



European Institute of Innovation,
Entrepreneurship, and Technology

**Title: Responding to Health Threats in
Tourism: Crisis Communication Strategies for
Norovirus at GlobalSun Resorts Ltd. Maldives**

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1. Abstract

Health-related crises in tourism challenge not only operations but also the brand identity and global reputation of hospitality enterprises. This assignment explores a simulated case involving a **norovirus outbreak** at **GlobalSun Resorts Ltd.**, a premier beachfront property in the Maldives. Norovirus, known for its rapid transmission and disruptive impact, is a recurring threat in communal living environments like hotels and resorts.

The report develops a strategic communication response based on **Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)** and **Hofstede's Intercultural Framework**, constructing three tailored documents: an internal memo, a public press release, and a stakeholder letter. These tools aim to preserve brand trust, reassure multiple audiences, and align messaging with cultural expectations across GlobalSun's international clientele.

Through academic review, strategic design, and cross-cultural reflection, the report demonstrates that **clear, empathetic, and culturally aware communication** is a powerful asset during tourism-related health crises. The findings highlight the need for proactive planning, integrated stakeholder strategies, and ethical leadership in navigating such incidents.

2. Introduction

In today's globally connected tourism sector, a single public health event can ripple across markets, affect thousands of travelers, and damage even the most trusted hospitality brands. This vulnerability is especially pronounced in high-density, high-contact environments like luxury resorts, where **communal dining, shared recreation, and high guest turnover** make rapid disease transmission a constant risk.

This report examines a fictional case of **GlobalSun Resorts Ltd.**, an upscale tropical resort located in the Maldives, where an outbreak of **norovirus**—a highly contagious gastrointestinal illness—has been detected. Although the infection rate remains localized, the resort's

management must respond swiftly to preserve guest confidence, protect staff, and minimize reputational fallout.

The goals of this crisis communication strategy are:

- To inform and guide staff through internal protocols,
- To reassure guests and the wider public through calm and clear messaging,
- To update stakeholders and business partners with structured, strategic information.

To achieve these goals, the report applies **Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)** (Coombs, 2007) to determine the right tone and content for the communication. In addition, **Hofstede's (2011) Cultural Dimensions Theory** is used to ensure that language and emotional framing are **culturally appropriate** for a diverse international audience.

This report argues that effective crisis communication during health threats is not only about managing operational risks—it is also about shaping the **emotional narrative of the brand** in the eyes of staff, customers, and stakeholders. In tourism, communication is experience. And in crisis, it becomes a test of trust.

3. Literature Review

This literature review explores the interplay between health crises, tourism vulnerability, and communication strategy. It examines how communication theories guide effective messaging and how cultural frameworks influence the acceptance and interpretation of such messages during public health incidents in hospitality.

3.1 Norovirus in Hospitality Environments

Norovirus, often referred to as the “winter vomiting bug,” is a **gastrointestinal virus** transmitted via contaminated surfaces, food, or person-to-person contact (CDC, 2023). Its fast incubation and high transmissibility make it particularly problematic in enclosed or communal environments—such as cruise ships, hotels, and resorts.

In a comprehensive review by Verhoef et al. (2018), norovirus outbreaks in resorts and similar facilities were often traced back to **poor food hygiene**, contaminated water, or insufficient surface disinfection. Once active, the virus can remain viable on surfaces for several days, complicating containment efforts.

For resorts such as GlobalSun Maldives, the risk is compounded by:

- **Shared amenities** like pools and dining halls,
- **Diverse international guests** with varying hygiene expectations,
- **Island geography**, which can delay access to external medical support.

This makes **prevention and rapid response communication** essential in tourism settings (Ali & Frew, 2014).

3.2 Crisis Communication Theories and Frameworks

The cornerstone of this report's communication design is **Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)** by Coombs (2007). SCCT categorizes crises based on how much the organization is perceived to be at fault and prescribes communication strategies accordingly.

- **Victim crises** (e.g., natural disasters, terrorist attacks): Low organizational responsibility. Sympathy and concern are emphasized.
- **Accidental crises** (e.g., health outbreaks with unclear origin): Moderate responsibility. Strategy includes correction and transparency.
- **Preventable crises** (e.g., negligence): High responsibility. Full apology and major reforms are needed.

In this scenario, norovirus is classified as an **accidental crisis**, requiring GlobalSun Resorts to demonstrate:

- Responsibility (without admitting fault),
- Corrective action, and
- Guest empathy.

SCCT has been widely adopted in the tourism industry, especially following COVID-19. Jin, Liu, and Austin (2014) found that brands applying SCCT principles during SARS and H1N1 outbreaks preserved more consumer trust than those that communicated vaguely or defensively.

3.3 Cultural Dimensions in Health Crisis Messaging

Effective crisis messaging in tourism must consider **cultural communication norms**, especially for brands like GlobalSun that serve multinational clientele. Hofstede's (2011) six-dimension model provides a framework to anticipate how different cultures interpret risk, authority, and emotion.

Relevant dimensions for this assignment include:

- **Uncertainty Avoidance:** Cultures like Japan, South Korea, and Germany value detailed protocols and trust in official procedure. Thus, messages for such audiences must include procedural detail and reference to authoritative sources like WHO or the CDC (Reisinger & Turner, 2003).

- **Power Distance:** In cultures with high power distance (e.g., India, Russia, UAE), people expect crisis updates to come from senior leaders, not mid-level staff. Including titles like “Chief Operating Officer” or “General Manager” adds weight and legitimacy.
- **Individualism vs. Collectivism:** Individualistic cultures (e.g., USA, UK) respond better to “your safety” messaging. Collectivist cultures (e.g., China, Brazil) prefer framing around community protection (“our shared wellness”).

Applying Hofstede’s model allows messages to be emotionally aligned, reducing friction and building **intercultural trust**.

3.4 Language, Framing, and Trust in Tourism Communication

Language is not just a tool in crisis—it is a **symbol of competence, empathy, and control**. Tourism brands must balance clarity with compassion, and factual accuracy with emotional intelligence.

Guffey and Loewy (2020) outline the four C’s of crisis messaging in Business English:

1. **Clear** – Short sentences, no jargon,
2. **Courteous** – Emotionally aware tone,
3. **Concise** – Avoid overloading information,
4. **Correct** – Facts, dates, procedures must be verified.

In health-related crises, tone management is particularly vital. A study by Liu, Fraustino, and Jin (2016) found that emotionally flat or bureaucratic language often worsens panic, while warm, authoritative language reduces fear and fosters cooperation.

Moreover, crisis messages should align with the “**three Rs**” of crisis reputation repair: **Responsibility, Reassurance, and Recovery** (Fearn-Banks, 2016). Each message—internal, public, and stakeholder—should reflect these themes without appearing insincere or overly scripted.

4. Methodology

This section describes how the communication strategy for the fictional norovirus outbreak at GlobalSun Resorts Ltd. was designed. It explains the theoretical models used, the reasoning behind content style and structure, and the ethical considerations that influenced each message.

4.1 Message Development Principles

The communication tools—an internal memo, press release, and stakeholder letter—were crafted using **applied simulation methodology**, a strategy often used in hospitality and tourism

education (Baggio, 2014). While no real outbreak occurred, the scenario was developed to reflect:

- Known characteristics of norovirus,
- Real communication practices in luxury hospitality, and
- Best practices from academic literature.

Each message was created to simulate **real-time crisis management** and was edited iteratively using the following quality checklist:

- Clear headline or subject line
- Audience-focused tone
- Logical structure with bullet points or short paragraphs
- Appropriate use of emotional cues and business language
- Cultural sensitivity and inclusive language
- Reference to public health authority (e.g., WHO or CDC)

The intention was to replicate what a trained crisis communication team would produce in an actual hospitality emergency.

4.2 Audience Segmentation Strategy

A key component of effective crisis communication is knowing **who** you're speaking to. This report used a **three-tier segmentation model**:

Audience Type	Needs	Tone & Format
Internal Staff	Clear direction, procedural updates	Direct, supportive, instructional
Public & Guests	Emotional reassurance, safety visibility	Empathetic, transparent, authoritative
Stakeholders	Financial and operational reassurance	Formal, strategic, investor-focused

This segmentation ensured that:

- Staff felt **empowered**, not overwhelmed,
- Guests felt **safe**, not alarmed,
- Stakeholders felt **informed**, not sidelined.

Following recommendations from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2022), each message was designed to **build trust before, during, and after** the peak of the crisis.

4.3 Use of SCCT and Hofstede's Framework

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) by Coombs (2007) was applied to determine how much responsibility GlobalSun should accept and how aggressively it should act. Since norovirus is usually considered **accidental**, the appropriate response strategy was a mix of:

- **Corrective action** (describing what the company is doing),
- **Minimizing risk perception** (mentioning limited cases and control measures), and
- **Expressing concern** without excessive emotion.

At the same time, **Hofstede's (2011) Cultural Dimensions Theory** was used to ensure that language and tone matched cultural expectations. For example:

- In the **internal memo**, directives were short and specific—helpful in high uncertainty-avoidance cultures like Germany or Japan.
- The **public message** avoided direct blame or speculation—important in collectivist cultures where harmony is valued.
- The **stakeholder letter** included executive authority and data—essential for high power-distance and performance-oriented cultures.

These dual frameworks—SCCT and Hofstede—ensured that the communication strategy was both **strategically effective** and **culturally competent**.

4.4 Ethical and Cultural Considerations

Ethical messaging was a top priority in message construction. As emphasized by Fearn-Banks (2016), ethical crisis communication should:

- Avoid scapegoating,
- Include vulnerable populations,
- Offer realistic updates, and
- Demonstrate empathy, not just efficiency.

Each message includes:

- Acknowledgment of the situation,
- Reference to actions being taken,
- An open line of communication (e.g., guest hotline, staff briefing, stakeholder contact).

Importantly, **no nationality, demographic group, or employee group** is blamed or implicated. This aligns with tourism ethics frameworks that stress **non-discrimination** and **global sensitivity** (UNWTO, 2022).

The development process also assumed a **digital distribution model**: messages would be sent via email, posted on official channels, and used during staff briefings. All messages were designed to be **multilingual-ready**, ensuring ease of translation without loss of tone or structure.

5. Findings

In this section, we present the three customized communication tools designed for GlobalSun Resorts Ltd. during the fictional norovirus outbreak. Each tool was developed using crisis communication principles and reflects the cultural sensitivity and tone suited to its intended audience.

5.1 Internal Staff Memo

To: All Resort Staff
From: Leila Hassan, General Manager, GlobalSun Resorts – Maldives
Date: July 29, 2025
Subject: Immediate Health Measures Following Norovirus Alert

Dear Team,

We are writing to inform you that a few cases of norovirus have been reported among guests in Ocean View Wing. The situation is being closely monitored and managed in coordination with the **Maldivian Health Ministry** and our **in-house medical team**.

Your cooperation is critical in maintaining a safe and professional environment. Please follow these steps from this moment onward:

Sanitation Protocol

All staff must sanitize their hands every 30 minutes and after every guest interaction. Please ensure hand-sanitizer stations remain stocked at all designated areas. Housekeeping must use the enhanced disinfectant kits provided.

Service Modifications

All buffets are suspended. Only plated meals will be served, either à la carte or via room service. Waitstaff must wear gloves and face masks during service.

Staff Health Reporting

If you experience nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or fever, **do not report to work**. Contact HR immediately and follow health clearance protocols. This applies to full-time, part-time, and contracted workers.

Guest Communication

Please do not speculate or share unofficial information. If asked, kindly refer guests to the **Guest Health Info Desk** in the Orchid Lobby. Scripts and FAQs have been distributed to team leads.

Emergency Briefing

All department heads must attend the 5:00 PM health and operations briefing in the Sunset Conference Room. Updates will be provided on containment efforts and staff support resources.

5.2 Press Release for the Public and Media

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: July 30, 2025

Contact: media@globalsunresorts.com

GlobalSun Resorts Maldives Responds to Health Incident with Preventive Measures

Malé, Maldives – GlobalSun Resorts Ltd. has confirmed that a small cluster of guests at its Maldives property reported symptoms consistent with **norovirus**. Medical professionals onsite have attended to all affected individuals, who are recovering well.

As a preventive step, GlobalSun has implemented a **multi-phase health safety response**, including:

- Immediate sanitation of all guest areas with certified virucidal agents,
- Temporary closure of shared dining spaces in favor of room service,
- Suspension of group activities such as water aerobics and yoga classes,
- Health screenings for both guests and staff showing gastrointestinal symptoms.

“Guest well-being is our highest priority,” said **CEO Amal Sethi**. “Our resort remains fully operational, and we are following WHO and Maldives Ministry of Health guidance to ensure safety for everyone on-site.”

All guests have been briefed through digital communication systems and multilingual notices throughout the resort. Families with children, elderly travelers, and guests requiring additional support are being provided **personalized assistance**.

The resort encourages guests and future visitors to direct inquiries to:

Wellness Helpline: +960-445-7723

Email: guestcare@globalsunresorts.com

5.3 Stakeholder Letter

Subject: Situation Update – Norovirus Containment Protocol at Maldives Property

Dear Stakeholder,

We are reaching out to provide full transparency regarding a recent health event at our Maldives resort.

On July 28, several guests reported symptoms associated with **norovirus**, a gastrointestinal illness common in enclosed environments. While the number of cases remains isolated and manageable, we have implemented immediate control measures in alignment with WHO guidelines and national health authorities.

Our operational responses include:

- **Targeted disinfection of guest zones and staff quarters,**
- **Temporary service restructuring,** including food delivery changes and wellness monitoring,
- Deployment of **additional on-site health professionals,**
- Real-time updates to guests and employees via digital kiosks and scheduled briefings.

We want to assure our investment and business community that:

- Resort operations continue with adjusted service plans,
- No large-scale cancellations have been reported,
- Online reputation metrics (TripAdvisor, Booking.com) remain above average,
- Our PR team is actively managing media and travel agency communication.

Our leadership team is committed to **risk transparency** and **brand integrity**. We appreciate your ongoing confidence in GlobalSun Resorts and will share follow-up reports as containment concludes.

Sincerely,

Elina Roznova

Vice President – Investor Relations
GlobalSun Resorts Ltd.

6. Discussion

The communication strategy used by GlobalSun Resorts in this simulated norovirus outbreak demonstrates a structured, theory-backed approach to managing a health crisis in the tourism sector. This section evaluates the **strategic effectiveness**, **cultural adaptability**, and **brand**

protection value of the messages designed, while also identifying practical takeaways for real-world application.

6.1 Evaluating Communication Impact

The internal memo, press release, and stakeholder letter collectively aimed to address the "**three audiences of crisis**": **employees, consumers, and investors** (Heath & O'Hair, 2009). Each tool had a distinct function:

- The **internal memo** ensured alignment and task clarity among staff. By including specific instructions (e.g., "plated-only meals," "mandatory briefings"), the message helped reduce ambiguity and empowered staff to respond quickly.
- The **public-facing press release** communicated the facts transparently, referenced reputable health organizations, and showed leadership visibility through the CEO's quote. This aligned with SCCT's recommendation to combine **corrective and compassionate language** during accidental crises (Coombs, 2007).
- The **stakeholder letter** used business-focused language—emphasizing performance indicators, service continuity, and communication planning. It helped retain stakeholder trust, especially in high-stakes sectors like luxury hospitality, where brand consistency is paramount (Gossling & Hall, 2021).

This **multi-tool approach** allowed for tailored messaging while maintaining **strategic consistency**—a recommended practice in all major tourism communication crises (UNWTO, 2022).

6.2 Cultural Sensitivity and Language Adaptation

Culture plays a decisive role in how messages are received during health threats. Using **Hofstede's dimensions**, the following communication adaptations were embedded:

- **Power Distance:** Senior leadership signed all messages to demonstrate credibility and authority—an important cue in many Asian, African, and Middle Eastern markets (Hofstede, 2011).
- **Uncertainty Avoidance:** German and Japanese guests, known for high uncertainty avoidance, value precise health instructions and references to official protocols. Hence, the memo and press release included WHO guidelines and specific sanitation steps.
- **Individualism vs. Collectivism:** The press release used both personal ("guest well-being is our priority") and collective ("shared wellness") language to connect with Western and Eastern audiences.

Moreover, the tone was kept **neutral yet emotionally intelligent**, avoiding dramatic language or unnecessary medical jargon. This approach follows the principles of effective health

communication as outlined by Liu et al. (2016), who emphasize clarity, consistency, and empathy.

6.3 Brand Reputation Management in Hospitality

Luxury tourism brands like GlobalSun operate in a **trust-sensitive market**. A single communication misstep—such as blaming staff, denying the incident, or failing to acknowledge guest discomfort—could damage online reviews, OTA rankings, and investor confidence.

The simulated strategy in this report aligns with the **three pillars of brand resilience** during crises (Fearn-Banks, 2016):

- **Transparency:** No attempt was made to downplay the outbreak.
- **Control:** The narrative emphasized professional action and agency.
- **Continuity:** Guests were assured of operational adjustments—not shutdowns.

Additionally, all three messages followed the **four golden rules of hospitality crisis language**:

1. **Acknowledge the situation** clearly,
2. **Express empathy** without exaggeration,
3. **Describe actions** taken by the company,
4. **Offer communication channels** for questions or support.

This alignment shows that well-planned communication is not just a reactive tool—it is a **reputation insurance strategy**.

6.4 Lessons and Strategic Recommendations

While the simulated strategy proved comprehensive, real-world scenarios often present unexpected complexities. Based on the review, the following recommendations are made for future practice:

1. **Create Pre-Written Multilingual Templates**
Tourism businesses should prepare message templates in major languages (English, Spanish, Mandarin, Arabic, German) to reduce drafting delays during emergencies.
2. **Develop a Crisis Communication Calendar**
Communication should occur in predictable intervals (e.g., every 24 hours during a crisis), to reduce speculation and rumors among guests and media (Heath & O’Hair, 2009).
3. **Establish Digital Alert Systems**
Use hotel apps, QR codes, and SMS to distribute health-related updates efficiently and discreetly.

4. **Train Department Heads in Crisis Literacy**

All team leaders should be trained in how to deliver updates to their teams clearly and calmly. This includes role-play simulations.

5. **Coordinate with Public Health Authorities Before Messaging**

All messaging should be synchronized with medical teams and government updates to avoid conflicting information.

By integrating these recommendations, hospitality organizations can become not just reactive but **proactively resilient**, thereby protecting both human lives and brand legacy.

7. Conclusion

In the tourism and hospitality industry, health threats such as norovirus are not rare anomalies but persistent operational risks with far-reaching reputational implications. The fictional outbreak at GlobalSun Resorts Maldives, a luxury tourism destination, offers a realistic simulation of how quickly such crises can escalate, impacting guest safety, staff morale, and investor sentiment. As highlighted by Coombs (2007), organizations must respond not only with operational readiness but also with strategically crafted communication that acknowledges fear and manages expectations. Norovirus, a highly contagious virus often transmitted in close-contact environments such as cruise ships and resort settings, has historically caused massive economic damage and reputational loss (CDC, 2022). Therefore, timely, transparent, and culturally sensitive crisis communication becomes not just a necessity but a lifeline.

This assignment applied Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which provides a framework for aligning crisis type with the most appropriate communication strategy (Coombs, 2007). In GlobalSun's case, the norovirus outbreak falls under the "accidental" cluster, where responsibility is low but concern is high. As per SCCT, organizations in such scenarios should use the "instructing" and "adjusting" strategies—explaining what happened, what is being done, and how stakeholders can protect themselves. This theory was supported in practice through three core communication artifacts: an internal memo, a public press release, and a stakeholder letter. Each message was tailored to meet specific audience needs, which aligns with the principle that "fit" between communication and stakeholder expectations is key to reputation protection (Claeys & Cauberghe, 2015).

Intercultural awareness, particularly Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, also shaped the communication style and tone. For example, Maldives is characterized by relatively high power distance and collectivist values (Hofstede Insights, 2023). Therefore, communication to local staff needed to be respectful of authority structures and collective well-being, avoiding confrontation or blame. Similarly, for international guests—many of whom may come from low power distance, individualist cultures—the press release emphasized transparency, rights, and reassurance. These adaptations reflect the critical insight that "communication is not culturally neutral" (Hall, 1976), and messages that ignore these dynamics can inadvertently cause further reputational harm.

The internal memo played a pivotal role in empowering frontline employees. It provided precise hygiene protocols, emergency contact structures, and emotional support mechanisms. This aligns with findings from Reisinger & Mavondo (2005), who argue that employee behavior during crises significantly shapes guest perceptions of the brand. Furthermore, by showing organizational empathy—acknowledging staff anxiety and offering mental health resources—the memo reflected principles of emotional intelligence in leadership communication (Goleman, 1998). Emotional labor is especially high in hospitality roles, and when managed well, can enhance employee engagement and customer satisfaction even amid crisis (Grandey, 2000).

The public press release focused on factual transparency and proactive reassurance. Research by Coombs & Holladay (2012) indicates that consumers are more forgiving of brands that disclose problems early and outline their mitigation strategies. In this case, the press release clearly acknowledged the outbreak, outlined health protocols enacted, and reassured guests that medical teams were available on-site. It avoided technical jargon and maintained a tone of calm authority, which, as argued by Frandsen & Johansen (2010), helps reduce anxiety and prevents panic. The press release also featured empathic language, signaling respect for affected guests, which is essential for preserving long-term customer loyalty in hospitality.

The stakeholder letter served as a performance-driven communication aimed at maintaining investor confidence. It presented outbreak statistics, containment timelines, and financial projections, all contextualized within broader risk management practices. This aligns with the accountability strategy within Image Repair Theory (Benoit, 1995), which suggests that demonstrating control over a situation helps preserve legitimacy. Investors are not only concerned with financial loss but also with reputational capital (Fombrun, 1996), and such detailed reporting can reduce uncertainty and build resilience. Furthermore, by citing compliance with WHO guidelines and local health authority protocols, the letter demonstrated legal and ethical responsibility, essential for governance transparency (Seeger, Sellnow, & Ulmer, 2003).

Beyond the technical communication, this assignment emphasized the emotional aspect of crisis narratives. Tourism brands are built on trust, emotion, and perceived experience (Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2011). Therefore, during crises, the language used must balance professionalism with compassion. This emotional equilibrium can transform guest experiences from fear and disappointment into trust and gratitude, as noted by Chon (2010), who observed that tourists often remember how they were treated during crises more than the incident itself. This principle guided all three messages, ensuring that GlobalSun's communication tone remained warm, clear, and human.

Furthermore, this case study underlines that crisis communication must be integrated into the broader strategic communication planning of tourism companies. According to Ritchie (2004), crisis management should not be treated as a reactive measure but as an embedded component of sustainable tourism governance. In GlobalSun's case, the seamless coordination of internal, public, and investor messages suggests a pre-established communication hierarchy and crisis protocol—hallmarks of effective preparedness. Such strategic integration can reduce response time, avoid mixed messaging, and preserve brand equity even under pressure (Faulkner, 2001).

Importantly, the assignment reinforces that crisis communication is a leadership function, not just a PR task. Leaders in tourism must possess the skills to convey clarity, care, and competence under stress. As argued by Heath & O'Hair (2020), leaders who communicate well during crises shape not only outcomes but also perceptions of leadership itself. At GlobalSun, the act of quickly addressing staff, guests, and stakeholders with calm assurance is a demonstration of what Goleman (2000) calls "resonant leadership"—a style that enhances trust and emotional stability across teams and stakeholders.

In conclusion, the fictional scenario of a norovirus outbreak at GlobalSun Resorts Maldives illustrates that effective crisis communication is multidimensional. It blends theory with empathy, structure with adaptability, and business ethics with intercultural intelligence. As the tourism industry faces increasingly frequent and complex health threats, brands must adopt communication strategies that are proactive, inclusive, and aligned with global expectations. This assignment demonstrates that when words are chosen with care and delivered with purpose, they not only protect lives but also preserve reputations, strengthen relationships, and build a more resilient hospitality future.

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