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Hell Is Empty, and All the Devils Are Here: Nexus between Toxic Leadership, Crisis Communication, and Resilience in COVID-19 Tourism

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Abstract: Sustainable travel has been redefined by the pandemic, as tourism destinations continue their struggle to stay resilient and vibrant. The COVID-19 crisis has fueled a lackluster performance and declined tourism growth worldwide while imposing serious threats to employees' resilience across the globe. However, little is known about the interaction between the global tourism crisis and employees' resilience in toxic leadership environments. To augment the existing understanding of the way employee resilience unfolds to respond to a crisis under toxic leadership, we draw on predictive research involving the UAE tourism industry. The UAE's economy was forced to shrink largely due to its long-lasting dependency on inbound tourism. Hence, the study data were collected from 412 employees working in the hospitality and tourism industry in the UAE. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the impact of toxic leadership on crisis communication and employees' resilience in the UAE's tourism industry. The results showed that both employee resilience and crisis communication are negatively influenced by toxic leadership in COVID-19 tourism. Furthermore, crisis communication positively influences employee resilience, and significantly mediates its relationship with toxic leadership. Interestingly, the findings suggest that the toxic work culture constantly blurs the lines of communication, and, ultimately, the contagious behavior of toxic leaders overwhelms the resilience of employees while they respond to a crisis. The theoretical and practical implications of this research are not confined to toxic leadership; however, the strategies to nurture crisis communication and employee resilience for sustainable tourism are presented in an evolutionary perspective based on the conservation of resources theory.

Keywords: COVID-19 tourism; toxic leadership; crisis communication; employee resilience; conservation of resources theory; sustainable tourism



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1. Introduction

Globally, today's tourism industry is a fast-growing sector and a great constituent of the world's economy, hence creating a substantial amount of employment opportunities [1,2]. In a similar vein, the tourism sector has become a basic element of the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) strategy for a diversified economy [3]. The UAE government and private sector have capitalized profoundly on the tourism sector to uphold the nation as a major tourist destination in the world [4]. Consequently, tourism has become a major constituent of the UAE's economy. The COVID-19 adversity has resulted in an indeterminate outlook for the tourism industry due to the shrinking numbers of tourists [1,2,5–7]. In 2019, before the COVID-19 crisis, the contribution of tourism to the UAE's economy was AED 188.6 billion, with an 11.6% share of total jobs [8]. However, it significantly declined in 2020 by 62.7%, during the COVID-19 crisis, to AED 70.3 billion, with a 9.7% share of total jobs. Gradually, in 2021, the tourism sector had partially recovered. The contribution of the tourism-associated industries to the UAE's GDP was close to AED 99.1 billion, which is equal to 6.4% of the total GDP, and, with a 10.6% job share, it is listed

among the largest employers. The falling demand during COVID-19 inversely affected the employees working in the tourism sector [9–11]. They faced stress-stimulating issues, such as job insecurity, and had to cope with great amounts of regular stress that affected their psychological well-being [12,13]. Thus, the circumstances of the COVID-19 crisis endangered the quality of the human capital of the tourism sector that is pertinent for the execution of superior service quality [14].

In the post-COVID-19 era, the UAE expects a growing number of tourists in 2022, though tourism's accomplishments will mainly be contingent on the availability of better human capital [15]. This situation has made issues such as employee resilience, leadership style, and crisis communication more pertinent [5–7]. The literature also affirmed the meaningful role of the organizational factors that suggestively influence employee outcomes, such as resilience in leadership style [16,17]. More specifically, an organization's leadership can outline the employees' responsibilities in a crisis setting. Past studies indicated that leaders provide employees with the required support and resources to respond properly to a crisis, such as crisis communication [18]. Moreover, management research has recognized numerous leadership styles, for instance, transformational, democratic, autocratic, transactional, and toxic leadership [19]. However, the toxic leadership style has received less attention from researchers than other styles. Perhaps the past research offers ample implications of non-toxic leadership styles in developing and shaping employees' behavior [17]. For example, most of the previous literature explains the influence of the positive attributes associated with leadership style [20], though toxic leadership being compared to others is a new concept and underscores the negative attributes of a leader [13]. Thus, it is largely unknown how such negative attributes of a leader can be critical in a crisis that necessitates a resilient response from the employees. Some recent research on the toxic leadership style identified it as a threatening and adverse factor for developing employee behavior [21].

Studies mainly focused on leadership models that include leaders, subordinate relations, and how their roles are carried out to extend the understanding of leadership styles [22]. Similarly, past studies on the tourism sector have also focused on recognizing and diminishing adverse elements regarding workplace stress in an industry [23]. However, in recent literature, scholars [24] noted that despite the numerous studies conducted to examine the approaches to coping with stress, such as employee resilience in the tourism sector, an inadequate investigation exists into the role of dysfunctional leadership styles, such as toxic leadership [25–28], which has been conducted in a crisis scenario [29]. This research attempts to advance the knowledge of the link between toxic leadership and employee resilience in a post-COVID-19 situation by exploring the potential underlying mechanism of crisis communication by underpinning the conservation of resources (hereafter, COR) theory.

Employee resilience has been identified as employees' action-related capability to leverage work resources to ensure constant adaptation to cope with crisis-related situations [30]. However, this research, which focuses on the employees working in the UAE's tourism industry in the context of the COVID-19 crisis (referred herein as COVID-19 tourism), seeks to examine the influence that toxic leadership can have on the emotions and performance of the employees [31]. In this regard, we argue that crisis communication can significantly influence the employees' resilience and instill a productive response once they realize the crisis [9–11,32]. It is in line with the crisis communication theory (hereafter, CCT): crisis communication reduces undue stress and leverages the dissemination of the work-related resources needed to respond to crises with higher levels of employee resilience [5,6,10]. On the other hand, the literature sheds light on the adverse consequences of a toxic environment (e.g., leadership); for instance, if leaders do not provide the required support to the employees, it will diminish employee resilience.

The present research develops and validates a novel conceptual model based on COR and CCT. It fills the void in prior literature by first providing evidence about the ignored role of the negative attributes of the leaders (i.e., toxic leadership) on the employees' resilience in the tourism industry setting. Second, this research attempts to augment the organizational

communication literature by considering the mediating role of crisis communication in a toxic leadership environment and employee resilience context that, to our knowledge, has not yet been studied. Finally, this research seeks to grasp the understanding of the toxic environmental-specific leadership approach that undermines employees' resilience in global tourism, which can have serious managerial implications and are discussed in other sections in detail.

2. Theoretical Background, Framework, and Research Hypotheses

2.1. Toxic Leadership in COVID-19 Tourism

The role of leadership has remained a core topic of interest in the literature for decades. Most of this research on leadership has endeavored to determine the leadership's psychological attributes, such as traits [33], actions [34], and styles [35]. These studies attempted to connect these attributes with the consequences, such as job performance, employee engagement, and satisfaction. In this regard, replete literature delineates the consequences of a diverse leadership style. However, some research has unswervingly sought to recognize dysfunctional leadership traits [34] and outcomes [35]. It was critical to understand the mechanism, which is how employees respond when they experience dysfunctional leadership [36]. On the other hand, little research has explored the unique forms and furtive facets of dysfunctional leadership [37,38]. This line of research coined it "toxic leadership" and defined it as a distinctive merger of adverse qualities, characteristics, and psychological traits. For instance, Smith and Fredricks-Lowman [39] argued that toxic leadership has predominantly adverse outcomes for employees and the organization. Another line of research, the toxic career model, has discussed how toxic leaders use their skills for personal growth at the cost of employees' performance and psychological well-being. In this regard, the topic of toxic leadership is to clarify its consequences for employees and the organization.

Outlining toxic leadership can be complicated because some employees perceive such a leader as a heroic rescuer (i.e., they may support some for achieving their personal goals) for the organization, whereas others feel it is troublesome. Recent research has defined toxic leadership as a mechanism in which leaders, because of their negative conduct or dysfunctional individual traits, cause severe and lasting damage to their subordinates and the organization [40]. Prior studies have defined toxic leadership as a multidimensional construct to capture different psychometric properties and associated traits [41]. The research has advocated that the situation-driven intensity, intentionality of toxic leaders, and dysfunctional traits guide their decisions and engagements. Considering these aspects of toxic leadership, several facets and factors of toxic leadership have been identified in the literature, including: (1) the intentionality of toxic leaders; (2) the degree of toxicity in terms of their toxic actions; (3) dysfunctional actions they take; and (4) dysfunctional individual qualities they uphold.

Regarding intentionality, a toxic leader can purposely harm subordinates for the sake of their achievements at the cost of others. While unintentionally referring to inconsiderate or irresponsible engagements, comprising incompetence also has substantial adverse outcomes. However, a toxic leader may not inevitably function at a similar extent of toxicity or adopt the particular damaging behavior. Similarly, the level of dysfunctional behavior may vary under different circumstances, and not always act in a dysfunctional manner [17]. Therefore, toxic leaders may adopt dysfunctional behavior in a particular situation while behaving benevolently in other conditions. Thus, the toxic leaders' destructive actions and dysfunctionality vary from one condition to another. Consequently, a toxic leader can fascinate subordinates and eventually manipulate harm, and demoralize them, owing to the toxic leader's engagement in various damaging actions [42]. In a nutshell, toxic leaders are those leaders who are involved in one or more of the following actions: (1) deliberately discouraging, depreciating, sidelining, being unapproachable, or distressing; (2) engaging in unethical doings; (3) knowingly nourishing their subordinates' impressions that augment the leader's authority and weaken the subordinates' ability to perform. Hence, toxic

leadership discriminates through several means based on their dysfunctional attributes. Such attributes lead them to maintain voracious desires that impetuses them to put their continuous authority and influence above their subordinates' welfare. In sum, toxic leaders often develop blaming personalities that lead them to see mistakes in their subordinates. The tourism policy response to the global pandemic has been largely dictated by various governments by staging extensive lockdowns (e.g., China's zero-COVID policy) that restrict international travelers from visiting their favorite tourism destinations, while imposing incredible pressures on and damage to the tourism industry [5,6,10]. Subsequently, the tourism industry leaders' behaviors are also adversely influenced by the political decisions made by the respective government (through externally imposed toxic leadership) while setting up the agenda for all industries (especially tourism) on how to aggressively deal with the COVID-19 pandemic crisis [5–7,10,26,27].

2.2. Employee Resilience in COVID-19 Tourism

The concept of employee resilience is coined as the “behavioral capability to leverage work resources to ensure continual adaptation, well-being, and growth at work, supported by the organization” [43]. Resilience signifies an individual's positive personality facet and approach that supports them in difficult times [44]. The resilience approach enables them to react positively and bounce back when confronted with difficulties or individual impediments. It enables them to react positively and effectively to problematic or crisis circumstances [30]. Therefore, resilience makes individuals capable of managing the risk associated with crisis circumstances [45]. Resilience is indeed related to one's capability to handle difficult conditions efficiently. The literature has defined resilience as a characteristic that can cushion the adverse influence of strain, anxiety, and stress [20].

Consequently, resilience can be attributed to an individual's ability to acclimatize to tense circumstances [44]. Some scholars have elucidated the concept of resilience as one's positive ability to adapt to crises. In contrast, others explained it as one's ability to overcome negative emotions to adjust to a continuously varying setting. Therefore, it has been acknowledged as an employee's capability to maintain a keen sense of psychological comfort, averting adverse emotions, which leads them to engage in positive actions to handle adverse situations. A stream of research also affirmed this notion and noted that employees with a higher extent of resilience have the potential to cope with turbulent situations by maintaining their psychological well-being. For this study, employee resilience has been used in the tourism industry context. The wave of COVID-19 created an immense crisis for the tourism industry, and employees went through not only an economic crisis due to the closure of the industry, but also great psychological pressures [46]. Therefore, organizations with capable employees with higher resilience were supposed to be an asset for these organizations.

2.3. Crisis Communication in COVID-19 Tourism

The notion of crisis communication has been conceptualized largely as the collection, indulgence, and distribution of information mandatory to tackle a crisis condition [47]. Mainly, crisis communication involves exchanging information among the organization and its public (internal and external stakeholders) before, during, and after adverse manifestations such as a crisis. The idea of crisis communication has been generally explained in organizational, managerial, and workplace settings [48]. The eminence of crisis communication echoes the clearness, precision, truthful, and accurate information that the organization delivers to its stakeholders about the existing circumstances adversely influencing the organization, along with the required engagements the organization needs to react to during a crisis [32]. Besides providing exhaustive information throughout the crisis, paramount practices of crisis communication involve the existence of feedback channels. As such, the stakeholders, including employees, can communicate with the organization during a crisis and provide organizations with their apprehensions regarding the circumstances. Ideally, an effective communicative environment requires feedback channels to ensure

two-way communication. The availability of such information-exchanging channels can assist organizations in getting timely feedback to take necessary and timely actions during a crisis [47,49].

2.4. Conservation of Resources Theory

The tenets of the conservation of resources (hereafter, COR) theory explain and define the mechanism of resource management and adversities connected to psychological stress. The COR states this phenomenon in greater detail and clarifies the motivation that determines individuals' capability to maintain their existing resources and adapt to new resources during stressful events such as crises [50]. Past models on stress have mainly focused on one's evaluations of traumatic circumstances as the defining element of the extent of the distress they will experience [51]. For instance, Fatima et al. [52] identified stress as unambiguously being the provocation, not the reaction. In contrast, building upon the homeostatic stress model, the COR theory states that stress is not a primary product of a person's evaluation of events; however, it has a fundamental conservation and socio-cultural basis of the stresses on people to attain and protect the situations that safeguard their well-being and ensure they maintain distance from risks to their well-being. Therefore, COR states that stress is a discrepancy between a person's conservation demand and reaction ability. In this regard, COR theory suggests that stress originates from trouble accomplishing the shared objectives toward which individuals of a culture endeavor [53]. To this end, stress is a social phenomenon and mainly ecologically resolute, since most of the foremost stresses placed on individuals have a shared cultural background. Individuals go through a socialization process whereby they learn and identify the ecological and social demands to uphold the acquisition and possession of what is representatively imperative for accomplishment within their cultural settings and persistence [51].

From this standpoint, individuals, through their cultural or ecological experiences, learn about the necessary resources to apply. These resources are described as things that individuals value in particular situations. COR theory maintains that the fundamental mechanisms to determine people's assessments of situations as distressing are fundamentally determined by resources. Moreover, the resources outline how people can manage such distressing circumstances. Owing to the robust relationship to wider life circumstances, this study departed from the tenets of the COR theory to extend our understanding of the implications of the stress inferred by the toxic leaders in the context of the tourism industry. In line with the notion of COR situations with a higher resource risk, loss tends to be more resource loss [52]. For instance, in a multifaceted crisis such as COVID-19, employees have a greater threat of losing resources and coping with stress, owing to the toxic leadership, which would negatively influence their resilience. In this scenario, COR suggests that by this time, those lacking in resources such as crisis communication support from the organization will be more susceptible to a further decline in resilience. We argue crisis communication serves as an underlying mechanism, such as a resource in COR. Employees with better resources (e.g., crisis communication) will be more resilient (see Figure 1).

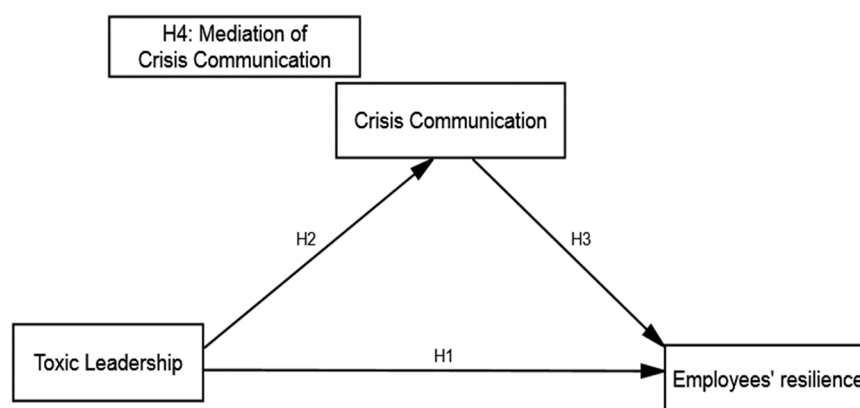


Figure 1. Conceptual model of employee resilience in COVID-19 tourism.

2.5. Influence of Toxic Leadership on Employees' Resilience in COVID-19 Tourism

Human resource management literature suggests that organizations may efficiently capitalize on evolving employee resilience to maneuver through impending crisis circumstances. However, workplace intimidation, such as toxic leadership, is among the most impending crisis times and can be regarded as distressing for employees of the organization [53]. Although it is established that employees with a higher tendency for resilience can resist and cope with such situations, research also affirmed the negative influence of actions from toxic leaders. On the other hand, those with less resilience ability are more vulnerable to toxic leadership actions [54]. There is a lacuna of studies on the negative influence of toxic leadership on resilience [55]. However, some have reported that a toxic leader's behavior is central to weakening the employees' resilience. For example, McGuire et al. [49] noted that in a crisis, the employees anticipate a supportive role from the leaders, whereas destructive behavior from the leaders would increase stress among them.

Similarly, Alanezi [20] also highlighted the dysfunctional personalities of the leaders as an attribute upheld by toxic leaders who lead to reduced employee outcomes. Extant literature has also revealed a few negative leadership behaviors that can cause discontent and adverse outcomes among employees. For example, studies have reported certain negative attributes of leaders, such as passive, destructive, ineffective, unethical, and dysfunctional leadership [56]. The researchers noted that these attributes are mainly associated with toxic leadership and can adversely influence employees' performance. We argue that due to the merger of adverse qualities, toxic leaders' practices are dysfunctional and, thus, can have negative consequences for employees' resilience. Exposure to toxic leadership styles in an organization, therefore, can create stress among subordinates instead of nurturing resilience. Consequently, resource drainage can occur and diminish the employees' resilience, and we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): *Toxic leadership has a negative effect on employees' resilience in COVID-19 tourism.*

2.6. Influence of Toxic Leadership on Crisis Communication in COVID-19 Tourism

The present-day tourism industry in the world has witnessed a COVID-19 crisis that has badly damaged this industry [57]. Consequently, recent studies suggest underpinning the tourism industry's management in research to identify the internal elements that can potentially harm the industry [32,58]. The current study also proposes highlighting the leaders' certain dynamics, such as toxic leadership, to overcome the problems the tourism industry faces. Among these critical implications, the literature has suggested the negative role associated with destructive leaders. Toxic leadership based on destructive attributes can negatively impact organizational practices such as crisis communication. Ample literature notes that destructive leaders (i.e., toxic) include the interactive behaviors that they exhibit

while practicing managerial tasks. Communicative leadership actions become more critical during crises to lead or guide the subordinates to attain organizational aims. Moreover, the contingency theory also explains that all leaders may not have an equal degree of abilities and experience when encountering a crisis, and they respond according to the predominant characteristic they uphold [49]. Toxic leaders in this perspective may be unable to carry out the communicative actions needed during the crisis. Crisis communication involves better interactive (e.g., two-way) actions. For instance, effective crisis management involves trustworthy and open communication between employees and leaders. However, toxic leaders continue to be suspicious of their subordinates. As a result, toxic leaders may not facilitate the communication channels needed to be activated even before the crisis. Therefore, we argue that toxic leaders may harm crisis communication, and propose that:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): *Toxic leadership has a negative effect on crisis communication in COVID-19 tourism.*

2.7. Influence of Crisis Communication on Employee Resilience in COVID-19 Tourism

Extant literature has advocated that effective management of the crisis communication practices by organizations during crises can increase employees' awareness [23] and readiness [59] to cope with these uncertain situations [60]. However, Pearson and Mitroff [59] noted that instant and constructive crisis communication is indispensable to lessen ambiguity in difficult conditions, since it permits workers to comprehend the condition clearly. Thus, employees gain actionable information from effective crisis communication to respond to the crisis effectively. Thereby, crisis communication positively improves the handling and ability (resilience) of the employees [60]. Abundant literature has affirmed that crisis communication positively influences the employees' outcomes, such as employee engagement [18] and employee crisis perception [49] and affective commitment [32]. These studies concluded that higher quality crisis communication could help organizations accomplish perceptible and optimistic fallouts on their employees' capabilities to respond to the crisis [48]. Research has shown that crisis communication positively influences employees' resilience [53]. Studies have also highlighted that employees' resilience requires an organizational environment with proportioned two-way communication. In such a supported communicative environment, employees' resilience can be enhanced, and they perceive self-confidence in their capabilities to implement them.

Certainly, crisis communication leads to rapid and condition-specific resilient responses from employees in unanticipated conditions. This way, supportive crisis communication (e.g., internal) among organizations and employees can facilitate employees' resilience and ensure effective responses to a crisis such as COVID-19 [46]. In this study, drawing upon COR and crisis communication theory (hereafter, CCT), we postulate a positive association between crisis communication and employee resilience. Furthermore, social exchange theory supports this postulation, as it anticipates a positive relationship due to the exchange of shared commitments. For instance, owing to crisis communication, employees get informed about the resources provided to them by their organizations, and they develop better crisis perception, thus helping promote employee resilience. Likewise, from the standpoint of the CCT, communication provides an enhanced level of organizational support to the employees, making them more confident during a crisis to apply resources effectively to respond to the crisis [61]. In the context of the tourism industry, we argue that crisis communication disseminated by tourism industry managers or leadership can support employees in reducing the stress and doubts associated with the COVID-19 crisis. When tourism industry managers or leadership disseminate information to employees about the resources (e.g., initiatives and policies) that they will employ to address a crisis, it provides employees with apprehensions about the intensity of the crisis. In this manner, the stress and uncertainties of employees can be managed, and the employees can anticipate effective, resilient responses. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): *Crisis communication has a positive effect on employees' resilience in COVID-19 tourism.*

2.8. Mediating Effect of Crisis Communication in COVID-19 Tourism

The literature has affirmed that the toxic leadership style adversely impacts employee outcomes, such as stress [62] and resilience [45]. However, certain variables have also been identified in the literature as the underlying mechanisms, such as crisis communication. The research noted that toxic leadership nurtures an organizational climate with more pressures and uncertainties owing to their communicative behavior. The way they disseminate and communicate with the employees at work, employees anticipate less organizational support available to them. In this scenario, the toxic leadership's low-quality crisis communication activates the mechanism of resource conservation [54]. However, in a crisis such as COVID-19, employees utilize their prevailing resilience and access resources such as crisis communication. Therefore, the extent and quality of the crisis communication facilitate the employees to successfully adapt the actionable resources, and counterbalance the situations that yield stress (e.g., COVID-19) due to fear of losing their economic resources. Under these crises, scholars have emphasized the positive leadership practices to impede factors threatening the employees' psychological wellbeing.

However, as noted earlier, toxic leadership attributes might result in low-quality crisis communication, which, in turn, leads to a low level of employee resilience. COVID-19 has instilled psychological distress among the employees, particularly in the tourism industry. However, the employees exposed to the actionable crisis communication may apply their resources and respond with resilient behavior. Research has further clarified that the employees exposed to crisis communication have improved cognitive and emotive perceptions about their organization [59]. The two-way symmetrical communication among organizations and their employees instills better developing resilient behaviors that serve as resources to act during crises, even in harsh workplace settings (e.g., toxic leadership) [32]. It has also been established that when crisis communication is provided to employees, their cognitive and emotional evaluation of their organization is strengthened. Even so, the toxic leadership attributes are not favorable for employee resilience. Crisis communication practices are expected to be the fundamental underlying mechanism for employees going through a crisis condition [63]. Thus, we argue that crisis communication, such as open communication or crisis readiness, may vary depending on leadership behavior. However, crisis communication still functions as the imperative expediter to employees' resilience during challenging circumstances, and we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 4 (H4): *Crisis communication positively mediates the relationship between toxic leadership and employees' resilience in COVID-19 tourism.*

3. Methods

3.1. Sampling and Procedure

This research was designed to understand the antecedents of the employees' resilience during the COVID-19 crisis that involved its relationship with toxic leadership and the mediating role of crisis communication. We selected the tourism industry of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as the population of this study. The UAE is a growing tourist destination and has emerged as one of the top destinations in recent years. For that reason, the tourism sector has been thriving in the UAE. Several international hotel chains, leisure services (e.g., zip line, etc.), restaurant chains, attractions, travel assistance (e.g., tour facilitators, travel agents), tourism information centers, and tourism-associated entertainment services (e.g., heritage places and theme parks, etc.) operate in the UAE. Like other tourist destinations, the COVID-19 crisis had enormous adverse effects on the tourism industry of the UAE, and this industry is at a crossroads. Therefore, in the post-COVID-19 situation, the tourism industry needs emergency measures, including employees' resilience to cope

with the emerging situation. Therefore, this study included employees from the tourism industry working in the UAE. A pilot study was carried out during February 2022 with a student sample of ($n = 30$) to evaluate the clarity of the questionnaire adapted for this research. The study employed a cross-sectional design for the data collection from the 412 respondents. To execute the data collection procedure, rigorous COVID-19 regulations were taken into account, and, initially, several tourism industries were approached using digital and communicative means (e.g., emails and calls). Those organizations showed a willingness to participate voluntarily in this research. They were contacted to administer the data collection through an online form containing a questionnaire measuring the latent variables and informed consent of participation. They were also committed to ensuring the confidentiality of their identity. Overall, 650 questionnaires were distributed among the employees from hotels, leisure, restaurants, airlines, and traveling and entertainment services, during a three-month period ranging from February to April 2022. We received 412 usable responses with a satisfactory response rate of 63.38% after several attempts of reminders.

3.2. Measures

The proposed model of this research comprises three latent variables, namely, toxic leadership (independent variable), crisis communication (mediating variable), and employees' resilience (dependent variable), respectively. All variables were measured using a 7-point Likert scale, anchoring "1 strongly disagrees, and 7 strongly agrees". Toxic leadership was measured using 15 items adapted from Schmidt [64]. The mediating variable of the crisis communication was measured using a 7-item scale adapted from the work of Charoensukmongkol and Phungsoonthorn [18] after making a few adjustments according to the context of the study. Finally, employees' resilience was measured using a 9-item scale adapted from the literature and Franken, Plimmer, and Malinen [65], and Näswall et al. [66]. However, to ensure the face and translational validity, the scale was set out for four academicians and four practitioners from the tourism industry. The constructive feedback was incorporated before the pilot study. The pilot study was carried out using an $n = 30$ student sample that revealed a satisfactory level of reliability above 0.70, and the study proceeded with the main data collection.

4. Results

The study utilized the most recent analytical strategy—structural equation modeling (henceforth, SEM)—for the validity, reliability, and inferential statistics [67]. It is in line with the notion of using SEM when the nature of the underpinning theoretical queries is complex, and complex models emerge after these theoretical deliberations [68]. For example, the involvement of the underlying mechanism variables, such as crisis communication, in this research must find direct and indirect relationships simultaneously. Therefore, using SEM enables this research to validate a complex model that has been developed by underlining the COR theory, which involves three direct and one mediating hypothesis. The analysis started with exploring the demographic attributes of the sample, which is reported in Table 1.

After the demographic analysis, basic normality tests were employed to observe the data distribution and identify the outliers. The assumption of normality was obtained after the deletion of the 32 outlier responses, so the final analysis involved a sample of 380 responses. After the deletion of the outliers, the skewness and kurtosis values were calculated using the suggested formulas, such as Hair et al. [69]. It was found that the skewness and kurtosis values remained between ± 2.58 . The identification of multicollinearity followed this analysis. For that reason, variance inflation (VIF) was computed using the linear regression function on the SPSS (version 20) by computing all possible linear relationships proposed in this study. The results demonstrated that there was no issue related to the high correlation between TL, CC, and ER (e.g., multicollinearity) in the data, and the values of VIF were found far below the recommended threshold of 10.

Next, Pearson's correlation was calculated as significant for all variables of interest (see Table 2). Finally, exploratory factor analysis was carried out with two purposes, namely, (1) to find out sample adequacy and (2) variance determination. The results of the EFA revealed that the KMO values for TL, CC, and ER were higher than the 0.60 cutoff, and Barlett's test was also significant. Thus, sample adequacy was obtained. Herman's test was employed by loading all latent items onto a single factor, and variance was below 0.50, suggesting there is no threat. Next, the confirmatory factor analysis (hereafter, CFA) was performed.

Table 1. Sample Demographic Characteristics (N = 412).

Gender	Frequency	%
Male	229	55.6
Female	183	44.4
Numbers of Years in Organization		
Less than 5 years	186	45.1
6–10	109	26.5
11–15	84	20.3
More than 15 years	33	8.1
Sector		
Hotel and restaurants	167	40.5
Traveling facilitation (e.g., tour operators, etc.)	131	31.8
Leisure/entertainment	54	13.1
Transportation (e.g., airline, etc.)	47	11.4
Heritage sites	13	3.2
Numbers of Employees in Organization		
Less than 100	141	34.2
101–500	119	28.9
501–1000	97	23.6
More than 1000	55	13.3
Education		
High School	32	7.8
College Diploma	112	27.2
Bachelors	175	42.5
Masters	89	21.6
PhD's	04	0.9
Age		
Less than 35 year	187	45.4
36–45	143	34.7
46–55	52	12.6
≥55	30	7.3

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (N = 412).

Variables	Mean	SD	α	TL	CC	ER
TL	3.47	0.989	0.89	1		
CC	4.18	0.827	0.82	−0.21 *	1	
ER	3.92	0.859	0.87	−0.31 *	0.46 *	1

Note: * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 and 0.01 levels.

4.1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

The co-variance-based SEM approach is an established multivariate analytical technique in tourism management research. This approach aligns with the study aims, and facilitates the nested and complex model designed to observe structural relationships

between latent variables. This research employed AMOS.24 software to perform the (1) validity assessments and (b) goodness of model through the CFA of the measurement model. Later, another structural model was calculated to estimate the relationship proposed in this research [70]. The results of the CFA of the measurement model exhibited the model fitness as: $\chi^2 = 2136.82$, $df = 817$, $\chi^2/df = 2.61$, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.96, IFI = 0.97, GFI = 0.93, and RMSEA = 0.038. Furthermore, three items were deleted from the measurement model to attain model fitness, including one from the employees' resilience, and two from the toxic leadership variable.

4.2. Validity Estimates

After reaching the fitness level of the measurement model considering recommended fit indices, the AMOS outputs of the item loadings (see Table 3 and Figure 2) were calculated to observe the convergent validity [71]. Based on the satisfactory standards of the average variance extracted ($AVE \geq 0.5$) and composite reliability ($CR \geq 0.8$), the variables, TL, CC, and ER, were found to have higher values than the recommended thresholds, and the convergent validity was established (see Table 4).

Table 3. Measurement model (N = 412).

Items	Loadings
Toxic Leadership	
TL1	0.93
TL2	0.88
TL3	0.83
TL4	0.91
TL5	0.70
TL6	0.84
TL7	0.77
TL8	0.69
TL9	0.38 *
TL10	0.80
TL11	0.46 *
TL12	0.73
TL13	0.82
TL14	0.85
TL15	0.72
Crisis Communication	
CC1	0.87
CC2	0.72
CC3	0.77
CC4	0.81
CC5	0.92
CC6	0.88
CC7	0.86
Employees' Resilience	
ER1	0.51 *
ER2	0.87
ER3	0.78
ER4	0.90
ER5	0.74
ER6	0.94
ER7	0.78
ER8	0.85
ER9	0.86

Note: Standardized loadings; * = items deleted due to low loadings.

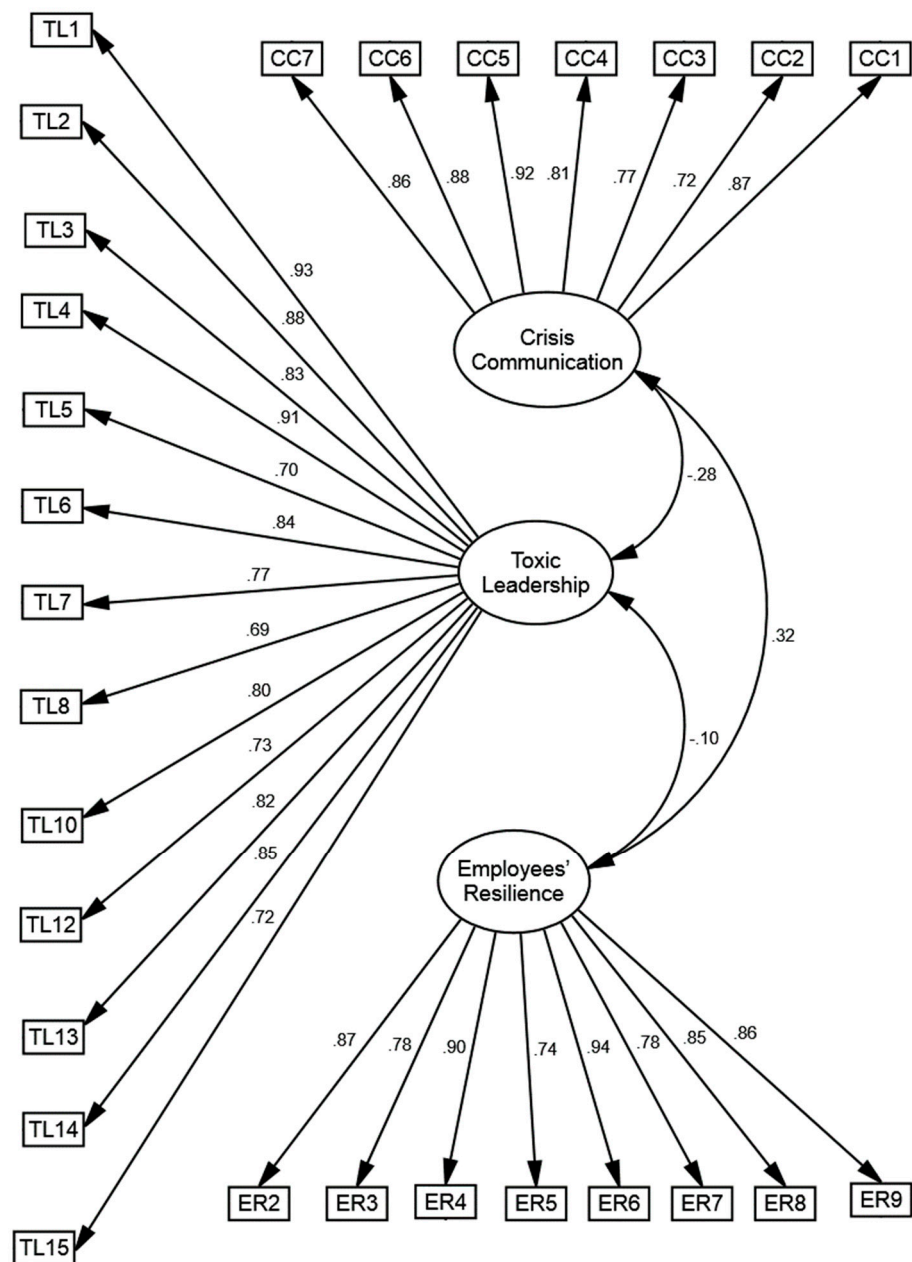


Figure 2. Measurement Model.

Table 4. Multicollinearity and Discriminant Validity (N = 412).

Variables	CR	AVE	TL	CC	ER
TL	0.960	0.654	(0.808)		
CC	0.941	0.698	−0.28	(0.835)	
ER	0.951	0.709	−0.10	0.32	(0.842)

Afterward, the Fornell–Larcker criterion (FLC) was used to evaluate the discriminant validity that was demonstrated (see Table 4) within the acceptable range of the recommended cutoff values, and the correlations between the variables, TL, CC, and ER, remained below the square root of the AVE of these variables [70].

4.3. Hypothesis Testing

This research posited three hypotheses about the direct relationships between TL, CC, and ER, along with one hypothesis delineating the mediating role of the CC. A structural model was used to confirm the consequences. It was employed to unleash the posited influence of toxic leadership on employees' resilience (H1) and crisis communication (H2), as well as the direct influence of crisis communication on employee resilience (H3). The findings of the study (see Figure 3) suggest that toxic leadership has a negative ($\beta = -0.19$) and significant ($p = 0.001$) influence on employee resilience. Likewise, the findings also suggested that toxic leadership has a negative ($\beta = -0.27$) and significant ($p = 0.001$) influence on crisis communication. Thus, H1 and H2 were supported. Moreover, the outcomes of SEM showed that crisis communication has a positive ($\beta = 0.41$) and significant ($p = 0.001$) influence on employees' resilience, and H3 was approved (see Figure 3).

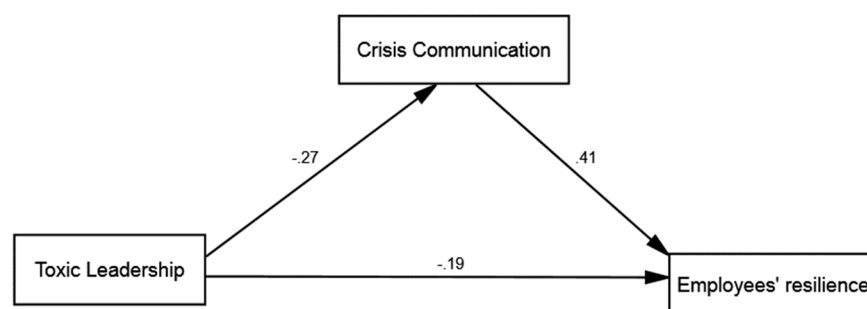


Figure 3. Structural Model (AMOS output).

Though H4 posited the mediating influence of the crisis communication between the relationships of TL and ER, the results of the mediation analysis uncovered that the indirect effect of the crisis communication between the relationships of TL and ER was positively significant ($\beta = .48$ and $p = 0.026$), and H4 was also supported (see Table 5). However, the direct relationship between TL and ER also remained significant, suggesting a partial mediation of crisis communication.

Table 5. Structural Equation Model—Hypothesis Testing Results (N = 412).

Paths	Beta-Coeff	t-Values	p-Values	Results
Toxic leadership → Employee resilience	−0.19	6.29	0.001	H1 Supported
Toxic leadership → Crisis communication	−0.27	4.84	0.001	H2 Supported
Crisis communication → Employee resilience	0.41	3.72	0.001	H3 Supported
Toxic leadership → Crisis communication → Employee resilience (indirect effect)	0.21	2.69	0.026	H4 Supported

5. Discussion

This research investigates some critical human-capital-related challenges facing the tourism sector [12,29]. The proposed model underpins the relationship between leaders' toxic behavior, employees' resilience, and crisis communication. The population of the UAE industry was chosen because it remained consistent and rapidly growing, albeit seriously affected by COVID-19 in the recent past. Yet, at present, it is striving to meet the targets. Using a quantitative approach, this study proposed three hypotheses to investigate the antecedents of employee resilience. The notion of employee resilience is central to achieving the aims of the organization. A higher extent of employee resilience is desirable for the service sector and the tourism industry. This research proposed the first hypothesis to find out the less explored relationship between toxic leadership and employee resilience.

The results of this study about the negative implications of toxic leadership in the tourism industry have also supplemented the previous research [33,34]. For example, the literature indicated that employees have reported that they left their jobs due to the

poisonous conduct of their employers in the most severe cases. Furthermore, studies also noted that employees take such actions because they feel it is the only way to alleviate the tension and unpleasant feelings created by the toxic leader's perceived abuse [44]. Last but not least, the results suggest that toxic leadership can decrease the usage of coping methods among the employees and can cause emotional discomfort. The results of the second hypothesis also verified that toxic leadership has negative implications for crisis communication. This is consistent with the tenets of the toxic leadership conceptualization that was not tested before in the literature [19]. However, some similar attribute-based leadership styles were studied and revealed patterns of the negative influence on crisis communication [19,47,72]. The result of the third hypothesis established that the employees were once provided with a supportive crisis communicative environment owing to organizational resourcefulness and coping techniques. It includes attempting to reduce their stress and applying their resources in an actionable form regardless of the toxic leadership environment. It is consistent with the past literature suggesting that employees cope with stress due to a higher level of resilience due to organizational support.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

This research extends the COR theory and suggests that toxic leadership has been shown to harm subordinates' emotional and employee resilience in the global tourism industry. The results of this research show that those who work with toxic leaders are more likely to be irritated, angry, and frustrated than those who do not work with toxic leaders. This study and Mubarak et al.'s [44] research linked psychological distress to abusive leadership, which similarly found a correlation (the extent to which subordinates reported anxiety, fear, and depression over the previous month). Subordinates' coping techniques (employee resilience) for toxic leaders in a crisis were studied and examined in the research. Past research noted that when dealing with toxic supervisors, subordinates use adaptive rather than aggressive or avoidance coping techniques [34]. According to the literature, the toxic leader was seen as a "phase" that would eventually pass [42]. The fact that the respondents did not react immediately and maintained a positive connection with the toxic leaders is also worth mentioning. It might be because their current assessments and future job advancement were on the line.

Researchers found that crisis communication is a way to connect toxic leadership and employee resilience. Previous literature suggests that employees attempted to keep a minimum of personal contact and interpersonal distance from their toxic bosses [33]. Avoidance was the second most common coping method employed by subordinates to work with toxic bosses. The avoidance strategy's most damaging component is keeping the toxic leader in the dark about company issues and prospects. Workers who have been treated unfairly by toxic managers are more likely to want revenge on the people who caused them harm [73]. It was proposed by scholars [40] that workers who were subjected to toxic leadership would frequently seek revenge to restore a feeling of fairness. It is common for employees to adopt hidden techniques, such as spreading rumors, discreetly misbehaving, and withholding information from their superiors, to adversely affect toxic employers. As a result, the environment and climate of the workplace might be tainted. Our results were consistent with these studies, and validated that toxic leadership can diminish the employees' resilience. The results also advance the literature in terms of the mediation implications of crisis communication. The results shed light on the positive support of crisis communication by the organization, which positively influences employee resilience. However, the presence of toxic leadership in an organization can reduce such a supportive communicative environment that can assist the employees with a handful of information needed to take resource-driven actions.

5.2. Managerial Implications

This research has significant repercussions for tourism industry leaders, their companies, and the people they manage. Tourism organizations should take timely, proactive

actions for the identification and correction or elimination of toxic leaders present in their respective organizations. In addition, it has been discovered that toxic leaders often achieve instant success at the expense of their subordinates' well-being. The research results have several critical implications, one of the most important being the idea that companies should be aware of and closely examine the performance of toxic leaders before rewarding them. In addition, businesses should also create anonymous whistle-blowing methods so that subordinates may disclose the wrongdoings of toxic leaders. These techniques should be made available to employees. It damages the effectiveness of the subordinates and the company if subordinates quietly adjust to the whims and fancies of toxic bosses.

In addition, passive coping strategies, such as keeping a safe distance from others, avoiding communication, and, most importantly, keeping information that is relevant to the organization's leadership in the dark, can have a direct and negative impact not only on the performance of tourism employees, but also on the organization as a whole. In addition, it leads to developing a poisonous working environment, propelling the whole company into a downward spiral of demoralization and criminal activity. The negative consequences of toxic leadership may be mitigated by instituting proper HR policies and crisis communication to resolve employee concerns; it may be beneficial to the organization. To get close to those in power, people may become tale-carriers, run-down colleagues, and generally destroy teamwork and collaboration. It can result from the presence of such leaders in the organization, particularly at very senior levels, and can result in a culture of sycophancy. These are some issues that prevent an organization from realizing its maximum potential, and need to be avoided.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

This research has some limitations due to the exclusivity of the tourism industry situation during the COVID-19 pandemic, and specific research settings with the usual limitations to which quantitative research is exposed. For instance, a crisis such as COVID-19 sheds a light on the ambiguity that could have transformed the tourism industry participants' responses to the questionnaire. Furthermore, the focus on several related sectors from the tourism industry might question the generalizability of this research to other domains that are not as economically affected by COVID-19. Future studies may also focus on the toxic leaders and their subordinates to see how their position in the hierarchy affects their mental health and how they cope. As a result of the study's cross-sectional design, there is no way to determine if psychological distress leads to changes in coping strategies. Because of this, it is recommended that subsequent studies with a longitudinal design be conducted to support and enhance the study's conclusions.

6. Conclusions

The self-centered attitudes of toxic leaders undermine crisis communication and employee resilience, especially at times of a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite wide investigations on toxic leadership across industries, its destructive impact in the tourism industry (especially during the COVID-19 pandemic) has been rarely studied. The present study complements prior research on global tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic, and extends the knowledge base on toxic leadership, crisis communication, and resilience [2,5–7,9–11,25]. Following the study's findings, the researchers provide the following management recommendations for practitioners' reference or use. First, the empirical study findings showed that toxic leadership in COVID-19 tourism might lead to harmful or dangerous actions for the tourism stakeholders, especially tourism employees [25]. Because of this, tourism industry operators should implement rules aimed at reducing the incidence of toxicity at the workplace [26,28]. Tourism organizations must foster a welcoming work environment that encourages anti-bullying behavior as an integral component of the organization's culture. Toxic leadership in the tourism industry at times of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis can foster communication breakdowns in leader-member social exchange, which, ultimately, leads to emotional weariness and a lack of employee re-

silience [5,9,10,27]. To prevent this detrimental rise in tourism workers' emotional tiredness as a consequence of toxic leadership, businesses should provide relevant resources, such as launching an unbiased procedure for internal complaints so that victims of toxic work environments have a reasonable channel through which they can relieve their stress relating to the unfairness they experience in their workplaces. Toxic leadership ignites workplace bullying; thus, it is a serious problem. Therefore, it is recommended that tourism firms and operators should develop psychological counseling departments that can increase employees' morale and help those who suffer from toxic leadership and workplace bullying. We propose that fair hiring practices, high-performance work systems, workshops, lectures, and religious seminars may potentially help to diagnose and fix the toxic work environment to ensure that tourism employees' resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic remains fortified [9–11,26,68].

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