

# The Concept of Cultural Competence in the Communication Management of Crises in Tourism

Zoi Georgakopoulou Vourloumi

PhD Psychology, Assistant professor, University of Patras, Amaliada Ilias, Greece

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**Abstract:** This study theoretically examined the connection between cultural competence and communicative crisis management in tourism, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive practices in a globalized tourism world. Initially, the basic principles of crisis communication in tourism were presented (definitions, stages of crises according to Fink, Coombs' SCCT theory) and the challenges arising due to the multiculturalism of tourism were highlighted. Common. Then, the concept of cultural competence was analyzed, through theories of cultural dimensions (Hofstede, Trompenaars), the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett) and the concept of cultural intelligence (CQ). It was pointed out that cultural differences affect risk perception, trust in information sources and tourists' compliance with directives in times of crisis, with relevant examples. As a main contribution, the "Crisis Communication Cultural Competence Model (C4M)" was proposed, a theoretical framework that integrates cultural competence in all stages of crisis management. The model includes: (1) culturally informed preparation (before the crisis), (2) culturally sensitive response (during the crisis), (3) intercultural coordination with stakeholders, and (4) continuous learning and feedback (post-crisis). The discussion highlighted the advantages of this model. More effective communication, increased visitor trust, enhanced reputation of the destination, avoided misunderstandings as well as the challenges of its implementation in practice. It was stressed that investing in cultural competence is in line with social responsibility and the sustainability of tourism, ensuring that no one is left without information or care in times of crisis. In conclusion, the study underlines that cultural competence is a fundamental component for a successful communication crisis management in the tourism sector. Further empirical research and the development of specialized tools are proposed so that the C4M theoretical framework can be tested and improved. In an increasingly multicultural world, integrating cultural sensitivity into crisis processes will strengthen the resilience of tourism destinations and promote more humane and inclusive tourism.

**Keywords:** Crisis Management, Crisis Communication, Tourism, Cultural Competence, Intercultural Communication, Cultural Intelligence.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the most vulnerable sectors in times of crisis, as various unforeseen events – from natural disasters and health pandemics to terrorist incidents – can sharply affect tourist flows and the image of a destination. Globalization and the rapid growth of international travel have led to an environment where tourists from different cultural backgrounds find themselves en masse in foreign destinations. In such a global tourism community, effective crisis communication management is critical to protecting visitors, building trust, and recovering quickly after the crisis (WTTC, 2019). However, communication in crisis conditions is not a simple "one-size-fits-all" process. On the contrary, it is strongly influenced by cultural factors and differences in public perception and behavior. As tourists come from different countries and cultures,

intercultural contacts in tourism are inevitable, especially in crisis situations where multiple stakeholders (travelers, local communities, authorities, tourism businesses) are involved. Crisis communication in tourism therefore often unfolds in a multicultural context, where the same message can be interpreted differently by different groups (Yeo et al., 2017). Nevertheless, a glaring research gap is identified in the investigation of the role of cultural competence – i.e. the ability to understand and adapt to cultural differences – in communication in times of crisis in tourism. To date, most crisis management and communication models have been developed at a general level or in an operational context and do not explicitly incorporate cultural parameters (Liu-Lastres et al., 2022). This creates a gap of knowledge and practice: how can tourism organisations communicate effectively with multicultural audiences in times of crisis? The aim of this theoretical article is to fill this gap by exploring the concept of cultural competence in the context of communicative crisis management in tourism. Initially, the theoretical background is presented, with emphasis on the communication of crises in the tourism sector (basic definitions, classical models and challenges) and on the concept of cultural competence (definition and related theories of Hofstede, Trompenaars, Bennett, as well as the concept of cultural intelligence). Next, the interconnection of the two concepts is analyzed, examining how cultural competence can influence crisis communication – from risk perception and trust building to decision-making – through examples of cultural differences. Then, a new theoretical framework, the "Crisis Communication Cultural Competence Model (C4M)", is proposed, which is also depicted graphically, combining data from the aforementioned fields. This is followed by a discussion regarding the advantages and practical applications of the model, its sustainability and its connection with corporate social responsibility in tourism. Finally, the limitations of this study are recognized and proposals for future research are formulated, before summarizing the main conclusions. In this way, the article aspires to contribute to a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of crisis management in tourism, highlighting the importance of cultural competence as a determining factor in effective communication and crisis response in a globalized, multicultural world.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Crisis communication in tourism

Crisis communication is generally defined as the collection, processing, and dissemination of information needed to respond to a crisis. According to Coombs (2019), communication is the quintessence of crisis management, as the outbreak of a crisis creates an immediate need for valid and clear information between both those directly affected and those indirectly affected. A well-designed communication strategy can mitigate damage and help restore the reputation of the organization or destination after the crisis is over (Wut et al., 2021). Especially in tourism, where people who are far from their familiar environment are often affected, providing timely and accurate information to travelers is crucial (Wut et al., 2021). For example, in the event of an emergency at a destination (e.g., a terrorist attack or natural disaster), tourists immediately need instructions on how to protect themselves or evacuate safely. In the literature on crisis management, various phased models of a crisis have been proposed. A classic example is Fink's (1986) crisis lifecycle model, which includes four stages: (1) the precursor stage, when there are warning signs of an impending problem, (2) the acute stage, where the crisis manifests and progresses, (3) the chronic stage, during which the effects last and the treatment takes place, and (4) the resolution stage; when the crisis closes and the situation normalizes. Similarly, Faulkner (2001) developed a tourism-specific framework, adapting these stages to: pre-event, prodromal, emergency, intermediate, long-term recovery, and final resolution. These step-by-step models underline that communication strategies need to be adapted according to the phase of the crisis (e.g. preventive communication before the crisis, guidance and information during the crisis, assessment and recovery after).

In addition to the temporal evolution of a crisis, theories have been developed that focus on the content and strategy of the response. One of the most recognized is Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (2019). The SCCT suggests that the choice of communication strategy should be based on how the public perceives responsibility for the crisis. Coombs categorized responses into three main groups: denial, degradation, and restoration. For example, in a crisis where the organization or destination is considered a "victim" (e.g., a natural disaster), strategies that simply inform and express sympathy are appropriate, while in cases where the organization bears responsibility, strategies of taking responsibility and repairing the damage are required (Coombs, 2019). SCCT emphasizes the protection of the organization's reputational threat through appropriate messaging, however in the tourism sector it has been pointed out that immediate concern for the safety and information of visitors must precede purely rumor concerns (Pyle, 2018). Indeed, as observed, many traditional crisis models have been developed with a focus on businesses and the local public, while in tourism the target audience is travelers, a category with special information needs (Liu-Lastres et al., 2022).

The implementation of communicative crisis management in tourism is accompanied by distinct challenges. First, tourists are often labeled as a "vulnerable population" in times of crisis because they may not be aware of the local language, media, or emergency systems of the area they are visiting (Yeo et al., 2017). This means that travellers may not be connected to the local crisis communication network and may not receive critical information in a timely manner through the usual channels (local media, government announcements, etc.). Second, there is no widely accepted specialized crisis communication model for the tourism industry to date (Liu-Lastres et al., 2022). Tourism scholars have from time to time adopted models from the field of public relations (e.g., Fink's or Coombs' model) and disaster management in public health, but these models do not fully capture the specifics that tourist destinations face during a crisis (Wut et al., 2021; Barbe et al., 2020). For example, many existing approaches focus on the recovery phase and the restoration of reputation after the fact, while for a tourist destination proactive communication and expert guidance to visitors as the crisis unfolds is crucial (Avraham & Ketter, 2017).

An additional challenge lies in the complexity of the actors involved: public organisations (e.g. civil protection authorities, tourism organisations), private businesses (hotels, travel agencies, air carriers) as well as individual tourists are usually involved in the management of a tourism crisis. Coordinating communication between these heterogeneous actors is difficult, and any inconsistency or contradictory messages can cause confusion or panic. In addition, the emergence of social media and the speed of dissemination of information (and rumors) intensify the challenge: a crisis in tourism immediately becomes a global topic of discussion through platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, which requires constant monitoring and direct communication reactions on the part of destinations (Sigala, 2020).

Finally, a crucial but often underestimated dimension is intercultural communication during the crisis. The recipients of the messages – tourists – come from different cultures, which means that their reactions to the same information may differ. For example, an evacuation or safety message must be understandable in multiple languages and take into account cultural norms (e.g., certain movements or symbolism may not have the same meaning for everyone). The next section (2.2) delves into precisely this concept of cultural competence, i.e. the ability to understand and adapt to cultural differences, which is the key to addressing the above challenge.

## 2.2 Cultural competence

Cultural competence refers to the ability of an individual or organization to understand, respect, and interact effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. It is a set of knowledge, attitudes and skills that allow us to adapt our behavior to culturally diverse environments (Bennett, 2015). In other words, a person with high cultural competence can perceive cultural differences without adhering to stereotypes, communicate in ways appropriate to the cultural context of their interlocutor, and collaborate effectively with people of different cultural backgrounds (Ang et al., 2015). Organizations, respectively, acquire cultural competence when they incorporate these values and practices at all levels of their operations – from their policies and strategy to staff training and their day-to-day activities (Yeo et al., 2017).

The understanding of cultural competence is based in part on the mapping of cultural differences. Geert Hofstede has been a pioneer in this field, introducing a theory of cultural dimensions that allows the comparison of national cultures (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010; Minkov, 2018). The key dimensions he proposed – such as power distance (how much the less powerful accept the unequal distribution of power), individualism versus reasoning (emphasis on the "I" instead of "we"), avoidance of uncertainty (how comfortable people are with uncertainty and ambiguity), and the masculinity/femininity index (emphasis on values such as competitiveness versus care and quality of life) – shed light on how cultural values influence behaviour and communication. For example, a culture with a high avoidance of uncertainty may react with more anxiety to an unclear crisis situation, requiring clearer and more structured guidelines, while a culture with high individualism may emphasize individual initiative and responsibility of each person in crisis conditions (Minkov, 2018). Hofstede's models, although descriptive, offer a starting point for predicting possible cultural divergences in responses to crisis messages.

At the same time, other scholars such as Fons Trompenaars have proposed alternative frameworks of cultural differences. Trompenaars focused on value dilemmas that arise between different cultures, such as universality versus concreteness (i.e., whether rules are applied uniformly or on a case-by-case basis), neutrality versus emotional expression (whether people openly express their feelings), and collectivity versus individual success (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2020). These dimensions have a direct impact on communication: for example, in a "neutral" culture, official messages of judgment may

be presented in a calm and restrained tone, while in an "emotional" culture the message expressing emotion (e.g. sadness, compassion) may be considered more sincere. Similarly, the universality/concretization dipole can affect expectations: some societies expect authorities to strictly adhere to pre-defined protocols for all, while others may emphasize flexibility and tailoring directives to each occasion (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2020). Knowledge of these differences is part of cultural competence, because it helps professionals to shape messages that "speak" to the value system of each audience.

Cultural competence is of course not limited to knowledge of general cultural characteristics. It also includes the interpersonal skill of bridging differences. Milton Bennett proposed the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), which describes the stages that individuals go through as their ability to perceive and understand cultural differences increases (Bennett, 2015). The initial ethnocentric stages (Denial – where the individual ignores differences, Defense – where differences are experienced as a threat, Minimization – where he tends to downplay differences and consider others "basically the same") gradually give way to ethnorelativistic stages (Acceptance – recognition and respect of cultural diversity, Adaptation – development of behavioural change and communication skills to fit into different cultural contexts; Integration – integration of multiple cultural identities. According to the Bennett model, the more advanced a person is in these stages, the greater cultural competence they have, as they can consciously shift their perspective and converse effectively across cultural boundaries (Bennett, 2015). For a tourism professional involved in crisis management, high intercultural sensitivity means that he will be able to understand how different cultures react to the crisis, avoid ethnocentric assumptions (e.g. that what works in his own culture will work everywhere) and adapt his communication strategy accordingly.

A newer concept closely related to cultural competence is Cultural Intelligence (CQ). Cultural intelligence is defined as an individual's ability to function effectively in situations characterized by cultural diversity (Ang et al., 2015). While emotional intelligence refers to the ability to understand and manage emotions, cultural intelligence focuses on understanding and adapting to different cultural conditions. CQ is often described as consisting of four components:

- the *cognitive dimension*, i.e. the knowledge one has about different cultures (language, customs, institutions, rules of conduct),
- the *metacognitive dimension*, i.e. the ability to be conscious when communicating with people of another culture and regulating their thinking (e.g. planning, observing and adapting communication strategies),
- motivation, i.e. motivation, self-confidence, and interest in engaging with other cultures (e.g., willingness to learn, resilience to cultural challenges);
- the *behavioral dimension*, i.e. the repertoire of behaviors that can be recruited and adapted according to the cultural environment (Ang et al., 2015).

A person with high cultural intelligence may, for example, adapt his or her speech style, non-verbal communication, or even the language he uses to make it better understood and accepted by people from another culture (Ang, Van Dyne & Koh, 2007). At an organizational level, the cultural intelligence of a tourism organization's staff signals its ability to serve international customers and work with multicultural groups. In the context of the crisis, this translates into staff and executives who can effectively handle communications with tourists of different ethnicities, foreseeing possible misunderstandings or different information needs.

In summary, cultural competence is based on the knowledge of cultural differences on the one hand (through theories such as Hofstede and Trompenaars) and on the development of personal skills and mindsets that allow for the bridging of these differences (as described by Bennett and the concept of cultural intelligence). In the following sections, we will explore how these concepts are linked to crisis communication in tourism – an area where cultural variables can prove crucial to successfully managing a crisis.

### 3. LINKING CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Cultural competence and crisis communication, as described above, meet naturally in the field of tourism, where every crisis has both local and international dimensions. In this section we examine how cultural differences affect: (a) tourists' perception of risk and the crisis itself, (b) the trust that develops – or is eroded – towards messages and sources of information during the crisis, and (c) tourists' decisions and reactions to the instructions they receive. At the same time, we present concrete examples where cultural differences have led to different outcomes or demands in communicative crisis management.

### 3.1 Risk perception and culture

Risk perception is not universal – it is influenced by cultural factors, values, and past experiences. Different societies tend to focus on different aspects of a threat. For example, cultures with high uncertainty avoidance (such as Mediterranean or some Asian cultures) may magnify risk perception in situations of uncertainty because any lack of clear information causes discomfort and anxiety (Minkov, 2018). Conversely, cultures that are more tolerant of uncertainty (e.g., Scandinavian) may appear more calm in the face of an initially vague judgment and expect less dramatic tones in the briefing. A practical example of these differences emerged in the COVID-19 pandemic crisis: in East Asian countries, where there is a culture of collective responsibility and previous experience of epidemics, residents and visitors immediately adopted protective behaviors (such as wearing a mask) and took government warnings very seriously. In other societies, there was initially an underestimation of the risk or even distrust of the severity of the measures, which influenced the reactions of tourists from these societies (Dryhurst et al., 2020). For a crisis manager, being aware of these trends means adjusting the tone and content of the message accordingly: those who are more aware of risk may need more reassuring information and clarity, while those who underestimate it need a stronger emphasis on seriousness in order to respond.

### 3.2 Trust in sources and cultural norms

Trust is central to crisis communication – recipients must trust the source and content of the information in order to follow instructions. Cultural values influence which sources of information are considered reliable. In cultures with a long distance of power and a strong belief in authority (e.g., some Asian or Arab societies), people tend to trust messages coming from official authorities, government officials, or experts, and expect guidance from them (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2020). Conversely, in more egalitarian societies with a short power gap (e.g. northern European ones), citizens may be more skeptical of official assurances and demand transparency and justification; Their trust is earned by honesty and acknowledgment of any uncertainties rather than by authentic statements. In addition, the degree of collectivity or individualism plays a role: in more collective cultures, people highly trust information circulating within their social network – family, friends, community – and may rely on informal sources of information as much or more than official channels (Yeo et al., 2017). For example, research has shown that certain ethnic communities or immigrant groups avoid news from government agencies and prefer to be informed by word of mouth or social media within their diaspora (Yeo et al., 2017). This may mean that in a crisis (e.g., an earthquake or hurricane) tourists from these communities will first turn to familiar persons or communities for guidance rather than immediately following the announcements of local authorities.

A typical example of a cultural influence on trust is language: the language in which a message is conveyed can determine the recipient's level of trust. If in a crisis in a popular destination (e.g. earthquake on a Greek island) all updates are given only in Greek, foreign tourists who do not understand the language will feel uncertainty and distrust – essentially they will be excluded from information. Failure to provide information in international languages can lead visitors to rely on their own sources, possibly less accurate or even rumors, which exacerbates the problem. According to relevant analyses, cultural ignorance in communication (e.g. not using the languages of the main tourist markets) can exacerbate a crisis, as it increases the vulnerability of those who remain uninformed and consequently creates a climate of mistrust and panic (Yeo et al., 2017). On the contrary, culturally adapted communication – such as translating important directives into several languages, using simple symbols understood internationally and actively engaging with the media of the tourists' countries of origin – can significantly increase public trust and facilitate compliance with the directives. For example, after the terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015, French authorities and tourism organizations made sure to provide continuous information in English, Spanish, Chinese and other languages, both online and through embassies, to reassure foreign visitors and guide them safely. This practice leverages cultural competence: it recognizes that the language and cultural context of the recipient are important for the effectiveness of communication.

### 3.3 Decision-making and reactions to instructions

Cultural values can influence how tourists make decisions under pressure and whether or not they follow instructions during a crisis. In some cultures, collective responsibility and social compliance are deeply rooted – for example, in Japan it is observed that in earthquake or tsunami situations citizens (and by extension Japanese tourists abroad) have a strong tendency to follow official evacuation instructions in a disciplined manner, because there is a value foundation of discipline and trust in the team. In contrast, tourists from more individual-centered societies may judge the situation for themselves before complying – perhaps trying to verify information from multiple sources or delaying leaving an area believing in their personal judgment (Ang et al., 2015). In addition, past experience with crises plays a role: tourists from countries that are



often hit by hurricanes or volcanoes are likely to be aware of the protocols and react quickly, while others may underestimate the need for immediate action.

Cultural competence allows crisis managers to prevent such differentiations. For example, if they know that a particular ethnic group of tourists tends not to express concerns directly because of politeness (a characteristic in some Eastern cultures), then during the crisis response phase they should ensure that help and additional information is discreetly provided to these individuals, even if they do not ask for it openly. On the other hand, tourists from cultures where the expression of emotion is intense (e.g. Mediterranean) may publicly show their fear or anger; the communicative handling must take this expression into account, showing understanding and giving space for questions, so as not to escalate distrust. An illustrative example of cultural difference in decision-making was observed during the volcanic eruption in Iceland in 2010. Many Asian tourists immediately complied with the authorities' instructions to stay indoors, while some European travelers initially tried to continue their holiday schedule despite warnings, showing a greater willingness to take personal risks. This does not mean that one is "right" and the other is "wrong" – but it does highlight how values about risk and autonomy influence response. For those in charge, adapting the style of persuasion is critical: for "autonomous" travellers it may be necessary to emphasize the logic and data behind the recommendations (in order to convince them based on arguments), and for "collective" travellers to emphasize the common good and the sense that "we all follow this plan together to be safe" (Yeo et al., 2017).

Examples of cultural differences in crisis communication: It is worth mentioning some brief examples where cultural competence – or lack thereof – has played a role in real-world crisis situations in tourism:

- *Natural disaster management in a multicultural destination.* After the earthquake and tsunami in Thailand in 2004, it was reported that initially the information to tourists was given only in Thai, resulting in many foreign visitors not understanding the warnings in time. Later, with the assistance of embassies and volunteer translators, a multilingual briefing (in English, German, Chinese, etc.) was organized, which improved the efficiency of the evacuation and strengthened the feeling of security (here it can be seen how cultural competence – the Understanding linguistic diversity – improve communication).
- *Health crisis and cultural behavior.* During the SARS epidemic in 2003, destinations such as Singapore and Canada were affected. In Singapore, the government used a communication style that was both rigorous and inspiring, entrenching a collective narrative of "we Singaporeans will overcome this crisis together," which is consistent with the culture of high collectivity and belief in state leadership. In Canada, where the public demands more transparency and individual freedom, The communication emphasized providing as much data and scientific explanations as possible, allowing citizens (and tourists) to understand the situation and cooperate voluntarily. These two approaches were culturally tailored to their audiences and achieved more resonance than a monotonous, common approach would have achieved (Ang et al., 2015).
- *Cultural misunderstandings.* In some cases, the lack of cultural sensitivity in crisis communication has led to unintentional misunderstandings. For example, during a security crisis in a North African resort, local authorities set up checkpoints with gunmen, which for locals was a sign of protection. However, some Western tourists felt even more concerned about seeing a military presence because they associated it with high risk. The absence of an explanation in language and style that they would understand (i.e. that this is done for their safety) initially shook their confidence. It was only when the hotel intervened by providing interpreters and information leaflets in English and German that the tourists calmed down and understood the situation correctly. This incident demonstrates that cultural competence in communication (in this case, anticipation of the foreign visitor's perspective and concerns) is essential to avoid unnecessary conflict or fear.

Overall, the connection between cultural competence and crisis communication in tourism highlights a key message: crises in tourism take place in an intercultural "setting", where senders and receivers of messages may "speak" different languages, not only literally, but also metaphorically, with different priorities, values and ways of understanding. An effective crisis manager must act as a "cultural mediator", translating critical messages in a way that resonates with each group. This requires cultural competence: knowledge, sensitivity and adaptability. In the next section, we propose a comprehensive theoretical framework – the "Crisis Communication Cultural Competence Model (C4M)" – that incorporates what we have discussed, in order to guide tourism organizations on how to systematically integrate cultural competence into communicative crisis management.

#### 4. PROPOSED THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CRISIS COMMUNICATION CULTURAL COMPETENCE MODEL (C4M)

Based on the theoretical analysis, it becomes clear that cultural intelligence should not be treated as an abstract concept, but as a specific ability that can be incorporated into the practices and systems of a tourism organization. Here are suggestions in three key axes – training, skills assessment, and strategy integration – on how organizations can cultivate and leverage CQ:

##### 4.1 Basics of C4M

Based on the above analysis, it becomes clear that the integration of cultural competence in crisis communication is not only desirable but necessary for multicultural tourist destinations. A new theoretical framework, the Crisis Communication Cultural Competence Model (C4M), is therefore proposed. C4M was designed to combine the principles of crisis management with the parameters of intercultural communication, providing a "roadmap" on how tourism organizations can prepare for and respond to crises taking into account the cultural diversity of their audience. The C4M model is structured around four fundamental pillars (4 Cs) that reflect critical dimensions where cultural competence meets crisis communication:

- i. *Culture-aware Crisis Preparation.* The first pillar stresses that the cultural dimension must be integrated from the pre-crisis stage. Tourism organisations are called upon to carry out cultural crisis planning, i.e. to assess the cultural profile of their main tourist markets and to identify in advance possible differences in language, values and information needs. It includes actions such as: Drafting communication plans in multiple languages, establishing contacts with embassies and migrant communities for information bridges, training staff on intercultural awareness issues and designing messages that will be universally understandable (e.g. using internationally recognized pictograms for safety instructions). In this context, the cultivation of trust with the various cultural groups in advance is also organised: for example, the creation of a destination crisis website with information in different languages and its communication to tourists on arrival can prepare the ground for reliable communication if something extraordinary happens.
- ii. *Culturally-sensitive Response :* The second pillar concerns actions during the crisis. Here, C4M proposes that all messages and communications should be filtered through a lens of cultural sensitivity. In practice, this means: providing information and instructions in all the dominant languages of the tourists on the ground (with the use of interpreters, translated communiqués, or multilingual notifications via mobile applications), adapting the communication style to suit the audience (e.g. more formal or informal style depending on what each audience considers credible, using either more emotional or more pragmatic language, as discussed in section 3), and sensitivity to specific cultural issues. For example, if food or medical assistance needs to be distributed to stranded tourists, a culturally sensitive response will take into account dietary or religious particularities (not offering food prohibited by a religion, respect for dress habits, etc.). This pillar emphasizes that during the crisis, the organization must act almost like a "cultural interpreter", translating not only words but also intentions, and ensuring that the message received by each tourist is the right one and provokes the desired reaction.
- iii. *Cross-cultural Coordination.* The third pillar of C4M recognises that crisis communication in tourism is not one-way (from the organisation to tourists), but multidimensional. It involves cooperation with many actors, often from different countries. Thus, the model underlines the importance of intercultural coordination between all stakeholders: local authorities, foreign consulates, international travel agencies, airlines, non-governmental organisations, but also leaders of traveller communities (such as tour guides or representatives of traveller groups). The aim is to create a communication network where information and instructions are circulated quickly and without cultural barriers. In the diagram of the model, this pillar is depicted as the "bridges" that connect the organization with external partners. Cultural competence here means that managers recognise and exploit cultural connections: for example, they may work closely with representatives of the countries of origin (embassies, tour operators) to convey credible messages to their citizens, knowing that these representatives already have the trust of travellers. It also includes internal adaptation – that is, raising awareness of the multicultural approach among all members of the crisis management team. In a culturally adequate model, the coordination of meetings, decision-making and the allocation of responsibilities are done based on the utilization of the cultural knowledge of each member (e.g. if there is someone

in the group with knowledge of the Chinese language and culture, he or she undertakes a channel of communication with Chinese tourists, and so on).

- iv. *Continuous Learning and Cultural Feedback.* The fourth pillar concerns the post-crisis stage and ensures that the C4M model is not static, but evolving. It proposes the institutionalization of feedback and learning processes with an emphasis on cultural lessons learned from the crisis. This means that, once the acute phase of the crisis has passed, the organization gathers information and assesses: How did the different groups of tourists respond? Which ones failed? Were there any misunderstandings that could have been avoided? Which messages resonated and which were ignored? This assessment can be done through tourist satisfaction surveys (in multiple languages), meetings with community representatives, or data analysis (e.g. which website languages were most used for information during the crisis). Based on this feedback, the organization learns and revises its plan: updates protocols, further trains staff, and strengthens relationships of trust with cultural communities. For example, if it is found that tourists from a particular country were not adequately informed because they did not use the Twitter where the updates were posted, then the organization will make sure next time to use WeChat or WhatsApp or other media that are popular in that community. The continuous learning pillar ensures that C4M remains a living model, improving with each new crisis, making destinations increasingly resilient and culturally flexible.

## 4.2 Diagrammatic Representation of C4M

In a diagram, the C4M model can be depicted as a crisis cycle (Pre-crisis, Crisis, Post-crisis) within which the four pillars-actions are integrated. In the Pre-crisis stage, the pillar of "Culturally Aware Preparation" appears. In the Crisis stage, "Culturally Sensitive Handling" and "Intercultural Coordination" appear at the same time. In the Post-crisis stage, "Continuous learning" appears. All the pillars are connected to each other and to the center, which is the main goal: effective crisis communication for all. In addition, the chart shows a feedback from Post-crisis back to Pre-crisis, suggesting continuous improvement (e.g., the lessons of one crisis fuel better preparation for the next). Colors or symbols can also be used to mark the main actors: in Pre-crisis the organization and communities, in Crisis the organization, tourists and partners, in Post-crisis again the organization analyzes with partners and communities. Such a diagram would help in the visual understanding that cultural competence is not a separate activity, but embraces the entire life cycle of the crisis (Chart 1).

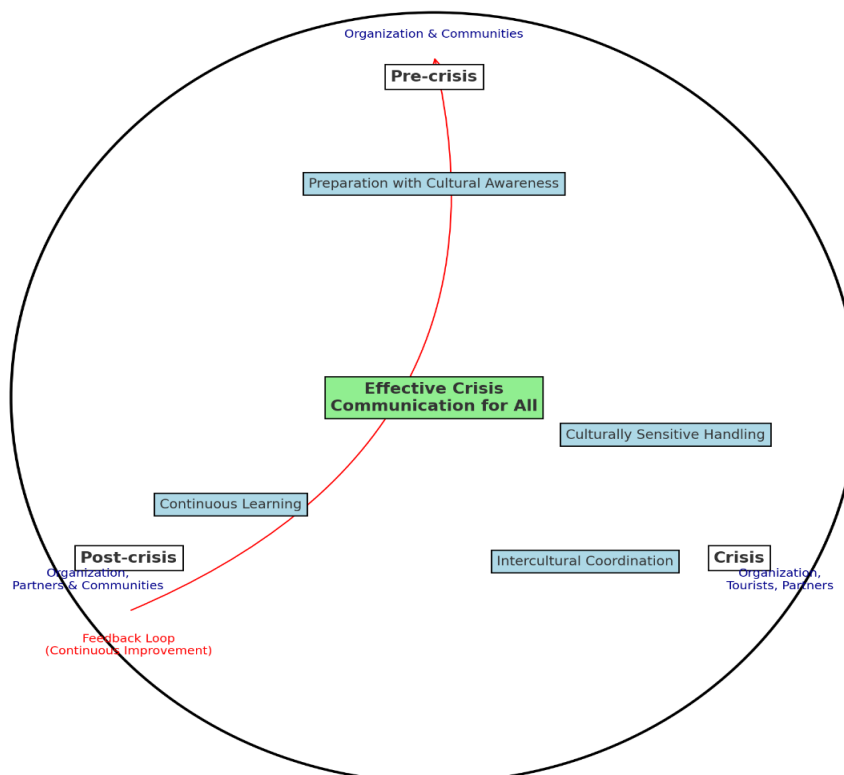


Chart 1. Model C4M



The C4M model, although theoretical, is based on the principles already identified in the literature, combines the proactive approach to crisis management (Fink, Coombs) with the adaptability and sensitivity of intercultural communication (Hofstede, Bennett, Ang). In the next part, there will be a discussion about the advantages that such a framework can offer, how it can be applied in practice in the tourism sector, sustainability and cost issues, as well as its contribution to the broader social responsibility of tourism organizations.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The integration of cultural competence in crisis communication management – as reflected in the proposed C4M model – offers multiple advantages both for tourist destinations and organizations, as well as for visitors themselves and local communities. In this discussion, we analyze the main benefits and possibilities of applying the model, evaluate the sustainability of such an approach in practice, and link culturally adequate crisis communication with the concept of social responsibility in tourism.

### *Advantages of the C4M model and culturally adequate approach*

*More effective communication and greater public compliance.* When tourism organizations communicate in a way that is understandable and respectful for each cultural group, tourists are more likely to receive the message as intended and follow it. This means that in a crisis situation (e.g., evacuation due to a natural disaster), more visitors will follow the instructions in a timely manner, reducing potential injuries or losses. Cultural competence in communication improves the safety of everyone involved. Studies in relevant fields (e.g., public health) have shown that culturally tailored communication increases the persuasiveness and effectiveness of a message (Yeo et al., 2017). In tourism, this translates into higher levels of compliance with crisis measures and ultimately better management of the situation.

*Enhance the trust and reputation of the destination.* A destination's ability to manage crises sensitively towards all visitors helps to form an image of responsibility and trustworthiness. A tourist who has experienced a crisis in a destination and felt well informed, protected and respected regardless of their origin, is more likely to trust that destination again in the future and recommend it to others. As examples testify, tourists who felt "abandoned" or neglected due to language or cultural barriers during a crisis, often express negative experiences and prevent others from visiting the place (Liu-Lastres et al., 2022). The culturally adequate model works proactively in this regard: it reduces the chances of a communication error that can damage reputation. In today's competitive tourism environment, reputational resilience is valuable and C4M can be part of its building strategy.

*Improve guest experience and satisfaction.* Even in the midst of a crisis, tourists appreciate good communication and a sense that the organization "cares" about them. Culturally ignorant handling can make a difficult situation even worse as an experience (e.g., a tourist who doesn't understand what is happening will panic more). On the contrary, providing information in the visitor's native language, demonstrating understanding of their needs (such as special care for children, elderly or disabled people by cultural context) and maintaining two-way communication (e.g. inviting questions and answering respectfully) improves the traveler's experience despite adverse conditions. After the crisis, such travelers often report higher satisfaction with the care they received, even if the crisis interrupted their vacation. This also matters from a business perspective: customer satisfaction is critical to loyalty and word-of-mouth marketing. Therefore, investing in culturally appropriate crisis communication practices is not only socially correct, but also a business-wise choice.

*Reducing the likelihood of secondary crises or conflicts.* An interesting benefit is that cultural competence can prevent what we would call a "second crisis", i.e. a crisis of trust or a social conflict that erupts due to poor communication in the initial crisis. For example, if in a health crisis some foreign tourists feel targeted or treated with suspicion (as happened in some cases at the beginning of COVID-19 when some viewed tourists from specific countries with fear), A climate of tension can be created between tourists and locals. A culturally sensitive approach, which takes care to dispel stereotypes and integrate everyone into a common framework of cooperation, reduces the possibility of such tensions. In addition, when tourists are properly informed, they are less likely to spread unconfirmed rumors on social media, which are often "communication crises" in their own right. Thus, the C4M model also functions as a reputation management tool and social cohesion.

### ***Practical applications and implementation challenges***

Of course, putting cultural competence into practice has some challenges:

- *Costs and resources.* Translating documents, training staff, maintaining a network with multilingual partners, all of these require an investment of time and money. For smaller tourism organizations or destinations with limited resources, this may seem daunting. However, the sustainability of such practices can be improved through partnerships and technology. For example, the use of new technologies such as real-time translation applications, bulk messaging platforms in default languages, or multilingual chatbots can reduce human costs while maintaining efficiency (Pyle, 2018). Also, partnerships with universities or international organizations (such as the World Tourism Organization) to develop culturally adequate communication guides and tools can provide ready-made solutions to destinations. Already, for example, there are "toolkits" and manuals for communicating crises that could be enriched with cultural guidelines and distributed free of charge.
- *The diversity of cultures.* In popular destinations, tourists come from dozens of different countries – it is practically impossible to adapt to all of them 100%. The C4M model does not propose the creation of dozens of different channels, but the adoption of a flexible strategy that caters to larger groups and strives to be inclusive. This means that organizations could prioritize 5-6 main languages (e.g. English, English, English, English, English, English Spanish, Chinese, French, Russian, Arabic – depending on their market) that cover a large part of the visitors, and ensure that they are at least provided with full information. In addition, the authorities can apply the principle of "reasonable accommodation": that is, try to communicate in a way that does not exclude even the "average" tourist. The use of plain English as a lingua franca, the avoidance of local idioms that foreigners will not understand, the parallel use of images with texts, are some techniques that improve the accessibility of the message even if one is not fluent in the language (Coombs, 2019). Thus, even if not all cultural aspects can be covered, a wide spectrum is covered.
- *Sustainability and social responsibility.* Investing in the cultural competence of crisis communication is also in line with the concept of corporate social responsibility and sustainability. Responsible tourism is not only about the environment but also about people – both tourists and locals. A destination that cares about the safety and dignity of every visitor in difficult times shows respect for human rights and diversity. To be part of the social responsibility policies of a destination or a tourism business: Culturally sensitive crisis management can be presented (and indeed is) as a commitment of the organization that no one will be left behind in a crisis, regardless of nationality or language. This not only has moral value, but now also an institutional value: international standards and organizations (such as ISO on risk management issues or the World Tourism Organization itself) could in the future incorporate cultural inclusion criteria into crisis protocols. Destinations that have already adopted it will be pioneers and will likely receive recognition or certifications, which in turn strengthen their brand. An example of social responsibility is the care of employees: we often forget that tourism staff also experience stress in times of crisis, and many of them (e.g. seasonal workers) may themselves come from different countries. Culturally adequate communication must also include employees – informing them in their languages, providing them with support to properly convey messages to customers, and protecting them from discrimination (WTTC, 2019). This creates a positive cycle. Employees feel safer and more useful, and thus provide better care to tourists during the crisis.

Overall, the discussion highlights that cultural competence in crisis communication is not a luxury. It is an essential part of a modern, human-centered and globalized approach to crisis management. Although there are challenges in implementation, the benefits in terms of effectiveness, reputation and social responsibility are manifold.

## **6. LIMITATIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Like any theoretical work, this article and the proposed C4M model have some limitations that need to be recognized.

- a. The model is based on theoretical reasoning and the synthesis of findings from various fields (tourism crisis management, intercultural communication, etc.), without having been empirically tested in practice. Empirical research is therefore needed in order to evaluate the effectiveness of C4M in real-world crisis conditions. For example, future studies could study cases of crises in different tourist destinations and compare the outcome and satisfaction of tourists between destinations that implemented culturally sensitive practices and those that did not.

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- b. Secondly, one limitation of the model is its generality: each destination has unique characteristics and there is no completely standardised solution. C4M offers a framework, but the details (which languages, which cultures, which media) need to be adjusted on a case-by-case basis. This requires further specialization. Future research could develop guidelines by region or by type of destination. For example, a theme park with an international audience may need different tactics than an ecotourism village. Researchers could create case studies and best practices of specific categories.
- c. In the field of intercultural communication, theories (Hofstede, Trompenaars, etc.) are criticized from time to time – e.g. that they oversimplify or overcategorize cultures, or that societies are changing and the data of old studies may not be fully valid today (Minkov, 2018). Therefore, their application to crisis communication must be done with flexibility and awareness that intracultural differences (i.e. differences within the same culture) can be equally important. One direction of future research is to examine not only the influence of national culture, but also other factors such as age, gender, travel experience, educational level, which also influence how one perceives and reacts to a crisis. For example, a young digitally literate traveler from any country may have more in common in terms of information with a peer from elsewhere (they both use Instagram/Twitter) than with an elderly compatriot (who prefers television). Therefore, future studies could incorporate a more multidimensional approach to "culture", including the subculture of travelers.
- d. Research is needed to harness new technologies in the context of cultural competence. For example, how can AI systems help automatically tailor messages to different cultural profiles? Is it possible to develop crisis apps that recognize the user's language and send personalized instructions? These are questions that combine tourism technology with cultural communication and would have practical value.
- e. It should be acknowledged that this literature review was based solely on English-speaking sources from the last decade, in accordance with the guidelines. This probably leaves out some classical works (e.g. the original work of Hofstede or Fink) and may not fully reflect some non-English-language studies or older ones that have value. Future research could broaden the field by looking at sources beyond the decade or in other languages for a fuller picture – especially since the subject is intercultural, it is interesting to see what scholars from different countries have to say about these issues.

Overall, the article sets out a framework and an initial theoretical contribution, but it needs a research program that continues in depth: pilot applications of the C4M model in destinations, quantitative and qualitative studies on the experience of tourists and crisis managers, and interdisciplinary collaborations between experts in tourism, communication and social psychology. Only in this way will it be possible to improve the model and make it a tool with practical power.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

This article explores the critical articulation between communicative crisis management and cultural competence, with an emphasis on the tourism sector. The globalization of tourism means that every crisis – whether it is a natural disaster, a health threat or a security incident – takes place in a multicultural environment, where messages must cross linguistic and cultural boundaries to achieve their purpose. A review of the literature showed that, despite advances in crisis management models (Fink, Coombs) and the rich theory around cultural differences (Hofstede, Trompenaars, Bennett, cultural intelligence), there is a gap in the connection between the two fields. The concept of cultural competence – i.e. the ability to adapt and communicate effectively between cultures – emerged as a key factor that can improve preparedness, response and recovery from crises in tourism. The theoretical framework "Crisis Communication Cultural Competence Model (C4M)" was proposed as a first step to integrate cultural competence into the crisis management lifecycle. This model underlines four main pillars of action: culturally informed planning before the crisis, culturally sensitive communication during the crisis, intercultural coordination between actors, and continuous learning after the crisis. Through examples and analysis, we have seen that these principles are not abstract, but can be applied in practice – from translating announcements and training staff, to working with communities and using international symbolism in information. In the discussion, the multiple benefits of such an approach were highlighted: increasing the effectiveness of messages, protecting human lives and reducing panic, enhancing the trust and reputation of the destination, as well as coupling with social responsibility and sustainability. It was also recognised that the implementation of C4M can have challenges (such as the need for resources and the management of multiple languages), but we stressed that in a world that increasingly requires inclusion and adaptability, such investments are justified and possibly necessary. The summary conclusions confirm the importance of cultural competence in communicative crisis management: it is not a "soft" luxury skill, but an essential factor of success and effectiveness. A tourist destination that understands the cultural peculiarities of its visitors and prepares accordingly, is better equipped to deal with the unexpected, protecting people and safeguarding its tourist activity. This article aspires to

serve as a trigger for further research and practical action. Crises in tourism will continue to happen – whether they are natural phenomena or man-made events, and their management will largely determine the sustainability of destinations. Equally, the cultural diversity of tourists will not only remain, but will probably increase. The intersection of these two realities requires an interdisciplinary approach like the one presented. With proper implementation and continuous improvement, cultural competence can become a cornerstone of crisis communication in tourism, ensuring that in difficult times all people, regardless of language or culture, receive the information and support they need. This perspective also reflects a moral commitment. Tourism, as a phenomenon of global interaction, must, especially in critical times, be unifying, human and inclusive.

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