



## **Green marketing in the context of sustainable tourism: Current situation and Perspectives**

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**Abstract:** Sustainable tourism is a form of tourism that takes into account the three pillars of sustainable development in the generation of its activities. The latter uses green marketing, a responsible version of marketing, to responsibly promote various tourism products and services. However, the sustainable tourism sector has not been able to escape unhealthy marketing practices such as “greenwashing” which highlights ecological pseudo-products, and only wreaks havoc on the image of genuinely responsible companies or the attitudes of consumers.

Therefore, we want to present the synthesis of our research of scientific literature through this article and highlight the themes of sustainable tourism and green marketing. Thus, our article will be structured around 3 parts: We will first address the conceptual framework of sustainable tourism and its foundations, then we will deal with the concept of green marketing and its tools, and finally, we will illustrate with cases adhering to sustainable tourism in Morocco and examples of greenwashing in tourism.

**Keywords:** Sustainable tourism, Tourism, Green marketing, Green advertising, Greenwashing.

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### **1 Introduction**

The tourism industry has proved over the years that it can be a major asset for the development and economic growth of countries, particularly developing countries. With the rise of ecological demands and the signing of global pacts on sustainable development, a new form of tourism has emerged: sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism refers to tourism activities that adhere to the principles of sustainable development, respecting the culture and traditions of local communities while contributing to their economic development.

Green marketing, on the other hand, is a form of marketing that focuses on ecological causes using classic commercial marketing tools. Green advertising is one of its key tools, even if it faces an uphill battle with

greenwashing. As for Morocco, the Ministry of Tourism signed the Moroccan Charter for Sustainable Tourism in January 2016 with a view to promoting a sustainable approach within tourism activities, preserving the heritage, culture and traditions of its destinations, and fighting poverty and contributing to improving the economic situation of its regions.

Thus, we wish to present in this paper a synthesis of our literature search in terms of the conceptual framework of sustainable tourism and its foundations, green marketing and its tools, and finally, we will illustrate with cases of initiatives adhering to the principles of sustainable tourism in Morocco, whose industry is also subject to greenwashing.

## **2 Conceptual framework of sustainable tourism**

### **2.1 Sustainable tourism and sustainable development: origins and assets**

The tourism sector is seen as a real lever for economic growth in countries all over the world. In addition to economic growth, tourism is a means of achieving development on several levels, notably social and territorial.

However, the economic, social and territorial benefits generated by tourism do not allow it to escape the environmental issues raised by sustainable development, given that the tourism sector tends to focus on information, consumer satisfaction (Soteriades and Avgeli, 2007), and profit maximization, often to the detriment of the ecological dimension. Studies have shown that the tourism sector is responsible for around 5% of greenhouse gas emissions, as it has many other negative impacts on the environment (Senn Zilberberg et al, 2016).

Indeed, in the 1970s, World Bank policies played a key role in encouraging developing countries to give greater importance to the tourism sector and to invest in it in order to benefit from its economic spin-offs in terms of attracting foreign visitors and therefore foreign currency (Christ et al. 2003).

Governments have therefore realized the advantages of tourism, and that the tourist industry is both a genuine means of economic development and a tool for redistributing wealth between countries in the North and South (Jafari, 1973). However, Camus et al (2010) take a different view, asserting that while the tourism industry represents economic advantages, it is the developed countries that benefit more than those in the South.

The late 1980s saw increasing attention paid to the environment and the protection of natural resources, notably through the Brundtland Report in 1987, which highlighted the importance of sustainable development, defining it as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to do the same. Thus, sustainable development is a whole approach that encourages responsible thinking before embarking on the exploitation of available natural resources, and responsibly guides technical development and investment choices (Rakotomalala-Ramandimbarison, 2019).

In 1992, at the Rio Conference on Development and the Environment, 172 governments signed the Rio Declaration (Arcuset, 2013) to establish a global partnership that fosters an attitude of respect towards the environment and the protection of its resources. The Lanzarote World Conference in 1995 led to the formulation of the Sustainable Tourism Charter: 75 countries took part in the conference, with over 1,000 participants ranging from representatives of renowned international organizations to government representatives (Marin, 2003). Then, in 1999, the UNWTO (World Tourism Organization) actively participated in the Johannesburg Summit, and a global code of ethics for tourism was established (François, 2004).

In 2004, the UNWTO emphasized the guiding principles of sustainable tourism, which draw on sustainable tourism management practices and the principles of sustainable development, focusing on 3 aspects: environmental, socio-cultural and economic, pointing out that these principles must achieve a certain balance and are applicable across all types of tourism and all types of destinations (Senn Zilberberg et al, 2016). In addition, "Towards sustainable tourism: a guide for decision-makers" was published by UNWTO and UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) in 2006.

Then, in 2007, a list of global benchmarks for sustainable tourism was drawn up thanks to the work carried out by the UN (United Nations) in collaboration with other international tourism players, notably the global association for sustainable standards, the ISEAL Alliance (International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling Alliance).

Following this work on tourism sustainability criteria, the GSTC (Global Sustainable Tourism Council) came into being in 2011, its main aim being to encourage adherence to standardized sustainable tourism principles that promote, among other things, respect for the environment and protection of natural resources (Senn Zilberberg et al, 2016). Furthermore, according to Rakotomalala-Ramandimbarison (2019), the development of the tourism sector depends first and foremost on the State. Indeed, the state is responsible for building the necessary infrastructure, such as airports and highways, financing tourism projects and planning the territory, and intervening to develop all forms of tourism.

Secondly, other players in the tourism sector such as restaurant owners, hotels and other service providers must commit to the development of the territory in which they operate, not forgetting to integrate sustainable development into their tourism strategies and activities (Guillouzo, 2014).

Integrating the principles of sustainable development into a company's overall strategy is part of a CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) approach that offers several competitive advantages for the company, whether in terms of enhancing its image in the eyes of consumers and the general public and will be subject to transparent communication advocating sustainability and ecological quality, or in terms of cost and waste control (Lejeune, 2010).

Furthermore, Northern European countries are more sensitive to the environmental and ecological cause (Guillon, 2004), and tourists from these countries are willing to change their tourism practices to help protect the

environment and improve the ecological situation. In contrast, English-speaking tourists are less sensitive to environmental issues (Camus et al, 2010).

Thus, sustainable tourism seeks to balance the three pillars of sustainable development: environmental, social and economic, in addition to governance, which involves the active participation of stakeholders, including local communities (Choi and Sirakaya, 2006). It is thus characterized by a long-term vision marked by sustainability (Miller, 2001) and the reconciliation of economic, social and environmental considerations. Furthermore, in terms of a sustainable development indicator, it is preferable, in terms of relevance, for it to cover more than one of these three pillars of sustainable development (Tanguay et al, 2012; Leroux and Pupion, 2014).

## **2.2 Sustainable tourism assets**

In the tourism sector, sustainable tourism is experiencing the most rapid growth (Cox, 2007).

Green, sustainable, nature or ecotourism are all forms of tourism that refer to sustainability and ecological quality (François, 2004). Sustainable tourism promotes tourism activities that respect the natural resources and cultural and social aspects of the territory that explain its attractiveness and tourism demand (Raboteur, 2000), and that contribute to the economic development of the territory as well as to the fulfillment of its individuals (Hmioui and Leroux, 2019).

For Lu and Nepal (2009), the guiding principles of sustainable tourism can be summed up in the protection of biodiversity and human heritage, as well as strategic planning and development characterized by sustainability over time that will make it possible to satisfy current needs and those of future generations. Lozato and Balfet (2004) agree, stating that the moderate use of natural tourism resources is an environmental obligation, and the contribution of the local population must be encouraged and taken into account. Sustainable tourism respects the environment and the traditions of local communities (François, 2008). The responsible tourist is one who has a social and environmental conscience when traveling, and adopts a respectful attitude towards the environment, the traditions and cultural values of local communities (Behnassi, 2008).

For businesses operating in the tourism sector, adhering to the principles of sustainable tourism will enable them to control costs and better manage waste, control water and electricity consumption and limit the use of environmentally toxic products. In this way, their tourism activities and products are based on ecological and social quality (Merasli, 2004). However, creating a sustainable tourism offer requires a structured, well-thought-out approach, particularly in terms of repercussions, and requires greater investment than in the case of mass tourism (Merasli, 2004).

As for the challenges of sustainable tourism (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005), they are numerous and concern all the players involved in tourism activity (Hmioui and Leroux, 2019), and include among others:

- Creating an environmentally-friendly tourism offer;
- Seek out new markets where tourists are sensitive to the principles of sustainable development;
- Controlling costs (water, electricity, etc.) and improving waste management;
- Preservation of cultural and natural heritage;
- Participation in economic development and the fight against poverty;
- Improving the image of the tourist destination and strengthening the company's image;
- Improving the tourism offering and meeting customer needs;

### 2.3 Sustainable tourism and territorial attractiveness

The sustainable tourism development program drawn up by the UNWTO and UNEP in 2006 sets out twelve sustainable tourism objectives that all future programs must take into account (Leroux, 2010):

- Economic viability
- Social equity
- Community well-being
- Biological diversity
- Environmental purity
- Local prosperity
- Local control
- Rational use of resources
- Visitor satisfaction
- Physical integrity
- Quality of employment
- Cultural wealth

Sustainable tourism plays an important role in terms of territorial attractiveness (Leroux and Pupion, 2014). According to Ruiz (2014), there are two categories of natural spaces based on tourist interest:

- Remarkable areas: these are areas or sites that receive a great deal of tourist traffic and are recognized either nationally or internationally, and benefit from budgets dedicated to their upkeep and protection, such as national parks or listed sites;
- Ordinary nature: in contrast to remarkable areas, ordinary nature includes rural environments that are less frequented than listed sites, but which are endowed with a high level of biodiversity. However, these areas receive no specific funding or management structure.

A tourist destination brings together a range of environmental, human, socio-cultural, organizational, physical and financial resources. The development of a tourist destination depends, on one hand, on the resources it has at its

disposal and which it mobilizes as part of its tourism offering, and on the other hand, on the financial means required for investment (Pupion, 2010).

Thus, there are cultural and environmental resources that meet the primary needs of consumers (the forest, fauna and flora for walks, the architectural heritage for site visits, etc.), and resources that offer peripheral facilitation or comfort services (stores, catering services, etc.). Although not all of these resources represent a competitive advantage, their depreciation inevitably leads to a depreciation in the value created at destination level (Pupion, 2010).

### **3 Green marketing and sustainable tourism**

In the scientific literature, a number of studies have focused on marketing trends in relation to the environment and the consumer (Le Gall, 2002 ; Sebti, 2022), namely green marketing, environmental marketing, ecological marketing or eco-marketing. Several studies use these terms interchangeably, while others point to differences in terminology (Peattie, 2001 ; Boukhedimi, 2022).

In the late 1970s, the term "environmental marketing" emerged, also known as "ecological marketing", "eco-marketing" or "ecolo-marketing" or "green marketing" (Boyer and Poisson, 1992), constituting one of the first attempts to take ecological issues into consideration in the disciplinary field of marketing (Lavorata, 2012). According to Boyer and Poisson (1992), ecological marketing means integrating the ecological dimension into marketing strategies. It refers to marketing activities aimed at finding solutions to environmental problems (Henion and Kinnear, 1976).

Ecological marketing was therefore born out of growing consumer demand for green products, and the desire of companies to strengthen their image with consumers by providing an environmentally-friendly offering and making a commitment to protecting the environment. For their part, Kotler and Bliemel (1999) assert that ecological marketing is part of the disciplinary field of social marketing, and uses the tools of commercial marketing to respond to various ecological and socio-cultural issues.

The concept of green marketing really emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It refers to all marketing activities aimed at minimizing the environmental and social impact of products and production systems, while guaranteeing customer satisfaction and sustainable profitability (Peattie, 2001).

According to Laville (2009), green marketing is an ethical argument for products or services that have a social or ecological added value on the market. It is also a social process through which individuals respond to their needs in an ethical manner that respects the environment (Ramezainian et al., 2009; Boukhedimi, 2021). We can see that the concepts of "ecological marketing" and "green marketing" are closely related and form part of the field of study of social marketing (Laville, 2009), and they share the association of the ecological dimension with marketing.

However, the definition of green marketing includes the notion of the social and is mainly distinguished from ecological marketing according to Le Gall, (2002) by the moral and societal motivations that are replaced in ecological marketing by market pressures and which is characterized by an anticipatory vision (Elloumi Ayedi and Kammoun, 2019). This makes it all the more important for marketers to consider the societal and political implications of their decisions (Dampérat and Dussart, 2007).

Green advertising is also a very important tool in green marketing. Indeed, advertising is a persuasive communication tool whose aim is to encourage consumption (Cathelat, 1968). Green advertising is a form of advertising discourse that adheres to the principles of sustainable development (El Balbal and Omari, 2022). It must therefore meet one or more of the following criteria (Banarjee, Gulas and Iyer, 1995):

- Explicitly or implicitly addresses the relationship between a product/service and the biophysical environment;
- Promotes an ecological lifestyle, with or without highlighting a product/service;
- Presents a corporate image of environmental responsibility.

Nevertheless, ethical green advertising has been in rivalry since the 1990s with greenwashing, which is an unhealthy advertising practice that puts forward ecological arguments (El Balbal and Omari, 2022) to enhance the image of the company in question (Audouin et al, 2009), when in reality the latter does not adhere to the principles of sustainable development.

#### **4 Greenwashing and sustainable tourism in Morocco: Current situation and perspectives**

For the Moroccan economy, the tourism sector represents a genuine lever for growth and socio-cultural development, contributing 12% to national GDP according to the *Annuaire statistique du tourisme 2015* ([www.observatoiredu tourisme.ma](http://www.observatoiredu tourisme.ma)), and 5% to employment.

Thus, in order to accompany the global transformation that has characterized the tourism industry, which is now concerned with the ecological and sustainable dimension of the sector, Morocco signed the Moroccan Charter for Sustainable Tourism in January 2016, and put in place guiding principles governing the Moroccan tourism industry so that it adheres to sustainability in ecological, social, cultural, and economic terms. Thus, the Moroccan Ministry of Tourism invites the various tourism stakeholders in the kingdom, including citizens and tourists, to comply with the following principles (Guertaoui, 2019):

- Commitment to protecting biodiversity and the environment;
- Preservation of local heritage and culture;
- Respect for local communities and commitment to local development;
- Adherence to the principles of social responsibility, fairness and ethics.

This approach will enable Morocco to preserve its environment and the biodiversity that characterizes it, in addition to improving the quality of life of local communities and the tourism offering in general.

However, Morocco faces a number of challenges in order to improve the tourism sector on several levels, including:

- Diversify the tourism offering and the number of tourist destinations;
- Develop and fully exploit the kingdom's tourism resources, given that only 350 of the 1,500 existing resources are partially exploited ([www.tourisme.gov.ma](http://www.tourisme.gov.ma));
- Prioritize the preservation and enhancement of its cultural heritage.

In addition, the Moroccan tourism sector has not escaped greenwashing, with several tourist agencies and organizers offering so-called eco-responsible holidays and tourist activities, without any real adherence to the principles of sustainable tourism. This is particularly true of 4x4 raids, which inconvenience the local population and traumatize wildlife, not to mention the waste generated by holidays and hikes, which pollute the environment and spoil the landscape.

Nevertheless, a number of Moroccan tourism players have responded positively to requests from the Ministry of Tourism to adhere to the principles of sustainable tourism. Here are a few examples of organizations promoting ecological culture within tourism in Morocco (Guertaoui, 2019):

- Terres Nomades: This travel agency promotes an ecological culture within tourism, through responsible and supportive tourist activities, where respect for the environment and the traditions of the local population is a priority;
- Anergui: This is an association created by the "Terres Nomades" agency, whose aim is to contribute to the financing of projects relating to local crafts, agriculture, education and health;
- Morocco at home (Le Maroc chez l'habitant): This is an association that allows tourists, in addition to regular tourist activities such as visiting historical monuments and enjoying natural landscapes, to visit local people to see more closely how they live and assimilate their local culture and traditions;
- The Amanar Lands: This is a unique ecotourism project (Aniba, 2016), founded by Jean Martin Herbercq, 30 minutes from Marrakech, near Tahanaout and spread over 120 hectares. This hotel project simultaneously links business tourism, through its offer for meetings and seminars in dedicated rooms or at the 250 m<sup>2</sup> tented plenary, and individual and family tourism. Les Terres d'Amanar offers activities supervised by qualified professionals. The menus on offer are prepared using local produce and by the women of the surrounding douars, thereby contributing to the employment of local villagers. The project won Morocco's Responsible Tourism Trophy in 2009, and the Green Key label in 2011, the first international environmental label for accommodation.

## 5. Conclusion

Sustainable tourism adheres to the principles of sustainable development, and plays a crucial role in economic development and regional appeal. It is committed to respecting the biodiversity of the ecological system and preserving the cultural and human heritage of tourist destinations, as well as contributing to the employability and self-fulfilment of the local population.

To promote their sustainable tourism activities, tourism-oriented companies use green marketing, particularly green advertising, to attract more responsible tourists and improve their image in the eyes of consumers and the general public. Nevertheless, the battle between green advertising and greenwashing continues.

Hence, Morocco signed the Moroccan Charter for Sustainable Tourism in January 2016, in order to improve the Moroccan tourism offering in terms of ecological quality and highlight the Moroccan heritage and cultural aspect that characterizes its tourist destinations while encouraging respect for and preservation of it. A number of Moroccan tourism players are now adhering to sustainable tourism, such as "Terre d'Amanar" and "Morocco chez l'habitant", demonstrating a willingness to change towards better practices that respect the environment and heritage.

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