

Sustaining ecotourism reputation in North Sumatra: Assessing digital crisis communication strategy and tourist trust

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia has natural attractions as the main asset of the sustainable tourism industry. However, with the widespread use of social media, reviews from individuals have become a serious challenge in maintaining the image and reputation of destinations in the digital era. Reputation crises triggered by negative reviews and viral content on social media often hinder the development of tourist villages, including ecotourism destinations in North Sumatra. The problem is that crisis communication management at the tourist village level is still not digitally structured, and crisis responses tend to be reactive. The Digital Crisis Communication Strategy (DCCS) model can assist tourist villages in managing crisis communication strategically and in an integrated way by utilizing communication technology such as local influencers, digital storytelling, as well as clarification and engagement mechanisms on social media. The purpose of this study is to develop and test the DCCS model in maintaining the reputation of sustainable ecotourism destinations, with a focus on Pantai Labu Tourism Village and Tangkahan Tourism Village, North Sumatra. The research employs a quantitative explanatory approach using a survey of 200 tourists who had visited the two villages. The main variables analyzed include digital crisis communication strategy, tourist trust, and destination reputation recovery. Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with a Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach. The findings show that the path coefficient estimation of trust has a positive and significant effect on DCCS. This indicates that the higher the level of tourist trust, the more effective the digital crisis communication strategy that can be applied. In other words, trust becomes the foundation for destination managers in implementing digital communication strategies. Reputation also has a positive and significant effect on DCCS. A good destination image, managerial credibility, and service consistency are proven to improve the effectiveness of digital-based crisis communication strategies.

Keywords: *Digital Crisis Communication; Destination Reputation; Tourist Trust; Sustainable Ecotourism; Tourism Social Media*

INTRODUCTION

The development of Indonesia's tourism industry has demonstrated a positive trend in recent years. Among various tourism segments, ecotourism has experienced notable growth, driven by increasing public awareness of environmental sustainability and conservation issues. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the availability of quality tourist attractions in Indonesia grew by 17.18%, heavily dominated by nature-based and marine tourism (BPS, 2024). Locally, this ecotourism surge is reflected in North Sumatra's prominent eco-destinations, such as Tangkahan, which recorded a peak of 34,103 domestic tourist arrivals in 2023 (Disparbud Langkat, 2023). However, this rapid tourism expansion simultaneously exposes these vulnerable destinations to heightened public scrutiny through digital platforms.

As these destinations attract more visitors, the expansion of digital media

introduces new challenges in managing their reputation. The rise of social media platforms has enabled tourists to actively share their experiences, including negative reviews related to facilities, accessibility, and service quality. In many cases, such negative electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), especially when amplified through viral content, can significantly influence public perception and potentially undermine the image of a destination (Filieri et al., 2021; Mariani & Borghi, 2021). Conversely, viral content that highlights the attractiveness of natural landscapes can enhance destination visibility and appeal.

This dual role of digital media indicates that tourism development is no longer solely dependent on physical infrastructure and service quality, but also on how destinations are represented and discussed in online environments. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of negative reviews and viral content becomes essential in analyzing how destination reputation is constructed and managed in the digital era.

Online searches related to sustainable tourism, particularly ecotourism, have increased by 26%, and social media has now become the primary source of information for travelers, playing a major role in shaping destination image (Adinugroho & Sofiani, 2023; Avraham, 2021; Zhou et al., 2020). However, the issue of negative reviews has become a serious concern for tourism managers and other related stakeholders (Dredge et al., 2011; Matthes et al., 2025; Novelli et al., 2018). The Global Crisis Communication Report (2023) notes that only 32% of tourist destinations in Southeast Asia have a digital crisis communication protocol. In Indonesia, a study by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (2022) found that more than 60% of tourist villages still lack a digital communication strategy, particularly in the context of crisis management.

The rapid development of social media has significantly influenced the image and reputation of tourist destinations, including Tangkahan Ecotourism Village. A growing body of research highlights that user-generated content such as reviews, comments, and viral posts on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Google Reviews, and YouTube plays a crucial role in shaping public perception of tourism destinations (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Filieri et al., 2019). Negative reviews related to infrastructure, accessibility, service quality, and overall visitor experience can quickly disseminate across digital platforms, potentially amplifying reputational risks when not managed strategically (Mariani & Baggio, 2022). Furthermore, viral content that emphasizes destination shortcomings may create a lasting negative image, influencing prospective tourists' decision-making processes and reducing visitation intentions (Harrigan et al., 2021).

Tangkahan Tourism Village, located in Langkat Regency, North Sumatra, is widely recognized as a prominent ecotourism destination, often referred to as the "Hidden Paradise." Despite its strong positioning, recent trends indicate that tourist visitation patterns have experienced fluctuations, which are increasingly shaped by online perceptions and digital discourse. Evidence from preliminary observations on platforms such as Google Reviews and Instagram highlights the presence of negative user-generated content, particularly concerning infrastructure, accessibility, and service quality. Previous studies suggest that such negative electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) can significantly influence destination image and reduce tourists' intention to visit (Filieri et al., 2019; Mariani & Baggio, 2022).

Several tourist villages in Indonesia have experienced a decline in visitor numbers by as much as 40–60% within three months due to viral negative reviews on social media, without proper crisis communication management (Pradhana et al., 2022). In North Sumatra, Pantai Labu and Tangkahan Tourist Villages serve as examples of

sustainable ecotourism destinations that prioritize nature conservation and local community empowerment. However, the development of these ecotourism destinations is inseparable from challenges related to image and reputation management in the digital era (Blackman & Ritchie, 2008; Carlsen & Liburd, 2008; W. T. Coombs, 2007; Hall, 2010). In Pantai Labu Tourist Village, for instance, viral content in 2023 regarding alleged illegal levies and poor waste management led to a 35% decrease in visitor numbers within two months after the incident (Dinas Pariwisata Deli Serdang, 2023).

Meanwhile, in Tangkahan Tourist Village, issues related to conflicts between local communities and conservation area managers have been reported and circulated through traveler forums and social media platforms. This digital dissemination of conflict-related information led to a measurable negative impact, resulting in an estimated 20% to 25% drop in monthly tourist arrivals during the peak of the dispute, as reported by the local tourism management records (Dinas Pariwisata Kabupaten Langkat).



Figure 1. Negative Information Shared Online

Such digital dissemination of conflict-related information has been shown to influence tourists' perceptions and can contribute to a decline in visitation interest (Mariani & Borghi, 2021; Filieri et al., 2021). Such negative information shared online particularly involving social or environmental conflicts spreads rapidly and significantly deconstructs destination image and trust among potential visitors (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Because these conflicts are actively framed and amplified by netizen opinions on social media, conventional crisis management is no longer sufficient. Therefore, a Digital Crisis Communication Strategy (DCCS) is urgently required to systematically counteract online misinformation, clarify structural issues in real-time, and strategically rebuild digital trust. Consequently, this study is grounded in the assumption that digital narratives surrounding conflict situations shape the perceived reputation of tourism destinations. Based on this context, the research problem focuses on examining whether there is a significant relationship between Digital Crisis Communication Strategy (DCCS) and the reputation performance of tourism destinations.

The urgency of this research lies in the fact that reputation crises triggered by negative reviews and viral content on social media often hinder the development of tourist villages, including ecotourism destinations. Therefore, every tourism manager must possess a clear understanding of Digital Crisis Communication Strategy (DCCS). The problem-solving approach and strategy in this study utilize the Digital Crisis Communication Strategy Model for Sustaining Ecotourism Reputation, emphasizing the need for integrated communication elements at the ecotourism management level (T. W. Coombs, 2024; Eriksson & Olsson, 2023). This includes the use of digital storytelling, engagement with local influencers, as well as mechanisms for clarification and active

interaction on social media. Such strategies place strong emphasis on creative narratives and emotional engagement with visitors, which are crucial in restoring and maintaining the reputation of sustainable ecotourism destinations. Thus, the main objective of this research is to analyze the influence of digital crisis communication strategies on the reputation of sustainable ecotourism destinations in North Sumatra and to examine the mediating role of tourist trust in the relationship between digital crisis communication strategies and the recovery of sustainable ecotourism destination reputation.

Classical studies on crisis communication were initiated by Coombs (2007) through the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). However, as the field evolved, subsequent studies on crisis communication shifted toward the digital sphere. Avraham (2020) explains that negative news now spreads rapidly through social media platforms (Paraskevas & Arendell, 2007; Pforr, 2009; Pike & Page, 2014). Research by Buhalis & Foerste (2015) and Sigala (2018) indicates that tourism destinations are highly vulnerable to user-generated content (UGC) such as negative reviews or viral posts. In several cases, public trust and visitor numbers have dropped significantly due to a single unresolved issue that was not addressed promptly. A study by Edelman (2022) further reveals that 88% of consumers trust online reviews, implying that negative content if not clarified quickly can severely damage a destination's reputation (Blanton et al., 2024; Ivasciuc et al., 2024; Zainol et al., 2023).

The study by Sari & Pramudibyanto (2021) indicates that most tourist villages still lack the capacity to develop and implement digital strategies. This creates an opportunity for further research on how tourism organizations or destinations should respond to crises (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019; Safitra et al., 2022; Sakas et al., 2022) taking into account the type of crisis and the perceived level of responsibility (Goh & Sigala, 2020; Sigala, 2020). Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) emphasizes the importance of proactive communication strategies in crisis mitigation (Abas et al., 2020; Maingi et al., 2024; Saputra, 2020; Saputra et al., 2024; Tkalac Verčič et al., 2019, 2024). Furthermore, the concept of Digital Reputation Management draws upon Reputation Management Theory (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2024; Verčič et al., 2022; Wijayanti et al., 2022), which underscores the necessity of managing narratives on social media. This includes the use of digital storytelling, influencer collaborations, and community based engagement to maintain positive perceptions of tourism destinations.

This study is highly relevant and contemporary as it addresses the need for a strategic framework of digital-based crisis communication within the ecotourism sector. It integrates classical theories such as Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Image Restoration Theory with modern approaches including digital storytelling and influencer engagement. Thus, the state of the art of this research lies in filling the existing research gap at the level of ecotourism villages that have been affected by reputation issues stemming from social media virality.

METHOD

The research model consists of three main variables: Digital Crisis Communication Strategy (DCCS) as the independent variable, Trust Recovery as the intervening variable, and Tourism Destination Reputation as the dependent variable. DCCS is operationalized through four dimensions: monitoring and early warning systems, strategic crisis response, influencer and stakeholder engagement, and post-crisis learning and adaptation, representing how tourism destination managers anticipate,

respond to, and recover from reputational crises in digital environments. Trust Recovery represents the restoration of tourists' confidence following exposure to negative information or crisis-related communication, while Tourism Destination Reputation reflects tourists' overall perceptions of the destination's credibility, attractiveness, and reliability. The measurement model (outer model) was assessed to establish indicator validity and construct reliability. Indicator reliability was evaluated using factor loadings, with values ≥ 0.70 considered acceptable, while convergent validity was assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with values > 0.50 indicating that the construct explains more than half of the variance in its indicators. Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha values > 0.70 were used to confirm internal consistency.

The structural model (inner model) was analyzed to examine the relationships between DCCS, Trust Recovery, and Tourism Destination Reputation, including the mediating role of Trust Recovery. Path coefficients were examined to determine the direction and magnitude of the relationships, while R-square (R^2) was used to assess the proportion of variance explained by the endogenous constructs. The significance of the hypothesized relationships was evaluated using T-statistics and p-values, with $p < 0.05$ indicating statistical significance. In addition, model adequacy was assessed using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), with values below 0.10 considered indicative of acceptable fit, and the Normed Fit Index (NFI), with values above 0.90 suggesting acceptable model fitness. Predictive relevance was further assessed using Q-square (Q^2) to determine the model's predictive capability for endogenous constructs. Collectively, these assessments were used to establish the validity and reliability of the measurement model, evaluate the proposed structural relationships, and determine the predictive adequacy of the research model.

The study population comprised tourism village managers, tourism business operators, and tourists who had visited the Pantai Labu and Tangkahan tourism villages. Using a purposive sampling technique, 200 respondents were selected based on their relevant experience and knowledge regarding these destinations. Data were collected via online and offline questionnaires utilizing a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The study involved three key constructs: Digital Crisis Communication Strategy (DCCS) as the independent variable measured through monitoring and early warning systems, strategic crisis response, influencer and stakeholder engagement, and post-crisis learning and adaptation; Trust Recovery as the intervening variable, reflecting the restoration of tourist confidence following a crisis; and Tourism Destination Reputation as the dependent variable, representing tourists' overall perceptions and evaluations of the destination within the digital context. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software, encompassing path analysis, hypothesis testing, and model evaluation. The measurement model (outer model) was assessed using factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE); values of ≥ 0.70 and ≥ 0.50 , respectively, indicated adequate indicator reliability and convergent validity (Hair et al., 2021).

Hypotheses Tested

- H1: The use of influencers (X1.1) has a positive effect on tourist trust (M).
- H2: Digital storytelling (X1.2) has a positive effect on tourist trust (M).
- H3: Crisis response through social media (X1.3) has a positive effect on tourist trust (M).

- H4: Tourist trust (M) has a positive effect on the recovery of the tourism village's reputation (Y1).
- H5: The digital strategy (X1) has a direct positive effect on reputation recovery (Y1).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The respondent profile indicates that the study is dominated by young and digitally active individuals. A total of 200 respondents participated in this study, consisting of 56% females and 44% males. The majority of respondents were aged between 21 and 35 years (62%), which reflects a demographic group that is highly engaged with digital technology and social media platforms. This age group is often characterized as digitally literate and more responsive to online information, including user-generated content and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). Consequently, they are more likely to be influenced by both positive and negative information circulating on social media when forming perceptions of tourism destinations.

In terms of platform usage, Instagram emerged as the most dominant social media platform (58%), followed by TikTok (25%) and Facebook (17%). This finding is particularly important, as it suggests that visual-based platforms play a significant role in shaping destination image. Instagram's dominance, despite the rapid growth of TikTok, may be attributed to its function as a more established platform for curated visual storytelling and travel-related content. This also implies that tourism managers should prioritize Instagram as a primary communication channel, while still leveraging TikTok for viral exposure and broader audience reach.

Regarding the purpose of visits, the majority of respondents (71%) visited for recreational purposes, while 19% were motivated by educational or ecotourism interests, and 10% for research or community-related activities. This distribution indicates that Tangkahan is primarily perceived as a leisure destination, although it still retains a niche appeal for ecotourism and educational experiences. Importantly, tourists visiting for recreation are generally more sensitive to service quality and overall experience, making them more likely to express dissatisfaction through negative reviews when expectations are not met.

Outer Model Results

The measurement model evaluation demonstrates that all indicators meet the required validity and reliability criteria. All factor loadings exceed the threshold of 0.70, indicating strong correlations between indicators and their respective constructs. Composite Reliability (CR) values range from 0.86 to 0.92, exceeding the recommended minimum of 0.70, while Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values range from 0.58 to 0.73, confirming adequate convergent validity. Additionally, Cronbach's Alpha values between 0.80 and 0.90 indicate high internal consistency among the measurement items. These results confirm that the constructs of Digital Crisis Communication Strategy (DCCS), Tourist Trust, and Tourism Destination Reputation are measured reliably and validly. Therefore, the measurement model is suitable for further structural model analysis.

Inner Model Results

The structural model analysis reveals that the Digital Crisis Communication Strategy (DCCS) has substantial explanatory power. The R^2 value for Tourist Trust is 0.56, indicating that 56% of the variance in tourist trust can be explained by DCCS. This suggests that effective digital crisis communication plays a crucial role in rebuilding and maintaining trust among tourists, particularly in situations where negative information circulates online. The R^2 value for Tourism Destination Reputation is 0.63, meaning that 63% of the variance in destination reputation is explained by the model. This relatively high value indicates that the combination of DCCS and trust recovery significantly contributes to shaping the perceived reputation of the destination. In other words, reputation in the digital era is not only influenced by actual service quality but also by how well crises are communicated and managed online. The Q^2 value of 0.41 indicates strong predictive relevance, suggesting that the model has good capability in predicting endogenous constructs. This reinforces the robustness of the proposed model in explaining the dynamics of trust and reputation in the context of digital tourism communication.

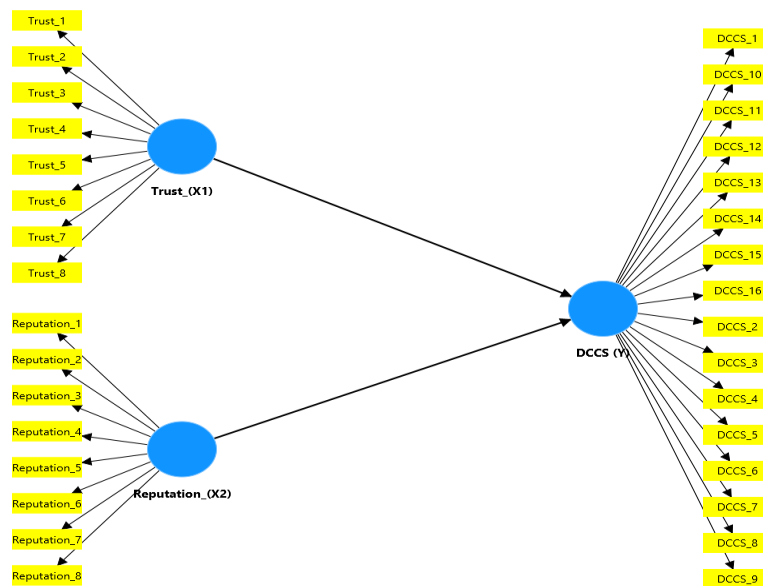
These findings indicate that the proposed model has substantial explanatory power and predictive accuracy in analyzing the relationship between Digital Crisis Communication Strategy (DCCS), Tourist Trust, and Destination Reputation.

Table 1. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path Tested	Coefficient (β)	T-Statistic	p-value	Result
H1	Influencer $\rightarrow$ Tourist Trust	0,32	4,75	0,000	Accepted
H2	Digital Storytelling $\rightarrow$ Tourist Trust	0,28	3,92	0,000	Accepted
H3	Crisis Response $\rightarrow$ Tourist Trust	0,36	5,11	0,000	Accepted
H4	Tourist Trust $\rightarrow$ Destination	0,47	6,84	0,000	Accepted
H5	DCCS $\rightarrow$ Destination Reputation (direct effect)	0,29	3,57	0,001	Accepted

Based on the analysis results, all research hypotheses (H1–H5) were accepted, confirming a significant relationship among the Digital Crisis Communication Strategy (DCCS), tourist trust, and destination reputation. The findings indicate that digital crisis response is the most dominant factor in building tourist trust ($\beta = 0.36$). This shows that the faster, more accurate, and more transparent the digital response provided by destination managers, the higher the level of tourist trust toward the destination. Furthermore, the results reveal that tourist trust plays a strong mediating role in the process of destination reputation recovery ($\beta = 0.47$). This means that the post-crisis reputation of a destination is not only determined by the direct implementation of communication strategies but also largely depends on the extent to which these strategies are able to foster and sustain tourist trust.

Nevertheless, the DCCS strategy still has a direct influence on destination reputation ($\beta = 0.29$), although most of this effect is mediated by tourist trust. Thus, it can be concluded that the success of reputation recovery for ecotourism destinations in the digital era is largely determined by the synergy between the effectiveness of digital crisis response and the ability to build tourist trust as a key element in crisis communication.



The results of the PLS-SEM modeling indicate that the Trust construct (X1), measured by eight indicators, plays a significant role in influencing the Digital Crisis Communication Strategy (DCCS) variable. Trust indicators such as honesty, transparency, consistency, and accountability of the tourism village managers show strong factor loadings, indicating that tourist trust is a crucial dimension in the success of digital crisis communication strategies.

The study population comprised tourism village managers, tourism business operators, and tourists who had visited the Pantai Labu and Tangkahan tourism villages. Using a purposive sampling technique, 200 respondents were selected based on their relevant experience and knowledge regarding these destinations. Data were collected via online and offline questionnaires utilizing a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The study involved three key constructs: Digital Crisis Communication Strategy (DCCS) as the independent variable measured through monitoring and early warning systems, strategic crisis response, influencer and stakeholder engagement, and post-crisis learning and adaptation; Trust Recovery as the intervening variable, reflecting the restoration of tourist confidence following a crisis; and Tourism Destination Reputation as the dependent variable, representing tourists' overall perceptions and evaluations of the destination within the digital context. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software, encompassing path analysis, hypothesis testing, and model evaluation. The measurement model (outer model) was assessed using factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE); values of ≥ 0.70 and ≥ 0.50 , respectively, indicated adequate indicator reliability and convergent validity (Hair et al., 2021).

These findings indicate that Digital Crisis Communication Strategy (DCCS) plays a pivotal role in restoring trust and the reputation of tourism destinations. This aligns with prior research on tourism crisis communication, which demonstrates that the quality and timeliness of an organization's response influence tourists' cognitive and emotional reactions to a crisis, particularly within social media environments. Studies on tourism and hospitality crises in online discussions have found that organizational response strategies alongside crisis characteristics and message quality significantly impact public reactions to crises (Zhang et al., 2021). Similarly, recent research

grounded in Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) suggests that aligning crisis response strategies with perceptions of destination resilience helps maintain the quality of the relationship between the destination and tourists, with trust in the destination and perceptions of responsiveness serving as crucial mediating mechanisms (Zhu et al., 2024). These findings reinforce the current study by demonstrating that crisis communication is not merely an information-dissemination activity but also a mechanism for sustaining tourist confidence and relational bonds with the destination. However, this study broadens the scope of previous research by conceptualizing DCCS more comprehensively encompassing monitoring and early warning systems, strategic crisis response, stakeholder and influencer engagement, and post-crisis learning and adaptation rather than focusing solely on individual crisis response messages.

These findings also carry theoretical implications for the application of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) within the context of digital tourism destinations. SCCT posits that crisis communication must be aligned with the level of reputational threat and stakeholder perceptions of the crisis, with appropriate response strategies serving to safeguard organizational reputation (Coombs, 2007). The study's findings extend this perspective by indicating that, in the digital tourism landscape, the reputational consequences of crisis communication can be realized through the restoration of tourist trust. This interpretation is supported by recent tourism research indicating that trust in a destination and perceptions of responsiveness can mediate the relationship between crisis management communication and the quality of the relationship between the destination and tourists (Zhu et al., 2024). A recent systematic review also identified crisis communication, institutional credibility, transparency, social media, and stakeholder engagement as interconnected factors in restoring tourist confidence and destination reputation following a crisis (Iswanto et al., 2026). Thus, the theoretical contribution of this study lies in extending the application of SCCT from a perspective primarily focused on crisis response and reputation protection toward an integrated trust-restoration perspective; in this view, effective digital crisis communication contributes not only to reputation protection but also to rebuilding tourist confidence as a crucial mechanism for destination recovery.

The demographic characteristics and platforms used by the respondents further underscore the importance of this digital perspective. The predominance of tourists aged 21–35 and the use of Instagram as the primary social media platform indicate that perceptions of the destination are formed in an environment where tourists simultaneously consume, produce, and disseminate destination-related information. This context is significant because tourists can act as secondary crisis communicators by sharing experiences, complaints, reviews, and other user-generated content. Previous research has shown that social media can facilitate secondary crisis communication and trigger distrust and negative behavioral responses toward tourism destinations when negative experiences are collectively amplified online (Zhang et al., 2020). More recent studies also indicate that rapid and consistent responses to negative online messages can contribute to reputation recovery, whereas silence or delayed responses tend to be less effective in tourism-related crisis situations (Wut et al., 2025). Therefore, these findings reinforce the theoretical relevance of viewing digital crisis communication as an interactive process involving destination managers, tourists, influencers, and other stakeholders, rather than merely as one-way organizational communication.

From a practical standpoint, these findings suggest that tourism destination managers should develop crisis communication strategies that are adaptive and sensitive to the specific characteristics of different platforms. Instagram can be leveraged to maintain consistency in destination information and visual narratives, while platforms like TikTok can facilitate broader information dissemination and boost engagement. At the same time, negative reviews and user-generated content should be viewed as vital early warning signals rather than merely threats to the destination's image. Monitoring such content enables managers to identify emerging issues, respond swiftly and consistently, and provide credible information before negative narratives spread further. This approach aligns with current evidence indicating that proactive monitoring and timely responses are crucial components of crisis communication for destinations within the social media landscape.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study also provide several critical insights into the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) developed by Timothy W. Coombs. SCCT tends to be organization-oriented and positions the public as passive message receivers. However, this study reveals that tourists play an active role in determining the legitimacy of crisis responses through the level of trust they hold toward the destination. Therefore, crisis communication should be more audience-centered rather than merely focused on organizational strategy. Moreover, SCCT does not fully accommodate the role of digital media, even though, in the context of today's ecotourism, crisis communication strategies are heavily influenced by user-generated content, influencer engagement, and digital storytelling practices. In this regard, the theory still lacks emphasis on the importance of two-way interaction and engagement, which form the core of digital communication.

SCCT generally treats reputation as a consequence of crisis communication strategies, whereas this study shows that reputation instead functions as reputational capital a foundational resource that determines how effectively digital crisis communication strategies can be implemented. SCCT also largely emerges from corporate or formal organizational contexts, making it less equipped to explain the local community dynamics found in community based tourist villages. In such contexts, community credibility and collective reputation significantly influence the effectiveness of digital crisis communication strategies.

Furthermore, SCCT is relatively limited in explaining long term processes, as it mainly focuses on immediate responses to crises. In contrast, this study emphasizes the importance of post crisis learning and adaptation, ensuring that tourist trust can be continuously restored and maintained over time. In conclusion, while SCCT remains a relevant foundation in crisis communication studies, it has limitations in explaining crisis dynamics in the digital era and within community based ecotourism. Therefore, this research opens space for the development of a new conceptual framework the Digital Crisis Communication Strategy (DCCS) Model which positions trust and reputation as the key drivers of effective digital crisis communication and is more responsive to the social media ecosystem and community participation.

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