



Elke Dens, marketing director - VISITFLANDERS  
Chair of marketing group - European Travel Commission  
Crisiscommunicator (temporarily)



@elkedens

“

You go to Brussels ...  
it's like living in a  
hellhole right now.”

**DONALD TRUMP**

REPUBLICAN U.S. PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

POLITICO



Browser tabs: Europe Travel Alert, State Department issues alert f..., State Department issues su...

Navigation: Bestand, Bewerken, Beeld, Favorieten, Extra, Help

TRENDING: UCLA, HARAMBE, TAYLOR SWIFT, AMBER HEARD, DONALD TRUMP

SEARCH: [magnifying glass icon] SECTIONS

DAILY NEWS | NEWS


SOCIAL: f, [Twitter icon], [Email icon]

SUBSCRIBE

Crime, U.S., World, Politics

# State Department issues summer travel alert for all of Europe over terror threats

920



MID SEASON SALE

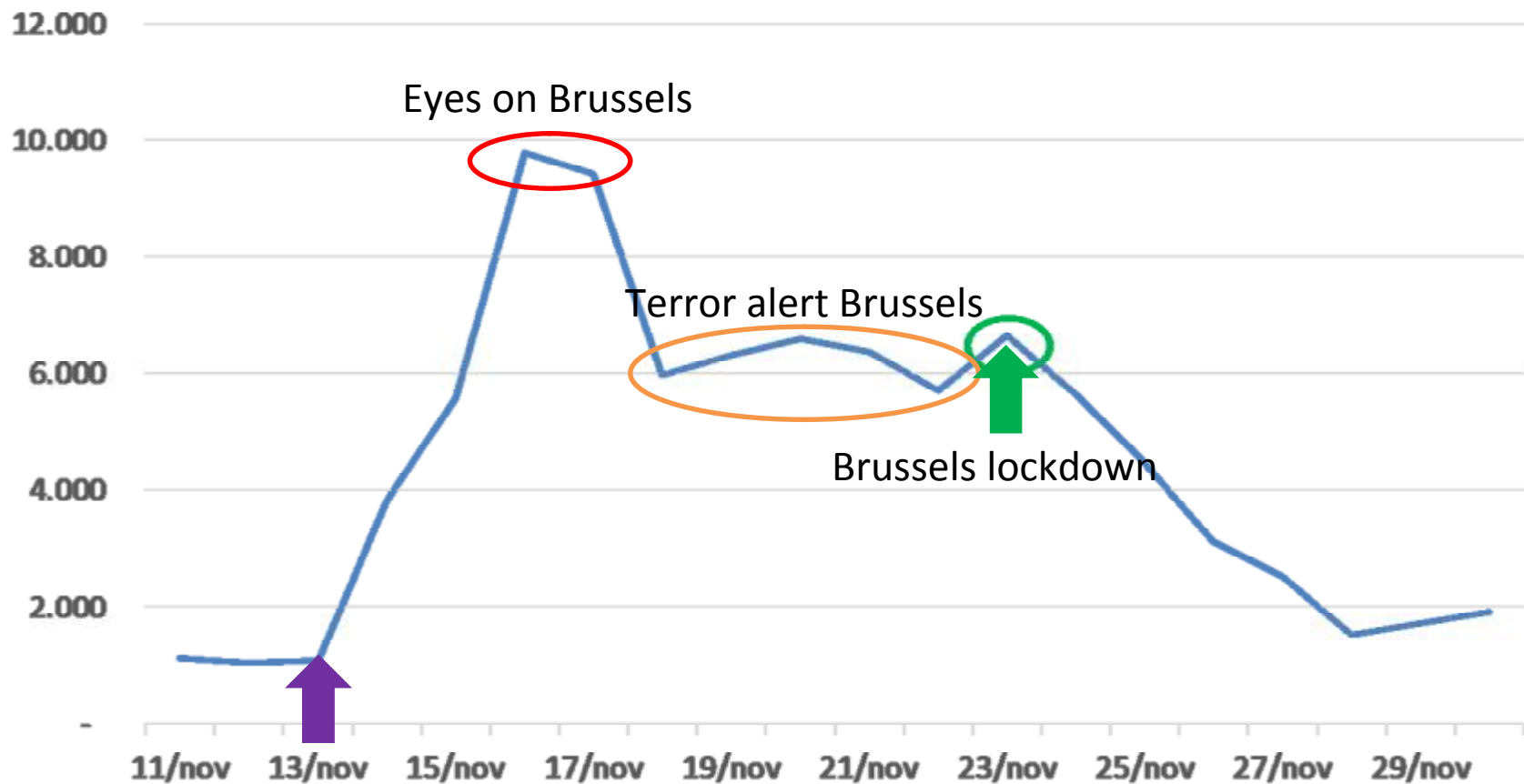
UNITED NUDE

MOST POPULAR

Taskbar: [Windows icon], [File Explorer], [Edge], [Chrome], [Office apps], [Spotify], [PowerPoint], [Word], [Excel], [Outlook], [Task View], [Search], [System tray]

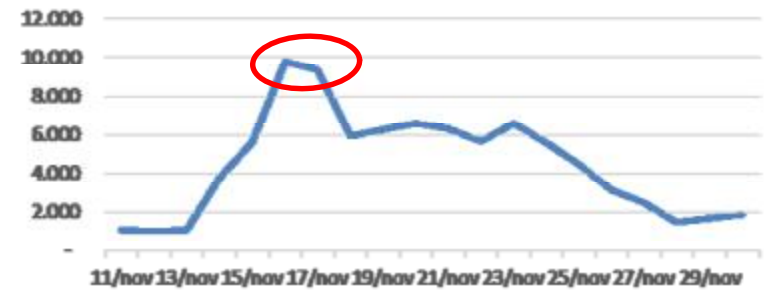
# So, what happened?

Start: Paris attack Friday 13/11



## Tracking online?

- We tracked with Synthesio the conversation online about following words: our destinations (Brussels, Flanders, Belgium, Antwerp, Bruges, ...) in combination with words like: safety, unsafe, anxious, dangerous, ...  
Ø88.000 mentions between 13/11 and 31/11
- Tracking in 12 languages

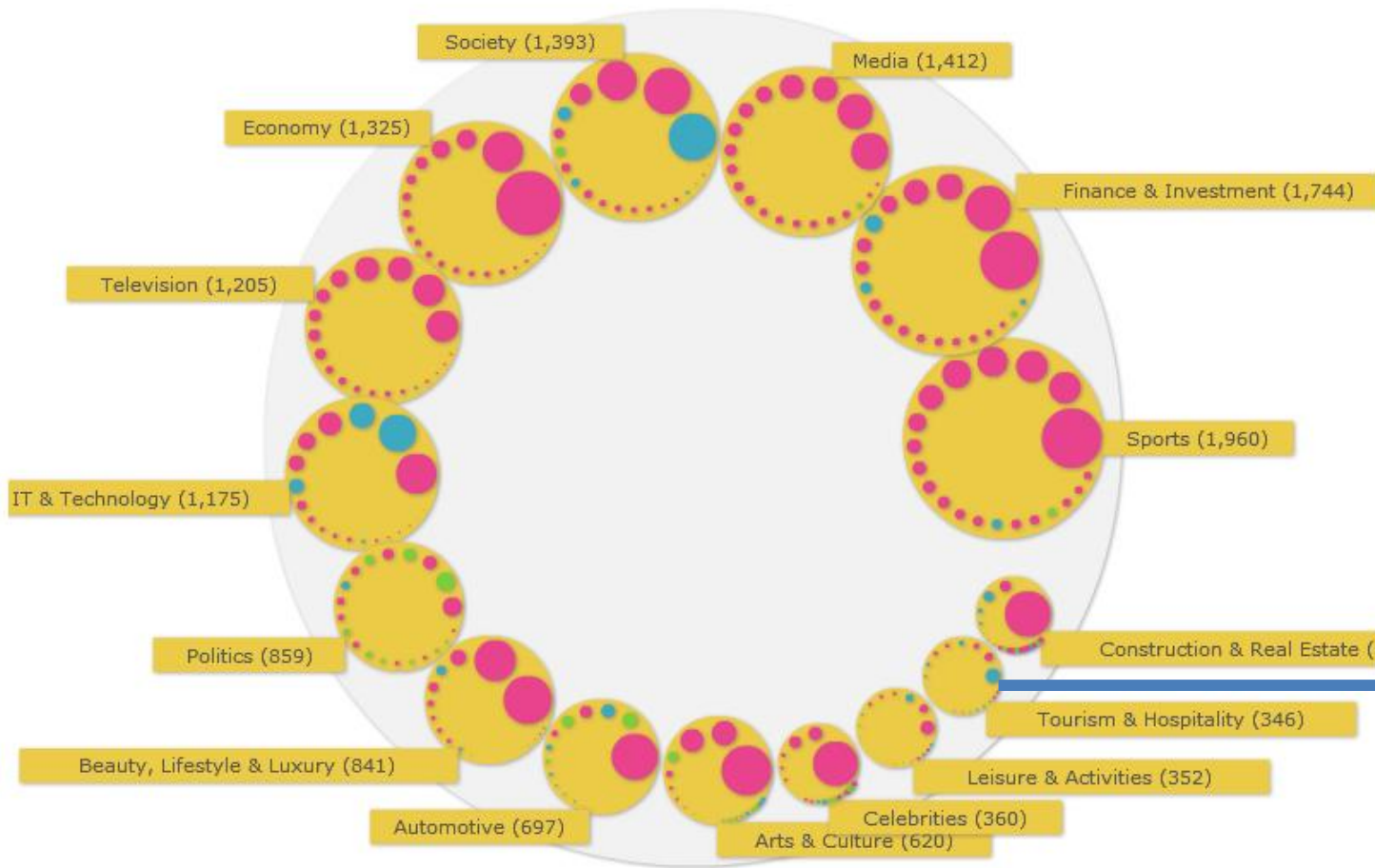


- The facts
- Europe, Brussels and Belgium
- Football  High attention in Spain
- Japanese?  Due to 1 influencer



# Where was the buzz?

**Communities**  
from 11/11/2015 to 30/11/2015  
Brussels safety > Brussels safety



Buzz on tourism and hospitality communities is small:  
Tripadvisor is biggest one (51 posts) with concerns about Bruges, London, Berlin

The graph above displays the 15 most representative communities, use filters to display more communities. Inside each community can be found the 20 most representative websites. Use the CSV Export to get all websites.

Source: Synthesio

## Where was the buzz (and where not) the first days?

Country	Mentions since 13/11	Social reputation score (/100)
United States	16.553	47
France	10.789	9
Spain	8.051	57
Italy	5.951	33
Brazil	4.470	36
Mexico	3.005	55
United Kingdom	2.797	41
China	2.693	
Canada	2.621	37
Japan	2.009	
Russia	971	
India	489	

Germany and Netherlands?

They were talking about Molenbeek

More linked to Turkey – Russia tensions

## What happened on Sunday 23rd?

- An official request from the federal police to the people to refrain from disclosing information on social media.



**Police Fédérale**  
@PolFed\_presse

 **Follow**

Par sécurité, veuillez respecter le silence radio sur les médias sociaux concernant les opérations de police en cours à [#Bruxelles](#). Merci

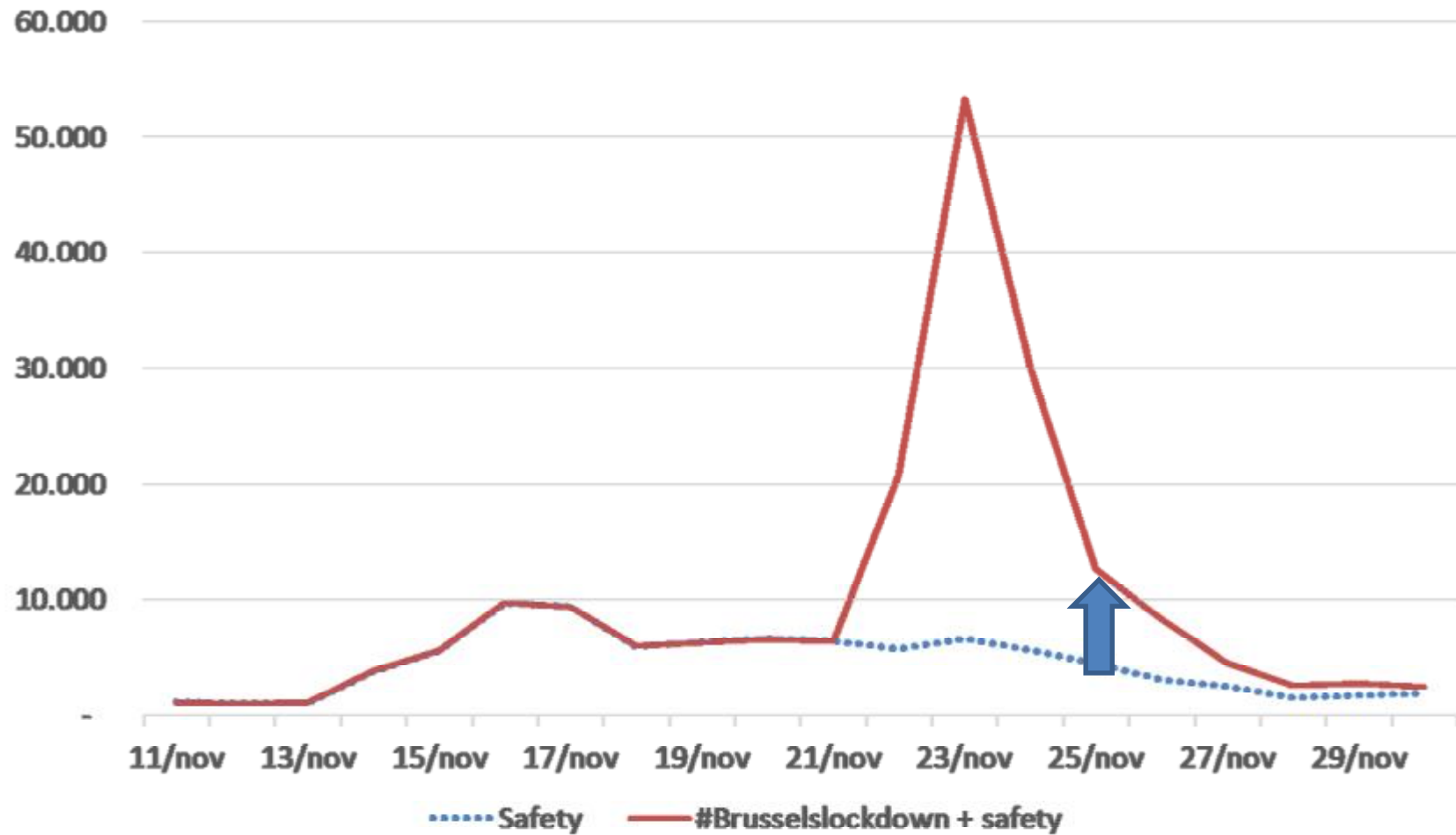
8:26 PM - 22 Nov 2015

  7,701  2,337

### Reaction of the people:

In a surreal display of solidarity, cat tweets flooded the #BrusselsLockdown, which had nearly 200 k mentions on Sunday evening

## What happened on Sunday 23rd?



Paula Lammers @PaulaLammers

RT @BrigadaGatuna: Los **gatos** colaps  
#Gatosconalosmalos

 Hide media



Jayce le Satirique  
@jaycelight

 Follow

BREAKING NEWS : Belgium Police using the new 200mph  
Hovercat during terrorist operations #BrusselsLockdown

9:32 PM - 22 Nov 2015

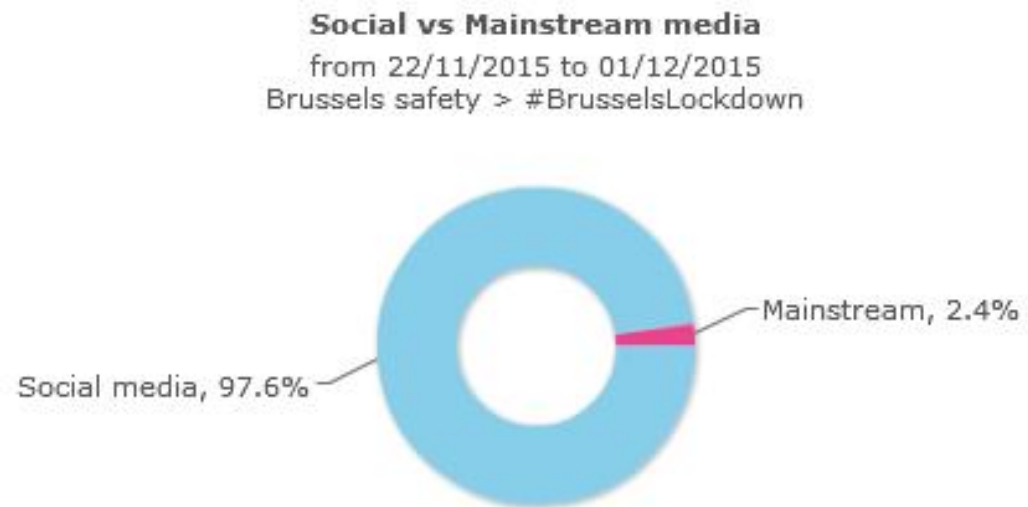
  65  61

n #BrusselsLockdown #Cats

uring lockdown



## Where was the buzz?



## What did we do?

- Together with a professional film crew we got on the streets of Brussels and made a movie referring to the cats.
- Belgian style \* Belgian humor \* Belgian people



## Results video

- In just a few hours, the video was shared numerous times and was picked up by national press and international press
- > 700.000 views
- > 2.700 mentions online
- Twitter reach (sum of the followers of each tweeter) about the video: 18 million in 5 days
- The SRS of Brussels safety rose by 22%



LeMatin.ch @Lematinch · 12m

**#BrusselsLockdown** la vidéo de l'office du tourisme belge qui déchire (si si qui déchire) [youtu.be/3AB6K7rWIG4](https://youtu.be/3AB6K7rWIG4) via @YouTube



Andreas Daneels

4 dagen geleden  
For us Belgians, surrealism isn't just an artform, it's a philosophy!

Beantwoorden · 17

Lonely Planet Travel News

Europe

## Belgian tourist boards lure visitors with surrealist cat video

Curated by Alex Butler · November 26, 2015 at 12:47 pm

After the recent security lockdown in Brussels spurred a surrealist feline-themed internet meme, the local tourism boards have now added their own bit to the running joke with a cat video that also shows off the best of the city.



Paul McNally @PaulMcNally · 3h

How to show tourists it's safe to @visitbrussels after #brusselslockdown? With a cat video. [xpat.com/tourism-agenci...](https://xpat.com/tourism-agenci...)

Los gatitos del #BrusselsLockdown como reclamo turístico

La Oficina de Turismo de Bruselas ha lanzado un peculiar vídeo para promocionar el turismo en la capital europea.

**theguardian**

## Belgian tourist authorities release cat-filled promo video

Capitalising on social media hit, surreal film depicts cats at Brussels landmarks including Grand Place and Atomium



Lilletourism @Lilletourism · Nov 25

On adore cette petite vidéo de nos voisins @VisitFlanders !

# **Crisis management overview**

- 1. Monitor and measure (continuously)**
- 2. Communicate (continuously)**

## **PHASE 1 – situation on highest treath level**

**1/Informative communication = objective information:  
Constantly updated information on the website, providing  
touroperator (assocations) & press with information.  
Working closely with national security & foreign affairs.**

**2/Communicate those things you can communicate: showing the  
local situation or the locals, by building on their reaction  
(LOCATmovie) or by interviewing them ≠ tourism promotion**

## NATION BRAND HEXAGON



## **Come out of your comfort zone in unusual situations**

- **A tourist board is used to communicate only positive news**
- **Also in unusual situations visitors need information and turn to you**
- **Therefore:**
  - **make sure you have all crisis information from first hand**
  - **make sure you are consistent in spreading this information**
  - **make sure you have a crisis communication ready**

## **Show leadership in usual and unusual situations**

- Don't wait for others, take the lead!**
- A tourist board has a lot of tourism stakeholders: hotels, taxi's, venues, guides,...**
- Make sure you bring them together IMMEDIATELY when there is a crisis**
- Involve, listen, inform and help them by sharing information and communication**

# **Crisis management overview**

**FASE 2: no longer in crisis, but perception is still there**

**Restart tourism communication:**

**Eg. by using ambassadors or influencers**



#relaxinbrussels  
visit.brussels 



People warned me not to go to  
Belgium because it is too dangerous.

**But I do  
what I want.**

Don't you ever tell me to stop!

**Madonna**

Rebel Heart Tour • 28.11.2015



#relaxinbrussels  
visit.brussels 



The most dangerous  
thing about Belgium is its  
**chocolate**  
because of the risk  
of high cholesterol.

**Howard Gutman,**  
former US Ambassador to Belgium • 29.11.2015

## **CONCLUSIONS & THOUGHTS**

- **A crisis is perceived different in each market**
- **Use opportunities to communicate**
- **Look beyond tourism, think about nation branding**
- **Keep on communicating in line with the listening**
- **Learn from others J**