

The impact of digital marketing on sustainable tourism: literature review

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ABSTRACT –

Some countries, including Morocco, have recognized the need to adopt sustainable and responsible tourism. Faced with this fact, professionals feel the need to adopt marketing strategies aimed at increasing the attractiveness and sustainability of their tourism products and services. Faced with changing customer expectations and perceptions, as well as their awareness and interest in sustainable development, tourism marketing has been adapted to this new concept aimed at making tourism more attractive and eco-responsible. Therefore, it is important to clarify and provide answers on the reconciliation between digital marketing and sustainable tourism.

Keywords- Sustainable development, sustainable tourism, tourism marketing, digital marketing, customer experience.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the middle of the 20th century, tourism has become a social necessity, a democratic right for every worker¹¹. Often considered as antonym of sustainable tourism, mass tourism concerns in particular the concentration of tourists towards a precise destination and for a short period of time. A study published in Nature Climate Change and reported by Le Figaro, showed that tourism generally involves nearly one tenth of global greenhouse gas emissions¹². This phenomenon is mainly based on the distribution and consumption of products that are harmful to the environment. This recent evolution in the tourism industry has led to a change in consumption patterns and behaviors of the population.

To face this phenomenon, an alternative form of tourism

was born: *sustainable tourism*. This new form of tourism is based on the protection and the development of the natural

wealth and heritage of the countries. It is also based on the development of employment, poverty reduction and social inclusion through the efficient exploitation of local resources and the preservation of the environment. It has been defined by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2006) as tourism that "*makes optimal use of environmental resources..., preserving essential ecological processes and contributing to the conservation of natural resources and biodiversity; respects the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserves their built and living cultural heritage, as well as their traditional values, and contributes to intercultural tolerance and understanding...*"¹³

In a logic of developing the customer loyalty, marketing is applied to tourism in order to create and promote the tourist offer. In 1971, J. KRIPPENDORF (quoted by R. LANQUAR and R. HOLLIER, 1981), tourism marketing was defined as "*a systematic and coordinated adaptation of the tourism policy, on a local, regional, national and international level, to an optimal satisfaction of the needs of certain determined groups of consumers, while obtaining an appropriate profit*". Tourism marketing is therefore a means of understanding consumer behavior in the tourism sector, but also a set of practices deployed by private and public companies as well as States in order to enhance the tourism offer.

Under the influence of technological innovations, our world has undergone profound transformations on all levels. A considerable change in society and more (Wenqi Zhou, 2019). The customer has become more sociable, more connected (Kotler et al., 2016). Thus, purchase decisions are conditioned by the opinions and reviews circulating on the internet, a cue and a trigger to act. In view of this evolution and complexity characterizing consumer behavior, the tourism sector is in need to be adapted to a more volatile environment and one more influenced by new technologies. Digital technology, in addition to marketing and customer experience, represents

¹¹ Gérard Ruiz, « Le tourisme durable : jouissance et protection de la nature », *Vraiment durable* 56, n° 1 (2014): 71-81, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-vraiment-durable-2014-1-page-71.htm>.

¹² Bertrand, « Du tourisme de masse au tourisme durable », *L'autre Livre* (blog), 6 février 2018, <http://www.lautrelivre.net/du-tourisme-de-masse-au-tourisme-durable/>.

¹³ Aziz Hmioui et Erick Leroux, « The place of sustainable tourism in Morocco’s tourism development strategy for 2020 », *Maghreb - Machrek* 239, n° 1 (24 mai 2019): 9-20, <http://www.cairn.info/revue-maghreb-machrek-2019-1-page-9.htm>.

Specifically, in consumer behaviors and characteristics, a major challenge for optimizing customer value in a digitalized environment (Lalla Saidia Hamidi, 2017).

Today, the upheavals caused by the Covid 19 have affected several sectors, including the tourism sector. The consequences of this crisis have affected the components of the value chain of the tourism industry and of any destination, and in the same way, have modified the way in which tourism companies operate, by directly and indirectly impacting the relationship with the customer/visitor. This crisis is also an opportunity to rethink the future of tourism in Morocco.

In sum, the objective of this work is to study the impact of the tourism sector in a crisis situation on our natural resources and ecosystems, by including the notion of digital marketing as a means of transforming and improving the tourism offer.

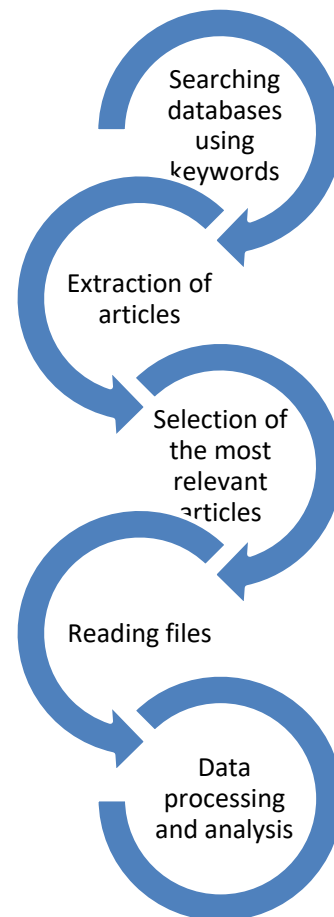
2. METHOD

This study is based on documentary research of the subject. The articles used come from the databases of the E-Resource platform set up by the IMIST and which allows access to the various international electronic resources acquired by the consortium. Five databases were used to gather information about digital marketing and sustainable tourism: - CAIRN, - SCIEDIRECT, - SCOPUS, - JSTOR, - SPRINGER. I also completed my research with Google scholar and worldwide science.

The above databases were searched using seven terms: sustainable development, sustainable tourism, e-tourism, ecotourism, tourism marketing, digital marketing, and tourism experience. We focused our research on the different concepts addressed by our problematic by spreading them over the years from the oldest to the most recent.

The method of extraction and selection of articles was based on three levels of classification: the first one was based on reading the title of the article to limit the number of results and select the most relevant studies; the second one was based on reading the abstract of each article to focus on the articles that deal with the main axes of the subject (digital marketing and sustainable tourism); the third one was based on in-depth reading of the most relevant articles. This reading was guided by objectively designed reading sheets reporting the most relevant elements of each article. Our sample consists of several articles that are considered relevant. These articles are classified and categorized in Zotero, a bibliographic reference management software. The collected data was then processed and analyzed in order to define and detail the different concepts that make up our topic and the relationship between them. We can summarize our methodology in the following diagram:

The objective of this work was to clarify the notion of sustainable tourism and the impact of marketing on the commercialization of tourism products and services,



while including the role of digital in the adaptation of the sustainable tourism offer to the context of technological and societal evolution.

We have partly addressed the evolution of the tourism sector from mass tourism to a more equitable and sociable tourism. In parallel, the weight of marketing in the tourism offers and the impact of digital technology on the improvement of marketing strategies which are now in line with the expectations of the new consumer.

3. Results:

Sustainable Tourism: A Special Interest in Sustainable Development

Following Brantland's landmark 1987 report entitled "Our Common Future", the concept of sustainable

development was introduced for the first time, thinking about this concept has gained momentum in many fields and has attracted the interest of researchers in a wide range of disciplines. In the same sense, in 1972, the report *"The Limits to growth"* by MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) was the first study to deal with the notion of sustainability. This may have raised *"awareness of the importance of conserving biodiversity in our daily environment"*¹⁴. This concept of sustainable development has been recognized by many, but its application remains different from one country to another and this even leads to and causes quite remarkable annoyances by scientists, companies and even the population.

In the 1970s, the world experienced a remarkable and dramatic rise in tourism. This brought a considerable number of social and environmental difficulties and challenged the notion of respect for local populations and the environment. Tourism has been defined by the UNWTO as *"Tourism that takes full account of its present and future economic, social and environmental impacts..."*¹⁵.

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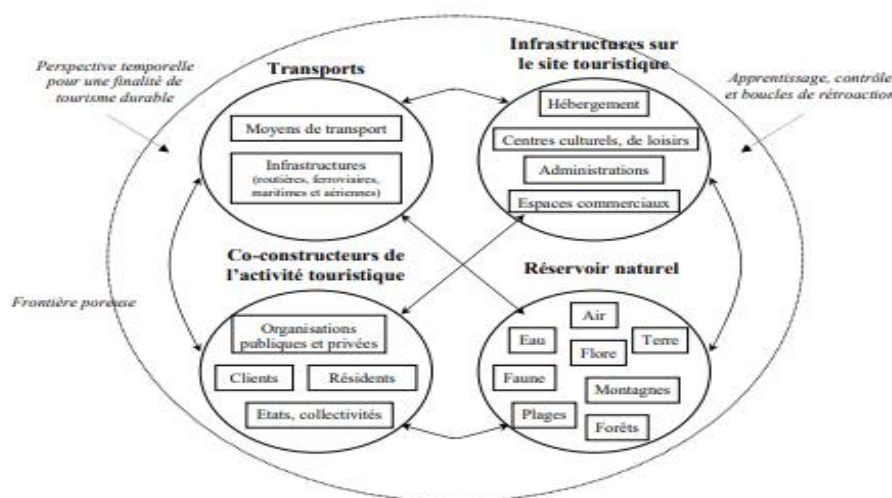
to the growth of low-cost air transport, a means to benefit the majority of intercontinental travel. It was also defined as an element of inequality in relation to the local population.

In response to these findings, a new form of tourism has emerged. A tourism that is more respectful of the environment, of the socio-cultural authenticity of the local populations and also more equitable. We are talking about sustainable tourism.

In 1995 at the World Conference on Sustainable Tourism in Lanzarote, Spain, also building on the elements put forward at the 1992 "Earth Summit" in Rio, sustainable tourism is seen as a solution to the difficulties associated with the negative impacts of mass tourism.

The studies put forward by Sandra Camus, Lubica Hikkerova and Jean-Michel Sahut, 2010, presented a systemic analysis for sustainable tourism by considering it as a complex set of interacting internal and external elements in order to achieve a specific goal. Sustainable tourism is seen as a set of interrelated sub-systems with the ultimate goal of preserving present and future generations. Below we present the model developed by these authors.

Figure: Systemic approach to sustainable tourism



Europe, it has developed internationally as the financial capabilities of the population have increased, with the development of mass consumption, leisure, and air and rail travel. The film *Mr. Hulot's Holiday* is the perfect representation of this new trend in holidays and leisure. At that time, tourism became more artificial and more playful. This made tourism move away from the notion of environmental and nature preservation.

Despite the impact of tourism on the economic growth in many countries, several studies have estimated the share of tourism in the emission of greenhouse gases at 5%, due

Source : Sandra Camus, Lubica Hikkerova, and Jean-Michel

This study has shown that systemic analysis provides a way of understanding tourism by treating it as a *complex social system*¹⁶. It also demonstrates that a sustainable tourism strategy can follow a virtuous circle through learning and feedback loops.

Marketing and Sustainable Tourism

Work and research in the existing literature on marketing and tourism has been accelerated. The relationship between tourism marketing and the notion of sustainable development has become the focus of much research.

¹⁴ Ruiz, « Le tourisme durable ».

¹⁵ Erick Leroux, « Vers un Tourisme Durable ou un écotourisme », *Management & Avenir* 34, n° 4 (2010) : 234, <https://doi.org/10.3917/mav.034.0234>.

¹⁶ Sandra Camus, Lubica Hikkerova, et Jean-Michel Sahut, « Tourisme durable : une approche systémique », *Management & Avenir* 34, n° 4 (2010).

This is due to the negative impact of 'mega tourism'¹⁷.. Today's customers have also become increasingly demanding and sensitive to sustainable development, hence the need for marketing to keep up with this new situation. Among the researchers who have studied the conciliation between marketing and sustainable tourism, M. Capron and F. Quairel (2004), spoke of two relational approaches: the first called substantial strategy and the second is called symbolic.

- *Substantial strategy*: considers sustainable development a real added value for marketing. A tool for differentiation and competitiveness;

- *The symbolic strategy*: sees sustainable development as a means of communication and marketing focusing more on the image and reputation of the company.

As a result of the interest in sustainable tourism, several countries and companies have started to adopt marketing strategies related to sustainable tourism. The aim is to raise awareness and introduce the customer to the concept of sustainability in the tourism sector and also to support the legitimacy of the organizations and the activity (Ch. Champels and M. Vandercammer 2009). It can be deduced that marketing applied to sustainable tourism is any approach that guarantees a responsible and equitable commitment at the environmental and socio-cultural level, at the level of the client or the tourism entity (BDS 2003).

The literature has referred to three types of customers (Marso Saida, 2022):

- *Clients who are sensitive to notions of sustainable development*;
- *The followers of "alternative" tourism: ecological, ethical, fair tourism, etc*;
- *Others who do not consider sustainable development a necessity*.

In a context of sustainable development, tourism companies and entities will have to be reactive and agile in order to respond as well as possible to the expectations of the different customer profiles. A demanding customer looking for a personalized offer that is more appropriate in terms of societal and environmental change.

Hence the need to pay particular attention to the notion of authenticity which has become fundamental in tourism marketing and has been discussed at length in anthropology (MacCannell, 1976; Olsen, 2002; Cousin, 2011). Two levels of authenticity have been declared in anthropological work. The first focused on the authentic feelings expressed by tourists through their travel experience, and the second attributed by its tourists to the countries and populations visited. Etienne Pauchant had announced that the demand for authenticity expressed by

tourists responds to the need for identity expressed by many populations, who invest in the search for their roots. This double movement of supply and demand has already triggered a huge wave of restoration measures, with a view to sustainable tourism... In many regions, the inhabitants cultivate their traditions and customs, as well as their social environment. These are examples of authentic societies. Authenticity can be seen as "*the bridge between supply and demand*" (Viviane Hamon, 2005).

The concept of digital marketing: a marketing revolution

Digital marketing is considered to be the set of marketing techniques using digital channels to promote or sell a product or service. It is based on the development of the use of the Internet and connected objects (Alaoui, Asbai and Benammi, 2018). We can refer to three fundamental concepts: Digital marketing or E-marketing, Internet marketing, Web marketing.

Marketing 4.0 does not in any way replace the old versions of marketing. They complement each other and each one brings new approaches likely to get closer to the consumer and at the same time to follow the trends of the global market. Frédéric Cavazza supports this observation by talking about 10.0 marketing: "*...this makes it possible to clearly understand the interest of combining these practices rather than trying to chase a miraculous innovation that will supposedly allow you to compensate for your weaknesses and catch up*"¹⁸.

4. DISCUSSION

As a result of the work and research carried out by several authors dealing with the relationship between marketing and tourism, we are now witnessing a very sustained interest in improving the tourism offer through marketing, which has been developed year after year.

Thanks to the development of new technologies, marketing has followed digitalization in its approaches and tools for commercialization and contact with the customer. An element of modernization and adaptation of the tourism offer to the new global context. In the case of the digitalization of sustainable development tourism, several tools and technologies are used to make the sustainable tourism offer more accessible. These include:

- *Web marketing*: an essential element in the promotion of sustainable tourism. It uses the Internet to develop the visibility of the offer among different customer segments.

- *The website*: a showcase and a perfect display of the different characteristics of the tourism offer. The ergonomics, style, design and colors of the website should represent the image that the company wants to

¹⁷ Marso Saida, « Contribution du marketing au développement du tourisme durable au Maroc », s. d., 12.

¹⁸ « Marketing 4.0 ».

convey, its values and convictions. In terms of tourism sustainability, this concerns the fact of exposing its values, labels and its environmental and societal commitments.

- *Social networks*: A visibility on the web but also means interaction and exchange with customers. On social networks we are now witnessing an improvement in visual content, using filters for photos, Reels used by Instagram or capsules by Tiktok. This has revolutionized digital content which competes with the advertising spot.

- *Professional networks*: LinkedIn a good contact network used by professionals in the tourism sector in order to keep in touch and exchange with customers and actors in the sector.

- *E-tourism platforms*: TripAdvisor, booking and others, platforms for referencing tourist establishments and destinations with the possibility of collecting and exposing the opinions of tourists of different nationalities. This highlights the notion of *e-reputation*¹⁹ which has become necessary for tourist establishments. This is referred to as the digital footprint and makes e-reputation paramount (Valat, 2018) and one that tourism businesses and destinations seek to develop and maintain in order to attract more prospects and retain and keep acquired customers.

- *Content marketing*: content is an essential element in sustainable tourism. It is about attracting and inspiring the customer, giving them the opportunity to project themselves into their next holiday and to find themselves in the offer. In sustainable tourism, the customer is looking for compliance with certain standards and requirements in terms of respect for the environment, local traditions, culture and equity. The content must be 'practical'²⁰. In this section, we can also mention UGC: user generated content, referring to consumers who create content and make a HASHTAG (photo, video and opinion by users for free). We also mention the important role of influencers in content creation and the impact they play in customer choice.

- *Mobile (Smartphone, tablet)*: Today's consumers are increasingly using the mobile to research and to contact tourism establishments (reservations, information, internet searches, navigation, etc.). Aware of the importance of this aspect, tourism companies have taken into consideration the mobility of the offer by adapting it to new technologies (retroactive website, mobile applications for booking and consulting offers...).

Sustainable tourism has begun to be known by the public, something that was not previously the case which given

the complexity of the concept. Today, the client is looking for more information on the subject. Sustainability in relation to the tourism offer has somehow changed the experience of the customers. A consideration made on an environmental and societal level. Marketing combined with digital has only enriched this experience and made it more attractive and interesting.

In the 2000s, Williams and Soutar (cited by Yousra Hallem, Lubica Hikkerova and Jean-Michel Sahut, 2017) understood the tourist's choice (in an adventure tourism context) by taking into consideration several functional, social, emotional and epistemic values (Sheth, Newman and Gross, 1991, cited by Yousra Hallem, Lubica Hikkerova and Jean-Michel Sahut, 2017). Nowadays, the consumer seeks new experiences with particular attention to the importance of environmental and cultural aspects (Prosser, 1994; Bergin-Seers and Mair, 2009, cited by Yousra Hallem, Lubica Hikkerova and Jean-Michel Sahut, 2017). This observation has been accentuated with the COVID 19 since 2020. A category of clients that is also willing to pay more for a sustainable tourism offer (Kazeminia et al., 2016; Kilbourne and Pickett, 2008, cited by Yousra Hallem, Lubica Hikkerova and Jean-Michel Sahut, 2017). Digital marketing has made the tourism offer more accessible and saleable and the customer more affordable. An improvement in the customer experience through digital tools that have facilitated contact with the customer, seeking proximity with the customer and influencing their choices.

The case of Morocco in the context of the COVID 19

In Morocco, sustainable tourism is in full expansion, and this was accentuated during the health crisis. It is considered a niche activity, targeting a small population. COVID 19 has therefore redistributed the cards. It accentuated inequalities by enriching some and weakening others. At the same time, it has made people more willing to travel and experience adventure. This customer segment has expanded and interest in sustainable tourism has grown. Travelers are looking for more tailor-made and personalized holidays.

Morocco is among the countries that have strategies for sustainable development projects. We can talk about the 2020 vision which is above all a desire and an ambition to enhance the natural, cultural and human assets of the country and to develop a responsible, authentic and human tourism. Technological advances have forced Moroccan companies to adopt digitalization in their marketing strategies while some remain behind for financial reasons or lack of skills.

During the health crisis and faced with a consumer who is both distrustful and demanding, Moroccan tourism companies have used several marketing tools. Before the opening of the borders, the companies were confronted

¹⁹ Youssef Badr, « mémoire présenté comme exigence partielle de la maîtrise en gestion de projet », s. d., 93.

²⁰ Alaoui Lalla Latifa, Asbai Mustapha, et Benammi Mohamed Hamza, « l'impact du marketing digital sur le tourisme marocain » 3 (2018): 17.

with a more demanding local clients looking for a tailor-made offer while respecting the safety elements related to the respect of distancing and sterilisation. A new situation to which companies should adapt. Digital was in a way a means of reviving the Moroccan tourism sector and an element of support for the experience and the customer journey.

5. CONCLUSION

Sustainable development associated with tourism makes sustainable tourism more attractive, even if sometimes not well understood. Moroccan companies have an exceptional potential to understand the new expectations and perceptions of the consumer. Digital marketing today is seen as a way to strengthen and support the marketing of sustainable tourism products and destinations by including different environmental and societal aspects. This work has allowed us to have a global overview of the concepts of sustainable tourism and digital marketing by focusing on the notion of customer experience and the role of digital marketing in the development and enhancement of the sustainable tourism offer in order to meet the expectations and requirements of a customer who seeks to enrich his experience and make it more lively and more responsible towards the environment and society.

Conventional and classic marketing is no longer meeting the requirements of today's consumer. Habits change and behavior evolves with time and with the developments and crises in the world. We talk about agile marketing.

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