



European Institute of Innovation,
Entrepreneurship, and Technology

**Title: Strategic Crisis Communication in
Tourism: A Case Study of Coastal Escapes Ltd.'s
Response to a Jet Ski Accident**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Abstract
2. Introduction
3. Literature Review
 - 3.1 Crisis Communication and Tourism Industry Challenges
 - 3.2 The Role of Professional English in Emergencies
 - 3.3 Intercultural Theory and Stakeholder Management
 - 3.4 Communication Frameworks for Crisis Scenarios
4. Methodology
 - 4.1 Rationale for Scenario Selection
 - 4.2 Audience-Centric Message Planning
 - 4.3 Theoretical Grounding in Practice
5. Findings
 - 5.1 Staff Internal Memo
 - 5.2 Press Statement for Media and Public
 - 5.3 Formal Letter to Business Stakeholders
6. Discussion
 - 6.1 How Communication Tone Drives Perception
 - 6.2 Ethical and Cultural Filters in Message Strategy
 - 6.3 Student Reflection on Learning Process
7. Conclusion
8. References

Abstract

Tourism organizations are especially vulnerable to public crises, as their core offering—experiences—are emotional, people-centered, and highly visible. In the event of a fatal guest accident, like the one hypothetically occurring at Coastal Escapes Ltd.'s Phuket resort, the response must be swift, professional, and compassionate. This assignment analyzes the crisis communication strategy used in response to a jet ski accident that results in the death of a tourist under the supervision of a third-party vendor.

The analysis focuses on how communication theory, intercultural competence, and professional Business English shape audience-specific messages that address three key groups: internal staff, the general public/media, and business stakeholders. Using theoretical tools such as Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), Image Repair Theory (IRT), and Hofstede's cultural dimensions, the assignment evaluates the power of tone, language structure, and message positioning in crisis recovery.

The three crafted messages are original and tailored to reflect different roles, reactions, and emotional demands. Reflections and discussions tie theory with real-world logic and showcase how thoughtful communication can lead during moments of public uncertainty. Ultimately, this

project emphasizes that leadership in tourism doesn't only come from decisions—it also comes from words.

1. Introduction

Crisis in the tourism industry is not a question of “if,” but “when.” Due to its dependence on human experience, environmental conditions, and third-party service partnerships, tourism is inherently exposed to unpredictable disruptions. When tragedy strikes—such as a guest's death during a recreational activity—it is the organization's communication response that determines whether the incident escalates or gets managed with dignity.

This assignment is based on a simulated case involving **Coastal Escapes Ltd.**, a fictional luxury tourism company operating high-end resorts across Southeast Asia. At its Phuket property, a tourist dies during a jet ski ride operated by a third-party vendor. While the company is not directly at fault, it is deeply tied to the experience and perception of the guest's safety. Public expectation places the burden of leadership on Coastal Escapes.

In this context, strategic crisis communication becomes essential. The purpose of this assignment is to:

- Apply academic and professional models of crisis communication to tourism
- Develop audience-specific messages using Business English principles
- Demonstrate intercultural awareness and tone adaptation
- Reflect on the process from a student and future professional's perspective

The structure includes a literature review of relevant theories and models, an explanation of message development methodology, the messages themselves, and a critical discussion on effectiveness, limitations, and lessons learned.

2. Literature Review

Effective crisis communication in the tourism industry blends language, leadership, and cultural sensitivity. Whether it's a natural disaster, health emergency, or fatal accident, a tourism company's message during a crisis defines how the public and stakeholders perceive its values, competence, and commitment to safety. This literature review explores four key areas that inform crisis communication planning in tourism: general crisis response in the hospitality industry, the strategic use of professional English, intercultural communication theory, and foundational crisis communication frameworks.

2.1 Crisis Communication and Tourism Industry Challenges

Crisis communication is not simply about releasing statements—it is about navigating a reputational storm with clarity, compassion, and control. In tourism, crises are uniquely damaging because guests expect not just a service, but an experience. When that experience turns tragic, the emotional impact is often heightened.

According to Henderson (2007), tourism crises can be categorized into operational (e.g., transportation accidents), reputational (e.g., scandals), and external (e.g., pandemics). In all cases, the speed and tone of a company's response determine whether it retains trust or worsens public backlash. Fearn-Banks (2016) argues that silence or overly defensive messaging tends to escalate public anger, especially in scenarios involving injury or loss of life.

In the Coastal Escapes case, the incident falls under the “operational” category but carries strong reputational consequences. The company did not directly cause the death but is responsible for the guest experience and vendor oversight. This gray area requires precise message positioning, especially in terms of tone and structure.

2.2 The Role of Professional English in Emergencies

Professional Business English serves as the backbone of effective communication across global organizations. It provides structure, clarity, and a neutral tone, which is essential during crises when emotions are high, and public scrutiny is intense.

Guffey and Loewy (2013) emphasize that in crisis communication, sentence construction, grammar accuracy, and vocabulary choice can affect whether a message is interpreted as sincere or evasive. Passive voice, for example, may reduce legal exposure but can seem like deflection if overused. On the other hand, overly emotional or informal language can compromise a brand's professionalism.

In the tourism sector, communication also serves multilingual audiences. As noted by Nickerson (2005), Business English in international settings must prioritize plain language while maintaining diplomacy. This is especially relevant in public statements and letters to stakeholders who may come from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

The writing in this assignment uses short, clear sentences; balanced emotional expressions; and active voice where appropriate—all grounded in the principles of Business English used in corporate settings.

2.3 Intercultural Theory and Stakeholder Management

Global tourism companies like Coastal Escapes operate across diverse cultural contexts, making **intercultural competence** a vital part of their communication strategy. What sounds sincere in one culture might be considered insincere or offensive in another.

Hofstede's (2011) cultural dimensions offer a foundational lens. For instance:

- Thailand, where the incident occurred, ranks high in **power distance** and **collectivism**, meaning messages to local staff should use respectful, hierarchical language and emphasize group unity.
- Western investor audiences, on the other hand, often value **individualism** and **low uncertainty avoidance**, expecting direct updates, risk management plans, and corporate responsibility.

Similarly, Hall's (1976) **high-context and low-context communication theory** helps explain why indirect phrasing may work better with Thai employees but not with American media or European investors. In this assignment, cultural context directly influenced how each of the three crisis messages was constructed—particularly in tone, use of passive voice, and emotional framing.

Respecting cultural norms is not only polite—it also ensures that the message lands effectively, avoiding further conflict or misunderstanding in an already tense situation.

2.4 Communication Frameworks for Crisis Scenarios

Two dominant academic frameworks shape how this assignment approaches message development: **Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)** and **Image Repair Theory (IRT)**.

SCCT, developed by Coombs (2007), provides a classification system for different types of crises and suggests appropriate communication strategies based on perceived responsibility. The model outlines:

- **Victim crises** (e.g., natural disasters)
- **Accidental crises** (e.g., system errors, third-party failures)
- **Preventable crises** (e.g., negligence)

Coastal Escapes' case fits under the **accidental** category. According to SCCT, this means the organization should use **rebuilding strategies**, including expressing empathy, explaining the steps taken, and demonstrating accountability, even if legal liability is limited.

IRT, proposed by Benoit (1995), focuses on the rhetorical choices available to organizations during image-threatening events. It includes five main strategies:

1. Denial
2. Evasion of responsibility
3. Reducing offensiveness
4. Corrective action
5. Mortification

In this assignment, the crisis response blends **corrective action** (e.g., suspending jet ski activities, vendor audits) and **mortification** (expressing sincere condolences), while carefully avoiding language that would imply legal blame.

Both SCCT and IRT highlight the need for organizations to manage **what they say**, **how they say it**, and **when they say it**, making them essential tools in crafting effective crisis messages.

3. Methodology

The goal of this assignment was to simulate a real-world tourism crisis and develop tailored communication messages for three distinct stakeholder groups using professional Business English, intercultural awareness, and communication theory. The methodology used is qualitative and scenario-based, focused on **message creation**, **audience analysis**, and **theoretical application** rather than numerical or statistical research.

This section outlines the reasoning behind the simulated case, the communication choices made, and how crisis frameworks were applied in a practical, business-focused way.

3.1 Rationale for Scenario Selection

The chosen crisis scenario—a fatal jet ski accident involving a guest at Coastal Escapes Ltd.'s Phuket resort—was selected due to its emotional intensity, reputational sensitivity, and relevance to the tourism and recreation industry. The tourism sector often faces unpredictable incidents involving third-party vendors, and guest safety is closely tied to brand image, even if the company is not directly responsible.

This particular event allowed exploration of:

- Indirect responsibility and how to communicate around it
- Cultural sensitivity in Southeast Asian settings
- The use of tone, structure, and message adaptation for different audiences

Using a fatal incident ensured a **serious, realistic simulation** where emotion, professionalism, and legal caution needed to be balanced in every message.

3.2 Audience-Centric Message Planning

Three messages were created, each targeting a key stakeholder group:

1. **Internal Memo for Staff**
2. **Public Statement for Media**
3. **Letter to Business Stakeholders**

Each message was written using a clear, pre-planned communication structure based on the **three-step writing model** (Guffey & Loewy, 2013):

- **Planning:** Define audience, objectives, cultural context, and tone
- **Drafting:** Create original text with theory-informed structure and vocabulary
- **Revising:** Edit for clarity, consistency, empathy, and professionalism

Audience expectations influenced word choice, tone, and emotional weight. For instance:

- The **staff memo** prioritized emotional support and operational clarity
- The **public/media message** used neutral, informative language to maintain brand trust
- The **stakeholder letter** employed a high-level, strategic tone that focused on risk and action

This strategy ensured each message met audience needs while reflecting the company's core values.

3.3 Theoretical Grounding in Practice

The writing was guided by three major frameworks:

1. Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

- Categorized the crisis as **accidental**, involving an external vendor.
- Recommended **rebuilding strategies** like explaining corrective steps and showing concern.
- Helped balance legal caution with moral responsibility (Coombs, 2007).

2. Image Repair Theory (IRT)

- Supported the choice of **corrective action** and **mortification** strategies without full admission of liability.
- Emphasized transparency, empathy, and future prevention (Benoit, 1995).
- Helped craft messages that were neither defensive nor overly emotional.

3. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

- Informed tone adjustments in the staff memo based on Thailand's **high power distance** and **collectivist** culture.
- Ensured stakeholder communications aligned with **low-context**, results-driven expectations in the West (Hofstede, 2011).

Message Format and Style

Each message followed a formal communication structure:

- Clear subject or title line
- Concise, factual introduction
- Middle section with background, current actions, and emotional tone
- Closing with future plans, contact info, or call to action

This structure mirrors real-world tourism and hospitality crisis templates, ensuring consistency and professionalism.

3.4 Writing Tools and Review Process

To ensure professional standards, the following tools and practices were used:

- APA referencing to maintain academic rigor
- Grammarly and Microsoft Word grammar checks
- Comparison with real-world press releases from companies like Marriott, TUI, and Accor during past crises
- Peer-style review by re-reading drafts from each audience's perspective
- Cultural tone-checking using Hall's (1976) and Hofstede's (2011) theories as filters

In addition, emotional tone was reviewed to ensure the messages were respectful but not melodramatic—especially important in a crisis involving death.

4. Findings

The following section presents three original crisis communication messages designed for a fictional but realistic incident at Coastal Escapes Ltd. These messages follow a strategic crisis communication model, incorporating empathy, clarity, cultural sensitivity, and professionalism. They were created to reflect the tone and expectations of three distinct stakeholder groups: employees, the general public/media, and business stakeholders.

4.1 Internal Memo to Staff

To: All Team Members – Coastal Escapes Thailand Region
From: Regional HR & Wellbeing Office
Date: 30 July 2025
Subject: Addressing the Jet Ski Incident and Supporting Each Other

Dear Team,

We are writing with heavy hearts following a tragic incident that occurred on 27 July 2025 at our Phuket property. During a recreational activity managed by an independent vendor, a guest suffered a serious accident while riding a jet ski. Despite prompt assistance from both our team and emergency responders, the guest later passed away at the hospital.

We know this news is upsetting and may affect many of you deeply. On behalf of our entire leadership team, we want to recognize the quick actions and professionalism demonstrated by our on-site staff, especially those who remained calm and supportive in the middle of a crisis.

As a precaution and out of respect:

- All motorized water activities have been **temporarily suspended** across Coastal Escapes' Thailand locations.
- A **safety and vendor partnership review** is underway.
- We are cooperating fully with local authorities and the guest's family.
- Free and confidential **emotional wellness sessions** are available through HR Support – please reach out if you need help processing this event.

We know it's not easy to stay focused during times like this. Please know we are all in this together. Support your teammates, ask for help when needed, and continue providing safe, meaningful service to every guest who walks through our doors.

With sincere appreciation,
Arun Sethi
Regional Director of HR
Coastal Escapes Ltd.

4.2 Public Press Statement

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Coastal Escapes Ltd. Responds to Phuket Guest Accident

Phuket, Thailand – 30 July 2025

Coastal Escapes Ltd. confirms that on 27 July 2025, a guest at our Phuket resort was involved in a serious jet ski accident while participating in an activity operated by an external water sports

vendor. Despite immediate medical assistance from trained staff and emergency personnel, the guest later passed away at a nearby hospital.

We are deeply saddened by this incident and extend our heartfelt condolences to the family and loved ones of the guest. Safety remains our utmost priority, and while the activity was conducted by an approved third-party operator, Coastal Escapes Ltd. is treating the matter with the highest degree of seriousness.

Company response measures include:

- **Immediate suspension** of all jet ski and similar activities at affected locations
- **Review of all vendor agreements**, licenses, and operating protocols
- **Active cooperation** with local authorities and tourism boards

"We stand with the family during this incredibly difficult time," said Group Managing Director, Amina D'Souza. "We are reviewing our safety and operational systems to ensure this kind of tragedy never occurs again."

The company is unable to comment further due to the ongoing investigation. Out of respect for the privacy of the family, we will not be sharing additional details at this time.

Media inquiries may be directed to:

media@coastalescapes.com

+66 2 456 ****

4.3 Letter to Stakeholders and Business Partners

To: Tourism Investors, Property Partners, and Affiliated Agencies

From: Office of the Chief Operating Officer

Date: 30 July 2025

Subject: Incident Notification and Operational Update

Dear Partners,

We are reaching out to inform you of a tragic incident that occurred at our Phuket property on 27 July 2025. A guest who was participating in a recreational jet ski activity—managed by a contracted third-party operator—was involved in an accident that led to the guest's death.

While the incident was external in origin, we acknowledge the broader responsibility we hold for the safety and perception of our properties. Coastal Escapes Ltd. is taking immediate and decisive action, including:

1. **Halting all motorized water activities** at Thailand properties until further notice

2. **Launching a full vendor compliance audit**, with immediate suspension of non-conforming partners
3. **Engaging with safety consultants and legal teams** to identify and close procedural gaps
4. **Maintaining open lines of communication** with all relevant tourism authorities and stakeholders

This event has prompted an internal review of our operations, and we are committed to not only restoring confidence but strengthening our resilience against future incidents.

We understand how events like this can influence brand perception, investor sentiment, and guest behavior. Your continued support and partnership are appreciated during this time. A full impact and response report will be shared in the coming weeks.

Please don't hesitate to reach out if you require any specific updates.

Sincerely,
Hassan El-Tayeb
Chief Operating Officer
Coastal Escapes Ltd.

5. Discussion

In crisis communication, particularly within tourism, the stakes go beyond correcting the record—they involve protecting emotional trust, service reputation, and future viability. This section critically reflects on the language strategies, theoretical models, and intercultural decisions used to construct the three crisis messages developed in the previous section. From internal team morale to public perception and investor confidence, the messages were shaped by intentional, audience-specific decisions.

5.1 Tone and Language Decisions

The biggest challenge in crisis communication is striking the right **tone**. In this assignment, each message was written to fit its target audience emotionally and structurally. The **internal memo** prioritized empathy and solidarity. Instead of focusing on facts alone, it acknowledged grief, praised the staff's efforts, and offered mental health resources. This mirrors Guffey and Loewy's (2013) argument that internal communication during emergencies should offer reassurance and foster community.

For the **press release**, tone was formal yet compassionate. Words like “deeply saddened” and “utmost priority” demonstrated responsibility without assigning legal blame. The language remained clear, using short, structured paragraphs and active voice to maintain reader trust. As

per Fearn-Banks (2016), public messages in a crisis must balance professionalism with visible humanity.

The **stakeholder letter** leaned into executive tone—calm, proactive, and strategic. By listing specific corrective actions and future reporting plans, it aimed to reassure investors and partners that the company had control over the situation. Heath and O’Hair (2009) argue that in stakeholder messaging, clarity of action is more valuable than emotional appeal. This guided the more technical, less emotional vocabulary of the letter.

5.2 Intercultural Sensitivity in Message Strategy

Since Coastal Escapes operates across multiple countries, the messages required an **intercultural lens**. For example, the **staff memo** was written with Thai workplace culture in mind. Thailand scores high on **power distance** (Hofstede, 2011), meaning that employees generally look to leadership for guidance. The memo acknowledged staff efforts while also emphasizing hierarchy and organizational care. It avoided placing blame or asking staff to act independently, which would feel culturally inappropriate.

For the **public message**, more universal Business English was used, since the audience included international tourists and media. According to Hall’s (1976) theory of **low-context communication**, Western audiences expect messages to be direct and informative. Therefore, the public statement was structured clearly, avoiding flowery language or vague apologies.

In the **stakeholder letter**, cultural expectations were financial and legal, not emotional. These readers wanted proof that the company was managing risk. This meant listing specific action items, setting expectations for follow-up reports, and using terms like “compliance audit” and “procedural gaps.” In line with Nickerson (2005), professional English in international business must emphasize **transparency, accountability, and action**.

5.3 Theoretical Models Applied

The messages were shaped by two main theories: **Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)** and **Image Repair Theory (IRT)**.

SCCT, developed by Coombs (2007), places this event in the “**accidental**” category—not directly caused by Coastal Escapes, but involving their brand and environment. In such cases, the company must express **concern and corrective intent** without accepting full responsibility. This is reflected in all three messages:

- Suspension of water activities
- Third-party vendor audits
- Public cooperation with local authorities

The **Image Repair Theory** by Benoit (1995) influenced how the brand was presented in all messages. Instead of denying or evading the event, the messages used:

- **Corrective Action** – outlining what the company is doing to prevent recurrence
- **Mortification** – expressing deep regret and condolences
- **Minimization** – reminding stakeholders of the third-party nature of the incident

This theory helped avoid defensive or legally dangerous statements, keeping the focus on ethical response and future action.

5.4 Reflections as a Student Communicator

Writing these crisis communication messages proved to be more than an academic exercise; it became a test of emotional intelligence, cultural literacy, and managerial foresight. As I immersed myself in the scenarios, I found myself not just writing for grades, but imagining the real consequences of each sentence—how words could either de-escalate a crisis or further damage an already fragile situation. This experience brought to life the theoretical principles I’ve studied in intercultural management and strategic communication. As Coombs (2021) highlights in his Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), the tone and timing of a message can significantly shape public perception and organizational reputation. Applying this theory practically helped me understand how important leadership becomes when it’s expressed not just in decisions, but in words.

One of the most surprising aspects of this assignment was how emotionally complex it became. Writing about a guest’s sudden death wasn’t just a matter of formulating a respectful statement—it required deep empathy, particularly for the grieving family, the affected staff, and the broader community watching the company’s response. I had to consider how language can either humanize or dehumanize a tragedy. As cited by Fearn-Banks (2016), crisis communication must blend facts with empathy to be effective. This emotional demand made me realize that crisis managers aren’t just strategists—they are often emotional first responders. It pushed me to think like a leader who must embody both responsibility and humanity.

The assignment also made me aware of the diverse audiences that must be addressed in a crisis. I learned how the same brand voice must be adapted to different stakeholders—employees, the public, investors, media—while maintaining core values such as accountability, transparency, and respect. To internal staff, communication needs to offer reassurance and clarity about their roles and safety. To the public, it must build trust through honesty and openness. Meanwhile, to corporate partners or board members, it must reflect strategy, risk mitigation, and commitment to future integrity. According to Heath and Johansen (2018), stakeholder analysis is critical in shaping crisis messages that resonate with intended audiences. This nuanced balancing act between consistency and customization was one of the most eye-opening aspects of the task.

Another key learning point was how important writing becomes in time-sensitive, high-stakes moments. In the tourism and hospitality industry, crises often unfold quickly, leaving companies

only hours—not days—to respond. The pressure to communicate clearly, professionally, and compassionately in limited time frames means there is no room for ambiguity or error. This reminded me that Business English in a crisis is not just about grammar or tone—it's a survival tool. As highlighted by Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2017), well-prepared crisis communicators must write under pressure without compromising clarity or ethics. This realization has shifted how I view business communication—not just as an academic skill, but as a leadership competency.

Finally, this assignment has reshaped my understanding of international management in the real world. In cross-border hospitality settings like BlueVista's, cultural sensitivity is not just a bonus—it is essential. Every word must reflect awareness of linguistic diversity, regional sensitivities, and ethical employment practices. It also reinforced that language is power: the power to comfort, to lead, to repair, and to change narratives. For me, this exercise demonstrated that leadership in the tourism sector will increasingly rely on ethical communication as a cornerstone of sustainable business. In a post-COVID era of heightened social consciousness and digital transparency, the way a company responds to crisis may matter just as much as the crisis itself (UNWTO, 2023). This assignment gave me not just a grade, but a glimpse into the real-world responsibilities of being a global manager.

6. Conclusion

This assignment demonstrated that in the tourism industry, effective crisis communication is as important as operational safety. A single tragic event—such as the jet ski accident at Coastal Escapes Ltd.'s Phuket resort—can change public perception overnight. What follows such incidents must be more than a statement; it must be a strategy rooted in empathy, clarity, and intercultural sensitivity.

The three audience-specific messages—crafted for staff, the public, and business stakeholders—highlighted the value of tailoring tone, structure, and content. These weren't just words on a page; they were tools of leadership, reassurance, and damage control. Through the use of Business English, the messages maintained professionalism while acknowledging grief and concern.

Theoretical frameworks such as **SCCT** and **IRT** were especially useful in helping strike the right balance between honesty and legal safety. Intercultural theories from **Hofstede** and **Hall** ensured that the messages felt appropriate to their audiences, especially in Southeast Asia's high-context, respect-oriented environment.

As a student, this assignment pushed me to write not just with my mind, but with empathy. I had to think like a manager, a guest, a journalist, and an investor—all at once. That shift in mindset is what made this project feel truly real. In the future, as I pursue a career in international tourism or hospitality, I'll remember that in a crisis, communication isn't just part of the response—it is the response.

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