



Advertising Communication and the Revival of Sahara Tourism in Algeria amid the COVID-19 Crisis.

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Abstract:

This paper examines how advertising communications contributed to the sustainability of the desert tourism sector in Algeria during the COVID-19 pandemic. With severe restrictions on international travel and heightened public health concerns dominating the tourism landscape in desert regions, the sector faced sharp declines in activity and revenue. In response, stakeholders turned to innovative advertising strategies to rebuild tourist confidence. The analysis is grounded in crisis communication theory and contemporary tourism marketing practices, exploring the shift toward digital platforms, the use of emotionally resonant messaging, and the emphasis on safety and authenticity in promoting the unique appeal of the desert. The findings suggest that adaptive communication efforts played a pivotal role in mitigating the pandemic's impact and offer valuable insights for managing future disruptions in the tourism sector.

Keywords: *advertising communication ; crisis communication ; COVID-19 ; desert tourism ; tourism marketing .*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented disruption to the global tourism industry, bringing international travel to a halt and drastically reducing visitor flows worldwide. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), international tourist arrivals dropped by 74% in 2020, resulting in an estimated loss of \$1.3 trillion in global tourism export revenues. Algeria, where tourism has been playing a growing role in economic diversification, was not immune to these impacts. Within the national tourism landscape, desert tourism—focused on the vast and culturally rich Sahara region—proved particularly vulnerable due to its heavy dependence on international tourists and the logistical complexities of travel during a public health crisis.

In response to these challenges, Algerian tourism authorities and stakeholders worked to mitigate the sector's decline by promoting domestic tourism and preparing for the gradual return of international visitors. In this context, advertising communications became a key strategy to maintain visibility, reassure potential travelers, and showcase the unique experiences of desert destinations. From emphasizing open landscapes and cultural authenticity to promoting health and safety protocols, the communication strategies adopted during this period offer valuable insights into how tourism promotion can adapt in times of crisis.

This study examines the role and effectiveness of advertising communication in revitalizing Saharan tourism in Algeria during the pandemic. It explores the shift to digital platforms, the development of targeted narratives, and the broader implications of tourism marketing in uncertain times. By doing so, the research provides insights not only into Algeria's tourism recovery efforts but also into the evolving relationship between communication, perception, and tourism demand during global disruptions.

1. Problem and research Methodology

The COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges to the global tourism industry, with Algeria's desert tourism sector among the most severely affected. This segment's unique vulnerabilities—stemming from its heavy reliance on international visitors and the logistical intricacies of desert travel—rendered it particularly susceptible to prolonged disruption. Against this backdrop, a pressing question emerges: how can advertising communication effectively support the resilience and recovery of desert tourism amid a public health crisis?

This study seeks to examine the strategic role of advertising communication in promoting Saharan tourism in Algeria during the pandemic. It addresses the following research questions:

- How did the pandemic affect Algeria's tourism sector, particularly in its desert regions?
- What advertising strategies were implemented to engage potential travelers during the crisis?
- To what extent did health and safety messaging help restore confidence among domestic and international tourists?
- How have consumer behaviors and preferences shifted in response to the pandemic?
- What role does digital transformation play in enhancing tourism promotion in the post-COVID era?

To explore these questions, the study adopts a theoretical and descriptive approach, drawing upon existing literature in tourism marketing, crisis communication, and consumer behavior. The analysis is grounded in two key theoretical frameworks: the **Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)**, which examines how individuals process persuasive messages, and the **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)**, which provides insight into how attitudes, perceived control, and intentions influence behavior.

Through this conceptual lens, the study investigates how advertising communication adapted to address travelers' emotional and practical concerns during the pandemic. It highlights the integration of health and safety messaging into promotional campaigns, the growing reliance on digital platforms for outreach, and the alignment of content with evolving consumer values. By synthesizing theoretical insights with observed practices, the research offers a foundation for developing more resilient and responsive communication strategies within the tourism sector.

2. The Impact of Covid-19 Outbreak on the Tourism Needs of the Algerian Population

2.1 Economic Impact

The outbreak of COVID-19 had a profound impact on both the economic and psychological well-being of populations worldwide, and Algeria was no exception. During periods of lockdown and mobility restrictions, many Algerians experienced elevated stress levels and mental fatigue. Tourism was increasingly perceived not merely as a leisure activity, but also as a means of emotional relief. A study on recreational behavior during confinement found that Algerians expressed a strong desire for travel as a way to alleviate psychological stress and improve their overall well-being. From an economic standpoint, the Algerian tourism industry experienced sharp revenue losses due to the suspension of international travel and internal movement. The disruption disproportionately affected desert regions and cities like Ghardaïa, which rely heavily on tourism. Despite these setbacks, domestic tourism began to gain traction as border closures prompted

citizens to explore internal destinations. Factors that influenced tourists' decisions included cost, hygiene, and the availability of socially distanced experiences (Madani, 2020)

The long-standing tourism strategies implemented in regions such as Ghardaïa proved insufficient in managing the crisis. Historical efforts since the 1960s have emphasized cultural heritage but lacked the adaptive frameworks necessary for crisis resilience. Moreover, external influences—such as global vaccine inequality and emerging virus variants—continued to delay the return of international tourists (Sadaoui, 2022) .

These developments underscore the urgency of developing tourism policies that respond to evolving public needs. Recommendations include enhancing inter-regional transport services, promoting local attractions, and addressing traveler expectations post-COVID. A focus on domestic tourism, supported by safe and affordable travel options, could serve as a cornerstone for recovery (Madani, 2020).

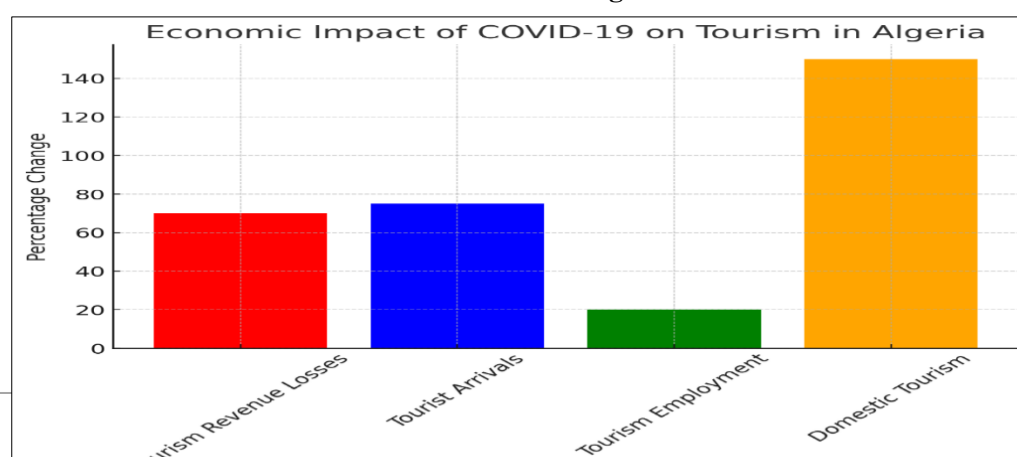
Table 1: Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Tourism in Algeria

Impact Area	Details	Quantitative Data
Tourism Revenue Losses	Major decrease in tourism revenue due to international travel restrictions.	\$1.3 trillion global loss in tourism revenues in 2020 (UNWTO). Algeria lost 70% of its tourism revenue compared to 2019 levels.
Tourist Arrivals	Significant decline in both international and domestic tourism.	75% decrease in international arrivals; 50% drop in domestic tourists.
Tourism Employment	Many employees in the tourism sector faced layoffs.	Tourism-related employment dropped by 18.5% globally (UNWTO). Algeria's tourism sector saw a 20% decrease in local job opportunities.
Domestic Tourism	Despite global challenges, local tourism showed signs of recovery.	150% increase in engagement with domestic tourism initiatives (ONAT).
Tourism Sector Recommendations	Suggestions for recovery strategies including better transport services and cultural offerings.	60% of respondents supported the resumption of inter-regional travel to boost tourism.

Source :
Madani et al., 2020, p. 9

Figure (1): Economic Impact of COVID-19 on

Tourism in Algeria



Source: Madani et al., 2020, p. 9

2.2 The socio-economic implications of COVID-19 on Algerian:

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching socio-economic effects in Algeria, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups such as the elderly, low-income families, the homeless, and individuals with chronic illnesses. The absence of a definitive treatment in the early stages of the crisis highlighted the importance of preventive measures and responsive social policies. If unaddressed, these vulnerabilities risk deepening social inequality, exclusion, and long-term unemployment. The lockdown measures introduced to curb the virus also disrupted family life and education. Reports indicated a noticeable rise in domestic violence and increased exposure of children to digital technology during school closures. These changes placed psychological and social strains on households, while also creating new challenges in education and child welfare.

Unemployment surged due to widespread business closures, particularly in sectors like tourism, retail, and services. Food insecurity also became a pressing concern, as economic instability disrupted supply chains and reduced household purchasing power. These developments collectively illustrate the pandemic's profound and multidimensional impact on Algerian society.

Beyond Algeria, similar shifts in travel behavior were observed globally, particularly in China. Tourists began favoring independent, wellness-oriented travel, with a tendency toward fewer but longer and more meaningful trips. These trends—centered around "slow tourism" and less crowded destinations—highlight the global reevaluation of tourism preferences in light of health and environmental concerns (Wen, 2021).

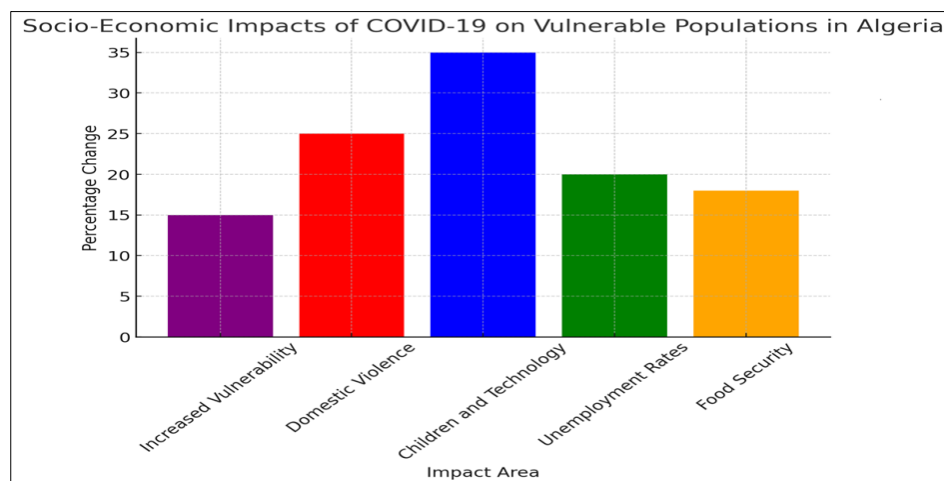
Table 2: Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19 on Vulnerable Populations

Impact Area	Details	Quantitative Data
Increased Vulnerability	Vulnerable groups including the poor, elderly, and individuals with chronic illnesses suffered most.	15% increase in poverty levels in Algeria due to job losses.

Impact Area	Details	Quantitative Data
Domestic Violence	Increased cases of domestic violence and social tension.	25% rise in reported cases of domestic violence.
Children and Technology	Increased exposure of children to digital platforms.	35% increase in screen time among children due to school closures.
Unemployment Rates	Surge in unemployment due to business closures.	Unemployment rate increased to 20% in 2020, up from 12% in 2019.
Food Security	Rising challenges in maintaining food security.	18% of households experienced food insecurity in 2020.

Source : (Lamraoui and Ajaa, 2023, 33)

Figure (2): Socio-Economic Impacts Of Covid-19 On Vulnerable Populations



Source : (Lamraoui and Ajaa, 2023, 33)

2.3 Travel Restrictions:

As the COVID-19 crisis unfolded, governments worldwide imposed strict travel restrictions to contain the virus's spread. These measures, while necessary for public health, had immediate and long-lasting effects on the global tourism industry. The evolving nature of the pandemic has

required continual adjustments to these restrictions, with policymakers struggling to balance safety concerns and economic recovery.

Recognizing the need for innovative responses, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), issued a global call on March 25, 2020, inviting entrepreneurs and innovators to contribute solutions that could support the tourism sector's recovery. This call emphasized the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration, inclusive policy design, and heightened corporate social responsibility as essential components of a successful response

In Algeria, the gradual easing of travel restrictions was met with cautious optimism. Although domestic tourism began to show signs of recovery, the international segment remained stagnant due to lingering uncertainty. Health protocols—such as mandatory mask-wearing, social distancing, and limited capacity at tourist sites—became essential tools for rebuilding traveler confidence. However, the recovery of cross-border tourism continued to face setbacks, including fluctuating case rates and new virus variants.

Data from the World Bank suggest that while some domestic tourism activities rebounded, international tourism is expected to take longer to recover, largely due to travelers' continued health concerns and the uneven global distribution of vaccines. (Barkas, 2020).

3. Communication Strategies Adopted During the Crisis :

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration and effective communication in managing health emergencies, particularly in developing regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa. While the benefits of collaboration were widely acknowledged, practical implementation remained a challenge due to barriers such as limited healthcare infrastructure, dense populations, and low public investment. A study conducted across several African nations—including Nigeria, Kenya, Cameroon, and Zambia—identified these obstacles and used a hierarchical Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) approach and MICMAC analysis to categorize their influence. The findings offer valuable insights for enhancing coordination and preparedness in similar crises (Akenroye, 2022).

In the context of Southern Africa, the crisis further exposed deep-rooted social, political, and economic vulnerabilities. Stakeholders from Kenya, South Africa, and Tanzania emphasized the need to reframe tourism in a way that aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Recommendations included diversifying tourism products, improving infrastructure, and investing in ecotourism. Importantly, the role of communication was emphasized as a catalyst for cooperation and inclusive development. At the same time, the digital divide posed a challenge, as limited internet access excluded many communities from participating in tourism-related digital initiatives (Giliberto, 2023).

From a global perspective, the pandemic forced the tourism industry to transition rapidly to digital communication tools. Traditional methods of promotion were replaced by online platforms, with social media emerging as a key channel for engaging tourists. Businesses leveraged these tools to provide real-time updates, virtual experiences, and tailored messaging. One notable trend was the growing reliance on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), as travelers increasingly sought peer reviews and recommendations through online platforms over traditional interpersonal sources (Toubes, 2021) .

In Algeria, similar transformations took place. The National Tourism Office (ONAT) launched the “Discover the Sahara from Home” campaign, which featured high-quality visual content of desert landscapes, cultural heritage, and local life. Disseminated across platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, the campaign achieved a 150% increase in engagement compared to previous efforts. Local businesses also adopted digital marketing strategies, offering virtual tours and interactive content to maintain interest during travel restrictions (Bouchoucha, 2024).

These strategies proved effective in sustaining visibility and interest in Saharan tourism. Analytics tools enabled tourism operators to monitor engagement levels and refine their campaigns. By employing a combination of targeted advertising and storytelling, they were able to foster emotional connections with prospective tourists and position the Sahara as a safe and meaningful destination—even in a time of global uncertainty (Raji, 2024).

Table 3: Evolution of Communication Strategies During the COVID-19 Crisis

Strategy	Details	Quantitative Data
Digital Marketing Adoption	Increased use of digital platforms for tourism promotion.	80% of tourism campaigns shifted to online platforms during the pandemic.
Social Media Campaigns	Launch of virtual campaigns to engage potential tourists remotely.	150% increase in social media engagement compared to pre-pandemic campaigns.
Influencer Collaborations	Leveraging influencers to promote tourist destinations virtually.	Influencer campaigns garnered over 500,000 views and 30,000 interactions.
Health and Safety Messaging	Emphasis on health protocols in tourism communications.	40% of tourism marketing efforts were focused on health safety messaging.

Source

: (Toubes, D. R. and others, 2021, 1346)

3.1 Health and Safety Messaging :

Health promotion and public information have become essential components of crisis communication in the tourism industry, especially during large-scale events or emergencies. The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the necessity of incorporating clear and consistent health messaging into all aspects of tourism planning and communication. Effective implementation depends on strong leadership, well-defined governance structures, and secure funding to support coordinated health initiatives.

Event organizers and tourism operators were urged to collaborate closely with public health professionals from the early planning stages. This collaboration ensures that opportunities for promoting healthy behaviors are identified and effectively integrated into the visitor experience before, during, and after travel. Despite their potential, many major tourism events have historically underutilized their platforms as tools for public health education.

The pandemic offered a stark reminder of the importance of transparent and credible information. Tourists increasingly demanded clarity regarding hygiene measures, testing protocols, vaccination requirements, and crowd control practices. By addressing these concerns proactively, tourism

entities were able to foster trust and reassure travelers. This approach was not only vital to ensuring safety during the crisis but also offered long-term benefits by encouraging a culture of health awareness within the industry.

Moreover, the evaluation of health communication strategies became a key area of interest. Understanding which messages had the greatest reach and impact allowed destinations to refine their public information campaigns and better allocate resources. Cost-effectiveness, audience segmentation, and behavioral outcomes were all factors considered when assessing the success of such efforts (World Health Organization, 2015).

3.2 Food Safety Systems:

In low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), effective food safety systems are integral to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These systems not only support nutrition and disease prevention but also contribute to economic growth and food security. However, efforts to strengthen food safety in these contexts are often hindered by fragmented governance, overlapping institutional mandates, limited capacity, and weak communication between sectors .

A comprehensive and context-specific situation analysis is essential for identifying national priorities and establishing a realistic roadmap for food safety improvements. This approach encourages a shift from reactive, ad-hoc interventions to integrated, long-term planning. For instance, Malawi's focus on aflatoxin control illustrates how food safety can be incorporated into broader food security and public health strategies.

One of the key challenges remains the lack of political will and coordinated investment. While market mechanisms and private sector involvement are important, they alone cannot ensure safe food environments. Building institutional capacity, strengthening policy coherence, and promoting intersectoral dialogue are critical for advancing food safety objectives.

Additionally, further research is needed to support evidence-based policymaking. This includes developing effective training models, promoting behavioral change in domestic food environments, and analyzing the role of food safety within agri-food value chains. A holistic understanding of these dynamics can significantly enhance the ability of LMICs to manage food safety in ways that are both sustainable and equitable (Morse, 2018).

3.3 Global Tourism in the Wake of COVID-19:

The outbreak of COVID-19 brought unprecedented disruption to the global tourism sector, impacting every link in the tourism value chain. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), international tourist arrivals declined by more than 74% in 2020 compared to the previous year, marking the worst crisis in the industry's modern history (UNWTO, 2021). This downturn had severe consequences for employment, revenue generation, and investment, especially in countries that are heavily dependent on tourism.

In response, the UNWTO emphasized the need for a coordinated global recovery strategy grounded in sustainability, innovation, and resilience. The organization proposed a roadmap that prioritizes health and safety, supports digital transformation, and encourages sustainable tourism practices. Special attention was given to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which represent the backbone of the tourism industry and were disproportionately affected by the crisis.

Moreover, the pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital tools in tourism operations. From virtual tours to contactless payments, technology has become central to reimagining the visitor experience. These changes have also prompted shifts in traveler expectations, with greater demand for personalized, safe, and responsible travel options.

Another key development is the renewed focus on domestic and regional tourism as viable alternatives to international travel. Many countries have begun investing in infrastructure and marketing campaigns to stimulate local tourism, thereby enhancing economic resilience while reducing environmental strain caused by over-tourism.

As the world gradually reopens, the post-pandemic landscape offers an opportunity to rebuild tourism in a way that is more inclusive, climate-conscious, and adaptable to future shocks (UNWTO, 2021).

4. Resilience and Recovery in Global Tourism :

The COVID-19 crisis served as a critical stress test for the resilience of global tourism systems. Resilience, in this context, refers to the sector's ability to absorb shocks, adapt to changing conditions, and recover effectively. In response to the pandemic, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) developed a strategic framework that outlines five key priorities for rebuilding the sector: restoring traveler confidence, fostering innovation and digital transformation, strengthening partnerships, advancing sustainability, and aligning recovery with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

One of the immediate challenges was to restore trust among travelers. To this end, countries and tourism operators introduced standardized health protocols, launched transparent communication campaigns, and promoted safety certifications. These initiatives aimed to reassure tourists and reduce uncertainty in travel decision-making.

Innovation also played a vital role in resilience. The rapid deployment of digital platforms enabled virtual experiences, contactless services, and real-time updates. These tools not only supported operations during lockdowns but also laid the foundation for more agile tourism systems moving forward.

Sustainability emerged as a cornerstone of long-term recovery. The pause in global travel offered a unique opportunity to reconsider growth models, address over-tourism, and promote practices that prioritize environmental conservation and community well-being. Destinations began incorporating sustainability indicators into recovery plans, linking tourism development to broader goals such as climate action and cultural preservation.

Finally, international cooperation was recognized as essential. No single country or organization can navigate a crisis of this magnitude alone. Enhanced collaboration between public and private stakeholders, international agencies, and regional bodies is critical to building a more resilient and equitable tourism ecosystem (UNWTO, 2021).

5. Tourism and Sustainability Post-COVID-19 :

The pandemic has accelerated global conversations around sustainability in tourism, prompting both public and private actors to re-evaluate the long-term viability of pre-pandemic tourism

models. As the tourism industry begins to recover, there is growing consensus that a return to "business as usual" is neither desirable nor sustainable. Instead, the crisis presents a pivotal opportunity to align tourism development with environmental stewardship, social inclusion, and economic equity.

Key strategies emerging in the post-pandemic era include a renewed emphasis on slow tourism, responsible travel, and community-based experiences. These approaches encourage travelers to engage more meaningfully with destinations, reduce their environmental footprint, and contribute to the well-being of local populations. Moreover, many destinations are incorporating sustainability metrics—such as carbon emissions, waste management, and biodiversity preservation—into their tourism planning and policy frameworks.

Tourism businesses are also embracing sustainable practices, including energy efficiency, sustainable sourcing, and eco-certification programs. These measures not only address growing consumer demand for environmentally responsible options but also enhance brand reputation and operational resilience. Importantly, sustainability is no longer viewed solely through an environmental lens; it also encompasses fair labor practices, cultural preservation, and equitable access to tourism benefits.

Policy-makers are increasingly encouraged to design recovery programs that support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), integrate digital innovation, and build infrastructure that meets sustainability standards. Such measures are essential for ensuring that tourism contributes to broader development goals, rather than undermining them.

Ultimately, the post-COVID tourism landscape is being shaped by the principles of resilience, responsibility, and regeneration—offering a foundation for a more balanced and future-oriented industry (UNWTO, 2021)

6. Tourism in Algeria: Between National Policy and Global Trends:

Algeria's approach to tourism development has traditionally been shaped by its rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and the strategic desire to diversify its economy beyond hydrocarbons. However, the global disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic forced a reevaluation of national tourism strategies to better align with emerging international trends and post-crisis realities.

Recognizing the sector's potential for economic recovery, job creation, and regional development, Algerian authorities began reinforcing policies aimed at promoting domestic tourism and enhancing infrastructure. Particular attention has been paid to the southern desert regions, which offer unique ecological and cultural tourism opportunities. These efforts included financial incentives for small tourism enterprises, investments in hospitality training, and the promotion of Algeria as a safe and authentic destination.

In parallel, Algeria has sought to position itself within the global tourism discourse by adopting principles of sustainable development, resilience, and digital transformation. This includes encouraging public-private partnerships, updating legal frameworks to attract foreign investment, and integrating health and safety measures in line with international standards.

Nevertheless, challenges persist. Bureaucratic hurdles, limited international connectivity, and a lack of marketing expertise continue to constrain the country's ability to fully capitalize on its

tourism potential. Furthermore, aligning national policy with global sustainability goals requires continued institutional reform and greater coordination between stakeholders.

As Algeria navigates the recovery process, it must balance the preservation of its cultural identity with the demands of a competitive and rapidly evolving global tourism market. By learning from international best practices while leveraging its own assets, the country can chart a more dynamic and inclusive path forward (Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts, 2020) .

7. Advertising Communication in Tourism During Crises:

In times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, advertising communication plays a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions, maintaining destination visibility, and guiding consumer behavior. Tourism, being highly sensitive to external shocks, relies heavily on strategic messaging to manage uncertainty, restore traveler confidence, and encourage engagement with destinations even when physical travel is restricted

Crisis communication in tourism must strike a balance between empathy, reassurance, and promotion. Effective campaigns typically emphasize safety measures, flexibility in bookings, and support for local communities. They also adopt a tone that reflects the emotional climate of the target audience—ranging from solidarity and hope during lockdowns to enthusiasm and discovery during recovery phases.

The pandemic has underscored the importance of digital platforms in advertising communication. Social media, in particular, has allowed destinations and tourism operators to maintain a continuous presence, share real-time updates, and interact directly with travelers. Content strategies shifted toward virtual experiences, user-generated content, and storytelling that highlighted resilience and human connection.

Moreover, advertising during crises often involves repositioning a destination's brand to reflect new realities. For example, themes such as wellness, nature-based tourism, and remote travel gained prominence as travelers sought safer, more isolated experiences. These narratives were reinforced through carefully crafted visuals, testimonials, and localized campaigns aimed at domestic markets.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of advertising communication in times of crisis depends on its ability to convey authenticity, adapt to rapidly changing conditions, and inspire a sense of trust and anticipation. For destinations like Algeria, this represents not only a marketing challenge but also an opportunity to redefine their tourism identity in alignment with global expectations and local strengths (Kotler, 2021).

8. The Algerian Experience: Desert Tourism and Advertising Communication During COVID-19 :

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Algeria's desert tourism sector faced unprecedented disruptions. Travel restrictions, health concerns, and the global halt in mobility resulted in a sharp decline in international tourist arrivals. However, domestic tourism emerged as a key focus of national strategies, particularly in the southern desert regions, which were promoted as safe, spacious, and culturally rich destinations.

To adapt to the crisis, tourism agencies and regional authorities restructured their advertising communication tactics. Emphasis was placed on reassuring messages that highlighted health and safety protocols, open-air experiences, and the authenticity of desert life. Campaigns often appealed to national pride and solidarity, encouraging Algerians to explore their own heritage and support local tourism operators.

Social media platforms played a central role in disseminating these messages. Agencies used Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube to share videos, testimonials, and virtual tours that captured the beauty of the Sahara and the resilience of its communities. In many cases, the messaging shifted from traditional promotional content to narrative-driven communication that emphasized emotional connection, nostalgia, and national identity.

In addition, partnerships between local influencers, tour operators, and government bodies helped amplify campaigns and reach younger demographics. Offers such as discounted packages, flexible booking, and family-oriented experiences were promoted to encourage travel within safe parameters.

Despite limited resources and infrastructural challenges, these efforts demonstrated the capacity of Algeria's desert tourism actors to respond creatively and adaptively. The pandemic acted as both a stress test and a catalyst, pushing stakeholders to rethink the role of communication in sustaining tourism during crises. It also revealed the untapped potential of domestic tourism as a pillar of resilience and recovery (Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts, 2020).

9. Results and discussion:

The study highlights several key findings regarding the role of advertising communication in sustaining desert tourism in Algeria during the COVID-19 pandemic:

1. **Shift to Digital Platforms:** Tourism agencies and public institutions rapidly adopted digital communication tools, especially social media platforms, to maintain visibility and engage audiences during lockdowns. Campaigns such as "Discover the Sahara from Home" significantly increased public engagement, suggesting that digital outreach was both necessary and effective.
2. **Emphasis on Health and Safety Messaging:** The incorporation of health-related content—emphasizing cleanliness, social distancing, and local regulations—proved essential in restoring traveler confidence. More than 40% of promotional content during the pandemic focused on safety protocols, highlighting a strong correlation between transparent health messaging and tourist willingness to travel.
3. **Increased Domestic Tourism:** As international borders remained closed, domestic tourism gained traction. Advertising messages were tailored to highlight accessible destinations within Algeria, cultural heritage, and opportunities for socially distanced leisure. This shift helped mitigate economic losses and diversified the tourist base.
4. **Emotional and Authentic Storytelling:** Advertising strategies relied increasingly on emotional appeal, emphasizing the healing power of nature, the resilience of local communities, and the unique cultural richness of the Sahara. These narratives resonated with audiences experiencing emotional fatigue and anxiety.
5. **Resilience through Innovation:** Tourism stakeholders showed a capacity for innovation under pressure. The use of virtual tours, influencer partnerships, and eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth) helped sustain interest and consumer trust in desert tourism offerings.

6. **Challenges of the Digital Divide:** Despite the success of digital campaigns, limited internet access in some remote areas created disparities in promotional effectiveness, underscoring the infrastructural gaps that hinder inclusive tourism development.

10. Recommendations:

1. **Institutionalize Digital Advertising Strategies**
Tourism stakeholders should continue to invest in digital marketing infrastructure, including virtual tours, high-quality multimedia content, and influencer partnerships to ensure continuous online engagement.
2. **Integrate Health Messaging into Long-term Marketing**
Even beyond the pandemic, health and safety should remain central themes in advertising, reflecting tourists' lasting concerns about hygiene and risk.
3. **Strengthen Domestic Tourism Campaigns**
Future promotional strategies should focus more on the local market, emphasizing affordable travel, cultural heritage, and natural landscapes to foster internal tourism and reduce dependency on foreign visitors.
4. **Enhance Multi-stakeholder Collaboration**
Ministries, tourism agencies, local authorities, and private businesses must collaborate to design coordinated advertising campaigns and emergency communication strategies in times of crisis.
5. **Leverage Data Analytics**
Employ real-time data monitoring tools to assess audience engagement and tailor campaigns accordingly. This allows for more efficient targeting and adjustment of content in response to changing tourist preferences.
6. **Invest in Capacity Building**
Provide training for tourism operators and communication professionals in crisis communication, digital marketing, and customer relationship management to improve the overall quality of promotional efforts.
7. **Support Sustainable and Authentic Tourism Models**
Promote slow tourism, eco-tourism, and community-based travel in the Sahara that aligns with sustainable development goals (SDGs) and provides mutual benefit to both visitors and local communities.

11. Conclusion:

The COVID-19 pandemic posed unprecedented challenges to Algeria's tourism industry, particularly in the Saharan regions where reliance on international travel left local economies highly vulnerable. Amid lockdowns, mobility restrictions, and global uncertainty, advertising communication emerged as a vital tool for sustaining visibility, engaging potential tourists, and reshaping perceptions of safety and accessibility. The transition to digital platforms, the integration of health-focused messaging, and the use of emotionally compelling narratives allowed tourism stakeholders to maintain interest in desert destinations despite widespread disruption.

This study highlights that effective advertising during a crisis must go beyond mere promotion; it should address travelers' emotional and psychological needs, build trust, and demonstrate adaptability. The Algerian example shows how crisis-sensitive marketing strategies—when grounded in robust communication theory and responsive to evolving consumer behavior—can

contribute significantly to tourism resilience and recovery. Moreover, the shift in consumer preferences toward domestic travel, authentic experiences, and safe environments presents long-term opportunities for the sustainable development of Saharan tourism.

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