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Marketing in the Modern World: Tourism After Terrorist Attacks

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Abstract

The travel and tourism industry is one of the world's largest industries with a global economic contribution (direct, indirect, and induced) of over 7.6 trillion U.S. dollars in 2016. The direct economic impact of the industry in the areas of accommodation, transportation, entertainment, and attractions, was approximately 2.3 trillion U.S. dollars that year (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2017). However, in recent years, the prevalence of terrorist attacks is causing hesitation in would-be travelers and stigmatizing certain destinations. According to *Statista*, the number of terrorist attacks in 2017 was 22,487, which includes acts of terrorism, insurgency, and politically- or ideologically-motivated violence by non-state actors—enough to cause widespread consequences within the tourism industry.

The goal of this project is to analyze the strategies and best practices of different marketing groups after terrorist acts have occurred. The scope will be on the psychological and financial reactions by both national and individual tourism companies after New York City 9/11, Paris 2015, the Nigerian Boko Haram kidnappings, and the Manchester and Las Vegas concert attacks. The results will likely suggest that proactive planning and comprehensive strategy will help people move past fear of terrorism and again encourage traveling to affected regions.

Keywords: marketing, tourism, terrorism, New York City, Nigeria, Paris, Manchester, Las Vegas, attacks, community, resilience

Marketing in the Modern World: Tourism After Terrorist Attacks

The travel and tourism industry is one of the world's largest industries with a global economic contribution (direct, indirect, and induced) of over 7.6 trillion U.S. dollars in 2016. The direct economic impact of the industry in the areas of accommodation, transportation, entertainment, and attractions, was approximately 2.3 trillion U.S. dollars that year (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2017). However, in recent years, the prevalence of terrorist attacks is causing hesitation in would-be travelers and stigmatizing certain destinations. According to *Statista*, the number of terrorist attacks in 2017 was 22,487, which includes acts of terrorism, insurgency, and politically- or ideologically-motivated violence by non-state actors—enough to cause widespread consequences within the tourism industry and affect the ways marketers are creating tourism campaigns.

The sad but undeniable fact is that there are many terrorist attacks to choose from in order to analyze tourism marketing practices after tragedy. As the world becomes more globalized, people who travel more are more likely to be directly impacted by a terrorist event. The attacks can be isolated incidents on a small scale that people never hear of, like a truck running into a crowd in Melbourne, Australia in December 2017 injuring 19 people, or could be large scale, coordinated attacks like the 9/11 attacks in New York City or the Paris 2015 bombings/shootings. The prevalence of terror attacks is causing visitor hesitation and stigmatization of certain destinations. By analyzing the strategies, practices, and psychological and financial reactions of tourism companies to terror attacks, the goal of this research is to show how companies can help people move past fear of attacks and encourage traveling to affected regions. The terror attacks researched are New York City 9/11 attacks, Nigeria 2014 Boko

Haram kidnappings, Paris 2015 shootings/bombings, and Manchester and Las Vegas 2017 concert attacks.

New York City

On September 11th, 2001, four coordinated terrorist attacks by al-Qaeda occurred in the United States. Two planes flew into the World Trade Center (Twin Towers) in New York City, one flew into the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and one crashed in a field in Pennsylvania. As a result of these attacks, 3,000 people were killed and over 10,000 injured. Immediately following the attacks, so many people were watching their TV screens for news and updates that for days after the attacks, US TV networks did not air any distractions or interruptions from the news. “US TV networks cleared their schedules of ads as the horror unfolded on TV screens. Major networks CBS, ABC, NBC and Fox were commercial-free zones for four days” (Dignam, 2002). In New York City alone, the tourism industry suffered immediately after the attacks transpired. A report from 2002 states, “The most recent figures show that NYC visitor numbers dropped 14.3% last year, with around 5.4 million fewer people visiting the city after September 11 compared with 2000” (Dignam, 2002). To combat the issue of decreasing visitor numbers, four weeks following 9/11, the city of New York spent \$40 million dollars on a multimedia advertisement campaign called, “Come see New York united in its finest hour.” A report from 2001 details the campaign, stating,

“The spot is the first phase of the State's unprecedented \$40 million advertising campaign to bring visitors back to New York. The sixty-second commercial invites business travelers and tourists to "Come see New York united in its finest hour." The commercial will begin airing Wednesday, October 10, on stations from Boston to Washington, and as far west as Cleveland. To maximize its significance, the spot will be "roadblocked," or

launched simultaneously, on more than 100 stations just prior to 8:00 p.m. EST this Wednesday. The commercial is scheduled to run for six weeks. In addition to the new television commercial, the multi-media tourism outreach campaign will also feature radio and print ads, as well as outdoor advertising, internet ads and direct mail in ensuing weeks” (Online Media Daily, 2001).

New York City’s tourism business wasn’t the only industry affected by the attacks. The image of the planes crashing into the Twin Towers was so dramatically replayed over and over that the airline industry was particularly impacted. In fact, they didn’t even try to overcome that horror in the immediate aftermath—most US airlines did not advertise on TV for months after September 11th. Once they did start advertising again, airline advertisers and marketers made the conscious decision to focus on price instead of the pleasure of the flying experience in their campaigns in order to sway consumers’ thoughts away from safety concerns (Dignam, 2002). Other industries also followed the airline and media industry’s lead and changed their marketing strategies due to the fact that in the months after these attacks, people became painfully aware that life could change in moments and that family, friends, and country are the most important things in life. Marketers noticed this shift in values, and they began to reflect the changes in their advertising and marketing practices. Major themes in communications were ones that reinforced American ideals like patriotism, religion, family, home, apple pie, and motherhood (Dignam, 2002). These feelings and values were so strong after 9/11 that they remain present in US advertising and marketing campaigns today--long after the sensitivity to images of violence and explosions has faded away.

The changes in New York City’s advertising efforts in the time immediately following the attacks, within tributes every year on the anniversary of 9/11, and among messages spread in

present-day New York are interesting to analyze. After 9/11, the famous logo, “I <3 New York” became extremely popular (Figure 1). The logo was actually developed in 1977, but it was used in the \$40 million “United New York” campaign, which is when it reached its prominence. The love and warmth conveyed in the logo created a community connection between people of all backgrounds to New York City, which is why it’s so famous around the world. This sense of community clearly remains today, because every year on September 11th individuals and businesses around the US and world will post some sort of anniversary tribute or remembrance of the attacks; these posts are often accompanied by the hashtag, “Never Forget” (#NeverForget). Unfortunately, there have been instances when businesses are criticized on their anniversary posts. For example, some businesses have offered discounts or promoted their brand in their tributes, which seems very crass and greedy to those who are mourning loved ones who died in the attacks. The best way for businesses to be successful in referencing 9/11 is to highlight the heroics and sacrifices made on that day and to highlight the resilience of communities affected by the attacks. As a result of the passage of time, present day New York City has rebuilt itself and is now known for other events, attractions, and marketing campaigns besides 9/11. For instance, the “Fearless Girl” statue was unveiled in front of the charging bull statue on Wall Street in March 2017 in honor of the Women’s March taking place around the country (Figure 2). The statue was commissioned by the investment management firm State Street Global Advisors in order to promote women’s leadership in companies, and it generated \$7.4 million in free advertising from radio, print, TV, and talk shows for the issue. It’s important to note the Fearless Girl advertising campaign because New York is now known for the resilience of New Yorkers and everything they’ve rebuilt and succeeded in after the 9/11 attacks. The memories of loss and heroism surrounding 9/11 are important for marketers to emphasize and for the city to

contemplate, but marketers must also continue creating campaigns that inspire confidence in the affected people's' ability to rebuild, endure, and thrive.

Nigeria

In Nigeria in 2014, two hundred seventy-six Nigerian schoolgirls were initially kidnapped by Boko Haram, a pro-Islamic state terrorist group against girls' education. Some girls escaped in the transport from the school to the Boko Haram hideout, but 110 were still missing. Famous celebrities like Beyoncé, Malala Yousafazi, Ellen DeGeneres, Michelle Obama, and Justin Timberlake posted photos of themselves holding signs with the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls to promote international awareness of the kidnappings (Figure 3). In March 2018, four years after the kidnappings took place, 104 girls were finally returned to their families. During the time they were missing, there was overwhelming parent and Nigerian citizen anger at their government's incompetence in dealing with the kidnappings. The failure of the government to retrieve the girls unfortunately and unintentionally made Boko Haram look like a strong terrorist threat that couldn't be overcome. In essence, a recent report speculates that, "The return of the girls might wind up as a major propaganda coup for Boko Haram [in terms of exhibiting strength in opposition to the centralized government] as villagers had been outraged at the way Nigerian officials had handled the girls' capture, and some questioned why the military did not launch a rescue operation" (Searcey & Akinwotu, 2018). The kidnappings could potentially have acted as a recruiting tool for Boko Haram, prompting the attitude of, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." Thankfully, since the majority of kidnapped girls were returned home, Nigeria as a country and its tourism marketers can now direct potential visitors to focus on other traits of Nigeria as a destination, like its art and culture scene.

Prior to the kidnappings, in 2012 the country's tourism strategy was to embrace its flaws and sell itself as "rough and ready" product for tourists—that is, visitors could expect to see and experience both the good (culture, art) and bad (poor infrastructure, petty crimes) while visiting Nigeria (Hirsch, 2012). In 2014 (the year of the kidnappings) there were 4.8 million people who arrived in Nigeria, and \$853 million was generated due to tourism reasons (Agency Report, 2016). In 2016, there were 6.01 million people who arrived in Nigeria, and surprisingly \$1.1 billion was generated from tourism (Agency Report, 2016). These numbers may seem confusing, because after the kidnappings took place in 2014, one would think visitation and spending numbers would decrease. However, the reason for the increase was more people traveled to Nigeria for business, but only spent money at restaurants or stores inside their hotels or where their business directly took them. "The stark reality is that while plane loads of foreigners come to Nigeria on a daily basis, majority on those planes come strictly for business and are usually holed up in their hotels until they return to base" (Ojo, 2017). Many international travelers were worried about their safety if they left designated areas like hotels, as the schoolgirl kidnappings didn't reassure anyone of traveler safety. This climate of fear made it difficult for Nigerian tourism to entice visitors to the country. A report on Nigerian tourism asks, "Is it even responsible to encourage tourism to Nigeria? The country's infrastructure – particularly its aviation safety and security – is worse than ever. Nigerians themselves are avoiding travelling to Boko-Haram affected northern cities" (Hirsch, 2012). The tourism industry faces other problems besides safety concerns and poor infrastructure. In 2014, Nigerian tourism companies were running into problems with the employment of inept tourism personnel, indifferent employee attitudes towards success, poor tourism funding, lack of commitment from the Nigerian government, poor policy implementation, and corruption (Agbebi, 2014). However, the World

Trade Center “insists it would be an injustice to discourage tourism to Nigeria as a whole because of these pockets of instability... We don’t believe there is any place under the sun not open for travel and tourism” (Hirsch, 2012). To combat these tourism disadvantages and stereotypes, the Nigerian Tourism Development Office launched a new tourism strategy ad campaign in 2016 called, “Tour Nigeria,” and its purpose is to promote Nigeria as the art, entertainment, hospitality, and tourism center of Africa. Nigerian marketers plan to achieve this objective through utilizing digital communities to promote advertisements, providing a thorough events calendar to give people plenty to do during their visit, and encouraging Nigerians to engage in domestic leisure travel in order to revitalize tourism, with the overall goal of boosting a positive and enticing image of Nigeria.

Paris

In November 2015, six locations in Paris, France, were simultaneously targeted through bombings and shootings by the terrorist group ISIL, including the soccer stadium, a rock concert, and cafes, resulting in 128 people killed. After the attacks, the Parisian people responded remarkably—they didn’t sit inside and cower from fear; instead, they made a point to sit outside at cafes and resume their daily routines in order to take away power from terrorist organizations. During and immediately after the terror attacks happened, communication businesses like Skype, Google, Verizon, and T-Mobile dropped international calling fees for people calling between America and France in order to allow families and friends to contact loved ones who were in Paris during the attacks. Additionally, Facebook activated French flag filters for profile pictures to allow people around the world to show support for France and used their safety check feature for the first time, allowing people in the affected area to let family and friends know that they were okay. In terms of marketing, businesses and cities around the world displayed French

imagery on their websites and social media accounts to show their support for the French people, i.e. the Empire State building in New York City lit up with the French flag (Figure 4). On social media, the hashtags #PrayForParis and #PorteOuverte (Open Door) were used to allow people to communicate if they were safe or looking for shelter (Ad Age, 2015). The attacks resulted in many TV networks sympathetically changing TV show episodes involving terrorism that were supposed to air during that time, and news and cable networks did 48-hour updates titled “Paris Under Attack” so people could be aware of updates on the city, victims, and perpetrators as they happened.

These attacks had an immediate impact on Parisian and French tourism. Tourism accounts for two million jobs and 7% of the France’s economic activity (Walker, 2015). The hotel/homestay industry was particularly affected, because Paris was the largest market for Airbnb with 1.3 million travelers from 2014-2015 (Canal, 2015). Foreigners account for 80% of customers at luxury hotels, in addition to 60% of luxury spending (Vidalon, 2015). Fortunately, in the three years since 2015, France’s hotel industry is recovering from the immediate drop in international visits due to their strong 40% European client base, local clients eating at hotel restaurants, and hosting major events like film premieres and fashion shows in hotels. These factors have combined to compensate for the 30% drop in American visitation since the attacks occurred (Tramuta, 2017). However, as time passes and visitors are faced with the ever-increasing reality of terrorism and terrorist attacks, the majority are deciding to not let fear stop them from traveling. “It’s sad, but people have resigned themselves to this new reality and keep traveling” (Tramuta, 2017). Marketing choices and strategies by tourism companies and industries are leading the way in reminding people to think of attractions and events in affected cities, rather than terrorism, when they are choosing travel destinations.

Manchester and Las Vegas

The Manchester and Las Vegas concert attacks occurred in May 2017 and October 2017 respectively. In Manchester, England, a bomb exploded during an Ariana Grande concert, killing 22 people and injuring 59. Two weeks later, Ariana Grande organized the “One Love Manchester” benefit concert in order to raise money to help the survivors and victims’ families who were affected by the bombing. A few short months after that, Las Vegas, Nevada also experienced a terrorist attack during a concert. In Las Vegas, a shooter fired into a crowd at a country music festival; 59 people were killed and 500+ hurt, making it the worst mass shooting in modern American history. Again, a hashtag, #VegasStrong, was circulated on social media to allow people to communicate and figure out what was going on during the attack. The famous Las Vegas ad with the catchphrase, “What happens here stays here,” re-aired on New Year’s after being notably absent from communication channels for two months. “After reviewing ad testing and research, they determined that the public ‘wanted their Vegas back’ and the decision was made to launch the new ad on New Year’s Day” (Velotta, 2018). New Year’s symbolizes a time of new beginnings, and three months after the attack, the city of Las Vegas was ready to have a fresh start.

In the time since these concert attacks happened, both Manchester and Las Vegas have faced repercussions from their respective incidents. In Las Vegas, the “What is strength” ads that aired in the days after the concert shooting showed average people helping victims after the attack.

“Initially, it unveiled messages that focused on how the community came together after the mass shooting, with average people joining first responders in helping victims. A spot featuring a cityscape and the voice of Las Vegas native and retired tennis star Andre

Agassi won praise for its sensitivity. “What is strength?” Agassi asks, playing off the #VegasStrong slogan that exploded on Twitter. “Strength is valet parkers who become medics, mothers who become emergency responders” (Associated Press, 2017).

These ads showed the connections that individuals in the community built with each other, and their resilience after the terror attack. Nonetheless, Las Vegas tourism numbers have suffered in the time following the concert attack. “In the three weeks that followed the shooting, bookings plunged much further, with domestic bookings down 21% and international bookings down 16%,” (Silk, 2017). Visitation also dropped 3.3% in January, and gaming revenue was down 8.89%—the steepest percentage drop in Nevada gambling markets for the month (Martin & Montero, 2018). Las Vegas tourism must emphasize other attractions and events in their marketing campaigns if they hope to divert consumer attention from the concert attack and recover in the category of tourism visitation numbers.

Unlike the other locations analyzed, in the months after its attack, Manchester has experienced an overall rapid visitation rebound with only a low impact on tourist numbers. A 2017 business report on Manchester says,

“For those businesses that were closest to the terror site itself, of course there was a colossal impact in the immediate aftermath, which lasted for around a week as the cordon stayed in place. Otherwise more widely the major impact will have been around our conference and hotel facilities. That's a relatively short-term impact... but it will have hit some of those businesses” (Mahy, 2017).

Manchester has not suffered as great a decrease in tourism numbers in the months after their attack mainly due to external factors like the strength of foreign currency compared to the weak pound as a result of Brexit, which encourages international visitors to keep visiting England.

Statistics reveal that after London, Manchester was still the second most popular destination in England. Additionally, the One Love Manchester benefit concert was watched by 100 million people globally, and \$13 million was raised in 12 hours for those affected by the initial bombing. These external economic factors and marketing actions have worked in Manchester's benefit, diverting consumer attention from the terror attack to other attractions and efforts that have taken place since October.

Key Themes

Several key themes emerge when analyzing the terror attacks in New York City, Nigeria, Paris, and Manchester and Las Vegas. First, the hotel industry is often the most heavily impacted by acts of terrorism. This is because after attacks happen, visitors don't feel safe leaving their homes; obviously, if people don't leave home, they aren't staying in hotels away from home. Second, a community bond, purpose, and shared values are created during and after the attack. For instance, in the course of reflecting on New York City ten years after the 9/11 attacks, one journalist stated, "The terrorist attacks created a common bond for us. We had a common enemy, we presented a common front against terror, we were collectively going to kick some butt for our loss" (Nelson, 2011). In the face of severe challenge, survivors come together and form a community, and then the city unites around healing and rebuilding. Third, digital communities and hashtags are generated by the public immediately during and after the attacks occur, promoting and demonstrating support for affected communities. This is an increasingly popular format for people to communicate empathy and to let family and friends know that they are okay. The generated hashtags group together relevant posts, so a person looking for information has access to everything by clicking on the hashtag. This greatly speeds up communication to help people understand what is happening and decrease confusion in order to better coordinate

relief efforts. Finally, it seems that terror attacks that are directed at tourism take about two years to recover from, while random attacks not aimed at tourism have an overall low impact on numbers.

“There are two types of terrorist attacks. One is an attack that is directly aimed at tourism...and in those cases those countries can often take about two years to recover.

The second type of terrorist incident – and this is what we saw in Manchester – is a random attack, often in a city centre, often in a crowded place, where it is not specifically aimed at tourism and tourists. In those cases, the impact on that city [in terms of tourism numbers] is very small” (Haines, 2017).

These common themes can help marketers understand what consumers are thinking during and after terror attacks and are relevant information to guide future advertising and marketing campaign efforts.

Additionally, tourism businesses can use key takeaways from these analyzed terror incidents to run successful campaigns—the first of which is don’t use tragedy to promote the brand or products. Oftentimes, silence is the best initial response until it’s clear what is going on; if a company doesn’t have something meaningful to add to the communication process, don’t bother posting. A brand with specific ties to the event may appropriately pay tribute, but they should leave out branded details in sympathy responses, because the point of the response is to offer condolences and support rather than sell a product. Secondly, people want news, information, and emotional connection while the attack is happening; they don’t care what their favorite brand thinks about the attack (Overmyer, 2015). For instance, placing a company logo prominently on a 9/11 tribute of an American flag with #NeverForget sends the message of, “Look at our company, we’re so patriotic!” rather than, “Our sympathies are with you.” Finally,

a hopeful note discovered from this research is that one distinct characteristic of the hospitality and tourism industry is resilience. Cities rebound by rebuilding and resuming daily activities rather than being fearful, and the people regroup stronger than ever. Again reflecting on New York City after 9/11, “Feelings of camaraderie and common purpose spilled over into business. It gave us a common language and rallying point. We were all working together to defeat a foe, and we were bonded by our cause” (Nelson, 2011). When faced with terror incidents, marketers help in communicating values of community, connection, and resilience to their audience. So, even though it doesn’t look like terror attacks are going away any time soon, the marketing and tourism industries will do their best to help communities value the importance of traveling when it comes to building connections around the world, even when that *building* sometimes becomes *rebuilding*.

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Appendix



Figure 1: “I <3 New York” logo (Glaser, 2009).



Figure 2: Fearless Girl (Associated Press, 2017).



Figure 3: Michelle Obama, “Bring Back Our Girls” (Wikimedia Commons, 2014).



Figure 4: Empire State Building after Paris attacks (Claryzaff, 2015).