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## Crisis Management Strategies in Jordanian Hotel Industry

Maisoon ABO MURAD

Al-Balqa Applied University, Prince Hussein Academy for Civil Protection, Jordan  
[maisoonahmad@disa.pha.edu.jo](mailto:maisoonahmad@disa.pha.edu.jo)

Abdullah AL-KHARABSHEH

Al-Balqa Applied University, Prince Hussein Academy for Civil Protection, Jordan  
[Abdbbs@gmail.com](mailto:Abdbbs@gmail.com)

Abdulrahman AL-KHARABSHEH

Jordan

[abd.leth@yahoo.com](mailto:abd.leth@yahoo.com)

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### Abstract:

The aim of the current study is to identify the crisis management strategies in five-star hotels in Jordan. The most world wild crisis management strategies in hotel industry were synthesized from the literature. Data for this study were collected from 50 managers in five-star hotels in Amman. Self-administrated questionnaires were distributed to the targeted sample. SPSS was used to analyse the data and test the hypotheses. The findings showed that the strategies used to manage crises are coping and response strategies; furthermore, the most common strategy is the changing path strategy. This study offers some new insights about crisis management in Jordanian hotels. So, it aims to contribute to this growing area of research in developing countries.

**Keywords:** crisis management; hotel industry; tourism industry; crisis management strategies; Jordanian hotel industry.

**JEL Classification:** M10; H12; Z31.

### Introduction

Living in a turbulent time brings crisis management as an essential approach for organizations to survive (Zamoum and Gorpe 2018, Alonso-Almeida *et al.* 2015; Crandall *et al.* 2013; Pearson and Clair 1998), particularly those working for industries which are fragile and prone to a wide range of crises and disasters such as tourism and hotel industry (Faulkner 2001, Abo-Murad and Abdullah 2019). Furthermore business environment nowadays is characterized by complexity and dynamicity, which make it a risky environment. Hence effective strategies are vital to mitigate negative effects, ensure the continuity of work and to ensure that organizations have the resources and information necessary to deal with such emergency situations (Bundy *et al.* 2017). Accordingly, the organizations need to adopt a risk assessment strategy to understand threats and weaknesses in its vital activities, specifically that some weaknesses may escalate into crisis that causes disruption to work (Hamidovic 2012).

Crisis management in tourism and hotel industry has been studied extensively in previous literature, (Lai and Wang 2020, Alzoubi and Jaaffar 2020, Abo-Murad *et al.* 2019). Hotel industry is considered one of the most fragile and vulnerable industries to countless types of crises (Abo-Murad and Abdullah 2019). Economic, social, political and technological fluctuations expose hotels to a widespread variety of threats (Faulkner 2001). Thus, hotels must be managed effectively with appropriate strategies to different situations, including emergencies and crises situations that might occur at any time (Abo-Murad and Abdullah 2019, AlBattat and MatSom 2014).

The Jordanian hotel industry is considered as a main pillar for the tourism sector thus it grows consistently with the tourism sector. Furthermore, Jordan is considered an attractive destination due to moderate climate and tourist monuments. Thus, hotel industry has experienced a remarkable growth in recent decades due to foreign investments. Hence it is vital for national economic growth (Masa'adeh *et al.* 2018, Sawalha *et al.* 2013). Though, Jordanian tourism and hotel industry has been exposed during the last decades to wide range of crises to name some (Arab revolutions, economic instability, Corona pandemic) (Al-Khrabsheh 2018). The Jordanian hotels need more efforts for development in order to keep pace with the fast growth of tourism sector, to maintain the competitive position, and to adopt effective strategies for crisis management (Tayeh and Mustaf 2018).

Crisis management is still in infancy, so more works and research are needed to develop this field (Crandall *et al.* 2013). Likewise, research on crisis management in the context of tourism and hotel industry is still under researched. Besides it is believed there is a limited research about crises in tourism in developing countries. Hence further studies are needed to focus on crisis management in tourism and hotel industry in developing countries (Ertaş *et al.* 2021, Abo-Murad *et al.* 2019). Based on these facts, the present study was conducted to discuss the issue of hotel management in times of crises. And what are the administrative tools necessary to overcome the dilemmas that arise at the time of crises. Additionally, this research aims to identify and discuss hotels crisis strategies.

Accordingly, the main research problem can be formulated in the following question:

What are the most important crisis management strategies followed (change the path, crises fragmentation, containment crises, exhausting crises and reserve crises strategies) in Jordanian hotels?

From this main question, two sub questions emerged:

1. To what extent are crisis management strategies used in five-star hotels in Jordan?
2. What is the most important strategy followed in the five-star hotels for crisis management in Jordan?

Hence the research hypotheses are:

The main hypothesis: "Five-star hotel management does not follow crisis management strategies during the time of crisis in Jordan."

H01: There are no statistically significant differences among five-star hotel management for change the path strategy for crisis management.

H02: There are no statistically significant differences among five-star hotel management for crises fragmentation strategy for crisis management.

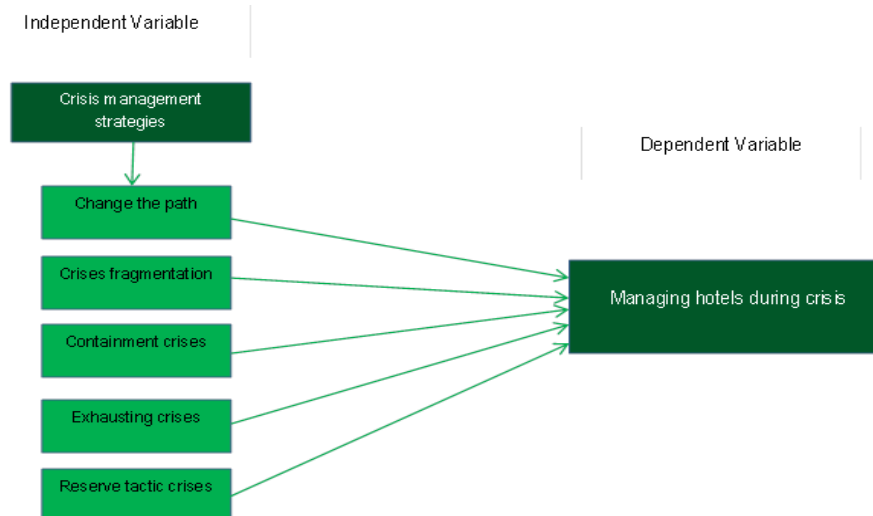
H03: There are no statistically significant differences among five-star hotel management for containment crises strategy for crisis management.

H04: There are no statistically significant differences among five-star hotel management strategy to exhausting crises in crisis management.

H05: There are no statistically significant differences among five-star hotel management for reserve crises strategy.

The following figure (1) illustrates the study variables (independent and dependent variables) based on the proposed hypotheses (EL Shaer 2018).

Figure 1. The study variables model





## 1. Literature Review

There is a lack of agreement on the definition of crisis in the literature (Alas 2009, Mitroff *et al.* 2004, Moore and Lakha 2006). This disagreement is due to several reasons. First, crisis management is argued as a new developing arena. Second, crisis is a multidisciplinary field (Crandall *et al.* 2013). However, most scholars have agreed on a general definition of crisis, in that it represents a sudden, uncontrollable event that threatens the existence of the organization, and in some cases the lives of people, and leads to either positive or negative effects (Sapriel 2003, Coombs 2007, Abu- Fara 2009).

One of the most widely-referred definitions of crisis management is the one offered by Pearson and Chair (1998). They defined it as a “systematic attempt by organizational members with external stakeholders to avert crises or to effectively manage those that do occur” (Pearson and Clair 1998, 66). The definition reveals several fundamental points that could be considered alphabetic of crisis management. First, it looks at organizational ability to effectively address two sets of activities, *i.e.* proactive and reactive. Proactive activities advocate the ‘prevention is better than cure’ principle. Examples of activities include signal detection of crises, planning, preparation, learning and prevention, whereas reactive activities are formulated to respond to potential crises. In this approach, organizations are pushed to be paranoid of potential threats and to always be prepared with less-than-ideal situations. Understandably, some crises are inevitable. Therefore, reactive crisis management activities focus on mitigating the effect of the crisis through damage containment and recovery activities to speed up continuance of operations.

Second, despite the significance of both proactive and reactive crisis management, the priority should be for the proactive crisis management. This is quite rational, since most organizations would prefer “no crisis” situation. Consequently, preventing damage and disruption will be much more valuable for them. Lastly, the definition also highlights that the responsibility and accountability of crisis management must not be limited to organizational members, but also to external stakeholders.

The crisis management field passed through several evolutions over the past few decades before it reached this wide-ranging view. Furthermore, it is almost agreed in the literature that Tylenol (pain relief capsules product for Johnson & Johnson Company) poisoning with cyanide in 1982 caused the launch of modern crisis management (Crandall *et al.* 2013, Mitroff 2005, Burnett 1998) which signify the adoption of proactive initiatives, and taking more strategic, holistic and integrative view to crisis management. Since that time, the crisis management field has witnessed huge expansion, reflected by numerous models for crisis management and theories that have been introduced (Dahles and Susilowati 2015).

The majority of crisis management models have been constructed based on crisis life cycle. Crisis life cycle has been adopted from biological models, by which it is suggested that there is matching between crisis and an organism since both passed through birth, growth, maturity and decline phases (Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt 1995). This analogy helps crisis researchers in studying crisis at different stages, thereby understanding its evolution (Crandall *et al.* 2013, Coombs 2012).

Crisis management models help organizations in formulating crisis management strategies. Crisis management strategies aim to prevent, mitigate or contain crises (Coombs 2012). This study intends to focus on modern crisis management strategies based on El Shaer (2018) and Gilpin and Murphy (2008), which are listed below:

1. Change the path of crisis: It aims to deal with severe crises by focusing on limiting the effect of and then changing its natural path and turning it into paths away from the direction of the beak of the crisis. The following options are used in implementing the change path strategy:

- Compliance with the circumstance imposed by the crisis temporarily.
- Going in the same direction as the crisis.
- Try to slow down the impact of the crisis.
- Export the crisis abroad.
- The provisions of controlling the direction of the crisis.
- Investing the crisis in its new form to compensate for the previous losses.

2. Reserve tactic strategy: this strategy designed to serve industrial organizations that need raw materials for production processes and to be able to cope with a shortage of raw materials in the event of crises and emergency conditions (Gilpin and Murphy 2008).

3. Fragmentation of the crisis: This strategy depends on knowing all details of the factors that cause the crisis by identifying the frameworks that lead to conflict and potential benefits, and then dividing the impact of the crisis into several parts that are easier to handle. It is used to address serious or severe crises (El Shaer 2018).

4. Exhausting the crisis: One of the most unconventional ways to deal with crises is that the crisis revolves around a specific impact. Therefore, without agreeing and effectively identifying this impact, it will be difficult to maintain the impact of the crisis. It depends on identifying the causes of the crisis; religious, economic or political (Gilpin and Murphy 2008).

### 1.1. Crisis Management in Tourism and Hotel Sector

It can be said that crisis management is among the biggest challenges facing the hotel sector in the future in addition to the fact that the tourism and hotel sector is an indication of early warning of crises that may affect other sectors. The tourism movement is active in our world today, so travelers face great doubts about the security and stability of their destination, due to the recent events and circumstances that have caused tension and unstable situations, especially in the Middle East (Zech 2016). However, hotel managers are generally still not sufficiently aware of the imminent risks of crisis situations. Some expert interviews, as well as surveys of selected stakeholder groups, revealed that the level of crisis awareness and preparedness by hotel departments is below average (Abo-Murad *et al.* 2019, Glaesser 2006). The focus was limited to only two types of crisis situations in most cases: fire accidents and economic crises, while neglecting to consider other crisis situations (Adnan 2014, Gonzalez-Herrero and Pratt 1995, Abo-Murad *et al.* 2019). The problem is getting worse since most hotels rely heavily on the detection of crises on tourism companies and tour operators that possess the capabilities of early warning systems, so they monitor the occurrence of the crisis. This leads to confusion in the workflow of hotels and pushes them to deal with crises in a limited and unsystematic way (Zech 2013). Pennington-Gray *et al.* (2011) concluded the most important types of crises and their sources that most hotels around the world face (with different classifications). These types of crises can be summarized in the following table.

Table 1. Types, sources and forms of crises facing the hotel sector in the world  
(Pennington-Gray *et al.* 2011)

Types of crises	Percentage of exposure	Sources of crises
Climate changes	%74.7	Environmental crisis
Natural disasters	%65.0	Environmental crisis
Crimes	%40.5	Socio- cultural crisis
Malfunctions of hotel devices and equipment	%23.6	Technical crisis
Accidents	%22.1	Health crisis
Financial crises	%13.6	Economic crises
Occupational health hazards	%10.9	Health crisis
Cultural obstacles	%11.2	Socio- cultural crisis
Food safety	%9.0	Health crisis
Terrorism	%7.7	Socio- cultural crisis
Diseases/ infectious diseases	%5.1	Health crisis
Politics	%1.3	Political crisis

From the previous table, it is shown that most common crises facing hotels are environmental crises, followed by socio-cultural crises and hence health crises. However, classifying crisis situations according to the level of control and their probability of occurrence is not sufficient because these aspects may vary significantly over the period of crises and taking into consideration other factors (such as location, crisis experience, and training sessions for the hotel staff). Taking into considering that most hotel organizations are small or medium-sized companies (that is, they usually have fewer than 250 employees), their interest in crisis planning appears to be less compared to major hotel companies (Abo-Murad *et al.* 2019). It is clear that time stress is a major constraint towards their handling of a crisis, and they usually do not have a dedicated crisis management team. One of the reasons that managers in these (small and medium-sized) hotels provide to justify the lack of professional crisis management is that the costs of tackling the crisis are lower than what might be spent on preparations for crisis management. Nonetheless, crisis management may save money anyway and create a competitive advantage for hotels (Pennington-Gray *et al.* 2011).

### 1.2. Crisis Management in Jordanian Hotel Industry

The hotel sector in Jordan is considered one of the sectors that recorded a relative decline in its revenues and the volume of occupancy due to its vulnerability to the many crises that ravaged the region surrounding Jordan, both in terms of security and stability, or in terms of the troubled financial and economic conditions that impact the



activity of this sector during the last ten years especially after the Arab revolutions since 2011. Jordan is one of the countries affected by these revolutions, which formed a kind of security and political crises in the external environment surrounding the Jordanian hotel sector. Given that the region of The Middle East is the epicenter of events, Jordan's proximity and its location have maximized the effects of the turbulent surrounding on the economic sectors in general and the hotel sector in particular. This crisis created a situation of insecurity and instability in the region, which prompted tourists to search for safer places away from political and security crises. Most of which was linked to the terrorist groups that have become a source of concern and fear among tourists (Degra *et al.* 2019). In a study prepared by Al- Omari *et al.* (2015) focusing on the consequences of the Arab security revolutions crises on the hotel sector in Jordan in the city of Amman in particular, it was concluded that this sector has been negatively affected by these political security crises in the field of occupancy rate, number of overnight nights, and total hotel income. There is no doubt that the hotel industry sector has been affected by these crises. More obviously it has faced a marked slowdown due to its link with the tourism sector in difficult conditions of serious deterioration at the present time.

Currently, the world is facing coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID -19) pandemic, which has spread across the world. Travel restrictions and border shutdowns were introduced in many countries and regions to control its spread (Qiu *et al.* 2020). In Jordan the estimated economic losses in tourism industry due to Corona pandemic is 1.4 billion dollars. Recent studies draw attention to the effect of health crises such (COVID 19) and give recommendation to better respond for the crisis (Nofal *et al.* 2020). Therefore, it is necessary for hotel industry to adopt effect crisis management strategies to respond for such crises.

## 2. Methodology

This study has adopted quantitative method for data collection. Descriptive analytical approach was applied by inferring the references and literature related to the subject of the study. Self-administrated questionnaire was adopted from previous research for measuring the study variables (Elshaer 2018). Questionnaires were distributed by researchers to hotel managers. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part addressed demographic data. The second part represented items to describe the study variable, which were divided into three main groups: management strategies before the crisis occurred - preparation, management strategies in responding to crises, and management strategies after the crisis. 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1(the least important) to 5 (the most important) was used to determine the answers for each of the questionnaire items. The data analysis was conducted with the help of SPSS.

The following table (2) shows the characteristics of the study sample that were determined in each of (gender, educational qualification, period of service in the hotel, monthly salary in Jordanian dinars):

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of study sample

Demographic variable	Number	%
First: gender		
Male	40	60%
Female	10	%40
Second: academic qualifications:		
Secondary certificates of lower	5	%22
Bachelor	30	%50
Diploma	10	%18
Post graduates	5	% 10
Third: salary / month in JDs		
100-300	5	%10
300-500	6	%18.0
500-700	19	%15
700-800	5	%10
More than 800	20	%47
Fourth: year experience at hotel:		
<1	7	%22
1-5 years	30	%40
6-10 years	3	%18
>10 years	10	% 20

### 3. Results and Discussion

Part one: Paragraphs related to the dependent variable (hotel management in times of crisis) (management strategies before, during and after the crisis):

Table 3. Means and standard deviations for management strategies before the occurrence of the crisis

No.	Ranking	Item	Mean	SD	Level
1	5	preparing a crisis management team	4.64	.790	High
2	1	Crisis management strategy	4.80	.556	High
3	3	Crisis communication channels	4.75	.643	High
4	4	Methods for identifying and evaluating crises	4.65	.779	High
5	2	Training hotel staff for times of crisis	4.74	.758	High
Mean value			4.62	.705	

Table (3) shows the mean and the standard deviations values for the implementation of management strategies before the occurrence of the crisis at a high level, was followed by the field of training the hotel staff in times of crisis with a mean value (4.75), then the field of applications of methods for determining crises and evaluating them with a mean value (4.74) and at a high level.

Table 4. Means and standard deviations for the paragraphs of management strategies in responding to crises

No.	Item	Mean	SD	Level
1	Providing quick information about the crisis situation for those in the hotel	4.78	.563	High
2	Provide accurate information after checking all facts related to the crisis situation	4.71	.670	High
3	Provide technical instructions on how to deal with the crisis situation	4.70	.686	High
4	Attention to the staff and people present in the hotel from a psychological point of view to avoid panic, stress and psychological shock	4.70	.705	High
5	Promote the presence of a crisis hotline to inquire about the progression of the crisis through follow-up to the news briefing	4.68	.709	High
6	Cooperation, coordination and requesting advice from tourism agents and partners	4.65	.801	High
7	Participation of responsible government agencies, consultation and coordination with them	4.60	.801	High
Total mean		4.65	0.709	High

Table (4) shows the means for the paragraphs of the initial procedures for dealing and ensuring public safety in the hotel at the time of the crisis, where the arithmetic averages ranged between (4.60 and 4.78) and at a high level, where the paragraph (providing quick information about the crisis status for the people in the hotel) came first The highest arithmetic average (4.78) and at a high level, while the paragraph (the participation of responsible government authorities, consultation and coordination with them) came in the last rank with the lowest arithmetic average (4.60) and at a high level.

Table 5. Means and standard deviations for the items of management strategies in the post-crisis stage

No.	Item	Mean	SD	Level
1	Evaluating and determining the effectiveness of the procedures to respond to the crisis time	4.82	.513	High
2	Make an amendment to the crisis management plan and the work team based on the result of the performance evaluation at the time of the crisis	4.81	.682	High
3	Begin to prepare corrective measures to avoid the same crisis in the future	4.80	.543	High
Total mean		4.74	.779	High

Table (5) shows mean values for the paragraphs of management strategies in the post-crisis period, and the men values ranged between (4.31 and 4.82) at a high level, where a paragraph (evaluation and determination of the effectiveness of the procedures for dealing with response to the time of the crisis) came and (made an amendment to the crisis management plan and the work team based on the result of performance evaluation at the time of the crisis), at the first rank with the highest mean value (4.82) and at a high level, while the paragraph (starting to prepare corrective measures to avoid the occurrence of the same crisis in the future) came with the last rank with the lowest men value (4.80) and at a high level.

Part Two: Paragraphs concerning independent variables: Crisis Management Strategies: changing the Path, reserve tactics, exhausting the crisis, containment of the crisis and fragmentation of the crisis.

Table 6. Means and standard deviations for crisis management strategies in descending order

No	Item	Mean	SD	Degree
1	Changing the path contributes to achieving compensation for the losses and achieving better results than those that were before the crisis	4.73	.612	High
2	Changing the path reduces the workforce in the hotel, which causes pressure at work for those who remain on the job at the time of the crisis	4.70	.794	High
3	Change the path strategy creates opportunities for creativity and innovation to take advantage of the crisis situation	4.66	1.035	High
4	Flexibility in the organizational formation of institutions and organizations is one of the most important methods of reserve tactics	4.70	1.011	High
5	The time factor in dealing with accidents and crises is taken into consideration and with appropriate accuracy	4.60	1.001	High
6	The strategies set by the hotel management to deal with crises are traditional and not appropriate for technological and security progresses	4.50	.635	High
Total mean		4.68	0.735	High

Table (6) shows mean values for the paragraphs of crisis management strategies, and the mean values ranged between (4.50, 4.73 and 4.70) and with a high degree, where the paragraph (change the path contributes to achieving compensation for losses and achieving better results than those that were before the crisis occurred) and (Changing the path reduces the size of the workforce in the hotel, which causes pressure at work on those who stayed on top of his work at the time of the crisis) reflected high degrees. While the paragraph (The strategies set by the hotel management to deal with crises are traditional and not appropriate for technological and security progresses) reflected the last rank with a mean value (4.50) in a high degree.

Part three: hypotheses testing

Table 7. Results of testing the study hypotheses

Hypothesis	T calculated	T Tabulated	T SIG	H0 conclusion	H1 conclusion
H01	18.88	1.9799	0.000	Rejected	Accepted
H02	4.88	1.9799	0.000	Rejected	Accepted
H03	4.1667	1.9799	0.000	Rejected	Accepted
H04	8.132	2.0452	0.000	Rejected	Accepted
H05	4.349	2.0452	0.000	Rejected	Accepted

From the above table, through the use of the T-Test, it is evident that Jordanian hotels do not adopt any of the modern crisis management strategies.

The results of this research showed that there are specific crisis management teams to manage crises in five-star hotels in Jordan, and that each team has a media speaking, and regular scheduled meetings are held for the team, which reflects the degree of awareness from hotel managers about the importance of a specialized department managing crises, communicating with inside and outside the hotel. The required roles are distributed among a work group for each of them, a role in implementing the crisis management strategy, regardless of being proactive and immediate strategies to deal with the crisis or response with the least resources and moral losses. This finding support evidence form previous research (Abo-Murad *et al.* 2019, Swalha *et al.* 2013).

Further results indicated that the crisis response plan is rarely reviewed and updated periodically at least annually in hotels. The follow-up of hotel departments with government agencies and tourism agencies on potential crises is almost neglected by the managers. Thus, crisis management approach in Jordanian hotel is still reactive with minimal efforts to prevent looming crises. And this result is considered consistent with previous studies.

However, the results showed some cautiously promising findings regarding the attitudes and perceptions of hotel manager. Hotel managers are keen to training and qualifying new employees regarding crisis management practices. Furthermore, they are keen to provide swift information during crisis situation. It is believed that such attitude needs systematic approach and regulatory procedures to enhance crisis management practices.

Regarding to changing the marketing mix of hotels at the time of crises, the results showed that the hotel departments approve the increase in the estimated budget for marketing to cover the marketing recovery plan at the time of the crisis and increase the marketing of domestic tourism by highlighting the features of the hotel to

conduct social and cultural activities inside the hotel. In accordance with this result, precious research have indicated that there is a significant impact of hotels' advertisement and hotels' direct sale on hotel performance during crisis (Masa'adeh *et al.* 2018).

Further results showed that the most followed strategy for managing crises in the hotels was the change of course strategy, which contributes to achieving compensation for losses and achieving better results than those that were before the crisis, but this strategy has a negative impact, as it reduces the size of the workforce in the hotel, which causes pressure at work for those who remained on the job at the time of the crisis.

Overall, the main research finding indicated that crisis management strategies and practices in Jordanian hotel industry are immature. This finding broadly supports the work of other studies in this area (Ertas *et al.* 2021, Alzoubi and Jaffar 2020, Abo-Murad *et al.* 2019, Elshaer 2018, Swalha *et al.* 2013).

## Conclusion

This study set out to provide a significant insight about the crisis management strategies used by the Jordanian five-star hotels, and to identify the most applied in this sector, in addition to the procedures followed by the hotel managers at the time of crises. The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that the crisis management in Jordanian hotel sector needs to develop crisis management practices based on proactive approach so it is necessary to integrate crisis management into the strategic planning of any hotel establishment.

The Jordanian hotel sector needs to use more preventive strategies to maintain hotel performance in times of uncertainty or potential crises. Tourism government agencies should play their role in improving crisis management practices in the tourism industry in Jordan.

Jordanian hotels should be prepared to face crises, manage costs during the crisis, and take full advantage of the guidance and advice provided by government and private agencies, maintain good communication with guests and gain their trust, and use technology to enhance hotel security.

Illuminating insights and motivating managerial and policy implications were drawn from the findings of this study. This study draws the attention of managers and policy makers to the importance of adoption of proactive crisis management. Additionally, this study recommends for establishing central body that is responsible for all the crisis management policies. Furthermore, this research ensures the need to propose legislation and regulation at different; organizational, sectorial and national level to support and encourage adoption crisis management and to prepare for threats and crises.

Overall, the research about crisis management in Jordan is still in its infancy, and this research is one step for other researchers who are interested in digging into the field further, whether in hotel industry or other contexts.

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