

Tourism Communication Strategies in Morocco During the Covid'19 Pandemic: The Case of The Hotel Sector

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has substantially affected the tourism industry in Morocco. the government has suspended all travel activities with the intention to restrict the spread of the virus. All tourist structures were directly affected by the crisis. Once these measures were slightly lifted, this situation, as complex and difficult to manage, forced tourism institutions to develop new communication strategies in order to recover their products and services. Nevertheless, these strategies differ according to the capacity of reception and the geographical location of each entity. In this regard, the objective is to measure the impact of Covid-19 on Moroccan tourism and especially the hotel industry, and the role of communication in promoting, as quickly as possible, their business activity (turnover), requiring the intervention of all stakeholders. Indeed, in this paper, based on a qualitative study, we will highlight, firstly, the communication strategies that have been adopted by a set of tourist structures in two regions, Rabat-Salé-Kénitra/Béni Mellal-Khénifra, and subsequently, measure not only the success of the latter to decamp these entities from their economic crises, but also to ensure their future growth prospects.

Keywords

Communication, strategy, tourism, economy, pandemic.

Introduction

The tourism sector was the leading source of state revenue, taking a little lead over sectors such as the automobile and agri-food industries. It is a sector with high added value, creating a considerable number of jobs and contributing 10% of the national GDP. Before the COVID-19 health crisis, it was a strategic sector for the Moroccan economy. However, given the health crisis which has negatively impacted this sector, the State has launched an emergency plan of two billion dirhams and five new measures to support the sector. The third measure of this plan mainly concerns tourist establishments, as was explained by the Minister when she gave more details on the terms of application of her emergency plan "In this kind of situation, we are obliged

to prioritize. We felt that the hotel industry,⁴⁷.This reflects the State's desire to meet the needs of this sector, which has suffered the major effects of the pandemic. Since March 2020 and because of the decisions to close the country and general confinement taken by the Moroccan government, this sector has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. 53% of companies in Morocco operating in different sectors, particularly the tourism sector, including the hotel sector, have experienced closure. However, after the end of the confinement and under the effect of the pandemic which remains, the hotel establishments found themselves in the obligation to make additional efforts to sell their services. It is in this sense that we have chosen to formulate the following research problem in order to provide some answers towards the end of this article. What are the communication strategies developed by hotel establishments during the Covid'19 pandemic to promote the sale of their services? From this main question arises the sub-research questions which constitute the main axes of our interview guide. What communication strategies were followed before the pandemic to promote the sale of their services? What communications strategies have been followed during the pandemic to promote the sale of their services? Our case study applies to a sample of two regions, namely the regionRabat-Salé-Kénitra and the Beni Mellal-Khénifra region. The choice of these two regions comes from our desire to compare two regions with different tourist potential. The first with plain geography and coastal location and the second with mountain geography and central location in Morocco.

POTENTIAL OF MOROCCAN TOURISM

One of the capital tourist destinations of the southern contour of the Mediterranean, Morocco, bribed by its climate, its natural wonders, its imposing cities, its welcome and the generosity of its people has become one of the favorite Mediterranean destinations for foreign tourists.

Indeed, tourism occupies a colossal place in the Moroccan economy. Following an analysis of the annual report of the

⁴⁷ <http://www.cnt.ma/grand-format-le360-tout-sur-le-plan-ammor-pour-le-sauvetage-du-secteur-du-tourisme/consulted25/1/2022>

Central Bank of Morocco published in 2004⁴⁸, the share of the tourism sector is three times greater than that of seafood, textiles or agriculture. As a result, it is one of the most important sectors ensuring economic growth, foreign exchange, investment and job creation.

In 2003, according to this same report, the tourist sector represented 6.9% of the gross domestic product (GDP), contributed to the creation of 600,000 direct jobs and produced 5.9 billion dirhams in flows of investment, with a capacity of 97,000 classified beds. All of this points directly to the relationship that is often predicted between tourism and development.

At the level of the Rabat-Salé-Kénitra region

Rabat-Salé-Kénitra, the region that shields the capital of the country, the city of light considered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site is a tourist destination of preeminence. It also has riches in terms of its history, its landscapes and its cultural and architectural heritage.

a. Litter capacity

According to the Regional Center for Investment in the Rabat - Salé - Kénitra region, the region has succeeded in increasing its litter capacity from 6,991 beds in 2017 to nearly 8,000 beds with many projects underway with prestigious brands. Objective: reach 17,000 beds with a strengthening of the seaside potential in 2018⁴⁹.

With this in mind, and to position itself as a destination of choice dedicated to business and leisure tourism, the capital of the Kingdom has received several luxury international hotel chains, Fairmont at Marina Rabat-Salé with 200 rooms and 80 residences, Ritz Carlton with a capacity of 120 keys (en suite), Marriott located in Arribat Center with 370 beds and Kasr Al Bahr with a total capacity of 250 keys.

At the level of Kenitra, the number of hotel establishments was very limited with a capacity not exceeding 600 beds (2019), indeed the opening of the industrial platform Atlantique Free Zone intended for the automotive industry aroused the need for the creation of new hotel units to provide accommodation for managers and executives from various foreign companies. These projects were launched approximately 4 years ago and will be completed by the end of 2020, which will increase the litter capacity tenfold by approximately 6,000 beds⁵⁰.

b. Natural and climatic wonders

The region is characterized by a very varied geography, made up of a coastal zone extending over 165 km, the relief in the form of plains (Gharb, Oulmès, Zaër, etc.). This nature thus has a coast full of fish, cultivable land and significant water resources, as well as varied ecosystems.

Its proximity to the Atlantic characterized by maritime influence, becoming continental in the interior. The climate is then of the semi-arid Mediterranean type between weighted and rainy in winter, and humid and temperate in summer accompanied by Chergui days, due to its location between the ocean and the central plateau.

c. Art and culture

When we talk about culture, we think directly of Rabat, the administrative capital of the country, also called the Moroccan capital of culture which since the launch of the development project "Rabat city of light" wants to be the symbol of Moroccan culture. Indeed, this plan initiated by His Majesty King Mohammed VI, was able to implement a set of projects of great importance such as the national theater, the largest in the whole kingdom, the opening of the national library which brings together more than 350,000 books.

On the museum side, inaugurated by His Majesty in 2014, the Mohammed VI Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art is the first public institution that meets global museum standards and regularly hosts high-calibre cultural and artistic events and exhibitions.

As for festivals, between Jazz au Chellah and Visa for Music, Mawazine remains one of the largest annual events in the world, with more than two million participants and artists representing some forty countries. The festival authenticates its vocation as an expansive international event with music from all over the globe.

At the level of the Beni Mellal - Khénifra region

The Béni Mellal-Khénifra region includes the former region of Tadra-Azilal and the provinces of Khénifra and Khouribga. Administratively, this region includes five provinces and, therefore, as many economic development niches. In Béni Mellal, Fquih Ben Salah, Azilal, Khénifra and Khouribga, the potential is undeniable in sectors such as agriculture, mining, crafts, tourism, but also energy and water.

The Beni Mellal-Khenifra region, which is experiencing a real dynamic of economic and social development, is likely to improve its positioning over time and become one of the most attractive and competitive regions of the kingdom. It is characterized by its location in the heart of the kingdom and its proximity to the major national centers (Casablanca, Marrakech, Rabat, Meknes-Fez), which are located within a radius of 300 km, and concentrate half of the country's population. A position that allows its companies and products to access a potential large-scale consumer market. The region also has structuring infrastructures, called upon to increase its attractiveness, such as the Beni Mellal airport and the Beni Mellal-Casablanca highway.

SRAT⁵¹ plans to carry out 250 structuring projects and 30

⁴⁸ <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/teoros/2005-v24-n1-teoros05460/1071108ar.pdf>

⁴⁹ <https://www.rabatinvest.ma/articles/tourisme>, consulted on 25/1/2022

⁵⁰ Op.cit

⁵¹ Regional Scheme for Planning and Sustainable Development of the

support measures, with an overall investment amount estimated at 130.2 billion dirhams. These projects relate to the construction of municipal infrastructure and equipment, the upgrading of urban centers, the improvement of the environment, climate change and renewable energies as well as water management. This, without obscuring the field of health, tourism, culture, sport and, in general, territorial disparities and economic and human development, in its various aspects. The environment, transport and logistics infrastructure, drinking water supply, opening up of the rural world, the creation of logistics zones, culture, sport, health, tourism and the upgrading of emerging centres, are all areas that will also be impacted by this Regional Development Plan. In the Beni Mellal-Khénifra region, tourism has always been considered a marginal economic activity. However, everything predisposes this region to position itself as a world-class tourist destination given its enormous potential and its undeniable assets. It is full of breathtakingly rich and varied natural landscapes, an immense cultural and historical heritage, and enjoys an exceptional geographical location, right in the center of the country and at the confluence of several roads. Its fabulous natural environment and its dense and diversified intangible cultural capital have, in fact⁵².

a. Litter capacity

In 2018, the bedding capacity of the Beni Mellal-Khénifra region was 6,350 beds. This capacity is divided into the following categories:

- The 1st and 2nd category gîtes offer 1,650 beds;
- Only one 5-star hotel offers 120 beds;
- 7 4-star hotels offer 883 beds;
- 3 star hotels offer 384 beds;
- 15 2-star hotels offer 777 beds;
- 18 one-star hotels offer 738 beds;
- 18 1st and 2nd category guest houses offer 380 beds;
- The hostels offer 131 beds;
- The tourist residences offer 76 beds.

This litter capacity is distributed in the Beni Mellal-Khénifra region as follows:

- The province of Azilal has the largest share with 2,468 beds;
- The province of Béni Mellal comes in second place with a capacity of 1629 beds;
- The province of Khenifra has a capacity of 580 beds;
- The province of Khouribga has a capacity of 353 beds;
- The province of Fkih Ben Saleh has a capacity of 102 beds⁵³.

b. Natural and climatic wonders

The territory of the Béni Mellal-Khénifra region is made

up of 4 large distinct geographical units which maintain relations of exchange, complementarity and forms of solidarity, particularly in the field of agriculture and extensive livestock farming. The geographical position of the Beni Mellal-Khénifra region gives it a climatic diversity that varies from a humid climate (summits of the High Atlas chain and certain peaks of the Middle Atlas) to a sub-arid climate below the mountain ranges. In terms of energy production, the region of Béni Mellal-Khénifra has a very important electrical energy supply system, consisting of 7 hydraulic plants. The agricultural sector is one of the promising sectors of the region and constitutes the bulk of the economic activity of the region⁵⁴. With a predominantly continental climate and a variable average annual temperature between cities, maximum of 40°C in the province of Beni Mellal and minimum of 2°C in the province of Azilal, tourist flows vary according to the seasons⁵⁵.

c. Arts and culture

Artistic activity is at the heart of the identity culture of the Béni Mellal-Khénifra region. Several tourist sites constitute the historical heritage in the region, especially in the mountainous areas. Several actions have emerged for the promotion of culture in the region, namely the creation of the center for the development of mining heritage and another for the interpretation of heritage in Fazaz in the province of Khenifra, a conservation of the rock engravings of Jbel Rat in the province of Azilal as well as a center for promoting the heritage of the region planned in Ain Asserdoune. Several scientific meetings have taken place on the rock engravings of the Central High Atlas aimed at the preservation and enhancement of the archaeological heritage of the Beni Mellal – Khénifra region.

The House of Culture of Beni Mellal, inaugurated by HM King Mohammed VI, constitutes a new milestone in the promotion of the cultural dynamics of the city, in line with the ambitious national policy aimed at the establishment of adequate cultural infrastructure. in all regions experiencing a deficit in this area. The construction of this building materializes the ambition of promoting the artistic and cultural creation of young Moroccans, a strategic priority and an essential component of the policy of sustainable development, carried out under the leadership of HM King Mohammed VI who will doubt a tourist asset⁵⁶.

THE SITUATION OF MOROCCAN TOURISM BEFORE AND DURING THE PANDEMIC

At the level of the Rabat-Salé-Kénitra region

After achieving significant growth in recent years, the Moroccan tourism sector has been brutally affected by

⁵⁴<https://knowledge-uclga.org/region-de-beni-mellal-khenifra.html> (Accessed 28/12/2021)

⁵⁵<http://www.benimellalkhenifra.ma/fr/ps/carte-didentit%C3%A9> (Consulted on 28/12/2021)

⁵⁶https://www.libe.ma/Inauguration-de-la-Maison-de-la-culture-de-Beni-Mellal_a50394.html (Accessed 28/12/2021)

⁵² Territory.

⁵² General meeting report of the Regional Tourism Council (CRT-BK), financial year 2021

⁵³ SRAT, Op-Cit, P10

Covid-19. But the impact is not restricted only to Morocco but also everywhere in the world.

The UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, mentioned in its last issue that in 2019 the GDP of the "travel and tourism" sector indicated 10.4% of international GDP, while in 2020 this sector only gained 5.5% of GDP, something that clearly explains the situation of tourism on an international scale.

In fact, 8,000 tourism businesses operating in various activities (accommodation, catering, travel agencies, tourist transport and car rental) are on a break. Morocco has lost a hundred thousand arrivals, estimating in this sense the losses of the tourism sector between 2020 and 2022 at 138 billion DH, a loss identified only in March.

Due to the spread of Covid 19, the Moroccan government, and more particularly the Ministry of Tourism, could not wait for the end of the confinement period and the return to normal life, and therefore launched a promotional campaign, preventive aimed at publicizing certain tourist areas within the country, an intervention under the name of "Goodbye" which lasted throughout the period of quarantine.

Rabat-Salé-Kénitra, also affected by the pandemic, after an almost total stoppage since March 2020 and after the announcement of the suspension of flights, as well as maritime connections, travel agencies, more particularly, found themselves in the obligation to close.

For their part, traders, craftsmen and guides collapsed after having exhausted their savings, relying on family help to be able to survive, or even on the support of their boss, others have completely changed their activities towards the fields, olive trees or on building sites. Admittedly, the crisis is taking hold locally at the level of tourist activities inferred following the period of confinement, however the classified establishments have been able to ensure their accommodation capacity according to the (Regional Delegate for Tourism, 2020). This comes down to the large number of tourists who found themselves stranded in Morocco after the announcement of the closure of the borders, gathered in Rabat and scattered over various hotels in the capital.

At the level of the Beni Mellal-Khénifra region

When we talk about the tourist potential of the Beni Mellal-Khénifra region, we are talking about a passing tourist region given the number of nights spent by tourists in the area, we are talking about seasonal tourism given the temperature which increases during summer, we are talking about limited number of visitors consisting mainly of local or national tourists, etc. a set of characteristics making this region vulnerable to any disturbance. The Covi'19 pandemic has had a strong impact on the region's tourism sector. Hotels, lodges, guest houses, restaurants, travel agencies, etc. a set of tourist structures have experienced closure, and consequently, a staff who have found themselves facing a difficult economic situation, To promote tourism in the Beni Mellal-Khénifra region in order to help it get out of the said situation, several actions have emerged. An action plan has been launched

including institutional activities, digital communication campaigns, promotional campaigns for tourist offers and digital promotional tools, before and during the pandemic. According to the moral report of the Regional Center of Tourism of the Béni Mellal-Khénifra region (CRT-BK: 2021), a set of measures have emerged by the Regional Council of Tourism and its various institutional partners to promote the region of Beni Mellal -Khénifra as a first-class tourist destination, and to strengthen the partnership with the Regional Council of Beni Mellal-Khénifra to activate internal tourism in the region.

On the institutional side, several actions have emerged, such as the CRT team which was part of the commission in charge of scouting in the municipalities of the region to strengthen the offer of ecotourism in a qualitative and quantitative way (accommodation capacity and tourist attraction). Initiation of the regional brand project, Swiss-Moroccan program for sustainable tourism, partnership agreement linking the region to the CRT-BK, framework agreement and agreements have been signed with the Moroccan National Tourist Office (ONMT) for the financial year 2019-2020, etc.

On the side of promotional campaigns for tourist offers, and on the initiative of the Moroccan national tourist office, the Regional Council of Tourism of Béni Mellal-Khénifra, benefited from a major promotional campaign Radio / Billboards / Electronic Newspapers /Announcements, within the framework of the CO-Marketing Partnership 2020 which made it possible to reach millions of Moroccans throughout the operation. The execution of the media plan was carried out using the website created and the animation of social networks through specific actions such as "Community Management" which began with the hiring of an agency specialized in Digital Marketing.

PRESENTATION OF THE RESEARCH FIELD AND THE STUDY SAMPLE

As part of our research and to achieve the expected results, we planned a qualitative study, and to do this, we administered a semi-directive interview guide with marketing and communication managers or with the managers of a set of tourist entities from the two regions that made up our case study. These are 6 hotel structures of different categories, ranging from a star to a palace. The choice of these hotel entities stems from our need, on the one hand, to compare the effects of the pandemic on these structures and the resilience of each in the face of its negative impacts, and on the other hand, to compare the communication strategies in each category compared to another to increase its turnover and overcome the vagaries of this pandemic, and this through the attraction of more tourists. The following table summarizes the characteristics of the hotel structures that made up our case study.

Name of the structure	Localisation	Category	Capacity	Period of touristic flows
The View Rabat Hotel	Rabat-Sale	Palace	146 units	Winter Spring Summer Autumn
The First suites Hotel	Rabat-Sale	****	19 suites	Summer
Jnane Ain Asserdoune Hotel	Beni Mellal-Khenifra	****	120 beds	Winter Spring Summer Autumn
La Luna Hotel	Beni Mellal-Khenifra	***	68 beds	Winter Spring
Mihad Hotel	Rabat-Sale	**	35 beds	From Septembre à Mai

Table. 1. Presentation of sampling

A. Survey results: Communication strategies

The impact of the pandemic on hotel structures nationally and internationally is undeniable. Statistics from the Department of Studies and Financial Forecasts (DEPF) under the Ministry of Economy, Finance and Administrative Reform, showed that the losses in the tourism sector during the first half of 2020 were close to 18.3 billion Dirhams or 44% of revenue. According to the economic report from the same department (DEPF), the estimated impact of the COVID 19 crisis for the year 2020 is estimated at a deterioration of 69% for tourist arrivals, 60% for foreign exchange earnings. and around 50% job loss.

This unfavorable development follows the downward trend in world tourism which, according to the World Tourism Organization, has seen a decline in the flow of international arrivals, thus causing a drop in world tourist spending between 800 and 1000 billion dollars, i.e. - 60% compared to to the year 2019⁵⁷. Thus, Morocco could not be spared the consequences of this pandemic.

a. Before the pandemic

The tourism sector in Morocco benefited from the interest of the previous government, through the action plan embodied by Vision 2020, which aims to make tourism one of the engines of economic, social and cultural and displays the ambition to be one of the 20 largest destinations in the world to establish itself as a benchmark in the Mediterranean region in terms of sustainable development, thanks to a unique tourism model, which will combine sustained growth with responsible

management of the environment and respect for socio-cultural authenticity. The key words of the project are authenticity, diversity, quality and sustainability⁵⁸. The major objective of the 2020 program reiterated the objective of the 2010 vision which aimed to reach 20 million tourists. This action plan had a positive impact on tourist mobility, which positively influenced the turnover of tourist structures which, according to our interview guides, showed their satisfaction with the turnover recorded during the pre-crisis period, through the occupancy rate of the interviewed entities which reached between 80% and 100%. For tourist structures that have a professional audience, they did not have to budget more resources for advertising promotions since their occupancy rate is ensured by permanent customers who visit the city for work.

The hotel structures interviewed expressed their lack of knowledge of the State's action plan for the promotion of tourism. However, they explained that, even if they have no knowledge of the details of this action plan, its effect was indirect and visible since the filling rate of their structures was satisfactory. This effect is not different among the tourist entities interviewed in the two regions. As for their communication strategies, we noted that the more tourist structures advance in number of stars, the more their communication strategies are developed and vice versa.

b. During the pandemic

The negative impact on the tourism sector was very visible. This effect was manifested through the closure of these entities during the period of confinement, like all other economic structures on a global scale. The post-lockdown period, which is a period characterized by mobility restrictions, has not saved these structures from the negative effects of the crisis. In order to mitigate the impact of the health crisis and the harmful repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry, Morocco has undertaken a multitude of measures aimed at accelerating the recovery of this sector.

On August 03, 2020, a program contract was signed by all public and private actors operating in the tourism sector in order to regain pre-crisis performance and those in accordance with the High Royal Guidelines on the occasion of the throne speech of the July 29, 2020. This contract, covering the period from 2020 to 2022, is designed around three main axes, namely: maintaining jobs and preserving the economic fabric, stimulating demand, and structural transformation of the sector.⁵⁹

During the pandemic, tourism structures in both regions have been negatively impacted. The decline in financial resources due to the drop in turnover of hotel entities has had an impact on human resources. A wave of dismissals

⁵⁷Bouanani El Idrissi, J., Jibraili, Z., &Ladraa, S. (2021). "The tourism sector in the era of COVID 19: Impact study on the organizational performance of hotel establishments in Morocco" InInternational Journal of Accounting, Finance, Auditing, Management and Economics, 2(5), 511-524. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5528078>

⁵⁸<https://www.casainvest.ma/fr/%3Finvestis/strategies-sectorles/vision-2020-du-tourisme>. Accessed 23/1/2022.

⁵⁹Bouanani El Idrissi and all, Op.Cit

characterized this period given the lack of financial resources to cover the internal costs of the staff, despite the intervention of the State to come to the aid of these structures and to fight against the dismissals. These affected more employees not declared to the CNSS.

As for the communication strategies followed by these structures to attract more customers, we noted, according to our interview guides, that the strategies differ according to two variables; the zone of the entity and the tourist category of the establishment.

- Beni Mellal-Khénifra region

Our interview guide revealed to us that the hotel structures in this region were satisfied with the booking site and advertisements on social networks without going towards other more developed communication actions such as patronage, sponsorship or the search for agreements or partnership with potential institutions. For the communication campaigns launched by the State, the entities interviewed postulate that they are not interested in them since the State does not take great steps to help their structures and that the subsidies granted by the State are limited to staff, something that does not change the critical situation in which the Moroccan hotel sector finds itself and that these actions remain insufficient. On the other hand, despite this critical situation,

The impact of the pandemic was felt more in small two- or three-star structures, while for the others, the negative impact was less felt since these hotels were intended to accommodate people returning from abroad for the period of containment.

Communication with the State took place with the aim of benefiting from certain prerogatives recommended to alleviate the impact of the pandemic such as "Oxygen Credit", deferral of taxes, deferral of payment of certain bills related to public services, etc. The main information communicated by the hotels was the reduction in prices to sell their services and this through social networks as the main means of communication with customers and prospects. This relationship with the customer attracts more attention from hotel agents. The structures interviewed said that they give more interest to customers through the activation of the customer portfolio, customer accounts, follow-up calls to measure their satisfaction and the establishment of the complaints book.

As for the internal communication of the organization, we have noticed that these structures have changed their communication strategy with human resources since a number have been dismissed or have chosen voluntary departure due to the lack of activities in the field. In general, and for fear of losing more qualified people, managers opt for a communication strategy that takes into account the needs of employees. The managers have noticed that a lack of confidence in the tourism sector has set in with human resources and consequently a lack of stability. This is explained by the turnover rate on the dashboards of these structures.

- Rabat-Salé-Kénitra region

The results of our interview guide demonstrated a clearly perceived divergence between the different entities interviewed, so we noted that the category of the hotel and the range of its services determine the type of communication strategy followed in favor of its clientele. Indeed, the hotel structures named hotel business, declare that their customer portfolio is specifically made up of businessmen, high personalities belonging to the world of sport (federations), aviation (foreign pilots) or diplomacy (ambassadors). And add in this perspective that they were not really in need to think of a real communication strategy in order to attract a large audience.

Our interviews thus revealed that this category of hotels did not suffer an economic fall in terms of their turnover during the period of the crisis, given that a large number of foreign people were found in the obligation to confine themselves to these hotels just after the government announced the closure of air and sea borders.

Furthermore, internally, these respondents mentioned that they have opted for a new communication strategy aimed at respecting barrier gestures in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19, we note the renunciation of paper media, meetings and replace them with morning briefings while respecting sanitary measures.

With regard to communication with staff, we have noted that managers have been forced to change their communication strategy in the face of this lack of visibility in the sector and the psychological repercussions of the crisis on the mental health of staff. especially after deciding to agree to a 25% cut in their income instead of resorting to layoffs.

Moreover, if at the level of the hotels mentioned above the managers became aware of the importance of a real communication strategy during the crisis, the less classified hotels neglected this aspect in the face of significant economic losses, between layoffs, and salary cuts for administrators who on their part were supposed to do other tasks in order to maintain their positions. We thus noted a total absence of meetings and the decisions were taken in a categorical and impromptu way.

As far as external communication was concerned, lowering prices was the only recourse. These hotel entities (2 and 3 stars) have turned to a few platforms through the net such as Booking, Agoda, Air bnb... on which they post their services and discount offers.

V. DISCUSSION AND SYNTHESIS OF THE STUDY

In terms of the first part of the questions, which concerns the communication strategy followed before the pandemic, our 6 respondents pointed out that the communication strategy was limited to announcements on social networks and on a few tourists, promotion sites such as Booking.

We have noticed that low category hotel entities (1, 2 or 3 stars) do not have a good communication strategy. They

are content with lower prices and a few advertising publications on social networks. Indeed, the small and medium tourist structures of the two regions are invited to develop their communication strategy in order to be able to boost their turnover.

The interviews that we had with the managers of the tourist entities revealed to us a set of observations that we can classify according to the target. Thus, we can identify strategies related to marketing communication, institutional communication and internal functional communication.

The strategy linked to marketing communication

To improve their turnover, tourist entities are required to:

- *Develop more communication with the customer and ensure careful follow-up to measure the level of his satisfaction;*
- *Build more loyalty relationships with customers;*
- *Encourage loyal customers through attractive promotions and offers;*
- *Grant the mission of promoting promotional communication to a professional instead of entrusting it to an employee who is not qualified in the field of communication;*
- *Invest in media tools to encourage people to travel and to consume the hotel product, such as posters, press relations, radio, television and the Internet.*

The strategy related to institutional communication

To improve their brand image, hotel structures are invited to:

- *Use more non-media tools to develop their brand image, such as patronage, sponsorship and patronage;*
- *Organize open houses to promote their products and services to customers;*
- *Activate sponsorship which allows the win-win relationship;*
- *Collaborate with influencers to attract more Moroccan customers.*

The strategy related to internal functional communication

To improve internal communication in the organization, hotel structures are invited to:

- *Apply the labor code in hotel establishments;*
- *Transform the fear that has set in among staff of losing their jobs due to the pandemic into a sense of security;*
- *Detect the real causes of staff turnover and fight against these causes;*

- *Develop the feeling of belonging and identification with the place of work for a good profitability of the staff;*
- *Use the means of internal communication to approach the employees of the strategies and values of the tourist organisation, such as the internal newspaper, the staff magazine, information meetings and training cycles.*

We must point out that despite the communication actions that hotel structures can undertake to boost the sale of their services, certain conditions exceed them and lower tourist flows, such as the pandemic which is experiencing peak periods and mobility restrictions in the kingdom. . We can also add that when the pandemic subsides and mobility starts again, a new variant of Covid'19 is born, so either travel restrictions are imposed by the State, or people minimize their travel for fear of being infected.

On the other hand, the entities interviewed expressed certain needs that they hope will be provided by the State to help them get out of their crisis situation, such as:

- *The communication of the Moroccan tourism potential on an international scale;*
- *Help them collaborate with influencers to attract more Moroccan customers;*
- *Encourage tourism investments with concrete and interesting actions;*
- *Develop the attractiveness of small towns to move from a city of passage of two to five nights;*
- *Market the tourism potential and sustainable tourism in the Ben Mellal-Khénifra region.*

CONCLUSION

The tourism sector in Morocco is considered to be a vital sector for the growth of the Moroccan economy. Like almost the majority of businesses, tourist structures have been strongly affected by the current health crisis. The latter revealed the flaws in the communication strategies used to promote their tourism product. The latter who need more than ever to be communicated in a modern and developed way. If before the pandemic tourist establishments were in a situation of satisfaction despite the lack of strategies developed to promote their product, today the situation is different and requires more promotional actions.

Our qualitative study, which focused on six establishments belonging to two Moroccan regions, shed light on the fragility of the hotel sector in the face of a compromised recovery due to the new Omicron variant. This fragility has an impact on the financial aspect, despite the efforts made by the State.

We noted a great lack of communication know-how and insufficient marketing and institutional communication strategies followed by hotel establishments. Hotel establishments lack qualified staff in promotional communication.

We have realized that the human resources of hotel institutions play a key role in maintaining organizational performance. To do this, managerial and psychological follow-up aimed at supporting employees is a priority in order to be able to keep a skilled workforce in the field and who are trying to change jobs, which in their eyes is no longer profitable. This employee who deserves special attention, because psychological support has unfortunately been lacking during this pandemic as pointed out by our interviewees.

Finally, we can point out that our chosen methodology is faced with the possibility of generalizing our results since the pandemic has not only affected the two regions that have been the case of our study, but the entire tourism sector on the country and globally.

Indeed, this study could be extended to different hotel accommodation structures such as cottages, Riad, guest houses, etc. and to explore other geographical areas outside the Beni Mellal-Khénifra or Rabat-Salé-Kénitra axis.

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