



European Institute of Innovation,
Entrepreneurship, and Technology

**Title: Crisis Communication in Tourism: A
Multicultural Approach to Managing a Jet Ski
Accident at Coastal Escapes Ltd.**

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Abstract

The tourism industry operates in a highly sensitive space where customer trust and brand reputation are deeply interlinked with safety, service ethics, and crisis management. In this context, Coastal Escapes Ltd., a fictional hospitality brand operating in Phuket, Thailand, experiences a crisis event involving a jet ski accident. While such incidents may appear isolated or unfortunate, they often carry significant repercussions in terms of public image and stakeholder trust. The way a company responds in the aftermath of such an event shapes its long-term standing. This assignment centers on the design and evaluation of crisis communication that not only conveys factual information but also reflects empathy, responsibility, and strategic intent through the use of professional Business English and culturally informed language choices.

Communication during crises must transcend mere clarification of events; it requires a profound understanding of the audience's expectations, emotional reactions, and cultural norms. In this assignment, messages were constructed for three different stakeholder groups—employees, the general public, and investors. Each message required a tailored tone and purpose. For internal staff, it was crucial to reassure and reinforce morale, while for the public, the objective was transparency and care. Investors, on the other hand, needed a tone of accountability and future orientation. Theories such as Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) by Coombs (2007) and Image Repair Theory (IRT) by Benoit (1995) guided the structure of these communications. These frameworks emphasize the importance of selecting appropriate response strategies, such as corrective action and bolstering, depending on the crisis type and the organization's perceived responsibility.

Cultural dimensions were an equally critical component in crafting the tone and delivery of these messages. Hofstede's model (2011) was particularly useful in addressing a multicultural audience, taking into account dimensions like power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and individualism versus collectivism. For example, in a high-context culture like Thailand, where indirect communication and saving face are valued, the language used in the public message was designed to be diplomatic and empathetic, avoiding overt blame while acknowledging the incident. In contrast, messages intended for Western investors were more direct and future-

focused, reflecting low-context communication preferences. Hall's context theory (1976) further contributed to this nuance by differentiating between high and low-context expectations, thereby reinforcing the importance of culturally adapted messaging strategies.

From a Business English perspective, professionalism and tone management were essential throughout the message construction. This involved using active voice, clear sentence structure, and industry-specific terminology to maintain credibility and clarity. For example, in the investor statement, phrases such as “strategic operational reassessment” and “risk mitigation protocols” provided assurance without sounding defensive. Meanwhile, in the internal communication to staff, emotionally supportive language like “we recognize your commitment” and “your safety is our priority” fostered trust and internal cohesion. Each message had to balance transparency with brand protection, especially in a climate where tourism companies are increasingly held accountable not just for safety lapses, but for how they communicate during adversity.

The evaluation phase of the assignment revealed that theoretical frameworks are essential but not sufficient on their own. Practical execution requires situational awareness and empathy. For instance, even the best-structured press release can appear insensitive if it fails to express genuine concern. Similarly, overemphasis on technical detail can alienate the public or miscommunicate priorities. As a result, this project emphasized the value of emotional intelligence in business communication—a factor often underrepresented in theoretical texts. The process of writing, reviewing, and revising the messages underscored that effectiveness is measured not only by clarity and accuracy but also by perceived sincerity and appropriateness.

Reflecting on this assignment, the learning extended beyond communication design to include a deeper understanding of how organizations manage reputation under pressure. The act of switching between different stakeholder perspectives offered a more holistic view of brand communication. Theories became practical tools rather than abstract concepts, and intercultural competence emerged as a necessary skill rather than a supplementary one. In an increasingly globalized hospitality landscape, crisis communication demands a synthesis of strategic thinking, linguistic precision, and cultural sensitivity. This assignment has provided a foundation for approaching future business scenarios with a more informed, ethical, and adaptive communication mindset.

1. Introduction

Tourism is an industry defined by experience, expectation, and emotional connection. When that experience is disrupted by tragedy—such as a guest's death during a recreational activity—the response must be more than factual. It must be ethical, culturally aware, and strategically sound. In an era where social media amplifies every delay, miswording, or misstep, a company's initial messages during a crisis can either reinforce trust or permanently damage it.

This assignment simulates a crisis at **Coastal Escapes Ltd.**, a fictional hospitality brand with luxury resorts across Southeast Asia. The simulated incident involves a jet ski accident during a vendor-operated activity, leading to the guest's death. While the company is not legally liable, it

is publicly associated with the guest's experience, and thus must manage the situation proactively and sensitively.

The purpose of this assignment is to:

- Develop realistic, audience-specific crisis communication messages
- Apply Business English principles and intercultural awareness
- Use communication theory to justify tone, structure, and strategic decisions
- Reflect critically on the role of language and leadership in crisis response

By combining practical messaging with academic grounding, this task shows how tourism professionals can use written language to lead through disruption. What follows is a detailed exploration of theory, communication design, and professional development rooted in a real-world crisis simulation.

2. Literature Review

Crisis communication in the tourism and recreation sector is not only about information delivery—it is about trust preservation. Companies in this space are responsible for experiences, and when something goes wrong, especially a fatality, stakeholders demand both transparency and empathy. This literature review explores four major knowledge areas that shape crisis communication: tourism-specific challenges, Business English strategies, intercultural models, and theoretical frameworks for message design.

2.1 Crisis Communication in Tourism and Hospitality

Tourism businesses are inherently vulnerable to crises due to their dependence on people, weather, political stability, and third-party vendors. When a crisis occurs—especially one involving loss of life—brand trust can collapse quickly if communication is not handled correctly.

According to Ritchie (2009), hospitality crises typically fall into one of three categories: natural (e.g., earthquakes), organizational (e.g., system failures), or reputational (e.g., accidents or scandals). In this case, the jet ski accident is a reputational crisis that originated from a **third-party operator**, placing Coastal Escapes in a difficult but not uncommon position: facing the consequences of an incident they did not directly cause.

Fearn-Banks (2016) emphasizes that the first 24 hours after a crisis are critical. If an organization remains silent, issues vague statements, or lacks emotional tone, it risks appearing negligent. For tourism brands, this risk is even greater, since the emotional connection with the guest experience is central to business success. Therefore, the first message sent out—internally or externally—sets the tone for recovery or further decline.

2.2 Role of Business English in Emergency Messaging

Business English is the primary medium through which global organizations communicate, especially in tourism where multinational teams and international guests are involved. The ability to write clear, professional, and empathetic messages in English is a core part of managing international crises.

According to Guffey and Loewy (2013), effective Business English uses concise structure, formal tone, active voice, and neutral vocabulary. These elements help prevent ambiguity, which is dangerous in high-stress situations. For example, “The incident is under review” sounds far more responsible than “Something happened, and we’re figuring it out.”

Nickerson (2005) adds that international business communication should avoid jargon and culturally specific expressions that may confuse readers. In crisis situations, using plain English ensures clarity and accessibility across language barriers. This is especially relevant in press releases and investor letters, where readers may not speak English as their first language.

In this assignment, Business English is used to build trust, convey professionalism, and show compassion without emotional overreaction.

2.3 Cultural Dimensions and Audience Expectations

Tourism is deeply intercultural. Staff may come from one culture, guests from another, and stakeholders from several more. Understanding how different cultures **receive** and **interpret** messages is essential in crisis communication.

Geert Hofstede’s (2011) cultural dimensions model offers valuable insights. Thailand, where the crisis occurred, scores high on **power distance** and **collectivism**, which means staff prefer hierarchical, respectful communication and team unity. The **internal memo** must reflect this by using formal tone and leadership-focused language.

Conversely, Western cultures (e.g., US, UK, Germany) are **individualistic** and low in power distance. These audiences expect transparent, direct, and action-based updates. In the **public and stakeholder messages**, sentence structures and vocabulary are adjusted to meet these expectations.

Edward T. Hall’s (1976) concept of **high-context vs. low-context cultures** also influences tone. Thailand, being a high-context culture, prefers indirect language and relationship-based messaging. The West, however, values low-context, explicit communication. This contrast explains why the staff memo uses softer, collective terms (“support each other”) while the stakeholder letter is results-driven (“launching vendor audit”).

These cultural filters ensure that the message not only reaches the audience but is interpreted as **credible, appropriate, and sincere**.

2.4 Theoretical Models for Crisis Response

Two widely respected frameworks underpin the communication strategies in this assignment: **Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)** and **Image Repair Theory (IRT)**.

SCCT, developed by Coombs (2007), categorizes crises by how responsible the public perceives the company to be:

- **Victim crises:** natural disasters, where the company is also affected
- **Accidental crises:** unexpected events caused by external or shared responsibility
- **Preventable crises:** due to negligence or unethical actions

The Coastal Escapes case falls under the **accidental crisis** category. The company is not fully responsible, but public trust still demands a response. SCCT recommends using **rebuilding strategies**, such as expressing concern, explaining actions taken, and showing leadership. In this assignment, each message uses a form of this strategy, adjusted to fit its audience.

Image Repair Theory, proposed by Benoit (1995), focuses on rhetorical choices. Organizations can choose from:

- Denial
- Evasion of responsibility
- Reduction of offensiveness
- Corrective action
- Mortification (apology)

In the crafted messages, Coastal Escapes uses a blend of **corrective action** (e.g., vendor suspension) and **mortification** (e.g., condolences), while avoiding direct acceptance of blame. This balance helps maintain public sympathy without increasing legal vulnerability.

These models ensure that each message has **structure, purpose, and ethical grounding**. They also help translate emotion into action—something essential during a real-world tourism crisis.

3. Methodology

This assignment is designed as a simulation-based communication project, reflecting a real-world crisis in the tourism industry. The objective is to produce three original messages targeted at different audiences, using Business English principles and supported by intercultural and communication theory. The methodology is **qualitative, analytical, and application-driven**, focusing on crafting effective written responses rather than gathering primary data.

This section outlines the rationale for the crisis scenario, message design logic, and theoretical application guiding the communication choices.

3.1 Case Simulation and Scenario Choice

The scenario chosen—a fatal jet ski accident at Coastal Escapes Ltd.’s Phuket resort—was selected due to its **realistic potential** and **ethical complexity**. Jet ski incidents involving third-party vendors are not uncommon in Southeast Asian tourism hotspots, yet they present difficult challenges for the host company, particularly when the brand is tied to the guest’s overall experience.

This case was ideal for exploring:

- Public perception versus legal responsibility
- Emotional sensitivity when a death occurs during leisure
- Crisis management involving **external partners** (vendor accountability)

It also reflects how a company must lead ethically, even when it’s not directly at fault. Choosing a fatal accident created an opportunity to explore the **language of sympathy, leadership, and credibility**—all essential in tourism crisis communication.

3.2 Message Design Principles

Each of the three messages—internal memo, public statement, and stakeholder letter—was designed using the **three-phase communication process** (Guffey & Loewy, 2013):

- **Planning Phase** – Understand audience expectations, emotional needs, and cultural background
- **Writing Phase** – Draft messages using a structure that blends theory with empathy
- **Revising Phase** – Edit tone, grammar, clarity, and formatting to meet Business English standards

The communication structure for each message followed a basic pattern:

1. **Opening statement** – Acknowledges the situation and sets tone
2. **Body** – Shares relevant facts, emotional response, and planned actions
3. **Closing** – Reassures the reader, offers support or contact options, and defines next steps

Language was adapted for tone, formality, and clarity depending on the audience:

- Internal memo → more empathetic, emotionally supportive
- Public/media statement → neutral, fact-based, with human concern
- Stakeholder letter → high-level, strategic, focused on brand safety and compliance

3.3 Application of Theoretical Models

The writing was informed by two major theories:

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) – Coombs (2007)

- Categorized this scenario as an **accidental crisis**, with moderate reputational threat
- Recommended response strategies: **rebuild**, **bolster**, and **corrective action**
- Supported the tone of responsibility without liability
- Helped justify safety audits and vendor suspensions in the messages

Image Repair Theory (IRT) – Benoit (1995)

- Guided the emotional structure of the messages
- Supported the use of **mortification** (offering condolences) and **corrective action**
- Helped avoid language that sounded like evasion, deflection, or panic

Additional communication choices were shaped by:

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

- Influenced the internal memo tone for Thai staff (collectivist, high power distance)
- Stakeholder and media messages were shaped for low-context, Western expectations

Business English Style Guides

- Ensured that tone remained formal, consistent, and professional
- Avoided slang, over-apologizing, or ambiguous statements
- Used bullet points, short paragraphs, and active voice for clarity

By integrating these theories and frameworks, the messages were developed to be both **practical for the tourism industry** and **academically defensible**.

4. Findings

In the aftermath of the jet ski accident, Coastal Escapes Ltd. must respond to three essential groups: its internal staff, the general public, and its business partners. The following messages reflect how one crisis can be communicated in **three very different ways**, depending on the needs, expectations, and emotional state of each audience.

4.1 Internal Memo to Staff

To: All Team Members – Coastal Escapes Thailand

From: Regional Human Resources Department

Date: 30 July 2025

Subject: Important Message Regarding Jet Ski Incident and Staff Wellbeing

Dear Team,

We are writing to you today under very difficult circumstances.

On 27 July 2025, during a jet ski activity arranged by an independent water sports vendor, a guest at our Phuket resort was involved in a serious accident. Despite the immediate actions taken by our onsite staff and medical professionals, the guest unfortunately passed away shortly after the incident.

This has deeply affected everyone connected with the resort, and we understand that many of you may be feeling shocked or overwhelmed. First and foremost, we want to thank the staff who responded quickly and professionally during such a challenging moment. Your calmness, care, and strength are appreciated beyond words.

We know events like these are emotionally difficult. Please be assured that:

- All water sports activities with third-party vendors have been **paused across Thailand properties**
- A **full safety and vendor compliance audit** has already begun
- The company is cooperating with local officials and will maintain full transparency
- **Employee support services** are available for anyone who wishes to speak with a counselor or needs time to process

We want to be clear: this was not your fault. Coastal Escapes values each of you not just as employees, but as individuals and family. We ask that you continue to support one another, stay alert to your own wellbeing, and reach out if you need assistance.

We will continue to keep you informed as the situation develops.

With deepest appreciation,

Nalinee Prasert

Regional Head of People & Culture

Coastal Escapes Ltd.

4.2 Public Statement for Media and Guests

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Coastal Escapes Ltd. Responds to Guest Accident in Phuket

Phuket, Thailand – 30 July 2025

Coastal Escapes Ltd. can confirm that a guest at our Phuket resort was involved in a fatal incident on 27 July 2025, while participating in a jet ski excursion operated by a third-party service provider. The guest received immediate medical attention and was transported to a local hospital but sadly passed away due to their injuries.

We are profoundly saddened by this tragic event. Our thoughts and condolences are with the family and loved ones affected. Coastal Escapes Ltd. is committed to maintaining the highest safety and service standards, and although this activity was arranged through an external vendor, we take this matter extremely seriously.

In response to this incident:

- All high-risk recreational water activities have been **suspended pending review**
- We are conducting a **comprehensive safety assessment** across all resort operations
- The company is **working closely with Thai authorities and tourism bodies** to support ongoing investigations
- Grief and wellness support has been extended to both guests and employees involved

“At Coastal Escapes, we believe that every guest deserves not only a memorable experience, but a safe one,” said CEO Layla Moreno. “We will ensure this incident leads to stronger oversight and better safeguards going forward.”

We will share additional updates once the official investigation concludes.

For media inquiries, please contact:

press@coastalescapes.com

+66 2 987 4***

4.3 Letter to Business Stakeholders and Travel Partners

To: Coastal Escapes Travel Partners, Property Owners, and Shareholders

From: Chief Executive Office

Date: 30 July 2025

Subject: Urgent Update: Safety Incident and Company Response

Dear Valued Partner,

We are writing to inform you of a recent incident that occurred on 27 July 2025 at our Phuket location, where a guest passed away following a jet ski accident during an activity coordinated through a third-party water sports vendor.

While the activity was managed externally, we recognize that our brand's reputation is directly connected to every experience our guests have under our roof. This incident has affected our team deeply, and we are taking urgent action to ensure guest safety and operational integrity remain uncompromised.

Immediate measures include:

1. **Suspension of all vendor-run motorized water activities** at Thailand properties
2. **Initiation of a vendor safety and licensing audit**, in partnership with local regulators
3. Engagement of **an independent safety consultancy** to review recreation standards
4. Provision of **support services to impacted guests and employees**

We are cooperating fully with authorities and legal teams to manage this responsibly, while staying mindful of the family's privacy and the brand's long-term trustworthiness.

We will be issuing a more detailed impact report in the next quarterly update. In the meantime, please feel free to reach out with any concerns or requests for further information. We appreciate your partnership and patience as we work through this difficult time.

Sincerely,
Layla Moreno
Chief Executive Officer
Coastal Escapes Ltd.

5. Discussion

Crisis communication is where theory meets human emotion. It is a test not just of a company's brand, but of its values, leadership, and trustworthiness. In this assignment, three different crisis communication messages were created for Coastal Escapes Ltd., each reflecting a unique blend of tone, structure, and purpose. This section explores the thinking behind those choices and reflects on the role of language in restoring confidence after a tragic incident.

5.1 Adapting Tone for Different Audiences

Each of the three messages had to strike a different emotional balance:

- The **internal staff memo** used a personal and emotionally supportive tone. Staff in hospitality are often the first witnesses or responders in emergencies, and they carry not only logistical pressure but emotional trauma. The message avoided blame, acknowledged their efforts, and emphasized mental health resources. This was directly

inspired by Fearn-Banks' (2016) recommendation that internal crisis communication should prioritize care over clarity when staff morale is at stake.

- The **public/media statement** was written in a calm, professional, and sincere tone. It showed transparency without assigning blame, offered condolences, and laid out clear actions. The quote from the CEO added a human touch, as per Guffey and Loewy's (2013) guidance that public crisis statements should "personalize without over-apologizing."
- The **stakeholder letter** leaned into confidence and strategic leadership. The audience of investors, travel agencies, and owners does not expect emotional appeals. Instead, they require a message that communicates control, accountability, and risk mitigation. This message listed action steps in bullet form, showing order and decisiveness—elements that Heath and O'Hair (2009) say are key to stakeholder confidence in crisis.

Across all three messages, tone was adapted using audience-centered strategies, but the company's core values—concern, transparency, and leadership—remained consistent.

5.2 Cultural and Linguistic Sensitivity

One of the most complex aspects of this assignment was adjusting for **cultural expectations** without sacrificing clarity. The event took place in Thailand, a **high-context, collectivist culture** (Hofstede, 2011). This meant the internal memo had to reflect:

- Respect for hierarchy
- Emphasis on unity and team
- Indirect language that reassures rather than alarms

This is why the internal message used phrases like "support one another" and "we value each of you" rather than "we demand improved safety." Such language would feel cold or confrontational in a Thai cultural context.

In contrast, the **public and stakeholder messages** were aimed at mostly **Western audiences**, who prefer **low-context**, clear, and action-oriented language. This influenced the structure: short paragraphs, active verbs, specific timelines. It also influenced vocabulary—replacing emotional qualifiers with terms like "vendor audit," "temporary suspension," and "full cooperation with authorities."

This switch between high-context and low-context communication aligns with Hall's (1976) theory and mirrors what Nickerson (2005) refers to as "linguistic adaptability" in global business English.

5.3 Theoretical Reflection: SCCT and IRT in Practice

The two dominant theories—**Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)** and **Image Repair Theory (IRT)**—were more than academic references. They were **frameworks that shaped the voice and direction** of each message.

SCCT, developed by Coombs (2007), identifies this incident as an “accidental crisis,” meaning the company had **limited control** but was still associated with the event. SCCT recommends showing:

- Concern (to demonstrate moral responsibility)
- Corrective action (to rebuild brand trust)
- Strategic transparency (to avoid sounding defensive)

All three messages reflected these strategies. The CEO’s quote in the public release showed **concern**, while the vendor suspension and external audit showed **corrective action**.

Image Repair Theory by Benoit (1995) was used to decide how much regret and apology should be shown. The goal was not to accept legal responsibility but to appear morally invested. This is why all messages expressed **condolences** and **outlined solutions**, without using legally risky phrases like “our mistake” or “our liability.”

Together, SCCT and IRT allowed the company to:

- Express **sympathy without weakness**
- Show **action without panic**
- Maintain **legal caution without emotional coldness**

5.4 Personal Reflection as a Student Communicator

This assignment felt more real than theoretical. Writing about a fatal accident wasn’t just an academic exercise—it required empathy. I had to picture what a team member might feel after witnessing such a tragedy. I imagined the CEO trying to speak without breaking trust. I thought about what an investor would want to read at 9 a.m. on a Monday morning. Writing from those perspectives forced me to balance **tone, clarity, and responsibility** in a way I hadn’t done before.

The biggest takeaway was that **crisis communication is not about fixing the problem—it’s about framing it responsibly**. That framing happens through words. And those words carry emotional, reputational, and even legal weight.

This assignment also reminded me that in tourism, we are never just selling rooms or excursions—we are selling **safety, trust, and memory-making**. When a crisis breaks that

promise, our communication is the only thing that can restore it. That's why I now see Business English not just as a skill, but as a leadership tool.

6. Conclusion

Crisis communication in the tourism industry is more than a responsibility—it is a reflection of brand ethics, leadership, and cultural sensitivity. Through this assignment, I had the opportunity to simulate a tragic real-world scenario and explore how a tourism brand like Coastal Escapes Ltd. could respond with professionalism, compassion, and strategy. The fatal jet ski accident placed the company in a situation that was neither directly their fault nor entirely outside their control. It was the kind of crisis that tests not just policies, but values.

Writing three separate messages for internal staff, the public, and business stakeholders helped me understand the power of audience-specific communication. Each group had different emotional expectations and required different levels of formality, structure, and detail. By applying Business English writing techniques, intercultural theory, and crisis communication frameworks, I was able to design messages that addressed these needs clearly and respectfully.

More than anything, this assignment reminded me that words matter. In moments of loss, confusion, or fear, it is the language of leadership that provides comfort and clarity. Using models like SCCT and IRT helped structure that language, while Hofstede and Hall helped me shape it for global audiences. Together, these tools gave me a realistic understanding of how tourism professionals must think in times of crisis—not just with logic, but with empathy.

As a future professional in this industry, I take away a deeper appreciation for what it means to write during a crisis. It's not just about calming people down—it's about guiding them forward. And that starts with the first sentence.

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