

Effective Communication With Thai Silver Tourists During Crises: A Perspective From a Professional Tour Leader

Kitirom Kasemsri, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand
Kamolrat Intaratat, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand
Karn Boonsiri, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand

The Asian Conference on the Social Sciences 2026
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

This paper employs a conceptual and integrative review methodology focusing on three primary objectives: 1) analyzing the communication challenges faced by Thai silver tourists during crises such as medical emergencies, natural disasters, or accidents which demand clear and culturally sensitive communication to ensure safety, minimize panic, and support effective crisis management. Findings also indicate that Thai silver tourists often require more time to process information and make appropriate decisions under stress; 2) Synthesizing verbal, non-verbal, and digital communication strategies relevant to senior tourism, which highlights that multichannel communication and digital recaps via accessible platforms are highly recommended; and 3) Examining the role of professional tour leaders as crisis managers, revealing that structured protocols, emotional stability, and transparent communication are essential for gaining cooperation and preventing panic. Ultimately, effective crisis communication not only safeguards well-being but also strengthens long-term trust and enhances the overall tourism experiences.

Keywords: communication, silver tourist, crisis management, crisis communication, tourism

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

Crisis communication presents a significant challenge for professional tour leaders, particularly when managing “Thai silver tourists.” This demographic is characterized by unique socio-cultural expectations and potential cognitive delays in processing information during emergencies. Hoff (2014) defines a crisis as an acute emotional upset resulting from situational or social sources that temporarily impair coping mechanisms. In a tourism context, these crises range from natural disasters (earthquakes, hurricanes, typhoons, etc.) and medical emergencies (heart attacks, accidents, strokes, etc.) to socio-political unrest (bomb disposal, protests, strikes, etc.). Jong and Goossen (2025) identifies and considers tourists as vulnerable, especially during crises because they often lack basic knowledge of the country, geography, local language, and local responses to crisis management. For silver tourists, such events are not merely logistical hurdles but profound psychological stressors that require empathetic and expert intervention.

Although crisis communication has been widely discussed in tourism studies, existing literature tends to focus on general tourist populations, organizational responses, or destination-level crisis management. Research specifically addressing the communication needs of aging travelers remains limited, despite the rapid growth of senior tourism in Asia. Studies on silver tourists have primarily examined travel motivations, health concerns, and service design, but have not sufficiently explored how cognitive processing speed, emotional vulnerability, and cultural expectations influence communication effectiveness during emergencies.

Furthermore, most crisis communication frameworks originate from Western contexts, where directness, speed, and procedural clarity are emphasized. These models do not fully account for Thai cultural norms such as euphemistic language, seniority-based politeness, and the preference for emotionally reassuring communication. This gap becomes critical because Thai silver tourists often require more time to interpret information and rely heavily on non-verbal cues and trust in authority figures.

This paper addresses these gaps by proposing a culturally grounded communication framework tailored specifically to Thai silver tourists during crises.

Objectives

1. To analyze the communication challenges faced by Thai silver tourists during crisis situations.
2. To synthesize verbal, non-verbal, and digital communication strategies relevant to crisis management in senior tourism.
3. To examine the role of professional tour leaders as crisis managers.

Methodology

This paper employs a conceptual and integrative review methodology. Rather than collecting empirical data, it synthesizes existing scholarship on crisis communication, gerontology, non-verbal behavior, and role of a professional tour leader. The analysis draws from theoretical models, practitioner guidelines, and documented crisis scenarios to identify communication principles relevant to Thai silver tourists. This approach is appropriate for emerging topics where empirical research remains limited but conceptual clarity is needed to guide future studies and professional practice. The goal is to generate a theoretically informed and culturally contextualized framework that can support tour leaders in real-world crisis situations.

Results

The conceptual synthesis yielded three interrelated results corresponding to the objectives. Each result reflects how communication dynamics, cultural expectations, and leadership practices converge to shape effective communication with Thai silver tourists during crises.

Communication Challenges Among Thai Silver Tourists

The analysis revealed that Thai silver tourists experience distinct communication barriers during crises, primarily stemming from age-related cognitive processing delays and cultural expectations of politeness and emotional restraint. Under stress, these travelers tend to require additional time to interpret information and respond appropriately. Rapid communication or over-information may heighten anxiety and confusion. Instead, messages delivered at a slower pace, with structured repetition and emotionally reassuring tone, were found to enhance comprehension and cooperation. Additionally, the reliance on trust in authority figures, the tour leader, emerged as a critical determinant of calmness and compliance. These findings underscore the need for communication strategies that balance clarity with empathy, ensuring that safety instructions are both understood and emotionally accepted.

Integrated Verbal, Non-verbal, and Digital Communication Strategies

The synthesis of communication modalities demonstrated that effective crisis management for senior tourists depends on a multichannel approach. Verbal communication remains a priority for urgent actions, such as evacuation or medical response, where clear, slow-paced, and structured instructions are crucial. However, non-verbal cues, such as eye contact, calm facial expressions, and steady gesture, often outweigh verbal messages in conveying reassurance and authority. The presence of these cues helps mitigate panic and reinforces the credibility of verbal instructions. Additionally, digital communication through platforms such as Line, WhatsApp, and WeChat serves as a vital complement, providing written recaps that function as shared memory for the group. These digital summaries reduce miscommunication and allow silver tourists to revisit information at their own pace and time of preference. Collectively, the integration of verbal, non-verbal, and digital channels forms a cohesive communication ecosystem that supports both immediate response and sustained understanding.

The Role of Professional Tour Leaders as Crisis Managers

The results further highlight the pivotal role of professional tour leaders as both communicators and emotional anchors during crises. Professional tour leaders demonstrate cognitive readiness, emotional stability, and cultural sensitivity. These are qualities that transform them from facilitators into crisis managers. Their ability to maintain composure, use euphemistic language, and project empathy directly influences group morale and cooperation. Structured protocols, such as pre-departure briefings and transparent risk communication, were found to strengthen trust and preparedness among silver tourists. Furthermore, the use of culturally appropriate euphemisms like softened expressions that preserve dignity while conveying seriousness, proved instrumental in reducing fear and maintaining respect. This culturally grounded leadership approach ensures that communication remains authoritative yet compassionate, aligning safety management with Thai values of harmony and respect for seniority.

The Multifaceted Role of a Professional Tour Leader

The primary mandate of a professional tour leader is to “lead”—to ensure a seamless, smooth, and safe journey with enjoyable travel experience for all tourists. Hence, direct responsibilities include challenging coordination.

1. Accommodation. Secure comfortable stays that meet tourists’ needs and preferences.
2. Transportation. Coordinate all means of travel, including airplanes, trains, buses or coaches, ferries, and local transfers.
3. Schedule. Plan in advance for daily itinerary to maximize travel experience and minimize hassles.
4. Meal. Ensure dining experiences reflect local cuisines, and that all dietary requirements are met, including food allergies and food restrictions.

Beyond managing logistics such as accommodation, transportation, and dietary requirements, a professional tour leader acts as the central pillar of group dynamics. Modern scholarship (Hotelsup, 2023; NomadsRoute, 2023; Rizvi, 2025) emphasizes that a professional tour leader must possess a “big picture” perspective, combining problem-solving skills with the ability to build a supportive atmosphere. In times of crisis, this role shifts from facilitator to primary responder, necessitating a deep understanding of the situation before any information is disseminated.

Strategic Crisis Management and Preparedness

Effective communication is rooted in proactive planning. Torossian (2023) suggests that identifying risks and developing response protocols are vital. Drawing from disaster response frameworks, such as those analyzed following the 2025 Bangkok earthquake (Anusornphanich, 2025), a tour leader’s communication strategy should follow three phases:

1. Mitigation and Preparedness. Make plans to minimize impact and educating tourists before a crisis occurs.
2. Emergency Response. Executing prompt, clear, and calm instructions to build cooperation and to ensure immediate safety.
3. Recovery. Providing emotional support and logistical rehabilitation once the immediate threat has passed.

Figure 1

Crisis Management Phases



Source: Microsoft Copilot and Chat GPT (2026)

Cultivating the Correct Mindset for Silver Tourists

Thai silver tourists prioritize safety and well-being, often seeking a pace that respects their seniority. To manage this group effectively, tour leaders must adopt a mindset of transparency and empathy. Proactive engagement builds a foundation of trust; when tourists feel that their leader is accountable and prepared, they are more likely to cooperate during stressful transitions. As Nukulomprattana (2020) notes, crisis communication is not just about informing – it is about maintaining the reputation of safety and the integrity of the relationship between the traveler and the provider.

Verbal and Non-verbal Communication Dynamics

The Tourism Institute (2025) describes verbal communication as the quickest way to communicate that offers a big advantage that both sender and receiver can perform two-way communication and know immediately if the messages are conveyed correctly. This is especially true in situations that require immediate response or action like area or building evacuation, fasten seatbelt for flight take-off or landing, brace position for flight emergency landing, or drop-cover-hold on for earthquake protocols. Communicating complex information such as high-stress situations, however, verbal communication may not suffice.

In the context of interpersonal communication, non-verbal cues, or simply body language, often outweigh verbal messages. It speaks louder than words itself. Using appropriate eye contact may indicate interest, confidence, and honesty; while hand gestures add emphasis to the message (The Tourism Institute, 2025). Hall and Knapp (2013) define nonverbal cues as all potentially informative behaviors that are not purely linguistic in content. For silver tourists, a tour leader's facial expressions, eye contact, and gestures must radiate calmness to counteract panic. Furthermore, the use of “euphemisms” is a strategic tool in Thai culture. As Zhang and Su (2023) explain, euphemisms serve to avoid harshness, maintain politeness, and manage the disclosure of sensitive information. This “linguistic cushioning” respects the seniority of the Thai silver tourists while ensuring that the gravity of the situation is understood without causing undue alarm.

Figure 2

Illustration of Verbal and Non-verbal Communication Dynamics



Verbal Communication



Non-verbal Communication



Euphemisms

Source: Microsoft Copilot and Chat GPT (2026)

The Role of Digital and Written Communication

Many professional tour leaders tend to overlook written communication as they focus on its disadvantages, such as time-consuming to draft, slower than speaking (verbal), and delayed replies and decision making. Despite the disadvantages of written communication, The Tourism Institute (2025) explains that it reduces miscommunication, serves as a reference that receivers can always read and cite, can be done simultaneously to many receivers (as a group chat), and can effectively deliver precise information to the target audience. Therefore, to ensure accurate information is conveyed successfully and to prevent misinformation, verbal communications should be supplemented with written recaps via platforms like Line, WhatsApp or WeChat. These platforms serve as a “shared memory” for the group and most Thai silver tourists tend to use them extensively. However, professional tour leaders must ensure clarity and brevity. Holley (2023) describes effective communication as a critical part of management success. Effective digital communication during a crisis should have clarity in itself, avoid jargons, slang, or humor, focusing instead on prioritized, actionable information that accounts for the potential “information overload” that seniors may experience.

Guidelines for Independent and Group Safety

While a professional tour leader is the primary guide who manages the good travel experience, tourists must also be empowered with basic survival protocols. These include maintaining an emergency kit, staying mindful of surroundings, secure all travel documents (passport, air tickets, travel insurance, etc.), and knowing how to contact the Royal Thai Embassy or Thai Consulate-General (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, 2022). The synergy between a leader’s expert guidance and a tourist’s personal preparedness creates a robust safety net.

Discussion

The analysis presented in this paper reinforces the long-standing argument that non-verbal communication often outweighs verbal messages in high-stress situations (Hall & Knapp, 2013). For Thai silver tourists, this dynamic becomes even more pronounced due to age-related cognitive changes and cultural expectations surrounding politeness, emotional restraint, and seniority. While Western crisis communication models emphasize directness, speed, and procedural clarity, these approaches may unintentionally heighten anxiety among older Thai travelers who rely heavily on emotional reassurance and relational cues.

The findings also highlight the importance of euphemistic language in Thai culture, which serves as a linguistic buffer to reduce fear and maintain dignity during crises. This contrasts with Western models that prioritize explicit and unambiguous messaging. The divergence suggests that crisis communication cannot be universally standardized; instead, it must be culturally contextualized and tailored to the psychological and emotional needs of specific demographic groups. The role of the tour leader as a “crisis manager” further underscores the interpersonal dimension of crisis communication, where trust, calmness, and perceived competence significantly influence group cooperation and safety outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the synthesis of crisis communication theory, gerontology insights, and tourism leadership practices, this paper proposes a five-pillar conceptual framework designed specifically for Thai silver tourists.

1. **Cognitive Readiness.** Information should be delivered at a slower pace, using simple, structured, and repeated messages to accommodate reduced processing speed and memory retention.
2. **Emotional Stability.** Tour leaders must project calmness through tone, facial expressions, and gestures. Emotional reassurance is essential to prevent panic and maintain group cohesion.
3. **Cultural Sensitivity.** Communication must respect Thai cultural norms, including the use of euphemisms, polite forms of address, and acknowledgment of seniority. These elements help preserve dignity and reduce emotional distress.
4. **Multichannel Communication.** Effective crisis communication requires a combination of verbal instructions, non-verbal cues, and written digital recaps via Line, WhatsApp, or WeChat. These platforms serve as shared memory tools that reinforce understanding.
5. **Trust-building Protocols.** Proactive engagement before crises, such as pre-departure briefings, transparency about risks, and visible preparedness, strengthens trust and increases compliance during emergencies.

This framework provides a culturally grounded model that can guide professional tour leaders in managing crises involving aging travelers.

Contributions

Theoretical Contributions

1. Extends crisis communication theory by incorporating aging-related cognitive and emotional characteristics, an area underexplored in tourism communication literature.
2. Integrates verbal, non-verbal, and digital communication into a unified framework tailored to senior travelers.
3. Highlights the importance of cultural norms, such as euphemisms, politeness, and seniority, in shaping crisis communication effectiveness.

Practical Contributions

1. Provides actionable guidelines for professional tour leaders acting as crisis managers.
2. Offers a communication framework that can be applied during medical emergencies, natural disasters, and socio-political disruptions.
3. Emphasizes the role of digital communication platforms (Line, WhatsApp, and WeChat) as shared memory tools for reinforcing understanding among senior travelers.

Social Contributions

1. Enhances safety, emotional well-being, and confidence among Thai silver tourists during crises.
2. Supports the tourism industry's preparedness for an aging society by promoting inclusive and culturally sensitive communication practices.

3. Contributes to national tourism resilience by strengthening crisis response capacity at the tour leader level.

Conclusion

The essence of professional tour leadership lies in the ability to bridge the gap between crisis and safety through effective communication. For Thai silver tourists, this requires a delicate balance of authority, empathy, and cultural sensitivity. By mastering verbal and non-verbal cues and leveraging digital tools for clarity, tour leaders can transform a life-threatening incident into a managed situation. Ultimately, successful communication does not just minimize loss; it strengthens the bond of trust and ensures that the tourism experience remains resilient, even in the face of adversity.

Limitations

This paper is conceptual in nature and does not include empirical validation through fieldwork, interviews, or crisis simulations. The proposed framework is based on secondary literature and practitioner observations, which may not capture the full diversity of experiences among Thai silver tourists. Additionally, cultural interpretations and communication preferences may vary across regions, socioeconomic backgrounds, and levels of digital literacy.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to express his deepest appreciation to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kamolrat Intaratat and Asst. Prof. Dr. Karn Boonsiri for their invaluable guidance and mentorship as academic advisors. Sincere gratitude is also extended to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Supaporn Sridee, Asst. Prof. Dr. Hareuthai Panyarvuttrakul, and Dr. Veeraphat Kritthanathip for their insightful academic advice. The author further wishes to thank Asst. Prof. Dr. Saroch Kaewmanee for his generous assistance with rewriting and proofreading, which significantly enhanced the clarity and overall quality of the manuscript. Finally, heartfelt thanks are extended to my family and the staff of ApiRomCharoen Co., Ltd. for their constant support throughout this academic journey.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

Microsoft Copilot was employed in obtaining concepts, structure of academic aspect, diction, language refinement, correcting grammatical errors, revising content, and correcting citations. Both Microsoft Copilot and ChatGPT were employed for enhanced and incorporated the author into the illustrations for both the manuscript and poster.

References

- Anusornphanich, P. (2025). Lessons learned from the Bangkok earthquake on March 28, 2025: Response guidelines for aviation, travel, and service sectors in emergency situations. *Journal of Aviation, Travel, and Service*, 4(1), 83–109. <https://so07.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/tft/article/view/8034>
- Hall, J. A., & Knapp, M. L. (Eds.). (2013). *Nonverbal communication*. De Gruyter Mouton.
- Hoff, L. A. (2014). *Crisis: How to help yourself and others in distress or danger*. Oxford University Press.
- Holley, R. P. (2023). Effective written communication for successful management. *Journal of Library Administration*, 63(1), 111–118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2022.2146444>
- Hotelsup. (2023, February 2). Guide vs tour leader – what’s the difference? <https://tinyurl.com/nhfd92j>
- Jong, W., & Goossen, H. (2025). *Enhancing tourists’ safety abroad: A literature review on best practices to support risk and crisis communication in tourism and hospitality*. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14673584251330801>
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand. (2022, November 29). *Preparation for disasters and emergencies*. <https://tinyurl.com/bdevujrp>
- NomadsRoute. (2023, December 25). *What is the difference between tour guide and tour leader?* Digital Nomad Travel Guide. <https://nomadsroute.com/what-is-the-difference-between-tour-guide-and-tour-leader>
- Nukulsomprattana, P. (2020, March 1). Crisis communication. *Popticles.com*. <https://www.popticles.com/business/crisis-communication/>
- Rizvi, H. (2025, March 13). Tour leader vs tour guide: Unveiling the key differences you need to know! *HidayatRizvi.Com*. <https://hidayatrizvi.com/tour-leader-vs-tour-guide-unveiling-difference/>
- Torossian, R. (2023, August 14). The four most effective crisis communications strategies. *RonnTorossian.com*. <https://ronntorossian.com/the-four-most-effective-crisis-communications-strategies/>
- Torossian, R. (2023, October 19). Effective crisis communications strategies for travel and tourism companies. *RonnTorossian.Com*. <https://ronntorossian.com/effective-crisis-communications-strategies-for-travel-and-tourism-companies/>
- The Tourism Institute. (2025). Mastering verbal and non-verbal dynamics in communication. <https://thetourism.institute/management-functions-and-behaviour-in-tourism/mastering-verbal-nonverbal-communication-dynamics/>

Zhang, Q., & Su, P. (2023). A pragmatic study of euphemisms. *Journal of Education and Educational Research*, 6(3), 75–79. <https://doi.org/10.54097/vr8m5x42>

Contact email: kitirom@apiromcharoen.com

ORCID: 0009-0002-7420-0323