

# The role of digital marketing in the resilience of sustainable tourism destinations, a case study of the Imilchil region

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## Abstract:

Actually, tourism remains a real strength of economic activity for all nations. However, this latest health crisis has really infected it negatively, and this is explained by the various damages that experienced the sector since the spread of the virus. As a result, several methods have been put in place to refresh the activity. Several visions lead to digital marketing, because it is the ideal and quick solution to get out of this situation.

**Key words:** sustainable tourism-digital marketing – resilience-sustainability-destination

## Introduction

The tourism sector represents a fruitful sector and one of the revenue-generating and full-employment niches.

Today, in the era of the health crisis, the tourism sector has been hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) and by the travel restriction measures that have been adopted to limit the spread of the virus.

Admittedly, any organization with a tourist vocation develops in a context destroyed by the damage of the health crisis. However, to get back in shape, the development of a marketing strategy becomes vital. Indeed, digital marketing is effective and fast to increase sustainable tourism activity, because today we live in a world where digital is an integral part of our daily lives.

In addition, on a global scale no country has escaped the decimation of its tourism sector. According to revised scenarios, « this shock could cause the international tourism economy to contract by 60% to 80% in 2020,

depending on the duration of the crisis. »<sup>1</sup>

According to available data taken from a subsequent study by the Ministry of Tourism, Handicrafts and Social and Solidarity Economy (MTAESS, 2021), tourism accounts for more than 6% of Gross Domestic Product. Overall, it

is the third most

important sector of the Moroccan economy. Tourism is one of the sectors most affected by the covid19 pandemic. Indeed, «arrivals at border posts experienced a drastic drop of -79% in

2020 compared to 2019 with 2.8 million non-resident tourists. »<sup>2</sup>

Hence the need to focus on the sustainable tourist product, which is essential and easy to relaunch compared to other tourist products, such is the case of the seaside resort which requires a lot of expenditure.

Take the example of our Beni Mellal-Khénifra region; and

more specifically the Imelchil area, which has been able to develop its tourist component thanks to the efforts made by tourist organizations such as the Tourism Delegation and the Regional Council of Tourism.

In this context, how does tourism combine technology and sustainable development strategies to stimulate and strengthen tourism activity?

To answer this, a series of questions arise:

- What marketing strategies should sustainable tourism adopt to be resilient?
- How to set up a digital marketing approach and develop it?
- How can the online presence of tourist organizations contribute to the attractiveness of the destination?

Faced with all these questions, we will first present a conceptual overview of the two notions “sustainable tourism” and “digital marketing”. We will then explore the relationship between the two notions and finally we will focus on the Imelchil region; cradle of a mixture of Béni Mellal-Khénifra culture. We will carry out a documentary study to better understand this subject.

Therefore, our objective is to show the importance of

<sup>1</sup> OECD. (2020). Actions taken in the field of tourism in the face of the coronavirus (COVID-19). Retrieved on 15/12/2021 from the site: [www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses](http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses)

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Tourism, Handicrafts and Social and Solidarity Economy. (2020). Tourism: key figures. Retrieved on 15/12/2021 from the ministry's website: [mtataes.gov.ma/Fr/tourisme/chiffres-clé-tourisme](http://mtataes.gov.ma/Fr/tourisme/chiffres-clé-tourisme).

digital technology and the use of digital tools to strengthen sustainable tourism, an area of activity that puts sustainable development at the center of its priorities.

## Sustainable tourism development in the Béni Mellal-Khénifra region

### I. Sustainable tourism

#### 1. Conceptualization:

Truly, tourism is a major economic sector globally. It is a transversal activity that affects many aspects of the receiving territory that we call the tourist destination. Indeed, it is an activity for which all the qualities of the territory are potential resources (Marsat, 2016).

The sustainable tourism industry has shown over the years that it can form an area of economic activity for the benefit of sustainable development strategies. Certainly, sustainable development occupies a major place in the lines of national economic policy.

It was in 1980 that the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) referred for the first time to the notion of "sustainable development" when publishing its global strategy for the conservation of the environment. (Godard, 1994).

Sustainable development is the set of economic actions that take into account the well-being of the local population of a geographical area. In addition, in 1987, Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland, Norwegian Prime Minister defined sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs.

A team of researchers from the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE, 2016) believes that "in 1992, the Earth Summit in Rio, held under the aegis of the United Nations, formalized the notion of sustainable development and those of the three pillars (economy/ecology/social): economically efficient, socially equitable and ecologically sustainable development.

#### 2. Sustainable development and tourism:

Admittedly, integrating sustainable development at all levels of tourist activity constitutes one of the fundamental challenges of tomorrow's tourism. In order to set up an adequate tourist process with the foundations of sustainable development, it is necessary directly to the goals of sustainable development. In other words, it is essential to study the behaviors and expectations of the targeted tourists with regard to the sustainable development and sustainable tourism of the destination.

In addition, tourism is indeed a job-generating activity. However, like all economic activities, tourism contributes to economic development and faces the challenge of sustainability.

Moreover, tourism is a bright part of the economy, and especially in terms of regional development. Because it allows you to create more currency and also more work opportunities. From this we also note that this activity directly or indirectly influences the socio-economic and socio-cultural fabric of each territory.

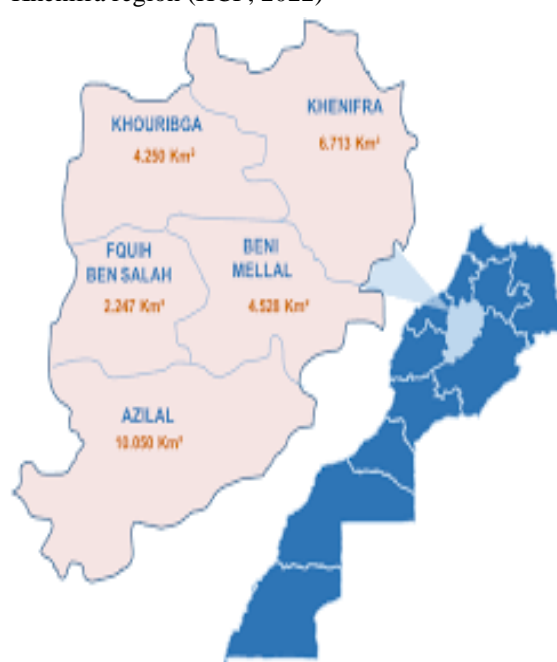
## II. Sustainable tourism in the Béni Mellal-Khénifra region

### 1. Description of the Beni Mellal-Khénifra region

The Béni Mellal-Khénifra region is a region made up of five provinces: Azilal, Béni Mellal, Fquih Ben Salah, Khénifra and Khouribga, 135 communes including 16 Municipalities and 119 Rural Communes (HCP, 2022). Its position at the foot of the Middle Atlas mountain gives it a strategic location rich in natural and cultural resources.

In addition, the capital of the region is the province of Beni Mellal. «The Beni Mellal-Khénifra region covers an area of 28,374 km<sup>2</sup> or 3.99% of the national territory. It is limited to the north by Rabat-Salé-Kenitra, to the northeast by the Meknes-Tafilalet region; to the south and south-west by the Draa-Tafilalet region and to the east by the Casablanca-Settat and Marrakech-Safi regions<sup>3</sup>. »

Figure 1: administrative division of the Béni Mellal-Khénifra region (HCP, 2022)



In addition, the region has an important road network of 4296 km, "in

cluding 1136 km affected by snowfall during the winter period" (Agence Marocaine de Presse, 2021), and on the other hand it is estimated that 4296 km we find "339 km of national roads, 1488 km of regional roads and 2469 km of provincial roads (BTP News, 2021).

Indeed, this requires permanent interventions in order to safeguard the existing road heritage and to improve the level of service and the level of road safety of users to guarantee safety.

Indeed, the Ministry of Equipment, Transport, Logistics and Water provides programs in this regard which consist of the realization of 54 projects over a length of 682 km with a budget of 1212 MDH (BTP News, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> HCP.(2021).Presentation of the Beni Mellal-Khénifra region.

Retrieved on 02/11/2021 from the site: [https://www.hcp.ma/region-drta/Presentation-de-la-region\\_a32](https://www.hcp.ma/region-drta/Presentation-de-la-region_a32)

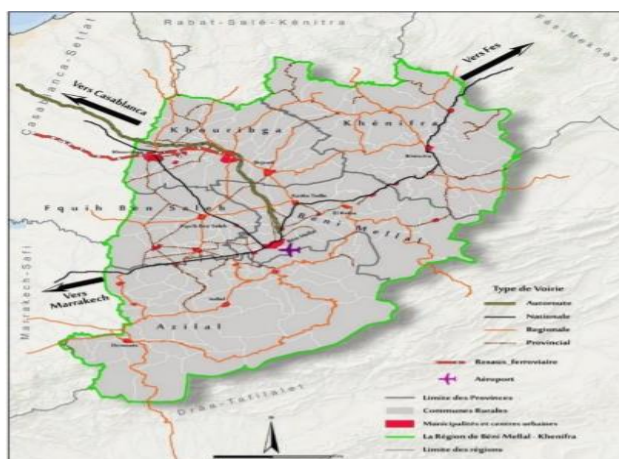


Figure 2: road network of the BéniMellal-Khénifra region (Ministry of Equipment, Transport, Logistics and Water, 2022)

## 2. Sustainable tourist activity in this region

Certainly, the year 2021 marks a resumption of tourist activity in the BMK region thanks to the launch of several programs aimed at supporting this sector, one of the most affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Recently, the Swiss-Morocco Sustainable Tourism program was launched, which aims to support tourism dynamics for the next four years in the Beni Mellal-Khénifra region (General Information Site of the BMK, 2021).

Indeed, after the health crisis we notice that; especially the province of Beni Mellal; was marked by the rehabilitation and development of several tourist sites and especially the park of Ain Asserdoune; classified national heritage since 1947.

In addition, the choice of this region as a target among the objectives of Sustainable Tourism Switzerland-Morocco is explained by its many assets: mountain ranges, varied flora and fauna. This program will also make it possible to "strengthen the capacities of local actors to manage the tourist destination. It also aims to improve the quality of tourist establishments and also to create several craft and agricultural cooperatives for the benefit of the local community. (The Economist, 2021).

However, in this region we find as a tourist niche, mountain tourism. Of course, tourism has a marginally major share in this area. Because it is rich in natural resources. It is in this regard that this region is included in the objectives of the Sustainable Tourism Switzerland-Morocco program.

According to previous studies, the ONMT has set up a funded report of almost 210 million dirhams in the deployment of the SMIT tourism development program (MAP Tourisme, 2021).

## Digital marketing

### I. Concept and definition of digital marketing

#### 1. Etymology of marketing

The etymology of the term marketing refers to various interpretations. From the Latin mercatus which means market, "Marketing" is an Anglo-Saxon term formed from "market" (market) with "ing", suffix which marks an

action that is happening.

Many attempts to define marketing are made by all its proponents. Far from opposing, they complement each other. Of all the definitions, two are proposed by the great marketing theorists: «Kotler, Keller and Manceau in their reference work "Marketing management", they point out that to define this concept, "the main difficulty lies in the fact that marketing is both an "art" and a "science", since it involves finding a balance between creative capacities and analytical methods. »<sup>4</sup>

Then, they give an operational definition centered on the function of the organization which adopts a managerial orientation around marketing management: "Marketing management is the art and the science of choosing its target markets, then of attracting, retaining and to develop a customer base by creating, delivering and communicating superior value to its customers"<sup>5</sup>.

And they add another societal definition centered on the notion of exchange which emphasizes the role of marketing in society: "Marketing is the societal process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and what they they want; this process consists of creating, offering and exchanging valuable products and services with others"<sup>6</sup>. Its ultimate goal is to satisfy the current and future needs of consumers and the profitability of the company.

In short, "the first books to appear on the subject describe marketing management as a decision-making process"<sup>7</sup>. Marketing then presents itself as a set of methods and tools that allow market analysis, positioning offer and promote it optimally.

## 2. Digitalization of marketing

During all these periods, we realize that "in economic life, marketing makes it possible to adapt products or services to market needs, as well as distribution and communication methods"<sup>8</sup>

The impact of technological developments on marketing is undeniable. For example, with the progress of information and communication technologies (ICT), companies can process and exploit databases on their customers. Then, present them with offers in real time, stimulating their act of purchase, thanks to new methods of contact and distribution.

Therefore, marketing is constantly evolving and changes are

permanent. However, if technological progress allows companies to evolve, they must stay informed about the tools to master. Marketing reinvents itself over time to keep up with changes in consumer behavior. Thus, the rise of digital technologies and their use on the Web, social media and mobile applications contribute to the

<sup>4</sup> KOTLER, KELLER, MANCEAU.(2015). Marketing management. (Pearson Education.p: 4).

<sup>5</sup> KOTLER, KELLER, MANCEAU.(2015). Marketing management. (Pearson Education.p: 5).

<sup>6</sup> KOTLER, KELLER, MANCEAU.(2015). Marketing management. (Pearson Education.p: 6).

<sup>7</sup> KOTLER, KELLER, MANCEAU.(2015). Marketing management. (Pearson Education. p: 31).

<sup>8</sup> Anthe Design.(2018).What is Marketing and what are its different techniques? . Retrieved on 01/21/2021 from the website: [www.anthedesign.fr/marketing-2/le-marketing-techniques](http://www.anthedesign.fr/marketing-2/le-marketing-techniques)



development of marketing.

Indeed, ICT and the Internet have profoundly changed purchasing behavior. Digital culture is now essential for both companies and individuals. The latter now choose their way of consuming, obtain information and share their experiences on the web.

## II. the integration of digital technology into the sustainable tourism policy

Nowadays, almost everyone goes through the web before getting a product or a service. Sustainable tourism is no exception to this rule. Increasingly connected, travelers have become accustomed to searching, comparing and booking their hotel rooms online for their stay. Finding out about the destination, reading recommendations, positive or negative opinions is now part of everyday life. Affected by technological advances in general and the innovations brought by digital technology in particular, sustainable tourism is today forced to follow the era of digitalization of the world. For this, it has adapted to economic and political changes. With online advertising, for example, the advertisements managed by the Moroccan National Tourist Office (ONMT) will be more attractive than the classic stand model.

There are many ways to promote this kind of tourism product. Indeed, this is based on the presence on the global web. Thus, the creation of a site makes it possible to increase the visibility. The use of social networks increases notoriety and visibility, with the objective of capturing a large number of potential tourists.

### Research methodology and results: Case study: the Imilchil region

The methodology adopted to achieve this objective consists of documentary research only.

The Imilchil region “is a mountain valley located at an average altitude of 2300 meters. It is made up of 5 municipalities”<sup>9</sup>.

Population légale des communes d'Imilchil selon le recensement 2014		
Nom des Communes	Menage	Population
Total Cercle : Imilchil	5 862	34 672
Commune Ait Yahya	736	4 560
Commune Amouguez	798	4 840
Commune Bou Azmou	1 638	9 583
Commune Imilchil	1 517	8 870
Commune Ouerbat	1 173	6 819

Figure 3: legal population of the municipalities of Imilchil according to the 2014 census (HCP, 2014)

Sustainable tourism in the Imilchil region attracts many tourists from the Marrakech circuit every year. In addition, it also attracts hikers and mountain climbing enthusiasts.

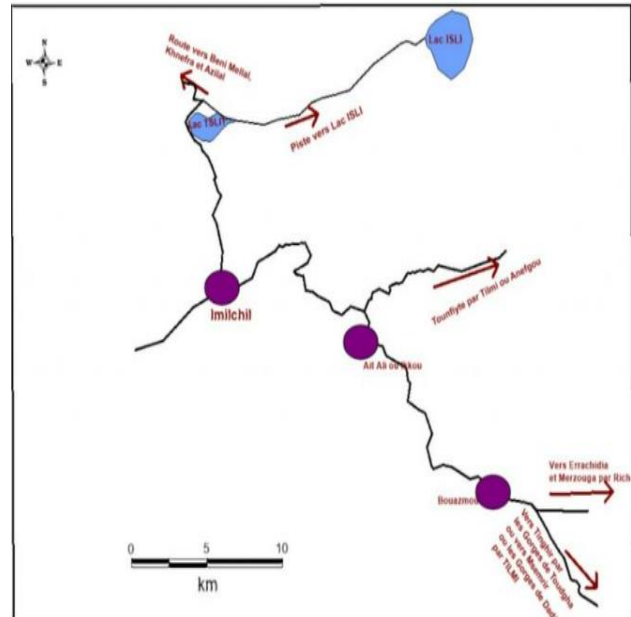


Figure 4 : tourist circuit of the Imilchil area (Portail du Sud du Maroc, 2016)

“Beyond its privileged position in the heart of the Eastern High Atlas Mountains, the tracks currently converted into asphalt roads have enabled the Imilchil site to be brought closer to the Moroccan tourist hotspots of the Todgha and Dadès gorges, Ouzoud waterfall...etc.”<sup>10</sup>

Besides that, this site is a tourist destination thanks to its various potentialities including the Engagement Moussem which is internationally renowned.

Admittedly, tourism is one of the sectors that has been most impacted by digitalization, and since it has been affected by the pandemic, several efforts have been put forward to save it. Consequently, some institutions opt for communication and digital marketing in order to attract national and international tourists. To do this, “the Regional Tourism Council (CRT) of the Draa-Tafilalt region in partnership with the ONMT has made efforts to promote and communicate the Draa-Tafilalt destination and the various neighboring provinces. In fact, the creation of the [www.ntla9awfdraatafilalt.ma](http://www.ntla9awfdraatafilalt.ma) platform is seen as a fierce communication campaign, because it invites visitors on a long journey from Zagora, Ouarzazate via Tinghir, Midelt, Imilchil, Er-Rachidia for the discovery of opportunities and treasures of the region” (The Free Library By Farlex, 2021).

So, from this quote we notice that the Imilchil area is straddling the tourist development of neighboring areas. Its strategic location in the hearts of Morocco allows it to be the pivot of the tourist golden triangle formed by the imperial cities of the Kingdom.

In short, the results obtained reveal weak territorial planning and poor tourist activity in terms of digital strategies designed by tourism organizations in the Beni Mellal-Khénifra region; own region of the Imilchil area.

### Conclusion

By way of conclusion, tourist activity is a double-edged

<sup>9</sup> Akhiam. (2021). Imilchil: when travel is in the service of man and nature. Retrieved on 02/12/2021 from the site : [www.akhiam.org/tourisme/](http://www.akhiam.org/tourisme/)

<sup>10</sup> Portail Sud du Maroc. (2016). Sustainable and solidarity tourism: Invitation to Imilchil-Amellago, in the heart of the Eastern High Atlas. Retrieved on 02/12/2021 from the site : [www.portailsudmaroc.com/actualite/7016](http://www.portailsudmaroc.com/actualite/7016)

weapon. Sometimes it maintains investments and regenerates revenue, sometimes it has harmful effects on the environment and the local population. In addition, this pandemic has precipitated the tourism economy into an unavoidable crisis.

For the past ten years, the Kingdom has had a Moroccan charter for responsible tourism. It then displayed its desire to develop tourism that respects people and the environment, which promotes the cultural, identity and intangible heritage of its different regions.

But we must not stop at this stage. It is therefore essential to initiate actions and put in place economic policies for sustainable development post covid-19. Thus, with the opening of the barriers, nothing is better than a digital relaunch for the emergence of the activity.

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