THESIS

KEY ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES OF TRIP.COM IN COLLABORATION WITH 4 AND 5 STAR HOTEL IN KUTA, BALI

POLITEKNIK NEGERI BALI

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TOURISM BUSINESS PLANNING STUDY PROGRAM

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KEY ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES OF TRIP.COM IN COLLABORATION WITH 4 AND 5 STAR HOTEL IN KUTA, BALI

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the implementation of Key Account Management (KAM) strategies by Trip.com in managing its partnerships with 4- and 5-star hotel partners in Kuta, Bali. As competition intensifies in the online travel agency (OTA) market, effective relationship management becomes essential for sustaining long-term collaboration and maximizing mutual value. This research aims to identify how Trip.com executes its KAM strategy, the challenges it faces, and the critical success factors for building optimal partnerships in the context of tourism distribution. A qualitative research approach is used in this study using semi-structured interviews, direct observations, and focus group discussions with Trip.com market managers and hotel sales representatives. This study uses a qualitative data analysis technique based on Creswell's (2014) framework, which follows an inductive process that allows themes and patterns to emerge from the raw data. The data analysis includes organizing and preparing the data, reading through all data, coding, generating themes, and interpreting the meaning of the findings. Results show that while Trip.com applies KAM principles such as strategic account selection, joint planning, and performance monitoring, the benefits are not equally perceived by all hotel partners due to varying levels of engagement, support, and alignment. Based on the empirical findings, this research proposes a conceptual model for optimal OTA–hotel partnerships, guided by the Input–Process–Output–Outcome (IPOO) framework as conceptualized by Brown and

Svenson (1988). The resulting model integrates strategic inputs, coordinated processes, measurable outputs, and sustainable outcomes. The study emphasizes the importance of trust, communication, technological integration, and shared goals in enhancing partnership effectiveness. This research contributes to tourism business literature by offering a structured framework for OTA–hotel collaboration and practical insights for improving KAM practices in the hospitality sector.

Keywords: Key Account Management (KAM), Gross Merchandize Value (GMV), Online Travel Agency (OTA).

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Bali has established itself as one of the world's premier tourist destinations, consistently attracting millions of visitors annually through its unique combination of rich cultural heritage, stunning natural landscapes, and world-class hospitality services. The island's tourism industry has experienced remarkable growth trajectories, positioning itself as a cornerstone of Indonesia's economic development strategy. In 2023, Bali welcomed 15.14 million visitors, including 5.27 million international tourists and 9.87 million domestic travelers, marking a 16% decrease from the 2019 peak, yet demonstrating remarkable resilience in post-pandemic recovery.

The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally disrupted global tourism patterns, with Bali experiencing severe impacts during 2020-2021. However, the island's recovery has been notably robust, with the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, led by Minister Sandiaga Uno, setting ambitious target of 7 million international tourists in 2024. This recovery trajectory reflects not only Bali's enduring appeal but also the adaptive capacity of its tourism ecosystem to navigate unprecedented challenges while maintaining its competitive advantage in the global marketplace.

The rapid expansion of Bali's tourism sector has catalyzed significant growth in the hospitality industry, with accommodation providers proliferating across all market segments to meet diverse visitor demands. According to data from the Indonesian Hotel and Restaurant Association (PHRI, 2023), over 3,500 officially registered hotels operate in Bali, encompassing budget-friendly hostels, boutique properties, luxury resorts, and five-star establishments. This substantial accommodation infrastructure reflects the island's maturity as a destination while simultaneously intensifying competitive pressures among hospitality providers.

The intensification of competition has compelled hotel operators to adopt sophisticated distribution strategies, particularly through partnerships with Online Travel Agencies (OTAs). The global online travel agency (OTA) market size was USD 305.23 Billion in 2023 and is likely to reach USD 534.35 Billion by 2032, expanding at a CAGR of 6.42% during 2024–2032, demonstrating the critical role these platforms play in modern hospitality distribution. OTAs have fundamentally transformed the travel booking landscape by providing real-time availability, competitive pricing transparency, global market access, and comprehensive marketing support systems.

Among the major OTA platforms, Trip.com has emerged as a particularly significant player in the Asian travel market, establishing substantial operations in Bali since 2015. Beginning with a modest three-person team at its initial office in Benoa Square, Badung Regency, Trip.com has expanded its local presence to operate from the Alamanda Building in Kedonganan with over 24 dedicated

employees managing hotel partnerships and operational activities. This growth trajectory reflects the platform's strategic commitment to the Bali market and its recognition of the island's importance within the broader Southeast Asian tourism ecosystem.

Trip.com's partnership portfolio in Bali has experienced exponential growth, expanding from a select few properties to encompass 7,822 partnered hotels across the island by 2023. This extensive network covers all accommodation categories, from budget establishments to luxury five-star resorts, demonstrating the platform's comprehensive market penetration strategy.

Table 1.1 Partnered hotel in Bali based on Star Ratings

No	Hotel by Star Rating	Total
1	0 Star hotel	546 hotels
2	1 Star hotel	415 hotels
3	2 Star hotel	1182 hotels
4	3 Star Hotel	2681 hotels
5	4 Star Hotel	2403 hotels
6	5 Star Hotel	595 hotels
	Total	7822 hotels

Source: Trip.com data, 2023

The classification system employed by Trip.com merits clarification, as it differs from official government hotel classification standards maintained by the Ministry of Tourism or PHRI. Trip.com's star rating methodology incorporates multiple criteria including hotel self-declarations, user experience ratings, and cross-

platform designations from other major OTAs such as Booking.com, Agoda, and Expedia. Consequently, hotels may receive different star ratings across platforms, reflecting varying evaluation methodologies. For this research, Trip.com's classification system provides the operational framework for understanding the platform's Key Account Management (KAM) segmentation strategy.

This research concentrates on the Kuta area, which represents an ideal case study environment due to its strategic significance within Bali's tourism infrastructure. Located adjacent to Ngurah Rai International Airport, Kuta serves as the primary gateway for international visitors while hosting some of the island's most popular beaches, entertainment venues, shopping districts, and luxury accommodations. Kuta is also one of the top revenue-contributing areas in Bali for Trip.com, reflecting its commercial importance within the online travel ecosystem. Moreover, the researcher works for Trip.com and is directly responsible for managing hotel partnerships in the Kuta area, providing valuable insider access and practical insights into the dynamics of OTA–hotel collaboration in Kuta, Bali.

Figure 2.1 Map of Kuta Area
Source: Cited from Wikipedia.com

According to Trip.com's internal data (2023), the platform maintains partnerships with 465 hotels in Kuta, of which 107 are classified as 4- and 5-star properties. This concentration of premium accommodations underscores Kuta's strategic importance and the intensity of competition within the luxury hospitality segment.

Table 1.2

Number of hotels in Kuta that have partnerships with Trip.com Group.

No	Star Rating	Number of Hotels
1	0 stars	21 hotels
2	1 star	35 hotels
3	2 stars	130 hotels
4	3 stars	172 hotels
5	4 stars	88 hotels
6	5 stars	19 hotels
	Total	465 hotels

Source: Trip.com data, 2023

To manage these high-value partnerships effectively, Trip.com employs a Key Account Management (KAM) approach a sophisticated B2B relationship management strategy that provides personalized support for top-performing hotel partners. Through KAM, selected properties designated as Key Account Hotels receive access to strategic consultations, exclusive promotional placements, targeted marketing campaigns, and enhanced operational support. This differentiated approach reflects the platform's recognition that premium hotel partnerships require specialized management to optimize mutual value creation.

Trip.com's KAM selection criteria encompass multiple performance dimensions to identify hotels warranting enhanced support:

- **Star Rating Classification**: 4 and 5-star properties receive priority consideration

- **Booking Volume and Popularity**: Hotels demonstrating consistent guest demand and high booking frequencies

- **Revenue Contribution**: Properties generating significant revenue streams for the platform

- **Customer Review Scores**: Hotels maintaining high guest satisfaction ratings that enhance Trip.com's reputation

- **Gross Merchandise Value (GMV)**: Properties contributing substantial total sales volume through the platform

Selected Key Account Hotels are further stratified into performance tiers (Top 20, Top 50, Top 100) based on annual production metrics, enabling customized support strategies aligned with each property's contribution level and growth potential.

Despite the theoretical soundness and systematic implementation of Trip.com's KAM framework, significant performance disparities persist among key account hotel partners. Analysis of Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) data for the top 50 key account hotels in Kuta reveals inconsistent outcomes that challenge the assumed effectiveness of the KAM approach.

Top 50 Kuta 4 and 5 Stars Hotels: GMV Comparison 2019 vs 2023
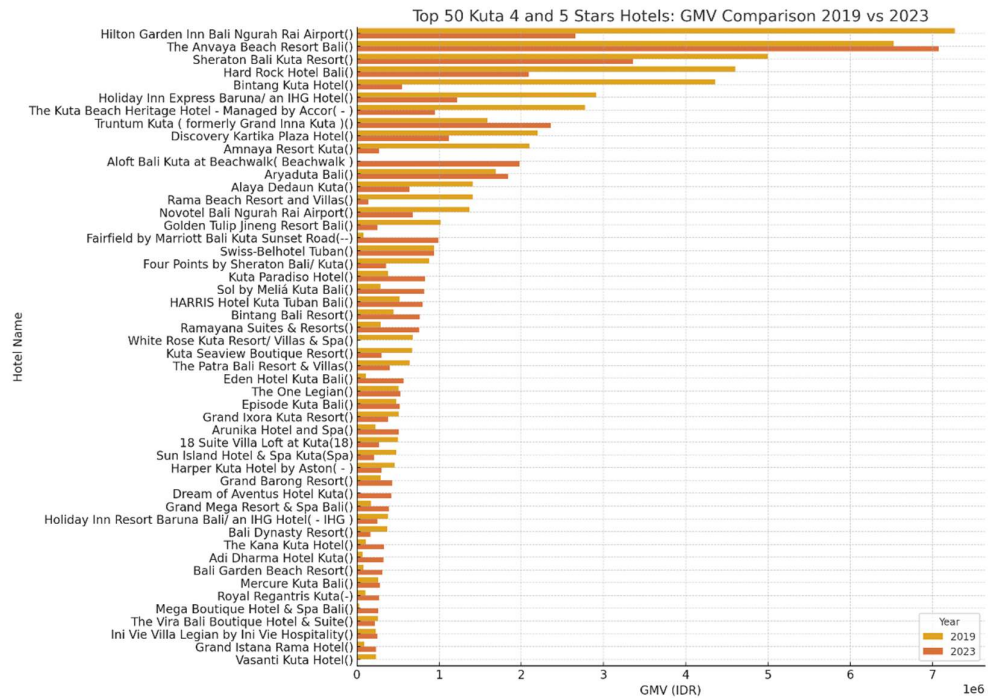
Table 1.3 Top 50 Kuta 4 and 5 stars hotel: GMV comparison 2019 vs 2023

Source : Trip.com data, 2023

This performance analysis reveals that while some properties achieved substantial GMV growth under Trip.com's KAM framework, many failed to recover to pre-pandemic levels or demonstrated only marginal improvement despite receiving enhanced support. These disparities suggest that current KAM implementation may not be optimally configured to address the diverse needs and circumstances of different hotel partners.

The inconsistency in KAM effectiveness raises critical questions about the practical application of key account management strategies in the dynamic hospitality sector. Understanding why some hotels thrive under KAM support while

others stagnate or decline is essential for optimizing partnership frameworks and ensuring equitable value distribution across the hotel portfolio.

This study aims to evaluate the real-world effectiveness of Trip.com's Key Account Management implementation in Kuta's competitive hospitality market. By examining both successful and underperforming key account partnerships, the research seeks to identify factors that contribute to KAM success and obstacles that limit its effectiveness.

The research addresses a significant gap in the literature regarding OTA-hotel partnership optimization in Southeast Asian markets. In the hospitality industry, OTAs play a crucial role in driving bookings and increasing visibility for hotels and resorts, yet limited empirical research examines how key account management strategies perform across diverse hotel contexts within specific geographic markets.

The findings will contribute to both academic understanding of B2B relationship management in digital tourism platforms and practical insights for improving OTA-hotel partnerships. By identifying best practices and implementation challenges, this research aims to propose actionable recommendations for enhancing KAM effectiveness and ensuring more equitable outcomes across Trip.com's hotel partner portfolio.

Furthermore, as the global online travel agencies market size was estimated at USD 612.95 billion in 2024 and is expected to grow at a CAGR of 8.6% from 2025 to 2030, understanding effective partnership management becomes

increasingly critical for sustainable competitive advantage in the rapidly evolving digital tourism ecosystem.

1.2 Formulation of Problems

Based on the comprehensive analysis of the current state of Trip.com's Key Account Management implementation and the identified performance inconsistencies among hotel partners, this research formulates two primary research questions that will guide the systematic investigation:

a. How does Trip.com implement Key Account Management (KAM) strategies for its 4- and 5-star hotel partners in Kuta, Bali, and what are the underlying mechanisms that contribute to the observed performance variations among key account hotels?

b. What are the critical success factors and structural elements that should constitute an optimal partnership model to facilitate sustainable mutual growth and long-term strategic collaboration between Trip.com and its premium hotel partners in Kuta, Bali?

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objectives

To analyze the implementation and effectiveness of Trip.com's Key Account Management (KAM) strategy with 4- and 5-star hotel partners in Kuta, Bali, in order to understand how it supports hotel performance, enhances strategic partnerships, and contributes to competitive positioning within the OTA landscape.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

a. To explore how Trip.com identifies, categorizes, and manages its key hotel accounts (4- and 5-star properties) in Kuta..

b. To evaluate the effectiveness of current partnership models used by Trip.com and recommend improvements and to propose strategic recommendations for improving Trip.com's partnership model with key account hotel partners in Kuta, Bali

1.4 Research Benefits

1.4.2 Theoretical Benefit

This study contributes to the academic understanding of Key Account Management (KAM) in the tourism and hospitality industry, particularly in the context of OTA-hotel partnerships in Southeast Asia. The findings can serve as a reference for future research on strategic partnership models, relationship marketing, and performance optimization in digital travel platforms. It also helps fill a gap in the literature related to how OTAs like Trip.com manage high-value hotel partners in highly competitive destinations such as Bali.

1.4.2 Practical Benefit

a. For Student (as Researcher)

This research allows the student to apply theories of Tourism management, relation marketing theory and key account management learned at Politeknik Negeri Bali (PNB) to a real-world case study. It

provides valuable hands-on experience in qualitative research and deepens understanding of strategic B2B relationships in the tourism sector.

b.   For Politeknik Negeri Bali

This study enriches the academic resources of PNB by contributing new insights and case-specific knowledge on OTA and hotel partnerships. The research findings may serve as a reference for future students conducting studies related to tourism business strategies, online distribution channels, or hospitality management.

c.   For Researched Company (Trip.com)

The findings offer practical feedback for Trip.com regarding the implementation of its KAM strategy in Bali, particularly in the Kuta area. Insights from hotel partners can serve as a basis for evaluating current partnership models, identifying areas for improvement, and enhancing collaboration with key hotel accounts. This can help Trip.com strengthen its competitive position, improve hotel partner satisfaction, and increase performance outcomes such as room production and revenue.

CHAPTER VI
CLOSING

6.1 Conclusion

This study explored the Key Account Management (KAM) strategies implemented by Trip.com in its partnerships with 4- and 5-star hotels in Kuta, Bali. The research found that Trip.com applies a structured KAM approach, selecting key hotel partners based on indicators such as Gross Merchandise Value (GMV), star rating, customer reviews, and revenue performance. These hotels receive special support through dedicated market managers, promotional campaigns, market insights, and access to international audiences, particularly the Chinese outbound market. This system is designed to move beyond basic transactional relationships and build long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships.

However, the study revealed that the success of KAM is not evenly distributed across all hotel partners. While some hotels achieved strong production growth, others showed minimal improvement or even declining performance. Several factors contributed to these mixed outcomes. A major issue identified was the lack of transparency from Trip.com regarding how algorithms determine hotel visibility, search rankings, and campaign eligibility, which created uncertainty and speculation among hotel partners. Additionally, although Trip.com provides a wealth of performance data, many hotels struggled to translate this raw information into practical strategies without sufficient explanation or advisory support from their account managers. Differences in the quality of communication,

responsiveness, and level of proactive engagement from Trip.com's market managers also influenced hotel satisfaction and performance, showing that the human factor remains critical even in a data-driven system.

The research identified several critical success factors that shape an optimal partnership model between Trip.com and its hotel partners. These include mutual value creation, where both parties see clear and measurable benefits; open and consistent communication, which builds trust and allows for timely problem-solving; and collaborative planning, where hotels are actively involved in co-creating campaigns and strategies. Trust and commitment emerged as fundamental pillars, aligning with relationship marketing theory that emphasizes long-term cooperation over short-term gains. Structural elements such as an integrated service framework combining technology and personalized support, transparent performance management systems, and clear mechanisms for joint decision-making were highlighted as necessary to achieve more sustainable and balanced outcomes across the portfolio.

Overall, the study contributes theoretical and practical insights into how OTAs like Trip.com can strengthen their strategic relationships with 4 & 5 stars hotel partners. It demonstrates that while KAM provides a solid framework for collaboration, its real-world success depends heavily on addressing transparency gaps, enhancing advisory support, fostering two-way communication, and ensuring that partnerships are structured for shared growth and long-term value creation.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the research findings and analysis, this study offers the following recommendations for two main stakeholder groups: Trip.com and hotel partners. These recommendations aim to enhance the effectiveness of Key Account Management (KAM) strategies and support stronger, long-term OTA–hotel collaborations in Kuta, Bali and similar tourism markets.

6.2.1 Recommendations for Trip.com

Based on the research findings, Trip.com should consider several strategic enhancements to its KAM approach:

- **Be more transparent with data and reports.**

  Clearly explain what factors contribute to visibility, ranking, and explain how campaign results are measured, how homepage visibility works, and how the system operates. This helps hotel partners trust the process and make better decisions.

- **Involve hotel partners in planning.**

  Work together with hotels early when planning new promotions tools or campaigns, or new system major update which might affect the hotel's operational.

- **Do post-campaign reviews.**

  After a campaign ends, review the results together with hotel partners and give suggestions for improvement. This helps both sides learn and grow.

- **Stay connected throughout the year.**

  Don't only engage hotels during high season, be there for the hotel if they need assistance or have questions. regular contact builds stronger relationships and shows long-term commitment.

- **Provide training to Trip.com market managers.**

  Provide regular training to improve both soft skills (like communication and teamwork) and hard skills (like using data, systems, and campaign tools). Better-trained managers give better support to hotels.

- **Conduct workshops for hotel partners.**

  Organize regular sessions to introduce new tools, campaign types, or updates. This keeps hotels informed and helps them use Trip.com more effectively.

- **Ensure fair account distribution to Market Manager**

  Assign hotel accounts fairly among market managers by considering the number of accounts, level of difficulty, revenue and area coverage. A balanced workload helps improve service quality and overall team performance.

6.2.2 Implications for Hotel Partners

Hotel partners should consider adapting their OTA relationship management approaches to:

- **Active Engagement:** Participate more actively in collaborative planning opportunities and strategic discussions with Trip.com. Share your goal with Trip.com Market manager and align with them.

- **Data and Technology Utilization**: Develop internal capabilities to interpret and act on performance data, market insights and marketing or promotional tools provided by Trip.com.

- **Relationship Investment**: Invest in building stronger relationships with Market Executives and other Trip.com team members to enhance collaboration effectiveness.

6.2.3 For Future Researchers

- **Conduct Comparative Studies Across OTAs**

  Comparing Trip.com's KAM implementation with other platforms like Agoda or Booking.com can provide broader industry insights.

- **Explore Quantitative Impacts of KAM on Revenue**

  Future studies could combine qualitative and quantitative methods to measure the direct financial impact of KAM strategies.

- **Investigate Cross-Destination KAM Models**

  Studying KAM strategies in different regions of Indonesia or Southeast Asia may reveal broader trends and local variations.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1 – Interview Guidance with Trip.com

Section	Objective	Questions
Introduction	Welcome the respondent, explain the purpose of the interview, and obtain consent.	- Thank the respondent for their time and participation.
		- Briefly explain the purpose of the interview.
		- Obtain verbal consent to record the session.
Respondent Background	To understand the respondent's background and role.	- Could you briefly describe your role at Trip.com?
		- How many hotel accounts do you currently manage in the Bali/Kuta area?
KAM Implementation	To understand how Trip.com implements Key Account Management (KAM).	- How does Trip.com select and categorize its key hotel accounts?
		- What criteria define a hotel as a "key account"?
		- What exclusive support or services are provided to KAM hotels?
Performance & Market Penetration	To explore how Trip.com helps improve production for 4- and 5-star hotels and what initiatives are implemented.	- How does Trip.com support 4- and 5-star hotels in increasing room production and revenue?
		- What specific initiatives (e.g., campaigns, visibility tools) have been most effective in Kuta?
Operational Challenges	To identify challenges faced in managing key hotel partnerships.	- What are the major challenges in managing partnerships with 4- and 5-star hotels in Kuta?
		- How does Trip.com measure the success of a KAM relationship?

Comparative Insight	To compare Trip.com's partnership model with other major OTAs.	- How do Trip.com's KAM strategies differ from those of Agoda, Booking.com, or Expedia?
		- What feedback do you typically receive from hotel partners?
Ideal Partnership Model	To gather input on the key components of a strong OTA–hotel relationship.	- In your view, what are the key components of an ideal OTA–hotel partnership?
		- How can Trip.com strengthen its value proposition to premium hotel partners?

Appendix 2 – Interview Guidance with Hotel representative

Section	Objective	Questions
Introduction	Welcome the respondent, explain the purpose of the interview, and obtain consent.	Thank the respondent for their time and participation. Briefly explain the purpose of the interview. Obtain verbal consent to record the session.
Respondent Background	To understand the respondent's position, role, and OTA experience.	Could you briefly describe your role and responsibilities? How long has your hotel partnered with Trip.com?
Partnership Evaluation	To assess the level of engagement and support from Trip.com.	Do you consider your hotel a key account for Trip.com? What types of support or campaigns have you received from Trip.com? How would you describe the responsiveness and communication from your Trip.com Market Manager?

Performance Contribution	To explore Trip.com's contribution to hotel revenue and exposure.	How has Trip.com contributed to your hotel's room night production and market exposure? Do you observe any guest profile patterns or market segments typically booked through Trip.com?
Comparative Evaluation	To understand how Trip.com compares to other OTA partners.	How does Trip.com compare with other OTAs like Agoda, Booking.com, or Expedia in terms of partnership quality? What are the advantages or limitations of working with Trip.com?
Partnership Challenges	To identify challenges in the current OTA partnership.	What are the main challenges you face in your collaboration with Trip.com? How does Trip.com handle issues such as rate parity, guest reviews, or payment processes?
Ideal Partnership Model	To collect recommendations for a better OTA–hotel relationship.	What would an ideal OTA–hotel partnership look like from your perspective? What could Trip.com improve to better support your property?

Appendix 3 – FGD Guidance

Participants   : 10 Sales/E-commerce Managers from 4- and 5-star hotels in Kuta
Duration   : around 30 minutes – 1 hour
Moderator Role   : Facilitate open discussion, maintain neutrality, encourage balanced participation

Discussion Guide:

Section	Objective	Guiding Questions
Introduction	Explain the purpose of the discussion, establish a safe environment, and obtain verbal consent.	Welcome participants and thank them for joining. Briefly explain the purpose of the FGD. Assure participants that their input will remain confidential. Obtain verbal consent to record the session.
Experience with Trip.com	Explore overall impressions and working relationships with Trip.com.	How would you describe your experience working with Trip.com? What kind of support do you receive from Trip.com? Do you feel your hotel is considered a key partner by Trip.com?
Effectiveness of the Partnership	Assess what Trip.com has done well in supporting hotel partners.	Which Trip.com initiatives (campaigns, promotions, visibility tools) have been helpful for your hotel? Do you receive sufficient market insights and performance reports? How effective is communication with the market manager or support team?
Partnership Challenges	Identify issues or obstacles encountered in collaboration.	What challenges have you faced in working with Trip.com? Are there any concerns related to rates, content accuracy, payments, or parity? How does Trip.com handle feedback or complaints from your side?

Comparison with Other OTAs	Benchmark Trip.com's partnership approach against other OTAs.	How does Trip.com compare with Agoda, Booking.com, or Expedia in terms of account management and partnership? What does Trip.com do better or worse than other OTAs?
Ideal OTA–Hotel Partnership	Define what an ideal collaboration looks like from the hotel's perspective.	What are the key features of an ideal OTA–hotel partnership? What improvements would you suggest for Trip.com to be your top OTA partner? What kind of support or services do you expect going forward?
Closing	Summarize key points and allow participants to share final thoughts.	What is the one thing Trip.com could change or improve that would benefit your hotel most? Is there anything else you'd like to add about your experience with Trip.com?

Appendix 4 – List of Informant

No	Name / Position	Company	Data Collection Method
1	Market Manager	Trip.com	Interview
2	Market Manager	Trip.com	Interview
3	Market Manager	Trip.com	Interview
4	Commercial Director	The Anvaya Beach Resort	Interview
5	Director of Sales	Aryaduta Hotel	Interview
6	Director of Sales	Solia Hotel Kuta	Interview
7	Executive Assistant Manager	Mercure Kuta Bali	Interview
8	Ecommerce Manager	The Vira Bali Hotel	Interview
9	Commercial Director	The Anvaya Beach Resort	Interview
10	Director of Sales	Dream of Aventus Hotel	Interview
11	E-Commerce Manager	Solia Legian Hotel	Interview

12	E-Commerce Manager	Truntum Kuta	Interview
13	E-Commerce Manager	Rama Beach Resort and Villas	Interview
14	Hotel Representatives	4- & 5-star Hotels in Kuta	Focus Group Discussion (FGD)