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### **Investigating Millennial Tourists' attitudes and risk perceptions towards terror attacks: a qualitative case study on France**

This study explores millennials' risk perceptions and response to terror attacks and the impact of these attacks on their visitor intentions. A qualitative approach employing interviews and focus groups with twenty-four millennials residing in the United Arab Emirates was conducted. France and the widely publicized attacks in Paris in 2015 and Nice in 2016 provided a case context for the data collection. Both participants who had travelled previously to France and those that had not were sampled. Results suggest that millennials indeed perceived terrorism as a risk. However, it is only one of a wide variety of perceived risks. The study provides insights of the variation in reactions to the attacks and the effects on tourist behaviour and decision-making among the sample.

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Keywords: risk perception; terrorism; France; Generation Y; tourist behaviour

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## **Introduction**

France was ranked first in international tourist arrivals in both 2015 and 2016, according to the UNWTO (2015, 2016). The French economy is also quite dependent upon the tourism industry, which added EUR 80,4bn indirect contribution to its GDP, accounting for 3,7% of the total GDP in 2015 (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2016). In 2015 and 2016, France suffered from a series of horrific terrorist attacks. The mass shooting and bombing in Paris in November 2015 and the lorry attack on Bastille Day in Nice in July 2016 are just two of the incidents covered in international media (BBC, 2016; CNN, 2016) during this time. The impact of the terror attacks in Paris included a decline in tourist numbers of 6.5% compared to 2015 in the Ile-de-France region, accounting for one million fewer visitors and creating a loss of EUR 750 million (The Local, 2016).

As illustrated by the case of France, terror attacks have lasting impacts on tourist visitation. Previous studies have examined how perceived terrorism risk can affect tourist decision-making and behaviour (Albu, 2016; Sharifpour et al., 2014). Tourist destination image, decision-making, and risk perception due to terror attacks can be influenced by information gathered through different sources (Albu, 2016). Among millennials, social media play a key role in the tourist information search (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). During crisis events, social media also provide a space for online social convergence, where concerned individuals can engage directly with those affected first hand by a crisis (Paris and Rubin, 2013; Paris and Hannam, 2016), as evidenced by the plethora of videos and personal reactions being shared during the November Paris attacks (Van den Bergh and Behrer, 2013; BBC Trending, 2015). Since risk perception is based on internalized experience and evaluation, the differences in how terrorism risk is perceived by individuals, who either have or have not visited France as a tourist, needs to be examined (Morakabati and Kapuscinski, 2016).

Although risk perception of terrorism has been studied in the tourism context, the need for qualitative research into understanding the impacts of terrorist attacks on risk perceptions and behavioural intentions toward countries affected by terrorism can provide a further depth of understanding (Uriely, Maoz, Reichel, 2007). Moreover, risk perceptions of the visitors who have not travelled need to be explored and compared to those who have visited previously (Reisinger and Mavondo, 2005). Therefore, this study aims at filling the gap in the literature, 1) by exploring the differences in perceived risk about terrorism for travellers with prior experience at a destination and those who have not yet visited and 2) by exploring millennials safety precautions, emotional responses, and intended tourist behaviour, adding to the understanding of millennial tourism behaviour in the 'age of terrorism'.

The aim of this paper is to investigate millennials' attitudes and risk perceptions regarding the terror attacks in France and its effects on their tourist behaviour. To achieve this aim, the paper will (1) examine differences in risk perception between tourists who have previously visited France and those that have not, (2) explore their emotional response to terror attacks through focus groups and video elicitation, (3) investigate the perceived risks of millennials towards travelling to France, and (4) explore the impacts of perceived terrorism risk on (a) precautions before travelling, (b) behaviour while on the trip, and (c) return visit intentions and destination choice.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Risk Perception in Tourism***

Risk is defined as a 'construct, by which unplanned or undesired effects are incorporated with a variable degree of uncertainty attached to it' (Kozak and Decrop, 2009, p.86). The extent to which dimensions of risk affects services or products depends on the characteristics and context of the services or products. As a service industry, tourism is highly

vulnerable to risks due to its intangibility, inseparability, variability, and perishability (Fuchs et al., 2012).

Risk in tourism has been grouped into four categories, including 'absolute risk, actual risk, desired risk, and perceived risk' with the perceived risk being the most studied (Yang, Sharifpour, Khoo-Lattimore, 2014, p.209; Wolff, Larsen, Øgaard, 2019). Risk perception is a distinct element of the decision-making process that can disrupt, disturb or alter the routine decision-making process (Sönmez and Graefe, 1998; Fuchs, Uriely, Reichel, Maoz, 2012; Quintal, Lee, Soutar, 2010, p.798). Internal and external factors influence risk perception. This includes both internal psychological factors of the persons' inner beliefs, their aversion to risk due to past travel experience and external factors from their environment, social relations, or media (Fletcher et al., 2013; Sönmez and Graefe, 1998; Yang, Sharif, Khoo-Lattimore, 2015). Risk perceptions in tourism are complex and can have multiple dimensions including, financial, psychological, social, or physical risks to a person's safety and well-being (Quintet, et al., 2009; Supani and Abd Hamid, 2020).

Political instability and terrorism are perceived as greater risks by tourists than natural disasters or social threats due to the unpredictability and emotional and psychological impacts. However, the perceived risk of terrorism has been found to be influenced by the proximity of a person to terrorist attacks (i.e., attacks to the homeland) (Sackett and Botterill, 2006). As risk perceptions are subjective and depend on the individuals' characteristics, lack of experience with terrorism risk leads to an extended impact of external factors and emotions on the decision-making process (Kapusinski and Richards, 2016; Perpiña, Prats, Camprubi, 2020). When risk affects the decision-making process, it can be difficult for an individual to come to a decision in a logical and reasoned manner and to evaluate all possible options from a large set of criteria (Van Middelkoop, Borgers, Timmermans, 2003; Slovic and Peters, 2006; Wang, Liu-Lastres, Ritchie, Pan, 2019; Supani and Abd Hamid, 2020). In a moment of

crisis, an individual often relies on feelings and emotions to make decisions or evaluate risk triggered by danger, also referred to as affect heuristics. For most people, decision making is a 'dual-process' informed by both intuition and logic (Slovic and Peters, 2006, p.322; Wang et al., 2019; Seabra, Reis, Abrantes, 2020).

Apart from personality characteristics, consumer knowledge influences risk or safety precautions. Subjective or 'first-hand' knowledge can lead to more confident decision making and reduced perceived risk. Prior visitation and experience can increase familiarity with the destination, increase confidence, and influence future travel decision-making behaviour. As a result, the prior travel experience can counterbalance and reshape consumer risk and uncertainty towards a destination. Additionally, the overall greater travel experience can reduce an individual's risk perception toward particular risks, such as perceived terrorism risk, compared to individuals with less travel experience (Sönmez and Graefe, 1998; Fuchs and Reichel, 2010; Sharifpour et al., 2014).

Travellers open to travelling to destinations or participating in more risky activities have been categorized as 'allocentrics' in Plog's seminal typology and 'sensation seekers' in Zuckermann's seminal work. These travellers often plan and calculate the risk before the exposure. However, many travellers that can be categorized as allocentric or sensation-seeking often plan to reduce or mitigate potential risks and may rely on past experiences (Lepp and Gibson, 2008).

Risk perception and personality characteristics have been studied in various contexts, such as natural and human-made disasters, within the tourism literature. For example, Yang, Sharif, and Khoo-Lattimore (2015) studied risk perception of kidnapping and political turmoil in Sabha's eastern coast in Malaysia. Risk perceptions of natural disasters were studied by Park and Reisinger (2010) in South Florida with a focus on individuals' regarding their perceptions of natural disasters and influence on international travel. Furthermore, an

ethnographic study was undertaken by Uriely, Maoz, and Reichel (2007) regarding Israeli tourists travelling to the potentially dangerous region of Sinai (Egypt) after previous terror attacks there.

### ***Tourism and Terrorism***

The horrific terrorist attacks on September 11th in the United States, and subsequent attacks in Madrid, London, Bali, Egypt, Turkey, Tunisia, Kenya, and elsewhere around the world have drawn considerable attention to the relationship between terrorism and tourism in the academic literature (Sackett & Botterill, 2006). Over the last twenty years, global terror attacks have had a major impact on the tourism sector, resulting in shifts in government policy and travel warnings, the implementation of new security measures at restaurants, airports, and stadiums, and tourists' demand. Compared to other types of shocks (financial crisis, natural disasters, and health crisis), the impact of terrorist attacks on the tourism industry has been shown to be more severe (Sönmez, 1998; Supani and Abd Hamid, 2020). For example, the US airline industry lost between \$1 to \$2 billion dollars in the first week after the September 11th attacks. The hotel sector had to face a 20% to 50% decline in hotel bookings across the country, resulting in a loss of \$2 billion during the first month after the attack (Goodrich, 2002).

Often terrorists target tourists or tourist spaces as they are 'soft targets.' According to Lisle (2013, p. 135), 'soft targets' are 'public or semi-public facilities where large numbers of people congregate under relatively loose security,' being easier to access, yet target a high number of individuals. Examples of these types of terror attacks are the terror attacks directed at tourists in Bali, where a suicide bomber killed a total of 202 people with 80% of them being international tourists (Lisle, 2013), and more recently in Sousse, Tunisia, where Islamic State inspired terrorists killed 38 holidaymakers (Smith-Spark, Walsh, Black, 2015). These

attacks highlight the threats posed by terrorism and the challenges for implementing security measures to stop it.

Due to the increased targeting of tourist areas for terrorist attacks, terrorism is an existential threat to individual visitors and the tourism industry. Beyond the casualties and destruction caused directly, terror attacks can have wider adverse social and economic impacts on tourism that can last for a long time after the attacks (Albu, 2016; Goldman and Neubauer-Shani, 2017; Seabra et al., 2020). This lasting impact is amplified for countries with an economic dependency on tourism (Fletcher et al., 2013). Additionally, a recent study by Goldman and Neubauer-Shani (2017) found that there is a clear relationship between an increase in international tourist numbers and an increase in the number of terror attacks.

In 2015, twenty-three countries globally recorded their highest number of deaths from terrorism since 2000 (Luxton, 2016; Global Terrorism Index, 2016). In 2015, 72% of all deaths from terrorism occurred in Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Syria. Nonetheless, 2015 was the worst year in terms of terrorism in OECD countries (Global Terrorism Index, 2016, p.40). For the preceding ten years, deaths from terrorism in OECD countries did not exceed 130 per year; however, in 2015, the number rose to 577 deaths. France was ranked second in the number of deaths through terrorism in 2015 and the beginning of 2016 in OECD countries after Turkey (Global Terrorism Index, 2016).

According to Europol (2016), the EU (European Union) is exposed to terrorist groups and lone actors' terror threats and attacks. In 2015 and 2016, the majority were either encouraged directly or affiliated with the IS (Islamic State), the deadliest terrorist group responsible for 6.141 deaths globally in 2015 (Global Terrorism Index, 2016).

Although France suffered from 11 terror attacks in 2015 and 2016, the Paris attack in November 2015 and the lorry incident in Nice in July 2016 gained the most international media attention. On the 13th of November 2015, a total of six coordinated attacks hit Paris.

Three individuals attacked the Stade de France stadium, where a football match between Germany and France took place, wearing suicide belts with explosives. Concurrently, in Paris's city centre, five bars and restaurants were hit by gunmen and one suicide bomber. Additionally, a fatal attack occurred at the Bataclan Concert Hall where three suicide-bombers killed 89 individuals. The total number of individuals killed in Paris was 130 and a hundred more wounded (BBC News 1, 2015; CNN, 2016).

On 14th July 2016, on Bastille Day, 86 people were killed in a terrorist attack in Nice when a terrorist drove a lorry two kilometres through the closed-off promenade where spectators had gathered for the fireworks and air show before the police finally stopped him (BBC News 2, 2016; BBC News 3, 2016). All nine individuals accounted for the Paris attacks, and the lorry attacker claimed to be a member of IS (BBC News 4, 2016; BBC News 5, 2016). The global media coverage of these attacks included videos, photos, and eyewitness accounts, many of which were shared widely across social media and twenty-four-hour news coverage (Fletcher et al., 2013; BBC Trending, 2015).

### ***Millennial Travellers***

Millennial travellers (Bolton, Parasuraman, Hoefnagels, Migchels, Kabadayi, Gruber, Loureiro, Solnet, 2013; Moscardo and Benckendorff, 2010), loosely defined as those born between 1981 and 1999, will soon surpass Baby Boomers as the largest travel spenders. As a result, the travel and tourism sector has been working to understand what influences this generation of traveller decision-making and behaviour and tailor their products and offerings to them. In some cases, this 'tailoring' has resulted in cosmetic changes (such as 'cool rebrands' or a bit of snapchatting) rather than changes supported by a deeper understanding of the generation. While there is no single agreed-upon defining moment or characteristic of Millennial Travellers, the September 11th and subsequent terror attacks worldwide can be considered as having a defining impact. For most millennials, travel behaviour is

characterised by escape, novelty, and excitement, perceiving travel more as a standard than an exception (Wilks and Pendergast, 2010; Vermeersch and Willson, 2016). On the one hand, a world that is 'smaller,' more connected, and more open, and, on the other, a world threatened by terrorism, climate change, global crime, poverty, and other threats to security and personal safety.

As a generation, there are some clear shifts in values, attitudes, and behaviour from those of previous 'Gen X' and 'Baby Boomer' generations. Hypermobility, constant connectivity, technology dependency enabling them to fulfill their need for independence, resilience, vanity, experience orientation, and social awareness are just some of the general characteristics of this generation (Bolton et al., 2013; Van den Bergh and Behrer, 2013; Moscardo and Benckendorff, 2010; Germann-Molz and Paris, 2015). For this generation, there is a blurring and a re-articulation of traditional binaries of travel and tourism (Hannam, Butler and Paris, 2014). The distinctions between being connected or disconnected (Paris, Berger, Rubin and Casson, 2014), home or away, working or playing, alone or together, are now rearticulated into choices of being connected and/or disconnected, home and/or away, working and/or playing, alone and/or together. In this sense, millennials reflect the globalized, mobilized, and connected world we live in today (Germann-Molz and Paris, 2015). Given the general 'shift' in values and behaviour, it is worth considering how millennial travellers negotiate security/insecurity within the context of travel decision making and behaviour.

Several key characteristics of millennials distinguish them regarding their travel behaviour. Millennials perceive travel more as a commonality than an exception. They are more comfortably mobile than previous generations (Wilks and Pendergast, 2010). Millennials grew up during tremendous innovations in information and communication technologies (Wilks and Pendergast, 2010; Vermeersch and Willson, 2016), and popular

press has often explained that millennials are too dependent upon technology. Millennials expect to have connectivity and may choose to disconnect (Paris et al., 2014). Technology affords them opportunities for socially mediated, experience-driven, personalized, and independent travel (Germann-Molz and Paris, 2015).

Millennials are experientially focused and looking for novelty, realness, 'off the beaten track,' and authentic travel experience (Bolton, 2013; Van den Bergh and Behrer, 2013). They want experiences that are unique and that they can share virtually. In other words, authentic but Instagram-able experiences. Being experientially-driven, many also seek out opportunities for learning and volunteering (Hartman, Paris, and Cohen, 2014). Corporate responsibility and sustainability can also have more of an influence on the buying behaviour of millennials.

Risk is perceived in a different way by millennials. Millennials have grown up in a period of frequent terror attacks, and as a result, may process the threats posed to individual safety and security differently. They may make travel decisions (to participate in 'risky' activities or visit 'risky' destinations) that appear reckless, however, may be quite informed, as millennials are generally very savvy consumers of information and can seek out multiple information sources online through social media and official sources to inform their decision making (Wilks and Pendergast, 2010; Paris and Rubin, 2013). On the other hand, they are more risk-averse in their spending. When they see the value, they spend. When they see experiential opportunities, they may be more willing to overlook potential risks. When risk turns into a crisis, millennials are a resilient group of travellers. They will still travel; they may just shift what they spend or where they go.

Millennials value independence, but they also desire sociality and social settings. They are particularly driven to share experiences with 'locals' (Paris, 2012) and their virtual social networks. Millennials' travel also tends to be very family and friends-oriented and is

often shared and mediated at-a-distance through social media (German-Molz and Paris, 2015). They share and co-create experiences with their virtually proximate and physically distant networks, shifting between socializations in person and onscreen. In times of crisis and potential risk, they may engage these networks for support and information (Paris and Hannam, 2016) to inform their decision making.

Risk perception is affected by individuals' characteristics and consumer knowledge, which can augment individual risk perceptions and even counteract them. Over the past two decades, tourists' perceived risk of terrorism has been fostered through attacks on tourists, tourist destinations, and tourism/transportation infrastructure. The aim of this study is to explore the risk perceptions and responses of millennials towards terror attacks and the impacts on their intended behaviour within the context of the 2015-16 terror attacks in France.

## **Methodology**

To address the study's objectives, a qualitative research design was employed utilizing focus groups and in-depth interviews with a group of millennial travellers. Two focus groups, each containing six participants, were employed to explore both individual and collective perceptions regarding the risk posed by terrorism and impacts on travel behaviour (Silverman, 2014, p. 206). The first focus group included participants who had previously travelled to France, whereas participants in the second focus group never visited France. The two focus groups explored different attitudes, reactions, and feelings from both groups (Miles, Huberman, Saldana, 2014). The focus groups aimed to also explore the interaction between participants by promoting an active group discussion (Flick, 2014; Veal, 2011; Silverman, 2014). For both focus groups, a focus group guide and visual aids in the form of online videos were used to stimulate the discussion and to recap information about the terror attacks. Five short videos of news coverage of the November Paris attacks and the Bastille

Day attacks in Nice were used to elicit responses to questions about the perceived risks of the attacks and impacts on behaviour. Additional questions focused on other risks respondents might have considered when travelling to France and how they mitigate risks. To document all participants' answers, the discussion was audio-recorded and transcribed afterward.

To complement the focus groups, individual in-depth interviews were employed to investigate individuals' understandings and attitudes. The in-depth interviews sought to uncover a deeper understanding of individual participants' perceptions, encouraging them to provide details and examples and reflect upon their answers. A total of twelve individuals participated in the in-depth interviews, including eight that had previously visited France and four that had not. A semi-structured interview guide was used for the interviews with relevant topics included in the checklist. Additionally, the interview also provided a space for additional new topics to emerge during the conversation (Veal, 2011). The in-depth interviews were also audio-recorded and transcribed afterward.

### *Sample*

Participants were selected with the purposive sampling method that focused on pulling together a somewhat homogeneous sample comprised of educated millennials currently living in Dubai, UAE. Given the diversity of Dubai, the global connections, scale of the travel and tourism industry, it provides a good sampling frame of individuals with shared characteristics and allows for a range of viewpoints based on religion and nationality. A recent study that explored the risk perceptions of the 2014 Ebola outbreak included a similar sample of participants (Atu, Paris, and Marochi, 2018). Participants were mostly university students in Dubai, studying a wide range of subjects, and one participant was a pilot. Twenty of the participants were between 19 and 23 years old, and two of them were 32. Participants included Christians, Muslims, and Hindus. Participants were from a variety of countries, including India, Australia, the UK, Lebanon, and Germany. Figure 1 shows a detailed

overview of the demographics of the twenty-four participants. Twelve participants were chosen for the focus groups as focus groups are group interviews on a specific topic with a limited amount of people, normally six to eight (Flick, 2014, Veal, 2011, Silverman, 2014). An additional twelve participants were chosen for the in-depth interviews to gain a deep and detailed understanding of the participants' perceptions (Veal, 2011). All previous tourists to France went to France for a holiday, apart from one participant who went for holiday and work purposes.

**Table 1: Demographics of participants**

| <i>Participant</i> | <i>Gender</i> | <i>Age</i> | <i>Occupation</i>              | <i>Places visited in France</i> |
|--------------------|---------------|------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1                  | Female        | 23         | Law Student                    | Normandy, Paris, Nice           |
| 2                  | Female        | 20         | Tourism Student                | Paris                           |
| 3                  | Female        | 21         | Tourism Student                | Paris                           |
| 4                  | Female        | 19         | Tourism Student                | Paris                           |
| 5                  | Female        | 20         | Tourism Student                | Paris                           |
| 6                  | Female        | 22         | International politics Student | Paris, Nice                     |

**Focus group participants not having been to France (Focus Group 2)**

| <i>Participant</i> | <i>Gender</i> | <i>Age</i> | <i>Occupation</i> | <i>Places visited most recently</i> |
|--------------------|---------------|------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 7                  | Female        | 23         | Tourism Student   | Pakistan, Malaysia, Italy           |
| 8                  | Female        | 19         | Tourism Student   | Saudi Arabia                        |
| 9                  | Female        | 21         | Tourism Student   | Philippines, Japan                  |
| 10                 | Female        | 20         | Tourism Student   | Pakistan, Italy, Spain              |
| 11                 | Female        | 21         | Tourism Student   | Bahrain, Italy                      |
| 12                 | Female        | 22         | Tourism Student   | India                               |

**Interview participants having been to France**

| <i>Participant</i> | <i>Gender</i> | <i>Age</i> | <i>Occupation</i>           | <i>Places visited in France</i>      |
|--------------------|---------------|------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 13                 | Male          | 22         | Tourism Student             | Paris, French Alps, Marseille        |
| 14                 | Male          | 32         | Pilot                       | Nice, Paris, French Alps, Marseille  |
| 15                 | Female        | 20         | Media Student               | Paris                                |
| 16                 | Female        | 22         | IT Student                  | Paris                                |
| 17                 | Female        | 21         | Medicine Student            | Paris, Belfort, Strasbourg, Lyon     |
| 18                 | Female        | 22         | Medical Engineering Student | Paris, Provence, Strasbourg, Belfort |
| 19                 | Female        | 22         | Law Student                 | Paris, Strasbourg,                   |

|    |        |    |                 |       |
|----|--------|----|-----------------|-------|
|    |        |    |                 | Nice  |
| 20 | Female | 32 | Tourism Student | Paris |

**Interview Participants not having been to France**

| <i>Participant</i> | <i>Gender</i> | <i>Age</i> | <i>Occupation</i> | <i>Places visited</i>                                |
|--------------------|---------------|------------|-------------------|--|
| 21                 | Female        | 22         | Tourism Student   | Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, Cyprus, Egypt, Malaysia, Italy |
| 22                 | Male          | 21         | Tourism Student   | US, Australia, India                                 |
| 23                 | Male          | 22         | Tourism Student   | Saudi Arabia, Italy                                  |
| 24                 | Female        | 21         | Tourism Student   | Pakistan   |

An information sheet was provided detailing the study and the interview or the focus group content. Participants were informed that the existing news clips employed may include visuals and sounds that may cause discomfort, including gunshots, bombing, and wounded people, and were given the opportunity to withdraw and/or not view them. Additionally, participants were informed and asked for consent for the focus group discussions and the in-depth interviews to be audio-recorded. All participants provided their informed consent and agreed to the participation; however they could withdraw at any time.

**Data analysis, results, and discussion**

To analyse the data, an inductive approach was adopted, guided by the literature. The transcripts of the interviews were first coded using a multi-step coding process including open coding, assigning codes to parts of data and summarising it, axial coding, using the established codes of the first cycle, and organizing them into a smaller number of units and identifying main codes through selective coding. After the initial open coding, the researchers met to discuss these codes and explore any linkages between emerging codes and the literature to guide the selective coding and ensure alignment with the research aim and objectives. The final inductive codes were then discussed and organised into themes and sub-themes. These final and agreed themes were then used to analyse the transcripts of the focus

groups. To keep track of the analysis process, memos were used at each stage and helped inform the final themes (Miles et al., 2014).

The following themes emerged from the analysis process: Perceived risks when travelling to France; emotional reactions towards terror attacks; knowledge and information of attacks; impacts of terrorism risks on behaviour

### ***Perceived risks when travelling to France***

During the interviews and the focus groups, forty-three different risks were identified, ranging from natural disasters to a tour guide not showing up. This indicates that perceived 'risks' are often of varying levels of severity and that often many perceived risks affecting the travel and tourism experience, decision making extend far beyond just risks to safety and security (Fuchs and Reichel, 2011). However, three main perceived risks emerged among those who had previously visited France and those who had not. These include crime, weather, and the language barrier.

The most frequently noted threat among respondents was a crime, specifically pickpocketing, theft, confidence men, and gangs. This aligns with previous studies that found that crime and petty crime is often a risk perceived by tourists (Larsen, Brun, Ogard, 2009). For example, participants 14 and 6 stated:

*“I wouldn’t prepare for France as such, maybe a bit regarding the pickpockets at night time...”*

*and*

*“I got harassed by a con man... near the Sacré Cœur, who was really aggressive and just laughed when I told him not to approach me.”*

Secondly, weather was a noted risk factor by many participants for visiting France. As all participants are living in the UAE, the differences in weather between France and the UAE are drastic, which could be the reason for their perception. Participant 15 stated:

*“Weather was something we prepared for... because it would be colder than it is here (Dubai).”*

Thirdly, the language barrier was the third most frequently identified risk among all participants. Of particular note, the language barrier was noted as a particular threat that extended beyond inconvenience but to a risk to safety and well-being, particularly in an emergency.

All three most frequently noted perceived risks were related to risk safety; however, these did not directly note terrorism as only two of the participants who had not previously visited France perceived terrorism as a significant risk when travelling to France. This was surprising, particularly given the news coverage of the attacks there over the past year before this study (Kapuscinski and Richards, 2016). However, this could relate to wider questions of media consumption, and social media use, etc. among this particular generation of people where much of the information consumed is shared among their social networks. After initial discussions of perceived risks, participants were shown several clips of news coverage of the attacks. It was clear that among the participants, there were a variety of different reactions.

### ***Emotional reactions towards terror attacks***

To assess emotions of participants towards terror attacks, they were asked to share how they felt either about the specific attacks featured in the news clip or more generally about the increasing terror attacks worldwide, as emotional consequences can even be present when only indirectly exposed to attacks (Baum, 2010). Among participants, some had a clear emotional reaction while others did not. Participants who experienced an emotional response either felt sadness, anger, fear, or had a personal connection. Emotional responses were more prominent among those who had previously travelled to France. Sadness was the most common feeling, followed by anger. Participants 10 and 2 stated:

*“It is the saddest thing that it is so common now in different parts of the world” and  
“... they said the gunman was smiling and was very calm about it just shooting people and taking  
someone’s life away, makes me really angry....”*

Previous research has shown that anger and fear have two different components of terrorism-related to them. The more terrorists are perceived as unjust, the more anger arises, and the more powerful terrorists are, the more fear arises, both being felt by participants (Giner-Sorolla and Maitner, 2013).

Those that had travelled previously to France related the news coverage to their personal experience and attachment to the place (Korstanje, 2009), either because of family relations or because of a previous visit to the affected area. For example, participants 1 and 2 have family in France and have visited their family. Participant 1 stated:

*"The Bataclan attack hit me the most because my cousins were on the streets when it happened... they said they heard firework sounds, but after that... we got to know it was gunshots."*

However, participants who did not have an emotional effect either did not have a personal connection with the terror attacks or felt desensitized due to attacks' reoccurrence, causing less shock (Morakabati and Kapuscinski, 2016). Participant 9 stated:

*"You only get affected by it for a few minutes... it's something common now people getting shot, which makes you desensitised."*

Overall, most participants exhibited some form of emotionality in their comments in response to the news coverage, which suggests that prior visitation is not a direct antecedent of emotional reactions. However, those who had previously visited the sites where the attacks took place, or those with family connections (who they may have visited in France) were more likely to have a deeper response due to that personal connection.

### ***Knowledge and information of attacks***

While the analysis was initially focused on reviewing the risks and responses to the attacks, a third theme, knowledge and information of attacks, was also identified to highlight the large range of prior knowledge and awareness among participants about France's attacks.

Further, how people 'knew' or 'came to know' also emerge as an interesting area of exploration.

Notably, participants who had not travelled to France previously had very little knowledge about the attacks. This was surprising given the '24 hour' news coverage of these attacks throughout the previous year by local news media and international news media. Traditionally, the 'media' and particularly the T.V. news media have helped shape public opinions, focus attention on specific events, and shape and inform consumers' perceptions (Hall, 2003). However, during the interviews and focus groups, it became apparent that this was not the case with this group of respondents. Additional questions were used to initiate a more in-depth discussion on news consumption, knowledge generation, social media, and other information-sharing aspects. Based on these discussions, it was clear that most participants 'inform' themselves online, mainly through social media. This has been suggested in previous studies of millennials and social media use (Popescul and Georgescu, 2016; Bolton *et al.*, 2013).

While there appeared to be a lack of knowledge of France's attacks, it was clear that the participants did actively consume news online. Participants gather their news mostly from official newspaper accounts on social media sites with posts, redirecting the viewer to the website. Many of the participants follow various local news sources and regional/international news on social media. However, most only consume what 'appears' on their news feeds; thus, it is curated by either the news social media accounts, sponsored content, or that which the 'algorithm' of their social media makes visible to them (often based on their past social media and online behaviour and that of their social networks). As their social media are the central information hub, they often do not 'seek out' news (as most previous generations who would read the morning newspaper), and, as a result, the

information 'finds them' (Gangadharbatla, Bright and Logan, 2014). Participant 13 shared this exact point:

*“If I see something on Facebook I am more inclined to read it, then for example to watch the news. So, if I see something on Facebook, and it seems important, I’ll look on the website...”*

Another explanation of the lack of knowledge/awareness was when the study was conducted, as it was more than a year after the attacks. Given the time, several other terror attacks around the world during that time, and the sheer amount of information that would be consumed by participants, it was clear that during the interviews and focus groups that these attacks were for most in the past. Among the participants who had previously travelled to France, there was a much greater awareness and knowledge about the attacks. As they had some sort of personal connection due to previously visiting the area, and in some cases family living there, they had likely given more initial attention to the news of the attacks when they occurred due to being in closer 'proximity' of the attacks (Sackett & Botterill, 2006).

#### ***Impact of terrorism risk on behaviour***

During discussions with participants, the potential impact of perceived terrorism risk on their tourist behaviour was investigated for three stages of the travel experience: before travelling, while on the trip, and return visit potential or destination choice. This section explores if and how participants alter their behaviour in France due to the terror attacks and how they 'handled' risk to reduce uncertainty (Fuchs and Reichel, 2011, p.268). In addition to questions about the attacks in France, for those that had previously visited, some additional questions and prompts were used to gain insights in relation to another country that they had previously visited having experienced an attack recently.

### *Impact on precautions before travelling*

Participants were asked how they mitigated potential terror risks before traveling. The most common 'risk' handling precaution highlighted by participants was to do a 'search,' a common risk reduction strategy (Fuchs and Reichel, 2011). Participants stated they would get more information from French newspapers and access embassy and foreign affairs websites. Participant 17 stated:

*“I would go to the webpage of the embassy or department of foreign affairs to check how they categorise the danger.”*

Participant 1, as a law student, checks terrorism statistics. However, several other participants said they did not take any precautions regarding 'terror risk' before making a decision, as terror attacks are beyond their control, could 'strike' anywhere, and are unpredictable.

Participants 23 and 14 commented:

*“I wouldn't prepare beforehand, I would probably go with a positive mind thinking that nothing will happen and hope for the best.” and*

*“Because I do travel a lot due to my job and France coming under the European banner, I guess the whole of Europe is a potential target for terrorist attacks for the past few years... I don't think about and prepare for these things anymore.”*

This might also be attributed to optimism bias, where individuals perceive that negative events are less likely to happen to them than to others, which concerning terrorism, results in a reduction of precautions or uncertainty of what precautions to take (Caponecchia, 2012). Among those that had travelled previously to France and those that had not, there did not appear to be any sort of pattern. As both groups included people that took precautions and those that did not.

### *Impact on behaviour while on the trip*

The influence of terror attacks on behaviour while on the trip was assessed by asking if and which precautions participants would take to minimize risk due to terror attacks when they next travelled to France. Responses could generally be organized into three different strategies. First, being mindful of crowded areas was the most common response. Participant 16 commented:

*“I would mind crowded areas where there is a high risk of getting hit because a lot of people are present.”*

Attendees might perceive crowded areas as a threat because many of the major attacks worldwide where tourists were targeted were in crowded areas, just as the attacks in Nice and Paris occurred in such an area. Nonetheless, some participants noted that they felt safer in the 'most crowded' or major attractions as these received additional protection, particularly after recent attacks throughout Europe. Participant 6, having visited France after the attacks, shared that:

*“I wouldn't mind crowded areas, being in Europe right after the terror attacks I haven't felt physically safer ever because there were armed soldiers... and the main tourist attractions are the ones most heavily guarded.”*

Secondly, a general increase in caution by participants was noted by most participants. This, however, could cause greater friction and distrust, particularly among people of different cultures, nationalities, and identities. Lack of trust and lack of engagement between hosts and guests are potential threats. As one participant suggested that they would 'trust fewer local people and not approach them.' A third, but less prevalent, 'strategy' would be to 'do nothing.' Participant 18 stated:

*"... maybe my thoughts are more occupied with these kinds of attacks, but I wouldn't behave differently because I think it can happen anywhere at any time and I don't want attacks like these to control me."*

In relation to terrorism risk, this is not unusual, as previous studies have suggested that preparation for and worry about terrorism is comparatively low in relation to their tourism behaviour (Caponecchia, 2012; Larsen *et al.*, 2009), and for some may be more of a concern at 'home' than when travelling.

*Impact on return visit potential or destination choice*

Another interesting area of discussion to emerge was in response to questions focused on uncovering the impacts that attacks may have on the intention to revisit (for those who had previously travelled) and destination choice. The results were mixed. First, a majority of participants that had been to France would still revisit. Individuals tend to avoid stimulating paranoia and perceive planning for terrorism incidents as unrealistic (Caponecchia, 2012). As participant 15 commented:

*"I don't think I would choose a country on how peaceful it is... so I think that feedback is very relative to circumstance and you don't need to be paranoid."*

However, another minority group of participants (including those with previous experience of travelling to France and those that had not) stated that they would not go back to France. This was very much evident among those that had not previously visited as alone five out of six focus group participants wouldn't travel to France (now that they are all aware of them), as participants 11 and 1 noted:

*"I wouldn't travel because your main intention is to have fun there and enjoy yourself and if something like this happens, it would stop me from travelling to that place...."* and  
*"Since the attacks have happened, I didn't travel to France because of the worry that it might occur again."*

Nonetheless, the answers by focus group participants not having been to France might have been influenced by the dynamics of the focus group and peer groups' social influence. The third group of participants noted that they would still travel to a destination where terrorist attacks had happened; however, they would not be able to due to their parents, guardians, or family members feeling it was not safe. Finally, some of the participants who had not travelled to France previously did not perceive additional terror attacks to be a risk, but rather feel that the political climate in the aftermath could be a threat to their safety due to their nationality or practice of Islam. Due to this uncertainty, they would either not travel or would take extra precautions. As participant 24 stated:

*“... I wouldn't feel comfortable to travel to any European country, especially not France because of the terror attacks, which kind of puts me under the radar because I am a 'Hijabi' and it will affect how people perceive me.”*

This most probably stems from how the political consequences were portrayed in the media combined with the lack of personal experience and familiarity with the destination or people.

### **Summary of key findings**

This study explored millennial risk perceptions of terrorism in the aftermath of the attacks in France. Further, this study explored the emotional reactions and impact of these attacks on their 'risk' minding precautions and future travel intentions. The findings suggest that for many of these respondents, the risk perceived by terrorism is one of many risks they negotiate during their decision making processes. The way millennials consume, share, and process information has also impacted the level of knowledge of the attack and their process of 'information search' before travel. The findings suggest that many of these respondents consume news that 'find' them on social media.

With regard to the emotional reaction and impact on future behaviour, the findings suggest that these vary due to the previous experience, personal connection, and a

sensitization to attacks like those that occurred in France as part of the 'norm.' For some respondents without previous experience or connection to France, these attacks would likely make them think twice about traveling to France or Europe. This was due to different reasons. For some, the terror risk is enough for them (or their family members) to choose not to travel to a destination. However, for others, the threat posed by the uncertainty of the political climate in the aftermath of the attack and the xenophobia would be perceived as a greater risk.

Overall, this study's findings suggest that while millennial travellers do have a variety of concerns and risks, they will still travel in the end. For many, they make a clear distinction between the risks that they can mitigate somehow and those that are out of their control. There was a common feeling that the 'risks' outweigh the rewards of travel. Travel is an important part of the experience, particularly among this group of young expatriates living in a country like the UAE.

As this study uses a qualitative approach, using a smaller sample size, to investigate Generation Y individuals in Dubai and their risk perceptions, this study portrays a snapshot of the topic, and results might vary amongst other age cohorts or other destinations. Hence, future studies should continue to explore how risk and security threats affect people, their decision making, and how destinations can mitigate unwarranted risks. Further, given that the global number of terror attacks and those impacted by terror attacks have consistently been on an upward trajectory and the number of international tourists has continued to grow, the nexus of these tourism and terrorism should continue to be an area enquiry.

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