforms is relatively easy, but the challenge lies in selecting platforms that align with the brand's luxury image. For instance,

Participant #5 mentions TikTok. While many companies have opened TikTok accounts to stay current, Constance Hotels & Resorts has chosen to focus on other platforms. The brand recognizes that TikTok may not be the right fit for conveying its luxury image and would not add value to the brand's online presence.

5.6.2 Managing resources and budget constraints

Budget constraints are also a significant limitation in public relations. The larger the budget, the more freedom there is to create new campaigns. While it is tempting to compare oneself to international hotel brands with bigger budgets, it is crucial to focus on one's own resources and work within those constraints. Participant #2 argues, "Comparatively, we may not match the spending power of larger international luxury brands, but with what we have, I believe we perform quite effectively. Certainly, with more resources, we could achieve even greater impact."

Additionally, advertising displays are very expensive. Given the budget allocated to public relations, it is challenging to launch a campaign across four markets simultaneously. The teams are therefore forced to make a choice and usually select only one market, the most relevant one for the campaign, which is likely to attract the most attention.

5.6.3 Responsiveness to unforeseen events and crises

The luxury hospitality industry must be prepared to handle unforeseen events and crises with precision and meticulousness. Participant #2 identifies crises within hotels as one of the primary challenges and emphasizes the importance of responding quickly to maintain the brand's reputation. She believes the key to managing these situations effectively is "having a prepared statement ready ensures consistent messaging during such times, which is a significant challenge".

Participant #3 gives the example of the COVID-19 crisis and the risk of bankruptcy for one of the hotels in the Maldives. The management put pressure on the team to boost the hotel's communication. Creativity was necessary, but it was challenging because, given the period, there was no new content or updates to communicate. It was crucial to find a unique

communication angle. This is why each year, the teams create a PR calendar with different angles to explore throughout the year, ensuring constant renewal.

5.6.4 Competition and market positioning

As outlined in the literature review, the competition in the luxury hospitality industry compels Constance Hotels & Resorts to put in extra effort to differentiate itself from its competitors. The brand's primary strategy isn't to be overly flashy but rather to honor its tagline, "True by Nature," while maintaining elegance and subtlety.

To stand out, the teams focus on innovation. Participant #2 notes when they all sell the same type of product, "it's crucial to offer unique experiences and effectively communicate these messages to our target audience." The brand emphasizes staying true to itself and avoiding imitation to maintain maximum authenticity. As Participant #5 puts it, "We know we have to do it the Constance way."

5.7 Discussion

The interviews conducted as part of this research offer valuable insights into the role of public relations in shaping the luxury image of Constance Hotels & Resorts. By studying the diverse approaches taken by the Communications and E-Business departments, the present study provides a comprehensive understanding of both traditional and digital PR strategies. The research underscores the significance of a meticulously crafted strategy in achieving the company's luxury goals.

The first objective was to understand the internal perception of luxury at Constance Hotels & Resorts. The findings show that the company's vision of luxury is deeply embedded in its PR efforts, ensuring alignment with its objectives. The focus on originality, service and quality is pivotal in crafting a strong brand personality, a concept supported by the literature review. The statement of Participant #2 underscores the importance of maintaining the brand's unique DNA to offer a unique product in a competitive market: "At Constance, we offer a very particular, exceptional hospitality with personalized service for our clients and experiences that differ from what our competitors present."

However, delivering high-quality services comes with challenges such as digital evolution, budget constraints, crisis management, and intense competition. The primary challenge, highlighted in both the interviews and the literature review, is digital evolution. Effective PR requires a holistic organizational approach to integrate digital strategies within broader organizational goals. Constance Hotels & Resorts effectively balances traditional and digital strategies to address this challenge.

The second and main objective of the research was to identify the PR efforts aimed at enhancing brand perception and customer engagement. The analysis of PR strategies and actions reveal an efficient approach to maximizing results in the luxury hospitality sector, and address a notable gap in the existing literature. The detailed examination of the various PR strategies brings to light the multifaceted approach to the creation of a luxury image at Constance Hotels & Resorts. The strategic focus on brand positioning and image, as well as the meticulous curation of content, highlight the brand's commitment to elegance. The use of specific elements such as tone of voice, vocabulary, and visual aesthetics aligns with the luxury market's expectations and helps in maintaining and enhancing a coherent and luxurious brand identity.

Furthermore, the practical application of these strategies through various PR actions, including high-profile events and targeted partnerships, illustrates how Constance Hotels & Resorts translates its strategic objectives into tangible outcomes. Corporate events like the Festival Culinaire and the Constance Art Love campaign are an opportunity for the brand to not only engage target audiences, but also to solidify the brand's presence. These actions show how Constance Hotels & Resorts leverages media presence and influencer collaborations to enhance its visibility and appeal. The findings give valuable insights into the concrete efforts made by luxury hospitality brands to implement effective PR strategies. By navigating these actions, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of how Constance Hotels & Resorts navigates the complexities of the luxury market to enhance its brand status.

The third and last objective of the research was to gain insight into the role of interpersonal relationships shaping the luxury image of the brand. While I first thought that the relational

aspect would play a significant role in the research, the findings show a surprising shift in focus among the participants. It became evident that the primary emphasis is on the PR efforts, including PR strategies and actions, with relationship-building being an underlying yet crucial component.

The participants highlight that effective relationship-building is key to Constance Hotels & Resorts' public relations efforts. Establishing and maintaining trust-based relationships with stakeholders, including media representatives, partners, or publics, is central to the brand's strategy. Face-to-face interactions during events are particularly significant in fostering trust, authenticity and credibility. The focus on genuine passion and confidence helps shape a positive perception of the brand. Media partners are in turn more likely to represent the brand favorably in their coverage.

Furthermore, the meticulous attention to detail in professional communication underscores the brand's commitment to maintaining a positive image. This focus on meticulous correspondence aligns with the luxury standards upheld by Constance Hotels & Resorts and reinforces the brand's reputation for excellence.

In summary, the insights gained from the interviews highlight the intricate relationship between PR efforts, and relationship-building in shaping the luxury image of Constance Hotels & Resorts. The interviews underscore the importance of a comprehensive PR strategy that uses both traditional and digital approaches to achieve the brand's luxury goals. Constance Hotels & Resorts' focus on maintaining an original brand identity through strategic positioning, meticulous content curation, and distinctive PR actions reflects its commitment to excellence in the luxury sector.

Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to explore the role of public relations in crafting and communicating the luxury image at Constance Hotels & Resorts. During my internship, I immersed myself in the world of luxury hospitality to understand how public relations strategies are developed to enhance the brand's image.

The study demonstrates how Constance Hotels & Resorts strategically uses public relations to enhance its luxury image, aligning its internal perception of luxury with its PR efforts. This addresses the first research question by showing how employees from the Communications and E-Business departments perceive their roles in crafting and maintaining the brand's luxury image. This also addresses the first objective: examining the internal perception of luxury. The company's commitment to maintaining a distinctive brand identity in a competitive market is focused on originality, quality service, and meticulous brand positioning. This answers the second objective: identifying the PR efforts. Indeed, the brand balances traditional and digital PR strategies, thereby enhancing brand perception and customer engagement.

The study further reveals that despite challenges such as digital evolution, budget constraints, and crisis management- topics covered under the first objective of examining the challenges associated with maintaining a luxury image- Constance Hotels & Resorts navigates these issues through strategic planning and innovation. This illustrates how employees adapt their strategies to uphold luxury standards, relating back to the first research question. High-profile events and targeted partnerships play a crucial role in translating luxury objectives into measurable achievements, thereby reinforcing the company's position in the luxury hospitality sector.

Additionally, relationship-building, initially perceived as a focus, emerges as an accessory element in shaping the brand's luxury image. This addresses the third objective of exploring the role of interpersonal relations and covers the second research question by showing how interactions enhance the brand's authenticity and credibility. Thus, in turn, complements PR strategies and actions, contributing to a positive luxury experience. Overall, this research addresses the gap identified in the literature review concerning PR

efforts. While the literature review highlights what public relations and luxury hospitality entail, there has been limited research on the specific actions required to achieve these objectives. By examining both the definitions and implemented actions, this study provides insight into how Constance Hotels & Resorts achieves its communication goals.

Limitations of the study

This study relied exclusively on internal interviews with employees at Constance Hotels & Resorts, which only provides a subjective perspective. The research objective of the research being to understand how the company's internal strategies are crafted and implemented, it does not give space for an objective viewpoint. Furthermore, the participants were unlikely to critically address negative aspects. This is due to a lack of critical distance and fear of repercussions. This can result in an overly positive representation of the company's public relations efforts and may hide areas for improvement.

Related to that point of subjectivity, the study also does not include external perspectives, which might have provided a comparison between employees and stakeholders outside the organization. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the research, while rich in detail, may lack applicability to other luxury hospitality brands or industries. A mixed-methods approach in future research could offer a more balanced view to understand the impact and perception of public relations strategies in luxury hospitality.

Additionally, the interviews were based on only six participants, chosen based on their knowledge of the topic. This approach aimed to focus the study on experienced individuals but also reduced the nuance of the findings. Notably, participants with more experience within the company, such as Participants #1, #2, and #5, were more comfortable expressing their views and provided richer insights. Consequently, the results are more focused on their perspectives. Including a broader range of participants in the study might have offered a more comprehensive view and highlighted diverse viewpoints.

Lastly, the specific case of Constance Hotels & Resorts may limit the applicability of the findings to other markets. While this study provides valuable insights on the Indian Ocean

market, it should be noted that the strategies and challenges faced by Constance Hotels & Resorts are based on specific local market standards and conditions. Indeed, strategies successful in one context or market may not necessarily apply to others. Future research could benefit from comparing a range of companies on different markets to provide a nuanced understanding of public relations strategies universally.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Interview with Participant #1 (Group Communications Manager)

Q1: How do you define the luxury image at Constance Hotels & Resorts ?

R: Luxury is primarily about attention to detail, starting with the setup, having an extraordinary location, and extraordinary infrastructures. When comparing hotels that often have extraordinary infrastructures, it ultimately comes down to the service and the details of the service. The details of the offerings, the little touches, everything is in the details in luxury. It's really the little extra things, the well-thought-out touches, every detail is anticipated for the guest. The service is very immersive. We accompany the guest throughout their journey.

Q2: Can you describe the key strategies used within the department to promote the luxury image of Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: First and foremost, it's about paying great attention to the brand and everything we project as an image, whether it's through our communication tools (photos, videos, writings, everything that represents the brand image must be immaculate, without any spelling errors, focusing on the small details). It's about how you write, the photos you use and convey, ensuring that logos are well-protected and not distorted, everything must be impeccable. There is also a type of imagery that corresponds to luxury; this involves paying attention to detail in a photo. From styling to accessories, every detail of an image must be perfect, including the model, the outfit they wear, the accessories, and the type of pose—they all need to be considered.

Therefore, the strategies must align across all levels of production, focusing on brand protection. Additionally, this extends to relationships and follow-up communications. Regarding email follow-ups, luxury standards dictate that responses must be within 24 hours; you can't keep someone waiting for 48 hours. This requires a certain level of diligence. Emails must be clean, error-free, and professional, contributing to the brand image in written form. The same applies to verbal communication; when meeting with journalists, it's essential to maintain elegance, promote the brand, and avoid any unprofessional behavior. We reflect the brand's DNA, which includes a sense of family and

conviviality. While being yourself is important, it's crucial to remember that you are representing a luxury brand in everything you do.

Operationally, the approach differs. The higher you go in luxury, the more criteria are established. For example, in a three-star hotel, a server might be required to attend to a guest within three minutes instead of one, and there might not be complimentary peanuts or coasters with drinks. The higher you go in luxury, the more stringent the standards become.

Q3: How do public relations activities contribute to the overall brand image and reputation of Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: Our main job is to generate as much publicity as possible, but in the right way, through the appropriate distribution channels, targeting our specific audience. We don't want to reach everyone; we want to reach our future clients.

Influence is key, and it's achieved through the media. We aim to get maximum exposure in the right media outlets to reach the right people, who are potential clients.

The website photos and videos are our responsibility; we contribute to the client's decision-making process. It also involves giveaways for tour operators and providing production tools to the sales teams to help them sell. All collateral must represent the image of our tour operators as well. We target potential clients and those in the decision-making phase, and we also serve as a support center for other departments, such as the sales department.

Q4: How do you measure the effectiveness of public relations efforts in promoting the luxury image?

R: We have an excellent analytical tool called the communication report, which allows us to measure the value of the coverage we receive. For example, an advertisement page has a certain value in a magazine, which varies depending on the media outlet. The value of a page depends on the reach and quality of the media. A media outlet might have a large reach but may not be one we aspire to be in; it has to be a combination of both. For

instance, an advertisement page in Le Point has a value of X, whereas a press page, an article, has a value of Y and generally holds more value than an advertisement page. This way, we can measure the value of all the press returns we get in different media outlets, calculated through a communication report that is sent out every month.

Q5: Can you share an example of a successful campaign or initiative that significantly improved the perception of luxury at Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: We have several corporate events where we invite international journalists to cover our events, which are primarily aimed at positioning our brand. While there is an informational aspect, the main goal is to enhance the brand's visibility through events like the Culinary Festival for gastronomy, the Paulée for wine, and the MCB TC Tour Championship for golf. These major events showcase the brand across different segments. Additionally, we have initiatives in collaboration with the e-business team, such as the Art Love Campaign and the loyalty program. We also conduct various PR events and advertising campaigns.

Taking the Culinary Festival as an example, I believe it perfectly conveys Constance's values and essence. It involves sharing experiences with renowned chefs and notable personalities who become associated with our brand, positioning our hotels in terms of gastronomy. It generates buzz through the participation of journalists, the communication campaign surrounding the event, and by positioning our brand at a high level of excellence, demand, sharing, and training. This creates significant online presence, with participants posting on social media and journalists covering the event.

Q6: How do you ensure the consistency of the Constance Hotels & Resorts image across different platforms and communications?

R: We have a brand guideline, essentially a brand book that provides a framework for graphic design. However, not everyone has access to this; we have experts in our department who understand exactly which image reflects our luxury brand identity. It requires expertise in branding and communication. Throughout my career, I've worked with various brands—3-star, 4-star, 5-star. You can adapt, but you must have the ability to put yourself in the shoes of the target audience and determine what is most suitable for

each brand. It's a matter of expertise, profession, and it lies at the core of what we do. This knowledge is acquired through studies and practice, but I believe there's also an innate aspect. You have to navigate within the brand's universe and especially understand the potential client's perspective. You need to communicate effectively with the client you want to attract. It requires projection, empathy, and imagination.

Q7: Can you discuss the challenges you face in maintaining or enhancing the luxury image of Constance Hotels & Resorts through public relations activities?

R: We operate in a very competitive environment, particularly in Mauritius, as well as in destinations like the Maldives where there are many hotels. We are a brand based in Mauritius with a Mauritian DNA. We remain a local brand but now have an impressive international portfolio. The difference really lies in our impact force in terms of budget, network, and so on. We have to work within our means, and that's where the difference in PR, media relations, comes in.

We need to be creative to get more attention than others, knowing that Constance has always wanted to avoid being too showy. The brand's DNA does not aim to portray itself as the best; we do it but always with a certain elegance and simplicity, staying "True by Nature." We are careful not to overdo it.

Q8: How do you ensure that the luxury image of Constance Hotels & Resorts evolves and remains relevant in a constantly changing market, considering consumer preferences and industry trends?

R: We are well aware that everything has become digital, including the press. We can't rely solely on traditional print media; fortunately, the press has also evolved by going digital. For instance, magazines now have websites. Therefore, we favor a mixed marketing approach. Through our customer analysis, we have noticed that among the high socio-economic classes (CSP++), those with a certain level of means still read the press. However, the percentages vary from year to year; we tend to reduce print each year in favor of digital. The entire company is moving towards making all tools more

user-friendly, ensuring it is easy for the client to find information and communicate with us.

Q9: How do you adapt your public relations and communication strategies to meet the needs of different markets and properties?

R: Each destination has its own target audience. Depending on the destination, we know which market to target. Cultural considerations are also crucial; you don't address people in the Middle East the same way as those in France or here. Certain images or messages resonate more with specific markets. For example, sustainability may be more significant in France, whereas Italy might be more interested in beach-related topics. It's essential to adapt to these diverse cultures.

To gather all this information, our sales teams and PR offices in different countries provide us with annual trends, expectations, and market developments. They give us an overview of the market dynamics—whether they are more inclined towards epicureanism, or if there's a trend of people wanting to travel far post-COVID. They provide us with general travel trends and specific market demands. Based on this, we adjust our visuals, communication strategies, and angles.

Given our somewhat isolated location, working with PR offices in each market allows us to have representatives who understand the media landscape. These local contacts are based on the ground, familiar with journalists and knowledgeable about the market. They provide us with analyses and propose PR plans tailored to each market. This collaboration is indispensable.

Regarding language, it remains consistent, but the angles can vary. Our tone of voice is standardized, reflecting our criteria of quality, excellence, and elegance. For instance, the tone may differ between C Resorts and Constance Hotels & Resorts. However, we can adjust the angle—for example, focusing more on sustainability or wellness. The angle and visuals may change, but the tone remains consistent.

Q10: How do you adapt your public relations and communication strategies to meet the needs of different markets and properties?

R: Each destination has its target audience. Depending on the destination, you know which market to aim for. There's also a cultural aspect; you don't address people from the Middle East the same way you would people from here or the French. Some images or messages resonate more with certain markets. For instance, France might be more sensitive to sustainability, while Italy might be more interested in beach-related content. It's essential to adapt to different cultures.

To gather all this information, the sales teams and PR offices in various countries provide us with annual trends, expectations, and market developments. They brief us on market trends, such as whether people are more inclined to travel far post-COVID, giving us a comprehensive view of travel tendencies and market-specific preferences. Based on this, we adjust our visuals, communication, and angles.

Being somewhat isolated here, working with PR offices in each of our markets allows us to have local representatives who know the media landscape. These representatives, familiar with local journalists and the market, can provide analyses and propose PR plans tailored to their market. This local expertise is indispensable.

While our language remains consistent, the angles can change. Our way of speaking is standardized to reflect our quality, excellence, and elegance. We have a specific tone for Constance Hotels & Resorts that differs from C Resorts. However, we can adjust the angle, focusing more on sustainability or wellness, for example. The angle and photos might change, but the tone remains the same.

Appendix 2 - Interview with Participant #2 (PR & Campaign Manager)

Q1: How do you define the luxury image at Constance Hotels & Resorts ?

R: At Constance, we offer a very particular, exceptional hospitality with personalized service for our clients and experiences that differ from what our competitors present. For me, luxury at Constance means attention to detail. This means that every detail matters so

that the client feels privileged. We provide experiences in exceptional locations in dream destinations on preserved islands.

Q2: Can you describe the key strategies used within the department to promote the luxury image of Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: Throughout the year, we implement press releases to promote our hotels and what we offer, whether it's new events, products, services, PR events, or collaborations with luxury brands like the implementation of Sisley products in our hotels, which garnered a significant press release. Through these releases, we also highlight our gastronomic experiences, which is a focal point at Constance. Gastronomy is deeply embedded in Constance's DNA, with collaborations featuring chefs who regularly visit our hotels to promote culinary excellence. They partner with our hotel chefs to host dinners for both in-house guests and external diners interested in the culinary experience. These events allow us to further emphasize Constance's gastronomic offerings, inviting journalists to cover such events through press releases. Sometimes, these collaborations involve a chef's own brand, and we promote these experiences through our events, which is a strong feature at Constance.

The expertise of our experts is also crucial. We highlight sommelier expertise and related events through advertorials or press releases. Occasionally, we organize PR events where our sommeliers can participate in various markets. It's been a while since we've done this, as scheduling sommeliers with European events can be challenging.

We also emphasize our eco-friendly actions because environmental issues are increasingly important today. It's part of the luxury experience when you stay at Constance. Guests expect us to make efforts in this area, and recognition is important. These actions are conveyed through press releases. We also engage in smaller activities with local journalists. A few years ago, we implemented beehives at Constance Prince Maurice, among the first to do so, producing our own honey used in our culinary offerings, which was well-received and generated significant publicity.

Throughout the year, we continue to implement PR actions, press releases, or media campaigns to promote the brand, new developments, and collaborations we establish.

Q3: How do public relations activities contribute to the overall brand image and reputation of Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: Public relations activities are crucial for brand image. It's a very important aspect for any brand because it directly influences brand reputation. We strive, through strategic efforts, to build trust, credibility, and convey positive perceptions to our audience.

Public relations are particularly instrumental in enhancing brand visibility and establishing a brand as trustworthy. They foster a positive connection with the public and significantly impact brand reputation. The actions you take will inevitably influence your audience. It's essential to stay present in the public's mind; disappearing from the market means being forgotten. While Constance isn't an international brand, we are well-known in certain markets. However, it's crucial not to remain silent. We consistently implement PR actions, primarily targeting our main market in Europe across all Constance destinations: Maldives, Seychelles, Madagascar, and Mauritius, for now.

All of this plays a role in shaping customer perceptions. We focus strongly on press relations, forging strong ties with media outlets so they think of us whenever there's a special feature or themed issue, like a "Gift Ideas" page towards the end of the year. It's always valuable to be featured in such sections.

If you're not visible to the public and media, you can quickly be forgotten. To maintain positive visibility, we collaborate with brands, highlight our assets, expertise, specialties, and products, inspiring people year-round.

Q4: How do you measure the effectiveness of public relations efforts in promoting the luxury image?

R: In traditional press, it's quite challenging to measure and quantify results. It's much easier online, for instance, during a social media campaign. You can easily calculate likes, clicks, shares, and time spent on the article.

In traditional press, it's more complicated, but I would say you know an action has worked well when your topic is picked up by high-quality press. For example, after the MCB TC Tour Championship golf tournament, we will soon report on how much coverage we received in the press and measure the value of that coverage in each magazine. It's mainly about the media coverage obtained from events, press releases, etc. Some press releases interest the media, others don't, and you can tell right away.

For instance, locally, we issued a press release about the Music&Wine event, and I didn't expect so much coverage. The Mauritian press was very interested in the fact that we organized a gastronomic event before the holidays. It's innovative, and such concepts are rare in hotels in Mauritius. You measure the impact of your event or press release mainly in terms of media coverage.

Q5: Can you share an example of a successful campaign or initiative that significantly improved the perception of luxury at Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: We've conducted numerous campaigns in recent years. One of the most recent, which I believe has been quite effective, though we're still awaiting a detailed report, is an outdoor campaign in France. We placed billboards in airports on the French Riviera, including Saint-Tropez, during the summer. We targeted airports with high summer traffic in the South of France, where there's a significant movement of our target audience, specifically the CSP+ travelers.

At the same time, we also ran campaigns in certain cinemas in Paris and on selected television channels that cater to our clientele. This campaign lasted approximately two months and was quite comprehensive, spanning airports, television, and cinemas.

A few years ago, we also launched a major campaign across our four main European markets: France, Italy, Germany, and England. It was a 360-degree campaign involving advertising in traditional press and articles that were syndicated to media websites. The media outlets promoted these articles on their sites via banners linking directly to our content. These articles also had redirection links to our website, allowing us to track

engagement metrics such as time spent reading, click-through rates to our site, and overall interaction.

This enabled our media buying agencies to provide detailed reports on the effectiveness of the campaign, including metrics on article views, engagement, and sharing. We also aired TV spots concurrently with this campaign, making it a comprehensive effort across traditional press, online channels, and television.

Outdoor advertising is costly, especially when conducting campaigns simultaneously across four markets. For instance, we're currently working with Cream agency on an upcoming billboard campaign exclusively in England, focusing all our budget there due to its importance as a key market for us.

This year, we've adjusted our strategy slightly. Typically, we run advertising campaigns simultaneously across Europe. However, this year, we've decided to focus market by market. We started with France, and next, we'll target England, followed by Italy and Germany in the coming months, unless we observe shifts in market trends that necessitate prioritizing one market over another. Strategies evolve in response to changing market dynamics, requiring constant adaptation.

Q6: How do you ensure the consistency of the Constance Hotels & Resorts image across different platforms and communications?

R: We all speak roughly the same language at Constance in general. We have established brand guidelines that serve as our reference point. It's essential to include the tone of voice. For example, Constance and C Resorts are two different products, each with its own concept, so they require different approaches in communication. We adhere to consistent visuals and language. The messages are coherent with each other thanks to this foundational base we have.

I think it works quite well across all platforms—whether it's online articles, blogs, social media, or traditional media, we convey the same message that reflects the brand's core values. I believe we are well-coordinated between communications and e-business, which

handles digital aspects. They speak to their target audience, and we speak to ours in a manner that ensures overall coherence. Our press releases aren't written drastically differently from our online content. There has been some work done within the teams to ensure everyone speaks the same language, whether in spoken communication, the images selected, the press outlets chosen, or the influencers selected. We don't just choose any newspaper or use any image. Everything is carefully considered so that the brand's values are consistently conveyed at all levels.

Q7: Can you discuss the challenges you face in maintaining or enhancing the luxury image of Constance Hotels & Resorts through public relations activities?

R: The challenges in PR revolve around constantly changing trends and evolving client expectations within the hospitality sector. We must adapt to these shifts. Another challenge is handling crises. Occasionally, hotels face crises, and we need to react swiftly to maintain a good reputation. Regarding crises, our team manages quite well due to our responsiveness. However, having a prepared statement ready ensures consistent messaging during such times, which is a significant challenge.

Additionally, there's the need to innovate and differentiate ourselves from competitors. We all sell dreams—white sand beaches and turquoise lagoons—but standing out becomes increasingly difficult with the rising quality of products in our destinations. It's crucial to offer unique experiences and effectively communicate these messages to our target audience.

Budget constraints are also a factor; we must work within our allocated budget. While we could achieve more with a larger budget, we manage well within our means. Comparatively, we may not match the spending power of larger international luxury brands, but with what we have, I believe we perform quite effectively. Certainly, with more resources, we could achieve even greater impact.

Q8: How do you plan and execute public relations campaigns to enhance the luxury image of Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: It depends on the specific action at hand. There are several aspects to consider. Firstly, regarding advertising campaigns, we conduct market research to understand current trends. Subsequently, we develop a targeted strategy aligned with these trends, always in accordance with the values and goals of the brand. We thoroughly analyze our target audience and tailor our approach to resonate with them while staying true to our brand identity.

We also carefully consider the timing of our communications. We don't communicate just any time of the year. We aim to capture attention when our target audience might be considering booking a stay with us. For example, we often focus our efforts during January and February, when people feel the winter blues and are eager to escape. We showcase sunny skies, beaches, and dreamy destinations to inspire them to plan their next vacation at our hotels.

Additionally, we strive to create compelling narratives through storytelling that engage and resonate with our audience. We highlight our expertise in areas such as gastronomy, sommelier services, and we explore wellness, although this presents challenges.

Q9: How do you adapt your campaigns to appeal to the luxury market segment?

R: It starts with understanding where our clientele is located, what they read, watch, and where they frequent. For instance, we wouldn't place advertisements in a small shopping center in a remote village. We target the right channels using sophisticated tools provided by our agencies to pinpoint our market segment and audience locations. This analysis guides our communication strategy, ensuring it aligns with our brand values and goals while resonating with our target audience.

Careful media selection is crucial. Today, we know our media well—where to communicate and with whom. There are no more secrets. We highlight unique characteristics and high-end personalized services through our messaging. We collaborate extensively with influencers and media outlets that share our values and align with our brand identity. We receive numerous influencer requests, but we carefully select those that

match our brand ethos. Negotiations ensue, ensuring mutual benefit before any collaboration begins.

Press trips are another cornerstone of our strategy. We evaluate journalist and influencer requests, negotiating agreements that fit our brand. Throughout the year, we organize thematic press trips—like when we introduced Sisley products, inviting beauty journalists to experience our wellness offerings. These trips integrate wellness activities such as morning yoga and nutrition-focused menus, complementing spa treatments and showcasing our holistic wellness approach over several days.

Other press trips focus on the overall hotel experience, allowing journalists to immerse themselves as guests. They sample restaurant specialties, enjoy massages, and participate in activities like kayaking or golf, providing a comprehensive experience for their coverage.

We also invite journalists to attend our events, such as the MCB TC Tour Championship golf tournament, which attracts golf-specific journalists alongside sport and lifestyle magazines interested in hotel features like golf facilities and competitions.

Strategic media purchases complement our PR efforts. With PR representatives worldwide, particularly in key markets, we build relationships with media outlets. Each year, we invest in advertising space in selected media, negotiating packages that often include online articles, fostering ongoing media support and publications.

Ultimately, public relations success hinges on relationship-building, ensuring media think of us for luxury, travel, or dream vacation topics. It's about nurturing these connections to secure ongoing coverage and support.

Q10: Could you explain the importance of the human and relational aspect in real-life situations within the context of public relations at Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: It's crucial to be present and represent the brand effectively. The human element remains essential—personal contact and meaningful conversations. If you don't build relationships with the press or journalists, they might not portray your brand as you wish. That's why we

prioritize being present and attentive. When journalists visit, they often have questions or specific requests, and it's important to address these promptly. Whether it's providing additional information or arranging meetings with event organizers, creating these connections is vital.

At Constance, fostering these relationships comes naturally. We genuinely believe in our products and services, and when we convey our passion and confidence, journalists can sense it. This authenticity influences their overall experience and how they portray it in their writing. In this profession, authenticity is key; it's not about delivering scripted presentations but allowing journalists to truly experience Constance and convey that experience authentically.

When journalists visit one of our properties, such as in Mauritius, and later think about our Seychelles locations, it often leads to continued contact or future collaborations. Building these connections ensures that journalists remember us positively and are more likely to reach out again in the future. It's about nurturing these relationships and conveying the right messages so that we are satisfied with the resulting articles.

While some journalists may base their articles solely on press kits or website information, we believe that true authenticity comes from the personal experience we provide. It's about welcoming journalists warmly, ensuring they have a memorable stay, and enabling them to understand and convey the essence of Constance Hotels & Resorts accurately.

Appendix 3 - Interview with Participant #3 (Communications Executive)

Q1: How do you define the luxury image at Constance Hotels & Resorts ?

R: To me, the luxury image is found throughout Constance Hotels & Resorts. It encompasses refined gastronomy, exceptional accommodations, breathtaking locations—where every step into the hotel offers an incredible view. Luxury also entails exclusivity and intimacy. For instance, during my stay at Constance Prince Maurice, while by the pool, a pool attendant came over and offered to clean my sunglasses—an unparalleled luxury experience. If you're a bit chilly at the bar, a server will offer you a blanket. It's in these small actions, these details.

In terms of communication, Constance Hotels & Resorts has long established itself as a luxurious brand within the hospitality industry through proven excellence. Our current work focuses on maintaining this luxury image. This is largely achieved through refined vocabulary, using elegant and poetic words, and maintaining a clean graphic image. Words and images must evoke elegance; everything hinges on visual appeal and language. Furthermore, we aim to stimulate the imagination of our clients, inviting them to envision an experience, a journey.

Q2: Can you describe the key strategies used within the department to promote the luxury image of Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: Collaborations are, for me, the main strategy. We don't collaborate with just anyone; we choose to collaborate with luxury brands because we are a luxury brand ourselves. For example, the French chocolate brand Valrhona or the French skincare brand Sisley help us in targeting audiences interested in luxury. If we decide to collaborate with Valrhona and offer desserts based on their chocolate, in terms of communication, we try to leverage this collaboration in the French market. This allows us to reach an audience that consumes the Valrhona brand. So, we focus on luxury collaborations.

Another strategy is the events we organize. We host very classy events with renowned guests. For instance, during the Culinary Festival, we invite Michelin-starred Chefs like Mercotte, Pierre Hermé, to inspire refined gastronomy. Through our events, we promote luxury and also create content for the brand.

Moreover, we don't limit ourselves to large corporate events only. If we collaborate with an Italian luxury brand, we ask our PR team in Italy to organize events in that country to invite people who consume that brand we are collaborating with. This helps in promoting Constance through well-established brands in the market.

We also choose to work with PR agencies in each of our main markets. We need them for events, collaborations, and more traditionally, for communication in magazines. They advise us on luxury magazines suitable for our promotion. We rely heavily on them

because they understand their market; they have the vision. With their help, we try to select magazines placed in strategic locations like VIP lounges at airports,...

Q3: How do public relations activities contribute to the overall brand image and reputation of Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: Personally, I remain convinced that digital channels currently reach the widest audience. However, it's true that an older generation still interested in luxury prefers reading luxury magazines over digital platforms.

The primary goal of our activities is brand awareness. We aim to make the brand known, enhancing our brand awareness. Organizing press trips, events, cultivating relationships with journalists—all of these efforts generate buzz around the brand. The human touch aspect of PR is crucial in creating a positive image.

Q4: How do you measure the effectiveness of public relations efforts in promoting the luxury image?

R: We measure the success of our efforts through media coverage. We don't rely on digital tools like e-business to assess our impact. Instead, we focus on media outcomes. For instance, we recently organized the MCB TC event, a professional golf tournament, where we aimed to attract local press for sponsors. In collaboration with Air Mauritius, we asked them to sponsor event tickets for guests in exchange for international press coverage of their brand. It's essential to be accountable to them; they could question why they sponsored us if there's no local media coverage or interest. This could be concerning for us.

Internally, we also prepare a communication report at the end of each month, which we share with the management team. It details our media coverage and allows us to analyze the month's activity—whether it was busy or quiet. This helps us conduct a detailed analysis by market, by hotel, etc. Our goal is simply to generate as much buzz as possible, measured by the number of coverages we receive.

Q5: Can you share an example of a successful campaign or initiative that significantly improved the perception of luxury at Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: We engage in numerous campaigns, but to be honest, I don't always see the utility in these campaigns. I perceive more impact from major corporate events like the Festival Culinaire or the MCB TC golf tournament.

Corporate events allow us to raise brand awareness significantly. Firstly, we invite journalists from each market. There are also industry professionals at the event who are experts in the experiences highlighted by the event—gastronomy, wine, golf, etc. These professionals are well-known in their respective markets. Celebrities also attend. For instance, during the Festival Culinaire, bringing Michelin-starred chefs from various countries like Pierre Hermé, Mercotte, who are prominent figures in certain markets, generates buzz around us. The Festival Culinaire has a strong French influence due to the celebrity involvement, whereas the MCB TC has a strong English influence with many British golfers. I think we don't have enough events, but they require so much involvement. They enable us to reach high-profile individuals and promote our hotels.

What's crucial for these events is the selection of professionals and collaborations with celebrities. We also rely heavily on what the hotel itself does. If the hotel we want to promote isn't hosting an event, it's challenging to promote that particular hotel. We can't just talk about the hotel's concept alone. Events allow us to talk about something different, to create new things.

Journalists, through their articles, and influencers, through their stories, help us gain brand recognition. It's important for us not to select just anyone. We need reputable, sophisticated media that align with the image of Constance Hotels & Resorts to reach our target audience. We also agree with journalists on the content they produce; we ask them what they propose. Often, after discovering and being impressed by the hotel, they decide to produce more content than originally planned. But for this to happen, we need to introduce them to the world of Constance—its gastronomy, setting, etc.—to inspire them to talk about the hotel beyond the event and maximize coverage as much as possible.

Q6: How do you ensure the consistency of the Constance Hotels & Resorts image across different platforms and communications?

R: This ties into what I mentioned earlier, but it all comes down to vocabulary. We must ensure consistency in the vocabulary used, whether it's in advertorials, images, posters, or press releases. It's crucial that across all content, whether traditional or digital, there is consistency in both the image portrayed and the vocabulary used.

Q7: Can you discuss the challenges you face in maintaining or enhancing the luxury image of Constance Hotels & Resorts through public relations activities?

R: After COVID, we were asked to significantly ramp up communication for one of our hotels in the Maldives, Constance Halaveli. The directives came from management, but we weren't given explanations for the reasons behind it. We suspected financial risks due to COVID, possibly even the hotel facing bankruptcy. This required us to reinvent ourselves under immense pressure to constantly produce new content. However, we were often told it wasn't sufficient without clear reasons from our manager on why we needed to do this urgently. We brainstormed and tried to be creative, but there was no new content to offer. Communicating repeatedly about the same things became monotonous. Moreover, journalists crave novelty, and the challenge was that generating novelty wasn't within our department's control. It depended on management and operations to introduce new initiatives. We could only communicate what was happening. We needed new updates and content, but we had nothing to push for Constance Halaveli's communication.

By being creative, we found a focus, an angle on Halaveli to emphasize its tailor-made, exclusive aspects. We therefore highlighted this exclusive aspect of Constance Halaveli: upon arrival in your room, you can choose your own perfume and music. To obtain this information, we deal directly with the hotel to get updates: a new chef, for example. At the beginning of each year, we prepare an Excel document with our PR angles. Our PR teams at each hotel send us their calendar for the year so we can develop our communication plan accordingly.

Q8: What is your role as a communications executive? How does it differ from the communications coordinator's role?

R: Astrid and I have different responsibilities; she focuses on production and events, which are quite distinct from my role. Personally, I work more on branding and campaigns.

Regarding branding, let's take the example of Constance's loyalty card. If we decide to launch a new loyalty card, the communications team needs to find agencies to propose communication strategies for this project. Our role is to lead the project based on our knowledge of the brand. For instance, we might direct the agency not to make the card blue because we want it to stand out. I manage the brand image and ensure that different projects align with Constance's image. We do a lot of outsourcing but always keep oversight. Branding projects are occasional but significant.

For campaigns, we also outsource. For example, Cream, our agency in the UK, proposes campaigns for each market, quite globally. They are capable of identifying trends; for instance, they notice that eco-friendly people are traveling more, so we should focus more on ecology. People are now seeking more sustainable destinations. They propose campaigns tailored to these needs. Personally, I'm skeptical about these collaborations because I feel they only present campaigns to us, and we provide advice. We outsource, but we're always here to guide different campaigns and projects to ensure they respect the brand's ethos.

Q9: What are your daily tasks as a PR executive?

R: Personally, I focus heavily on organizing and managing press trips, maintaining contact with the PR teams assigned to each market. We follow the media plan that was approved at the beginning of the year, directing the various markets according to our angles. I ensure that all these processes run smoothly.

Q10: Do you have an example of a PR initiative that has been challenging for the brand image, and how did you overcome it?

R: Recently, we acquired new hotels that we have rebranded under the Constance Luxury banner. These hotels were not previously recognized as Constance luxury properties, so our challenge is to integrate this image into people's perception. We need to communicate

about Constance Luxury, Rodrigues Luxury. It will be challenging to promote the new hotels because we are introducing a new destination, Rodrigues Island, and promoting exceptional service even though people may not be familiar with it.

The challenge is to communicate without alienating others. We cannot claim to be better than what was there before. Generally, in communication, we must be careful not to offend others or say something inadvertently that could be misinterpreted, including about the destination, the MTPA, or sponsors. We must always be meticulous in what we say or write to avoid unintentionally offending partners.

Regarding competition, since I joined Constance, my feeling is that we don't really care about others. We have been directly advised not to compare ourselves to competitors. Instead, we emphasize our luxury experiences in golf, gastronomy, and wine to distinguish ourselves. We offer unique experiences that allow us not to compare ourselves to others.

Appendix 4 - Interview with Participant #4 (Communications Coordinator)

Q1: How do you define the luxury image at Constance Hotels & Resorts ?

R: For me, luxury at Constance is all about attention to detail. For example, during a press lunch for the MCB TC, the servers were attentive at all times. They are very responsive: they notice if your glass is empty and offer a refill. Imagine you're at the Barchois restaurant at Constance Prince Maurice, enjoying the weather, and suddenly it starts raining. Immediately, a server will rush to provide you with an umbrella.

Luxury also encompasses our service. We have sommeliers in all our restaurants. We invest heavily in training for our sommeliers. A sommelier is not a waiter; they never touch your plate. They solely focus on wine and advise you on the wines listed on the menu.

In terms of communication, we place significant emphasis on visuals. They must align with our branding in terms of colors and fonts. It's also crucial for us to stay up to date. Whenever there is internal information, we communicate it promptly. We must always be on top of things.

Q2: Can you describe the key strategies used within the department to promote the luxury image of Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: We use press releases extensively. Whenever we have new information, it allows us to send it to our PR offices so they can distribute it to all media outlets.

We also focus on visuals for advertisements, tailored differently for each destination. Whenever we receive a request for advertising, we send visuals specific to that destination. This approach works well because nowadays people prefer visuals over text. A visual immediately shows you what it's about. For example, a visual for Madagascar showcases it as an exclusive island. A visual for Constance Belle Mare Plage might feature children's feet, highlighting its family-friendly environment.

Being present at events with journalists also contributes to our image in terms of relationships. It portrays a positive image of the company and encourages journalists to write favorable articles about the brand.

Q3: How do public relations activities contribute to the overall brand image and reputation of Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: They help keep people informed about everything happening within the hotels. We communicate extensively, updating all the small details. These seemingly insignificant details assist people in making their choice to come to us and select a hotel.

Everything we do within the department increases our visibility. For instance, I manage the German market. This year, we ran a digital campaign in Germany near bus stops, displaying digital images of Constance Hotels & Resorts. This initiative increased visibility and generated publicity for us.

Q4: How do you measure the effectiveness of public relations efforts in promoting the luxury image?

R: When we receive coverage, we can assess the journalist's tone of voice. How they write allows us to gauge if the journalist was satisfied with their stay.

We conduct roadshows with our markets, and our PR offices provide reports showing that for certain campaigns, we receive inquiries from various media outlets interested in learning more about Constance and requesting press trips. Our PR offices analyze and understand how the market operates in each country. They know the key actions to undertake throughout the year.

Regarding free coverage obtained through barter, those who come on press trips stay three nights for free in exchange for articles. For example, we have fewer coverages for Madagascar because we have limited budget allocated to that destination.

We have the numbers. We can see the reach achieved per article based on the media outlet. This also allows us to understand the target audience. Each magazine caters to a different target audience; you may have magazines for pregnant women, for weddings, and so forth.

Q5: Can you share an example of a successful campaign or initiative that significantly improved the perception of luxury at Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: The Culinary Festival event is a good example. We've been organizing it annually for several years now. Innovation is key; we can't repeat the same thing every year. For the upcoming edition, we are collaborating with Régis Marcon. He's a new chef for our event but similar in profile to Bernard Loiseau from previous editions, both being Michelin-starred chefs with a background in restaurant and hotel management.

By bringing in new collaborators while maintaining the core concept, such events showcase the experiences within our hotels. The Culinary Festival specifically highlights gastronomy at our properties. These new collaborations demonstrate our commitment to renewal and evolution. We invite prominent figures for the jury and renowned Michelin-starred chefs, attracting press coverage that highlights our hotels and the event.

Q6: How do you ensure the consistency of the Constance Hotels & Resorts image across different platforms and communications?

R: In terms of tone of voice, we use a specific range of words because they are more sophisticated. It's not the same language as for C Resorts. The tone of voice for C Resorts is more bubbly, cheeky, and fun. For Constance, we maintain a more formal language.

Regarding visuals, we always showcase what we do because it inspires luxury: wellness, sustainability, gastronomy,...

Q7: Can you discuss the challenges you face in maintaining or enhancing the luxury image of Constance Hotels & Resorts through public relations activities?

R: I haven't faced any major challenges since joining the department less than a year ago.

I have a few small examples that come to mind. Recently, we had to organize a corporate photoshoot in the Seychelles during the festive season, and the hotel had already set up Christmas decorations. However, we couldn't have these decorations in the photos because they were to be published on the B2B platform. The photographer had to remove all the decorations and then put them back under our remote guidance. This meant that we had to forgo many photos. We also had to forgo many videos recently because there was an explosion in the Seychelles that caused flooding in the hotel. The photographer had to use images from his stock that he had taken several years ago.

Another example is a photoshoot we organized at the Blue Penny Cellar restaurant at Constance Belle Mare Plage. We received the request for the shoot on a Friday for the following Monday, so we didn't have time to find a suitable location to shoot as requested, and we couldn't take the portrait photos as planned because the space didn't allow for it.

These examples illustrate that what can be challenging to manage are the unexpected events that can arise and sometimes need to be managed remotely. It's important to navigate these logistical aspects, which can be complex, and to bridge the gap between what we aim to achieve and what is realistically feasible.

Q8: Can you describe the process of creating production materials that align with the luxury image of Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: For the creation of production materials, we first need to create a specifications document and a shooting list outlining all our needs. We ensure that everything meets Constance's production standards. We collaborate with major production houses like Coconut Production, who handle our corporate materials. It's crucial that they truly understand the Constance concept before going on location to film. They need to grasp the brand's identity, what effectively showcases the brand concept: luxury, sustainability, gastronomy, and more.

There's also storytelling, as with visuals. Our visuals need to resonate with people. They must be high-quality and transparent, reflecting one of our core values. During the shoot, we make sure to showcase everything the hotel has to offer so that guests know what to expect upon arrival.

After the shoot, there's a selection process for photos based on factors like lighting. For instance, if we're taking photos in the hotel gym, where there's a television playing various videos, we ensure that the photos only display the Constance logo or something equally presentable.

Q9: How do you ensure that the visual elements (like photos and videos) used in your communications reflect the luxury standards of Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: Our criteria depend on our aesthetic. We also promote diversity significantly. In other hotel groups, you often see a fair-skinned, blonde model. We strive to include more diversity; for example, we might choose a brunette with a darker complexion to appeal to a broader audience. We want to avoid portraying luxury as reserved for only a certain type of people.

We ensure that everything we produce is of high quality. For example, in our recent sustainability video production, we ensured all information was up-to-date. We collaborated closely with the sustainability department to gather accurate information and used the appropriate logos in the video. We thoroughly verify that all information is current and correct. In terms of production, we outsource to professional videographers and photographers who can deliver work that meets our high standards.

Q10: Can you provide an example of how your production work has directly influenced the perception of luxury at Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: All the visuals, photos, and videos we communicate are carefully crafted to evoke a sense of luxury. For instance, we often incorporate blue hues into our photos to reflect the destination's ambiance.

One example is the shoot we did at the Blue Penny Cellar restaurant at Constance Belle Mare Plage for the winners of the Bocuse d'Or competition. This shoot was part of an HR campaign where we gathered all past winners of the Bocuse d'Or and featured them in several local newspapers. Our goal was to showcase how Constance trains some of the best chefs, preparing them for such prestigious competitions. It demonstrates the high-quality training available at Constance and highlights our commitment to gastronomy.

This HR campaign was particularly meaningful because in the hospitality industry in Mauritius, there's significant turnover. Many chefs prefer to work on cruise ships where they are better compensated. Our campaign aimed to impress potential recruits and show them that working at Constance could significantly boost their careers.

On a smaller scale, we also conducted a shoot for the Swing restaurant at Constance Belle Mare Plage. These photos were essential to fill gaps in our B2B gallery. We needed them for press articles and client requests, ensuring we had comprehensive visuals to showcase our offerings.

Appendix #5 - Interview with Participant #5 (Digital Content Manager)

Q1: How do you define the luxury image at Constance Hotels & Resorts ?

R: Personally, I would say that in today's world, luxury can be subjective. You have the material things, the money things; you can buy whatever you want. But someone who is spending quality time on the beach with their family, in good weather, with a good atmosphere, feeling relaxed and at ease—that, to me, is luxury. This is what we try to sell above all at Constance. In our hotels, this aspect is luxury. Wherever you go—Mauritius,

the Maldives, the Seychelles, Madagascar—we are situated on dreamy islands. These islands are prized for their beauty, they are so paradisiacal. Of course, it comes with a price tag, but this natural aspect is, in my opinion, the true luxury rather than the material things. At the end of the day, you can buy everything, but you don't get that same feeling of peacefulness, of being pampered.

We have been through economic crises, COVID, the war in Russia and Ukraine. If you look at it, we are living in a world that can erupt at any time. Spending time with family in a peaceful place, I think that is luxury. If you look at the trends, in the past, there was usually one family member working, now both parents work, and children go to school. It's therefore complicated to spend time together as a family. Having some quality time is part of what we sell. "Come to us, spend time with your family in a paradisiacal place where you eat well." Indeed, in everyday life, we don't always have the time to prepare a good meal. We sell this aspect in our hotels: you eat well, drink well, exercise, swim, get a massage. This is luxury and this is well-being. On our social media, this is what we try to highlight because we must not forget that we are a business as well; this is how we want to attract people and make them think of us. "I want a relaxing holiday. Okay, Constance. I want an island wedding. Okay, Constance. I want a spa holiday in the Seychelles. Okay, Constance." The photos we post on our social media are photos that make people want to come. It's a mix of motivational and inspirational content.

Q2: Can you describe the key strategies used within the department to promote the luxury image of Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: Our tagline "True by Nature" is known by everyone within the company. Everyone tries to follow it and move in the same direction. For example, on social media, I won't post something that isn't used offline. We try to see how tour operators sell our hotels while maintaining this same luxury spirit. It's our common strategy.

We have methods to operate on social media, and these methods come with objectives. Our goal is to attract people to our social media because that's where they are. To attract people to our social media, we run contests. People are directly brought to you through these contests. You can then direct them where you want: you can take them to your website to

see other hotels or offers, to Facebook for cross-selling, ... but it all depends on what your objective is.

Q3: How do public relations activities contribute to the overall brand image and reputation of Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: I believe the e-business department contributes about 80 percent to the image of Constance. We live in a digital world. Everyone visits the website. There's still a percentage of people who call to book, but people are more visual. It has been scientifically proven that everyone has a phone, everyone scrolls. If you are not present digitally, then nobody sees you.

That's why we have a website, which is in four languages: English, French, Italian, and German. We are on social media: we have a corporate Instagram account @constancehotels, a corporate Facebook account, a corporate Twitter account, and we are also on Pinterest and YouTube. For the seven hotels, we also have a Facebook account for each hotel. For websites, we have www.constancehotels.com, our B2C site, and we have the hospitality website, which is B2B.

We also have digital partnerships; we associate with brands to better position ourselves. We have OTAs (online travel agencies), sites like booking.com, but that's really fast-selling, they just sell rooms and all. However, I look for platforms that help to position and elevate the brand, like Kiwicollection, MrandMrsSmith, Visaluxury, Hotelcollection. We also affiliate with brands such as airline companies or product brands. This allows us to leverage our brand and our positioning.

Speaking of social media, if you type Constance Hotels on Google, our site might be on the 4th or 5th level, but if you are associated with online tour operators, you still find your site through your partners. This really allows us to be present.

There are also influencers; they help us project the image and feel of our hotels. We collaborate with influencers whose profiles have been analyzed and tested. They haven't bought their followers; it's a real database. Each influencer has a collaboration agreement;

we don't tell them what to do but highlight certain angles. "Show us in photos what a beach holiday is for you." We guide them, and they push us.

Saying we do 80 percent of the work is because we are truly present digitally.

Q4: How do you measure the effectiveness of public relations efforts in promoting the luxury image?

R: On digital, it's not about posting just for the sake of it. There's always an objective. We use what we call KPIs (Key Performance Indicators). Your objective could be profit, sales, awareness, engagement, or data collection. No matter what you do, there's always an objective. Once you've chosen your KPIs and set your objectives for the campaign, at the end, you refer to the results to see if it worked or not. For example, if you run a campaign to promote a destination in a country like Dubai, or showcase new hotels in Mauritius, and the campaign performs well with lots of likes and engagement, towards the end, META provides all your data. In your KPIs, you've already set that your objective was awareness at a certain percentage, and if you reach those percentages, you can assess your actions and goals. If it's about sales or bookings, for instance, we recently launched a seaplane offer and boosted a post about it on social media. At the end, you can see if you got as many bookings, allowing you to determine if the campaign worked or not. It's also about achieving the desired results; it's up to you to follow your campaign. You need to systematically track it. Often, when you launch a campaign, there are minor issues, so you can see what's not working and make adjustments here and there to make it work. So always, you put it out, you have to follow, check, and then you have the results.

Q5: Can you share an example of a successful campaign or initiative that significantly improved the perception of luxury at Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: We really focus on this intangible luxury at Constance. Our campaigns used to be a bit too commercial, "come to us, win a trip,"... So we launched the Constance Art Love campaign, with the goal of changing the perception when people talk about Constance Hotels. Yes, they are luxury hotels, but what else do we offer beside blue sky, blue sea, or nice food and drinks? What sets us apart?

We came up with the idea of collaborating with well-known artists. By associating with artists, even without saying it explicitly, you're already associating with luxury. The concept was to invite artists to our hotels, where they would find their muse and create masterpieces. We would then sell these artworks, with the proceeds going to charity. So, we're not just receiving; we're also giving back.

We partner with artists and charities, donating the proceeds. It's deliberate to elevate our image. We needed to find artists who fit our profile: active on social media, with a strong following, selling their art, and willing to create a piece within a week. It took us some time to find these artists.

Chau Hang from China visited Constance Prince Maurice and Constance Belle Mare Plage in Mauritius, Rabi Alieva from Munich came to Constance Ephelia and Constance Lemuria in Seychelles, Nina Brooke from Great Britain visited Constance Moofushi and Constance Halaveli in the Maldives, and Emmanuel Dascanio from Italy visited Constance Tsarabanjina in Madagascar. Each artist stayed at different hotels and created their masterpiece. We then auctioned these artworks on a digital platform, with a starting price of 1,500 euros per piece, including 4 nights at the respective hotel where the artist stayed.

Initially, we were apprehensive because it was a novel idea, and we weren't sure how it would be received. However, it turned out really well. We sold all the artworks and received considerable coverage from our offices, which promoted the campaign extensively. It was also prominently featured on our website, boosting its visibility. It was a significant campaign, the longest of my career so far. Selling the artworks allowed us to consistently communicate about the campaign on social media and our website. Naturally, unintentionally, we improved the feeling associated with Constance. We enhanced its image; Constance is not just about blue skies and beaches but also about people's awareness of where they are and how they can contribute through charities and beyond. It's a human aspect.

Q6: How do you ensure the consistency of the Constance Hotels & Resorts image across different platforms and communications?

R: Our mission across different platforms is for customers to recognize Constance instantly. We have what we call our bible, our e-business content calendar. It's a year-long calendar that details for each platform, every defined and well-crafted theme. There's a specific theme set for each month. Social media moves quickly, so you need to know how to keep your audience engaged. You can't stick to the same theme all year; you have to change it up. Depending on the time of year, you choose a theme that resonates with the audience: in January, people are interested in wellness, wellbeing, getting away; in December, it's festive, people love food, want to escape the cold and come to the sun, on the islands, the beach.

The tone of voice is also crucial. The way a press release is written is the same way you should speak on social media or on the website. A Facebook post should use the same language as the website. Certain words are never used: for example, the word "free," we rephrase to avoid using "free" and make it more elegant, replacing it with "complimentary." We might say "your seaplane transfer is on us" instead of "your seaplane transfer is free." In terms of revenue, you'll never see "Buy one, get one free" or "Two nights for one" because psychologically, it doesn't evoke luxury.

By adhering to our graphic charter, branding guidelines, and tone of voice, we manage to maintain consistent messaging and create an identity for the company.

Q7: Can you discuss the challenges you face in maintaining or enhancing the luxury image of Constance Hotels & Resorts through public relations activities?

R: The evolution of digital platforms is constant. There are always new platforms emerging, like how Twitter recently became X or Threads was born. As a company striving to maintain an exclusive luxury image, we're present on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. We've considered what the next step should be. When Threads gained traction, we observed its evolution carefully. We opted not to open an account prematurely just for the sake of it. We maintained vigilance, and after a few months, we observed that the platform lost relevance, so we decided against opening an account there. Having an account means feeding it with content. If you post the same photo across all platforms, you risk losing followers because it becomes boring. People want to see dynamic, unique

content that captivates them. Our task is to maintain that allure and keep our audience engaged. Posting identical content everywhere leads to poor engagement.

The second challenge lies in our company structure. Generating content requires a significant workforce for photography and posting. Opening an account solely for the sake of it doesn't align with our strategy.

TikTok is another example that often comes up for discussion. While it's effective for visibility, it doesn't align with Constance's luxury image. Our luxury-seeking audience may not find us credible on TikTok. Choosing the right digital platforms depends on the product. For instance, launching a youth-focused sunglasses brand makes TikTok a sensible choice, but it's not a one-size-fits-all platform.

In terms of competition, it's clear competitors draw inspiration from one another. Just last week, I discovered a hotel brand on Instagram that replicated our "True by Experience" campaign. They adapted it slightly because they knew it worked well for us. They even used the same artist, Nina Brooke, for a concept similar to Constance Art Love.

In e-business, regarding competition, we remain vigilant, constantly observing what competitors do. However, we maintain integrity and avoid outright copying. We strive for originality and prefer to innovate rather than imitate. It's crucial to monitor industry trends, but we remain true to our tagline "True by Nature". We uphold our pillars of true places, true service, and true experience. Every department aligns with these pillars; for instance, the communications department focuses on communicating around themes like food and wine, weddings and honeymoons, and golf. We adhere to the Constance way of doing things.

Q8: How do you ensure that the digital content produced aligns with the luxury image and message of Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: You must be sure of the concept of the hotel. If we take the example of Constance Hotels & Resorts and C Resorts, which is a lifestyle brand, not luxury. If you know both concepts well, you know what makes the difference.

What also helped me during the repositioning of Constance was being the brand ambassador. It allowed me to absorb all the branding elements. Experience also helps; if I were a beginner, I might have mixed everything up.

When comparing Constance Hotels & Resorts to C Resorts, the tone of voice is different. Once you understand the concept and branding guidelines of each brand, it's easy not to confuse them. As I mentioned earlier, we would never use the word "free" for Constance Hotels & Resorts, but we would likely use it for C Resorts.

Delphine works with me on the C Resorts profile. I give her creative freedom; my role is more about policing, ensuring that the content she creates for C Resorts reflects its tone, which is more relaxed, laid-back, and humorous. The tone of voice for Constance Hotels & Resorts is relaxed and fun but remains sophisticated.

Of course, I sometimes miss the mark and realize I haven't respected the spirit of Constance. For Constance Hotels & Resorts, what's important is the tagline "True by nature" and the reason people come: intangible luxury. For C Resorts, the tagline is "Come play. Let go. Feel free." All ideas and partnerships must align with the essence of these taglines. For example, in terms of events, the Culinary Festival works for Constance Hotels & Resorts, but it wouldn't fit C Resorts. That's why we came up with the C Kite Festival for C Resorts, where both young people and adults engage in kite activities. The tagline "Come play. Let go. Feel free." truly embodies the spirit of the event.

Q9: Can you describe your content creation process, including how you decide on topics and themes that resonate with the luxury market segment?

R: For posts, as mentioned earlier, we have our bible, the e-business content calendar. This calendar is month by month, we don't want to be boring so we have one theme per month. We conduct research, use key words, and track trends according to each month. What do people like in January? In February? What are they searching for in December? Also, with our revenue team, we look at occupancy rates. Who is booking holidays in December? In January? We gather all this information to then create the content calendar. Therefore, we

know that December is the festive period, one of our busiest and most expensive seasons, when many repeat guests come. We need to create topics that will interest them. All the content that comes out, posts, blog articles will be derived from the theme.

For campaigns, we find them based on objectives. For example, for Constance Art Love, the objective was to enhance Constance's image. For the "True in the Indian Ocean" campaign, the objective was differentiation. We say we are the innovative hoteliers in the Indian Ocean, we want to grow in the Indian Ocean, we don't want to be like the big groups that are everywhere in the world but we want to grow in the Indian Ocean. This campaign allowed us to show that we were truly dedicated to the Indian Ocean. "True in the Indian Ocean" is a campaign that allows us to sell our experiences, intangible things. You go to Constance Prince Maurice, you dine at the Barachois restaurant, you experience dining on stilts that move over the water, you see a shark swimming near you, it's a "True Indian Ocean experience". You go to Constance Moofushi, you want to do coral planting and give back to Mother Nature, it's a "True Indian Ocean experience". You go to the Seychelles, you want a spa village just for you, you can have it. We want to push our experiences within our hotels. You can have a great time throughout the hotel but you won't have that "True Indian Ocean". All this to say that each campaign depends on an objective.

Q10: Can you share insights on the types of content (e.g., articles, videos, interactive features) that have been most effective in conveying luxury and generating audience engagement?

R: It comes back to our pillars. We have a photo of the view at the entrance of Constance Belle Mare Plage in Mauritius. Every time we post this photo, it's a hero picture, the engagement is very strong. This photo works because it's idyllic. You see palm trees, blue sky, blue sea, blue pool. It really drives engagement. In the Maldives, you have the hammock, a white sandy beach, palm trees; it attracts people. These photos are the most engaging because our audience is predominantly from European markets who dream of this.

Appendix 6 - Interview with Participant #6 (E-Business Manager)

Q1: How do you define the luxury image at Constance Hotels & Resorts ?

R: The strength of luxury marketing is investing in tools that allow you to know your client so well that you only provide what they want and never disappoint them. In luxury hotels, we know what time you wake up, what you eat, what shampoo you prefer in your room to please you—that's ultra-luxury service. But for that, you need the right tools, which is our biggest challenge. We must constantly question what we're doing. We rarely work with the same service providers for many years; we change social media agencies because we need someone who is eager and not stuck in routine. We have to evolve constantly.

The problem is that technology helps you offer a luxury service but doesn't replace it. When a client visits your website and chats with a bot, does he expect a luxury service to involve asking a thousand questions to a bot that sometimes doesn't work? Clients seeking luxury service have very specific requests. When you're in a standard hotel model, it's normal not to offer personalized service. The bot can respond, but when a client wants room service at any time, they don't care about the restaurant's opening hours; they expect that even if the restaurant is closed, they can still get something brought to their room.

Q2: Can you describe the key strategies used within the department to promote the luxury image of Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: The e-business department is responsible for the entire digital marketing and communication strategy. There are three main objectives: prospection, which involves developing Constance's brand awareness across all possible platforms and ensuring that the brand and hotels are talked about as much as possible; conversion, which focuses on generating as many bookings as possible with a priority on direct conversions (booking through OTAs incurs a commission of 18 to 20 percent on the room price, whereas direct bookings through our site are almost 100 percent profit, so we aim to generate maximum conversions via the website); and retention and loyalty, which involves actions like the loyalty program launched in 2024, social media actions, and online reputation management.

In e-business, we operate in specialties. There are three clusters: social media, CRM and big data, and web marketing strategy.

Regarding social media strategy, we handle paid advertising, community management, social engagement, content, and copywriting on the blog and website, as well as digital partnerships with various companies. These partnerships enhance the brand's visibility, ensure others talk about us, and increase our conversion rate, aiding prospection.

For the website, we manage its development and all marketing strategies that drive traffic to it. We handle everything related to SEO, SEM, Metasearch, price comparison, and online reputation. We create Google alerts for any articles circulating on Google to monitor for a positive reputation. This aids traffic and conversion.

Q3: How do public relations activities contribute to the overall brand image and reputation of Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: We aim to have a targeted audience funnel. At the top of the funnel, there's the mass audience, the cold audience. This group represents the majority of people we aim to reach and target, those who do not know Constance. We need to know where to position ourselves, so we categorize several things on Facebook, targeting, for example, luxury travelers, high-income individuals, residents near our hotels for events, and frequent travelers.

Our warm audiences are people who know our brand, have heard about it, and might have visited our website but haven't booked yet, or people who have engaged with our social media campaigns or are website visitors. Our communication strategy will differ from that for the cold audience. For the cold audience, we will talk a lot about Constance and present the brand, whereas here, we will be more commercial. The hot audience consists of those who have even reached our booking engine but haven't converted. We offer them a discount or special offer. We are much more aggressive in our communication because it's an interested audience, so we will be more commercial.

There is a real intention to allocate our budget depending on the funnel, to have different communication and audience strategies. Our goal is to transform the cold audience into a warm audience, then into a hot audience, and eventually make them convert.

Q4: How do you measure the effectiveness of public relations efforts in promoting the luxury image?

R: Online reputation is measured through ReviewPro, a platform that centralizes all public reviews across various platforms for all hotels, allowing them to respond to reviews directly from this platform. It also generates and centralizes all customer satisfaction surveys, compiling all results to give a score out of 100. This score allows comparison of hotel performances within the group and against a list of assigned competitors for each hotel. It's a crucial tool for top management and hotel managers because it enables them to compare and identify their positioning relative to the competition. This helps determine if we are well-placed in terms of online reputation. The tool performs semantic analysis; its algorithm reads public reviews, identifies positive or negative keywords, and provides management with real indications of what works or doesn't work within the hotels. We implement these tools, but it's up to the tools themselves to manage these analyses and take necessary actions.

At the time of departure, public reviews are also crucial for the net promoter score. Through our CRM, we invite clients to leave a review on TripAdvisor or any other platform to gather as many 5-star reviews as possible. If a customer hesitates between two brands, they might choose us because we have more positive reviews. We also try to maintain contact on social media, encouraging them to become fans of Constance. Additionally, we are soon going to develop a loyalty program.

Q5: Can you share an example of a successful campaign or initiative that significantly improved the perception of luxury at Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: Working with influencers and celebrities is something we manage both reactively and proactively. As we become more well-known and present on social media, our visibility increases, attracting more influencers. Nowadays, we receive daily requests from influencers or celebrities interested in testing our hotels. They negotiate for free stays or

discounts in exchange for posts on their social media. This is the reactive way of working with them. We analyze these requests using software that generates information on the influencer's profile, including the number of real followers versus fake followers, and their true audience. I assess the deal based on the true audience. Additionally, we analyze the market of the audience—whether it is predominantly European, American, Asian, etc.—to ensure the influencer will speak to the audiences we are interested in. From there, we decide what we will offer and what we will ask in return. We draft a service agreement summarizing the tacit agreement between both parties and ensure they meet the conditions. In terms of trust, customers trust user-generated content (UGC) from clients the most, followed by UGC from influencers, and then content from the brand itself.

The proactive way of working with influencers involves seeking them out ourselves. For events like the MCB Tour Championship or Music & Wine, we look for influencers specialized in wine, golf, luxury, etc. These partnerships with influencers are very effective in terms of brand awareness, but they also require thorough reputation analysis. Nowadays, some influencers are increasingly criticized for promoting anything. We need to differentiate and conduct a qualitative analysis in addition to a quantitative one. We don't just look at the potential visibility it can generate.

Q6: How do you ensure the consistency of the Constance Hotels & Resorts image across different platforms and communications?

R: Social media and strategy play a crucial role, with a different strategy for each platform. People look for different content on each platform, so we conducted an analysis to understand what type of information people seek on each platform and what works best to develop coherent strategies. The e-business team currently manages over 20 different accounts, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, and YouTube for the group and individual hotels, as well as accounts like WeChat for the Chinese market. Each strategy has different objectives, allowing us to maximize engagement, traffic, and KPIs.

On Instagram, we use the platform to inspire and create a desire to travel. We leverage Instagram to generate brand awareness, as it is the platform where we work most with

influencers. We also use it for amplifying user-generated content (UGC), which is marketing done by our clients on our behalf. We use trendy hashtags and encourage clients to share their experiences on social media by mentioning our hotel, making others who see the content want to visit us. On average, UGC generates 20 to 30 percent more engagement than content created by Constance. People are more likely to trust content generated by other clients because they can relate and imagine having the same experience; it feels more genuine.

On Facebook, we communicate a lot with our loyal members; it is our oldest platform historically. We have a large fan base, with over 500,000 followers on Facebook. This allows us to use a variety of interesting formats in paid advertising (carousels, stories, single posts, multiple photos, etc.).

Pinterest serves as our image bank, allowing us to embed photos from Pinterest on our blog instead of directly embedding them. If people click on the photos, it generates engagement and interaction, improving the photos' search engine ranking.

The same goes for YouTube; when we use videos, we embed our videos or ask our partners to embed our videos to generate views and improve the videos' search engine ranking.

Q7: Can you discuss the challenges you face in maintaining or enhancing the luxury image of Constance Hotels & Resorts through public relations activities?

R: The biggest challenge in e-business is that the digital world is constantly evolving. Five years ago, we didn't do metasearch. Tomorrow, there will be new developments, and we will need to adapt. With artificial intelligence, if a client does a search, they won't take the time on Google; they will go directly to ChatGPT and ask for a list of the best hotels in Mauritius for honeymoons. We need to understand how this artificial intelligence works, or we will be out of the loop. The same goes for CRM; if we are not constantly seeking to understand the market and the possibilities, we will fall behind.

Today, what might replace CRM is CDPs (customer data platforms). This software is connected not only to your PMS but also to your spa booking platform, your system

managing clients' WhatsApp messages, and your website. It analyzes cookies on the site to identify the client behind them, tracks their website traffic, and sends them personalized newsletters based on their preferences. With a CDP, you're so well connected and can gather so much information that you can hyper-personalize what people want.

In terms of PR, staying relevant and innovative is key. We can't rely on doing things the same way year after year. We need to keep refreshing our approaches, whether it's changing social media agencies or adopting new technologies to stay ahead. Additionally, while technology helps in delivering luxury services, it can never replace the essence of luxury service itself. Clients in the luxury segment have very specific demands, and they expect personalized service that technology alone can't provide. For instance, a client might expect room service at any hour regardless of the restaurant's opening times, and that kind of flexibility and attentiveness is crucial in maintaining our luxury image.

Q8: How does your role as Head of E-Business interact with the overall luxury image strategy of Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: There needs to be a connection between all the clusters within the department. Communication is key. Even though we have segmented specializations, all our actions are complementary, and there must be coherence. For example, if we launch a campaign with an influencer, they need to know what they have to do on social media. The social media cluster will analyze whether this profile is worth it for the campaign. We might ask the influencer to offer their followers a promo code, but this promo code must be analyzable and trackable. I need to understand that this traffic was generated by that influencer, which involves the web cluster. Therefore, communication between the clusters is essential. Once there are bookings, the CRM must also understand that they come from this campaign to send an appropriate pre-arrival message or other tailored communication. Ensuring harmony between each cluster is my role.

I also have the responsibility to constantly challenge and assist them. I conduct a lot of research on CDPs, how we can improve our payment systems. They are often so busy with daily tasks that they need someone to challenge them and help find tools to improve the e-business work.

When they need help or support or have questions, it is also my role as a manager to handle the human aspect.

Q9: Can you discuss the role of the company's digital presence, including the website, in conveying the luxury experience to potential clients?

R: Digital partnerships with OTAs, airlines, and others help maximize brand awareness and drive conversions. This is an ongoing process. When we receive partnership requests, we analyze them to determine if they are worthwhile.

The CRM strategy covers the entire customer journey. It can send booking confirmations, pre-arrival emails (for upselling, capturing client information, speeding up the check-in process, and suggesting newsletter sign-ups), in-stay emails (to identify and rectify issues for dissatisfied clients who are already at the hotel), and post-stay emails (for cross-selling and requesting guests to complete satisfaction surveys, with reviews linked to room numbers to identify areas needing improvement). Each type of email has its own purpose and strategy.

Through our CRM, we also create an automated marketing system targeting those who booked via Booking.com or Expedia, encouraging them to book directly next time and enjoy certain benefits. We do not do this with tour operators and travel agencies due to our strong relationships with them; we focus only on OTAs.

There is a significant difference between marketing emails (newsletters sent for pure marketing purposes, which legally require the recipient's consent) and transactional emails (communications tied to a reservation, like confirmation emails or booking information, which can include subtle marketing messages and fall into a grey area where consent isn't strictly necessary).

In summary, considering the customer journey and client experience, we aim to encompass the entire digital experience and target the client with communication and marketing actions based on their stage in the customer journey.

Q10: What are the main digital channels and technologies you use to enhance the perception of luxury at Constance Hotels & Resorts?

R: When it comes to inspiring a client who doesn't know our hotels, making them want to travel or discover our hotels, we utilize social media, the blog, the website, newsletters, segmented newsletters, and social collaborations with influencers or celebrities.

Once they are inspired and want to travel, whether they are unfamiliar with our hotels or need to decide between competitors, we employ SEM (search engine marketing) to achieve the best rankings. We engage in display advertising, and form partnerships, such as offering benefits when traveling with Singapore Airlines. Public reviews are crucial since no client will ignore the reviews of others. We ensure strong and positive public reviews. On booking sites, we use travel ads and engage in partnerships for bookings. Metasearch tools help compare our prices with OTAs. We send booking confirmations and interact on social media with those who mention us or use our hashtags. We like, discuss, and show appreciation for their content to encourage more user-generated content (UGC). This is why we created hashtags like #MyConstanceMoment. We also run campaigns where clients can share content with the hashtag #MyConstanceMoment and enter a draw to win a trip, generating maximum content and brand awareness. We identify dissatisfied clients and promoters through reviews.

At the time of departure, public reviews are crucial for the net promoter score. Via our CRM, we encourage clients to leave a review on TripAdvisor or any other platform to gather as many five-star reviews as possible. If a client is torn between two brands, they will choose us because we have more positive reviews. We try to maintain contact on social media, turning them into Constance fans. We are also developing a loyalty program.

We must balance using tools to maximize service, like ReviewPro, to understand what needs improvement, whether we are well-positioned, and if we offer excellent service. However, it cannot replace the luxury experience itself.