Developing an Integrated Crisis Management Mechanism for Chinese Hotel Chains—Addressing Challenges in the Post-COVID Era

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Abstract

The hospitality and tourism industries, particularly the hotel sector, have consistently been vulnerable to crises, with external factors like political, economic, and environmental changes exacerbating this susceptibility. The research aims to evaluate how hotels in China managed crises during and after the pandemic, focusing on the roles of various stakeholders in the crisis management process. The study seeks to explore the crisis management mechanisms employed by these hotels and propose a framework that considers the needs of all stakeholders. This study employs a quantitative research approach, using a self-administered 5-point Likert scale questionnaire. The study's population includes hotel managers, front-line staff, and key stakeholders such as local government officials and representatives from hotel associations, with 387 valid samples obtained through purposive sampling.Regression analysis and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were used to test the hypotheses and analyze the relationships between the variables. The research findings are: 1)Perception of Crisis significantly correlates with Crisis Management Strategies (r = 0.513, p < 0.001) and Hotel Organizational Trust (r = 0.528, p < 0.001). 2) Perception of Crisis (β = 0.532, p < 0.001) and Human Resource Policy (β = 0.571, p < 0.001) positively influence Crisis Management Strategies. 3) Crisis Communication (β = 0.186, p < 0.001) and Training (β = 0.203, p < 0.001) significantly impact Hotel Organizational Trust. 4) Crisis Management Strategies (β = 0.396, p < 0.001) positively affect Marketing Strategy, while Hotel Organizational Trust (β = -0.015, p > 0.05) does not. 5) Creative Marketing Strategies (β = 0.553, p < 0.001) enhance Post-Pandemic Hotel Performance. 6) SEM results confirm strong model fit (χ²/df = 1.137, RMSEA = 0.019, SRMR = 0.037, TLI = 0.981, CFI = 0.982). 7) Regression analysis shows significant positive relationships, particularly Perception of Crisis (β = 0.134, p = 0.007) with Crisis Management Strategies.

Keywords: *Chinese Hotel Sector ; Post-COVID Era; Crisis Management Strategies; Organizational Adaptability*

INTRODUCTION

Regardless of the time frame, whether before or after the pandemic, the hospitality and tourism industries have consistently been recognized as vulnerable and highly susceptible to crises or disasters. This vulnerability is largely driven by external factors, including political, economic, and environmental forces. In particular, the hotel sector is exposed to a wide range of threats, such as financial crises, political instability, and environmental changes (Zabaldina & Dvorska, 2024; Alonso-Almeida et al., 2016; Lutskyi, 2024; Veiga, 2014; Chen et al., 2024). The most recent and globally impactful crisis—COVID-19 pandemic, stands out for its profound and unprecedented effects on the hospitality and tourism sectors, making it

one of the hardest-hit industries. According to the China Hospitality Association (2022), the Chinese hotel sector suffered losses exceeding 10.5 billion US dollars in the first two months of 2020, and the effects were felt across all provinces (Yuan, as cited in China Daily, 2022). The COVID-19 crisis mirrors previous disruptions in the hospitality industry, such as the SARS epidemic of 2003, which also severely impacted hotel businesses (Nan, 2020; Humeniuk et al., 2022; Johnson et al., 2022; Razak, 2020; Emam & Elziny, 2020). Historically, the hospitality industry has been highly susceptible to various forms of crises, ranging from natural disasters to political instability and global pandemics. The COVID-19 crisis was distinct in its widespread impact, leading to the closure of hotel businesses, a drastic reduction in global travel, and a prolonged economic downturn for the industry (Filimonau et al., 2020; Godovykh et al., 2021).Crisis management (CM) has long been an essential concept within the hospitality sector, especially in the face of unforeseen disruptions. Crisis management is generally understood as the process by which organizations handle, mitigate, and recover from significant disruptive events (Santana, 2003). Notably, the hotel sector is particularly vulnerable to crises due to its dependence on tourism, local conditions, and consumer behavior, all of which can be dramatically affected by crises such as pandemics (Pforr & Hosie, 2008). In response to crises, hotels must quickly adapt and implement strategies that ensure their survival and recovery. A well-organized crisis management system can help mitigate the damage caused by such events, but this requires the involvement of multiple stakeholders, including hotel management, staff, customers, local governments, and associations (Zech, 2016; Subedi & Kubickova, 2023; Obiora & Kpakol, 2015; Atasoy et al., 2022). While previous research has primarily focused on crisis management practices during disasters like natural calamities or terrorism (Hall, Scott, & Gössling, 2020), the global scale of the COVID-19 crisis necessitates an integrated approach to managing such long-term disruptions. This study aims to address these gaps by exploring how Chinese homegrown hotel chains respond to and recover from such crises.

This study focuses on developing an integrated crisis management mechanism for Chinese homegrown hotel chains in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It aims to evaluate how these hotels managed crises during and after the pandemic, with particular emphasis on the roles of various stakeholders in the crisis management process. The research questions guiding this study are: How did Chinese hotel chains respond to the crisis, and what were the key factors in their crisis management mechanisms? Additionally, the study investigated whether stakeholder engagement, including hotel management, employees, customers, and local governments, aligns with empirical data from the crisis period. The research objective is to explore the crisis management mechanisms employed by homegrown hotel chains in China and propose an integrated framework that considers the needs of all stakeholders.

The expected outputs of this research is to use the findings to enhance crisis preparedness and response in the future. Hotel managers and owners will benefit from the proposed crisis management mechanisms, which will guide their decision-making processes during future crises, improving their recovery strategies and overall resilience. Ultimately, the findings hopefully will contribute to improving the resilience of the hospitality sector so as to withstand future disruptions and maintain sustainability in an increasingly unpredictable global environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Crisis: Definition and Management
A crisis is defined as "an extremely difficult or dangerous point in a situation" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). Derived from the Greek word 'krinein,' meaning to decide, a crisis is often seen as an unpredictable

event that threatens stakeholders and negatively affects an organization's performance and survival (Coombs, 2007). In the tourism sector, crises evoke negative perceptions and can significantly impact local economies and tourism, with the extent of the crisis often influenced by public perception (Santana, 2004; Abraham et al., 2020).

Crisis Management (CM) refers to the process of preventing crises, intervening during a crisis, minimizing damage, and restoring normalcy afterward (Rosenthal & Pijnenburg, 1990; Sausmarez, 2007). In the hotel industry, CM has evolved to focus on proactive strategies that understand, prevent, and respond to crises while considering stakeholders' needs (Glaesser, 2003). Coombs (2015) outlines CM as a procedural process with four stages: prevention, preparation, response, and revision, aiming to minimize harm to the organization, stakeholders, and the industry. This study defines CM as an integrated approach where hotels effectively prevent and manage crises while addressing stakeholder interests at each stage, including preventive measures, crisis management plans, and post-crisis assessments (Coombs & Holladay, 2012).

Research Hypotheses

According to Comfort et al. (2020), shared crisis perception enables timely threat recognition and swift decisive action, fostering cohesive organizational responses. Thus the hypothesis is proposed:

H1: The perception of crisis by the management team and employees has a positive impact on crisis management strategies.According to John & Thakur (2021), flexible organizational structures allow quick decision-making and resource allocation essential in crisis situations. Thus the hypothesis is proposed:

H2: The adaptability of organizational structure during a crisis has a positive impact on crisis management strategies.According to Filimonau et al. (2020), strong organizational commitment demonstrates dedication to protecting stakeholders and maintaining operations during crises. Thus the hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Organizational commitment during a pandemic has a positive impact on the establishment of crisis management strategies.According to Cameron (2008) and Coombs (2014), clear and timely communication builds trust, manages expectations, and coordinates stakeholder actions. Thus the hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Effective crisis communication among stakeholders has a positive impact on the establishment of crisis management strategies.According to Setiaji & Dewi (2022), trained employees are better equipped to recognize and respond to crises, reducing potential errors. Thus the hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Knowledge and skills training for front-line employees have a positive impact on crisis management strategies.According to Khan et al. (2021), emergency HR policies such as flexible working arrangements help maintain employee morale and productivity during crises. Thus the hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Emergency human resource policies formulated during a pandemic have a positive impact on crisis management strategies.According to Filimonau et al. (2020), shared crisis perception among management and employees contributes to increased organizational trust through transparency and decisive action. Thus the hypothesis is proposed:

H7: The perception of crisis by the management team and employees has a positive impact on organizational trust in the hotel.According to organizational resilience theory (Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2007), flexible structures demonstrate an organization's ability to manage crises effectively, enhancing stakeholder trust. Thus the hypothesis is proposed:

H8: The adaptability of organizational structure during a crisis has a positive impact on organizational

trust in the hotel.According to Meyer & Allen (1997), organizational commitment encompasses affective, normative, and continuance dimensions that foster employee trust when management demonstrates concern for well-being. Thus the hypothesis is proposed:

H9: Organizational commitment during a pandemic has a positive impact on the establishment of employee trust in the hotel.According to Walter (2024)., clear, timely, and transparent communication alleviates anxiety and uncertainty, fostering stakeholder trust and confidence. Thus the hypothesis is proposed:

H10: Effective crisis communication among stakeholders has a positive impact on the establishment of trust in the hotel.According to Lee & Park (2020), well-trained employees better handle unexpected situations and communicate effectively with guests, instilling confidence in the organization. Thus the hypothesis is proposed:

H11: Knowledge and skills training for front-line employees have a positive impact on organizational trust in the hotel.According to Taylor (2021), emergency HR policies such as flexible working arrangements and mental health support demonstrate organizational commitment to employee well-being. Thus the hypothesis is proposed:

H12: Emergency human resource policies formulated during a pandemic have a positive impact on organizational trust in the hotel.

According to Choi (2022), a hotel's crisis response shapes its brand image and reputation, which can be leveraged in marketing efforts to position itself as safe and responsible. Thus the hypothesis is proposed:

H13: Crisis management strategies during a pandemic have a positive impact on the choice of marketing strategies.According to Morgan & Hunt (1994) and Palmatier (2007), organizational trust built on reliability and credibility reduces risk perception and makes stakeholders more receptive to marketing messages. Thus the hypothesis is proposed:

H14: During a pandemic, organizational trust has a positive impact on the selection and effectiveness of marketing strategies.According to Kotler (2019), innovative marketing strategies focusing on creativity and value creation are essential for capturing consumer attention and rebuilding customer confidence post-pandemic. Thus the hypothesis is proposed:

H15: In the context of COVID-19, the adoption of innovative and creative marketing strategies is critical for the post-pandemic performance and recovery of hotels.
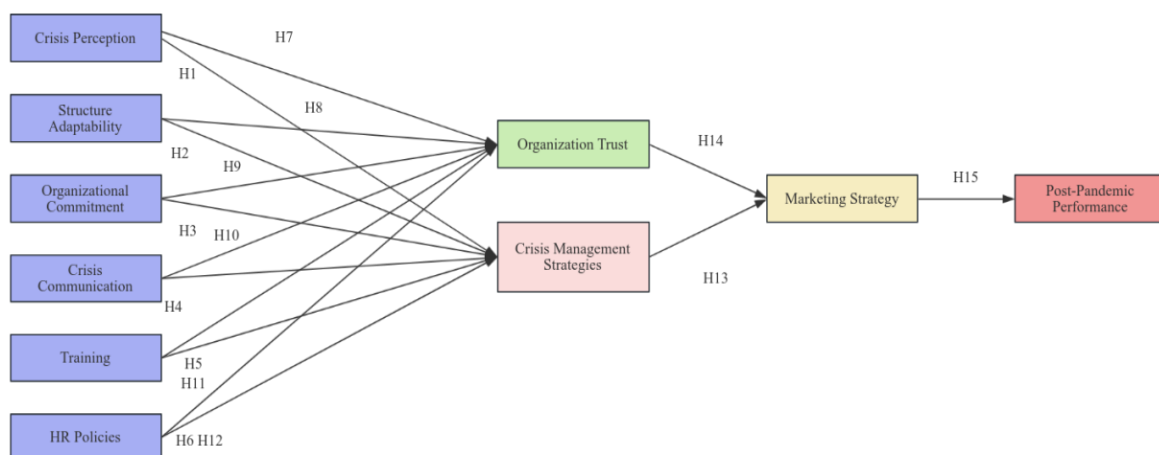

Figure 1:Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to investigate crisis management strategies and their implementation in hotel chains in Chengdu, China. The study utilizes a 5-point Likert scale self-administered questionnaire to gather data from all levels of employees. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee in Human Research at the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) prior to data collection.

3.1 Population and Samples

The population of this study consists of hotel managers, front-line staff, and key stakeholders such as local government officials and representatives from hotel associations. Purposive sampling was used to select participants based on their experience and expertise in crisis management. Finally, a total of 387 valid samples were obtained, ensuring a comprehensive representation of the target groups involved in the study.

3.2 Date Collection and Analysis

Data was collected using a self-administered Likert 5-point questionnaire, which included 76 items across multiple variables.The questionnaire was adapted from previous studies to ensure content validity and relevance. The original questionnaire was constructed in Chinese to align with the target population's language, and it was distributed through WeChat and the online electronic platform Wenjuanxing. Regression analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses. The analysis was further analyzed by Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which confirmed the robustness of the relationships between the variables and their significant impact on the hotel's post-pandemic performance.

3.3 Pilot Test

In the pretest phase, a total of 140 valid sample responses were collected from front-line hotel employees at Marriott International, Hilton Worldwide Holdings, and InterContinental Hotels Group. The pretest data confirm the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. The pilot sample size of 140 responses is sufficient for testing the measurement model and can be used for the full-scale survey.The reliability and validity of the questionnaire were assessed. The reliability values for all variables exceeded 0.8, confirming high internal consistency. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed, revealing that all 76 items could be effectively categorized into 10 distinct factors, with a cumulative variance explained rate of 71.97%. The model demonstrated good discriminant and convergent validity, supporting the use of the measurement model in the formal survey.

RESEARCH RESULTS

For the formal test, 387 valid responses were collected, primarily from front-line employees of Marriott International, Hilton Worldwide, and InterContinental Hotel Group. The sample was gender-balanced (47.8% male, 52.2% female), with 53.0% of respondents aged 24-39 years and 63.6% holding a bachelor's degree.Reliability analysis confirmed that all variables met the required threshold, with values above 0.8. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) further supported the validity of the model with strong fit indices (χ^2/df = 1.137, RMSEA = 0.019, SRMR = 0.037, TLI = 0.981, CFI = 0.982) for the 10-factor model.

Table 1: Variable Correlation Analysis

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Perception of Crisis	1									

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Organizational Structure Adaptability	0.494***	1								
Organizational Commitment	0.424***	0.465***	1							
Crisis Communication	0.273***	0.399***	0.206***	1						
Training	0.291***	0.299***	0.310***	0.203***	1					
Human Resource Policy	0.453***	0.541***	0.440***	0.308***	0.380***	1				
Crisis Management Strategies	0.513***	0.611***	0.496***	0.400***	0.386***	0.571***	1			
Hotel Organization Trust	0.528***	0.482***	0.471***	0.408***	0.454***	0.556***	0.481***	1		
Market Strategy	0.149**	0.287***	0.196***	0.180***	0.100*	0.209***	0.389***	0.176**	1	
Post-Pandemic Hotel Performance	0.056	0.161**	0.144**	0.076	0.096	0.126*	0.162**	0.118*	0.553***	1
Mean	3.41	3.67	3.34	3.56	3.06	3.40	3.41	3.44	3.68	3.40
Standard Deviation	1.09	1.02	1.19	0.90	1.10	1.10	1.04	1.10	0.78	1.23

Notes：*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001.

Table 1 shows significant positive correlations among key variables, indicating their interdependence. For example, Perception of Crisis correlates strongly with Organizational Structure Adaptability (r = 0.494, p < 0.001), Organizational Commitment (r = 0.424, p < 0.001), and Crisis Management Strategies (r = 0.513, p < 0.001), highlighting the influence of crisis perception on organizational responses. Additionally, Crisis Management Strategies is positively correlated with Human Resource Policy (r = 0.571, p < 0.001) and Hotel Organization Trust (r = 0.481, p < 0.001), suggesting their role in shaping organizational effectiveness. However, Post-Pandemic Hotel Performance shows weaker correlations with other variables, particularly Crisis Communication and Perception of Crisis. The table also includes means and standard deviations, emphasizing the variability and central tendencies of the data.

Table 2: Model Fit of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

	χ^2/df	RMSEA	SRMR	TLI	CFI
10-factor model	1.137	0.019	0.034	0.981	0.982
9-factor model	4.548	0.044	0.079	0.817	0.839
8-factor model	8.192	0.118	0.212	0.709	0.658
7-factor model	16.192	0.236	0.323	0.604	0.630

	χ^2/df	RMSEA	SRMR	TLI	CFI
6-factor model	25.192	0.288	0.376	0.504	0.567
5-factor model	35.192	0.388	0.395	0.440	0.532
4-factor model	41.192	0.421	0.453	0.437	0.498
3-factor model	48.192	0.544	0.473	0.404	0.431
2-factor model	54.192	0.672	0.553	0.383	0.408
1-factor model	61.192	0.706	0.598	0.355	0.397

Table 2 presents the fit indices for several models, with the 10-factor model showing the best fit. The 10-factor model achieves optimal values with a χ^2/df of 1.137, RMSEA of 0.019, SRMR of 0.034, TLI of 0.981, and CFI of 0.982, all indicating a good fit. In contrast, the fit indices for models with fewer factors (e.g., 9-factor, 8-factor) progressively worsen, with the 1-factor model showing poor fit with a χ^2/df of 61.192, RMSEA of 0.706, SRMR of 0.598, TLI of 0.355, and CFI of 0.397, suggesting that fewer factors do not adequately represent the data. These results confirm that the 10-factor model is the most suitable representation of the data structure.

Table 3: Analysis of Factors Influencing Crisis Management Strategies

	Crisis Management Strategies			R^2	Adjust R^2	F
	β	t	p			
Perception of Crisis	0.154***	3.595	0.000	0.532	0.524	71.908***
Organizational Structure Adaptability	0.264***	5.623	0.000			
Organizational Commitment	0.155***	3.670	0.000			
Crisis Communication	0.135**	3.480	0.001			
Training	0.108**	2.783	0.006			
Human Resource Policy	0.208***	4.595	0.000			

Table 3 demonstrates how key factors like Perception of Crisis, Organizational Structure Adaptability, and Human Resource Policy significantly influence crisis management strategies (with p-values < 0.01), directly supporting hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, and H6.

Table 4: Analysis of Factors Influencing Hotel Organizational Trust

	Hotel Organizational Trust			R^2	Adjust R^2	F
	β	t	p			
Perception of Crisis	0.231***	5.247	0.000	0.508	0.500	65.364***
Organizational Structure Adaptability	0.037	0.776	0.438			
Organizational Commitment	0.153***	3.547	0.000			
Crisis Communication	0.186***	4.688	0.000			
Training	0.203***	5.097	0.000			
Human Resource Policy	0.230***	4.956	0.000			

Table 4 shows that factors like Perception of Crisis, Organizational Commitment, Crisis Communication, and Training positively impact hotel organizational trust, confirming hypotheses H7, H9, H10, H11, and H12.

Table 5: Analysis of Factors Influencing Marketing Strategy

	Market Strategy			R^2	Adjust R^2	F
	β	t	p			
Crisis Management Strategies	0.396***	7.386	0.000	0.151	0.147	34.256***
Hotel Organization Trust	-0.015	-0.277	0.782			

Table 5 emphasizes that Crisis Management Strategies significantly influence marketing strategies (β = 0.396, p < 0.001), supporting hypothesis H13, while Hotel Organizational Trust does not significantly impact marketing strategy, which aligns with hypothesis H14.

Table 6: Impact of Creative Marketing Strategies on Post-Pandemic Hotel Performance

	Post-Pandemic Hotel Performance			R^2	Adjust R^2	F
	β	t	p			
Marketing Strategies	0.553***	13.034	0.000	0.306	0.304	169.878***

Table 6 confirms that innovative marketing strategies play a critical role in improving post-pandemic hotel performance (β = 0.553, p < 0.001), supporting hypothesis H15.

Table 7: Fit Indices of the Structural Equation Model

	χ^2/df	RMSEA	SRMR	TLI	CFI
Result	1.137	0.019	0.037	0.981	0.982

Table 7 presents the fit indices for the structural equation model (SEM), confirming its good fit to the data. The values indicate that the 10-factor model provides an optimal representation of the data structure, with χ^2/df = 1.137, RMSEA = 0.019, SRMR = 0.037, TLI = 0.981, and CFI = 0.982, all meeting established thresholds. These results validate the model's structural validity and confirm its appropriateness for analyzing the relationships between the study's variables.

Table 8: Model Impact Relationship Testing

Impact Relationship			b	β	SE	t	p
Perception of Crisis	→	Crisis Management Strategies	0.125	0.134	0.046	2.708	0.007
Organizational Structure Adaptability	→	Crisis Management Strategies	0.319	0.319	0.065	4.936	<0.001
Organizational Commitment	→	Crisis Management Strategies	0.134	0.150	0.044	3.068	0.002
Crisis Communication	→	Crisis Management Strategies	0.134	0.126	0.047	2.863	0.004
Training	→	Crisis Management Strategies	0.100	0.105	0.041	2.476	0.013
Human Resource Policy	→	Crisis Management Strategies	0.194	0.203	0.052	3.735	<0.001
Perception of Crisis	→	Hotel Organization Trust	0.230	0.237	0.050	4.634	<0.001
Organizational Structure	→	Hotel Organization Trust	0.01	0.01	0.06	0.167	0.86

Impact Relationship			b	β	SE	t	p
Adaptability			1	0	5		8
Organizational Commitment	→	Hotel Organization Trust	0.147	0.159	0.046	3.200	0.001
Crisis Communication	→	Hotel Organization Trust	0.219	0.198	0.050	4.350	<0.001
Training	→	Hotel Organization Trust	0.206	0.208	0.044	4.709	<0.001
Human Resource Policy	→	Hotel Organization Trust	0.245	0.247	0.055	4.432	<0.001
Crisis Management Strategies	→	Market Strategy	0.343	0.434	0.053	6.451	<0.001
Hotel Organization Trust	→	Market Strategy	-0.031	-0.040	0.047	-0.661	0.509
Market Strategy	→	Post-Pandemic Hotel Performance	0.910	0.592	0.085	10.720	<0.001

Table 8 displays the results of the regression analysis testing the impact relationships in the SEM model.

CONCLUSION

The hypothesis testing results show strong support for most of the proposed relationships. Key factors such as crisis perception (H1), organizational adaptability (H2), organizational commitment (H3), crisis communication (H4), employee training (H5), and emergency HR policies (H6) positively impact crisis management strategies. Organizational trust is also influenced by crisis perception (H7), organizational commitment (H9), crisis communication (H10), employee training (H11), and HR policies (H12), while organizational structure adaptability (H8) did not significantly affect trust. Crisis management strategies (H13) positively influence marketing strategies, but organizational trust (H14) does not directly impact marketing choices. Lastly, creative marketing strategies (H15) significantly enhance post-pandemic hotel performance.

LIMITATION AND FUTURE DIRECTION

This study has limitations, including its focus on China, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or cultural contexts. Future research should test and refine the proposed crisis management mechanism in diverse settings to ensure broader applicability. Additionally, relevant authorities and hotel associations in China should emphasize the importance of crisis management (CM) to hotels, particularly homegrown chains, and demonstrate how to effectively recover from the long-term impacts of COVID-19 while preparing for future crises. Future studies could also incorporate more empirical data to deepen the understanding of CM practices, benefiting smaller hotels and policymakers by enhancing responsive systems and aiding in tourism recovery.

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