



The Role of Digital Tourism Marketing in Enhancing the Attractiveness of Therapeutic Tourism in Guelma Province

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Abstract :

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This research addresses the topic of tourism marketing in Guelma Province as a fundamental pillar for activating the region's natural and historical resources, particularly the therapeutic tourism linked to thermal springs. The study highlights that tourism has become a strategic economic sector that promotes local development and creates job opportunities; however, the exploitation of these resources in Guelma remains below expectations. The findings reveal that the province is endowed with exceptional thermal resources and classified archaeological sites, yet it faces challenges related to weak infrastructure, the absence of modern marketing strategies, limited investment, and insufficient use of digital tools. The study recommends developing a comprehensive marketing plan based on digital marketing, public-private partnerships, diversification of local tourism products, and the involvement of the local community, ensuring the effective and sustainable use of Guelma's natural and historical assets while enhancing its competitiveness at both the national and international levels.

Keywords:

Tourism Marketing, Therapeutic Tourism, Thermal Springs, Digital Marketing.

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1. INTRODUCTION:

Tourism marketing is a fundamental pillar in developing the tourism sector and enhancing its contribution to the national economy. With the evolution of economic and technological concepts, tourism marketing has acquired a strategic role in attracting tourists and fostering competitiveness among tourist destinations.

Tourism marketing is also one of the most important pillars contributing to the development and strengthening of the tourism sector, as it helps to promote tourist destinations and attract visitors. Given the increasing global competition among countries to attract tourists, tourism marketing has become essential for effectively leveraging tourism assets and achieving economic and social development. Technological advancements in media and communication have also contributed to expanding the target audience and achieving better results in marketing campaigns. In this context, the province of Guelma stands out as one of the Algerian provinces rich in diverse tourist resources, both natural, such as thermal springs and mountainous landscapes, and historical, such as archaeological sites dating back to ancient times. However, the availability of these resources alone is not enough to achieve a genuine tourism revival. Effective tourism marketing strategies are required to promote the province as a distinctive tourist destination and attract the largest possible number of local and foreign visitors. Hence the importance of this research, which aims to shed light on the reality of tourism marketing in the province of Guelma, analyze the challenges it faces, and review the available opportunities for its development.

Swimming practices vary according to the nature of the geographical and cultural environment. While swimming in the Algerian province of Guelma is practiced within a traditional therapeutic framework, the province possesses natural and cultural assets that qualify it to be an important tourist destination. Based on the foregoing, the study's central question revolves around the following fundamental question:

What are the opportunities and possibilities for tourism marketing in the province of Guelma?

Sub-questions:

To analyze this issue, the following sub-questions will be answered:

1. How does tourism marketing contribute to attracting and developing the local economy in the province of Guelma?
2. Is medical tourism an untapped resource in the tourism sector in the province of Guelma?

Study Hypotheses:

To answer the main problem and sub-questions, we formulated the following hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1: Effective tourism marketing contributes to enhancing tourist appeal and developing the local economy in the Wilaya of Guelma.
- Hypothesis 2: We consider therapeutic tourism (such as the thermal baths of El Hamma and El Roknia) to be an underutilized resource in the tourism sector in the Wilaya of Guelma.

Study Objectives:

This study aims to:

- Analyze the current state of tourism activity in the Wilaya of Guelma by identifying the most important natural, historical, and cultural assets that the region possesses.
- Diagnose the mechanisms and strategies used in tourism marketing at the Wilaya level and evaluate their effectiveness in attracting tourists.
- Propose solutions and recommendations to improve tourism marketing performance in line with the requirements of modern tourism and the competitiveness of tourist destinations.
- Highlight the role of tourism marketing in stimulating the local economy and creating job opportunities within the Wilaya of Guelma.

The importance of this study lies in the following points:

- Academic importance: It contributes to enriching the literature on tourism marketing in Algeria by highlighting a province with promising tourism potential.
- Practical importance: The study's findings can serve as a practical reference for local decision-makers, tourism agency managers, and investors interested in the tourism sector in the province of Guelma. Furthermore, it raises awareness of the importance of local tourism marketing and its role as an effective tool for promoting inland and alternative destinations to traditional ones, thus achieving balanced tourism development across the country's various provinces.

2. Intellectual and Theoretical Reviews of Tourism Marketing

2-1. Theoretical Concepts of Tourism Marketing, Importance and Characteristics:

2-1-1. The Concept and Importance of Tourism Marketing:

Tourism marketing is defined as « a set of activities aimed at attracting and motivating visitors to visit a specific place. It includes market research and analyzing tourists' desires »(Mohammed, 2018).Is also defined as « A set of processes and activities aimed at studying the needs of the tourism market and developing tourism products and services to meet those needs, in addition to promoting tourist destinations using various means to reach the target audience. Tourism marketing encompasses understanding tourist behavior, designing marketing campaigns, and evaluating their results to improve future performance » (Mohammed A., 2018).

It can be summarized that Tourism marketing is a set of activities aimed at identifying and meeting tourists' needs through the development, promotion, and distribution of tourism products, thereby achieving tourist satisfaction and generating profits for tourism establishments. It In other words, «it is the effort exerted to promote and market tourism resources in line with the desires and needs of current and potential tourists» (Shoman, 2015).

2-1-2. The Importance of Tourism Marketing:

Tourism marketing is an effective tool for achieving sustainable development in the tourism sector by increasing visitor numbers and improving the image of tourist destinations. It also contributes to boosting the local economy by increasing revenue and creating job opportunities in tourism-related industries such as hospitality, transportation, and cultural services. Furthermore, marketing helps build a strong tourism identity that distinguishes the destination and attracts diverse categories of tourists. (Salim, 2020)

The importance of tourism marketing is evident in the following: (Zaïr A., 2018)

- Enhancing the competitiveness of tourist areas.
- Supporting the national economy by increasing the number of tourists.
- Developing infrastructure and stimulating tourism investments.
- Preserving natural and cultural resources through sustainable tourism.

2-1-3. Characteristics of Tourism Marketing:

The characteristics of tourism marketing are as follows: (Riyad, 2020)

- Intangibility: The tourism service cannot be touched before consumption.

- Non-storability: The tourism product cannot be stored for later use.
- Reliance on the human element: The quality of the tourist experience is linked to the quality of human service.
- Seasonal fluctuations: Tourist demand is linked to specific seasons.
- Significant vulnerability to the external environment: It is affected by political, economic, and health factors (such as pandemics).

2-2. Elements of Tourism Marketing:

The elements of tourism marketing consist of the tourism product, price, distribution, and promotion. The tourism product includes all the services offered by the destination, such as hotels, museums, and recreational facilities. Price is the value paid by the tourist for these services and must be competitive while ensuring service quality. Distribution relates to how the tourism product is delivered to the tourist through travel agencies and online platforms. Promotion includes all media activities aimed at attracting tourists and raising awareness of the destination (M, 2019).

2-3. Tourism Marketing Strategies:

Tourism marketing strategies rely on a thorough study of the market and target customers, and the design of offers that meet their expectations. Among the most important strategies is the use of digital marketing through social media, improving the visitor experience through customer loyalty programs, and collaborating with governmental and private entities to develop joint campaigns (Al-Alamiyah).

Generally, tourism marketing strategies are manifested in the following (Sulaiman, 2021):

- Digital Marketing: Using social media and websites.
- Tourism Positioning: Differentiating a tourist destination from others.
- Tourism Market Segmentation: Dividing the market by income, age, and tourism objectives.
- Sustainable Marketing: Marketing destinations that are committed to preserving the environment and local culture.
- Marketing Partnerships: Collaborating with airlines, hotels, and global travel platforms.

2-4. Tourism Marketing and its Role in Developing the Tourism Sector:

2-4-1. The Role of Tourism Marketing in Developing the Tourism Sector:

Tourism marketing directly contributes to boosting economic growth by increasing the number of visitors and stimulating investment in tourism infrastructure

and services. It also creates new job opportunities and develops local communities, thus supporting sustainable social development in tourist areas.

2-4-2. Challenges Facing Tourism Marketing:

Tourism marketing faces several challenges, such as intense competition between destinations, climate change affecting tourism seasons, weak infrastructure in some areas, and a lack of marketing awareness among some stakeholders. Security and political issues also play a role in influencing the image of a tourist destination.

- Health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic
- Weak infrastructure in some countries
- Lack of clear marketing policies
- Intense international competition

3. The Tourism Marketing Hub in Guelma Province

3-1. The Geographical Location of Guelma Province:

Guelma Province is located in northeastern Algeria, covering an area of 3,686 km². Geographically, it represents a meeting point between the two industrial hubs of the north (Annaba and Skikda) and the capital of eastern Algeria (Constantine) to the west, occupying a central position between the north and the High Plateaus. It is 500 km from Algiers, the capital, and 150 km from the Tunisian border. It borders the following provinces: (Tourism, 2022)

- Annaba Province: to the north: with its international airport, port, and important economic base, located 64 km away.

- Skikda Province: to the northwest: with its port and petrochemical industrial base, located 87 km away.

- Constantine Province: To the west: with its international airport and its importance as the capital of eastern Algeria, located 106 km from the capital.

- Souk Ahras Province: To the east: a border region with Tunisia, located 77 km from the capital.

- Oum El Bouaghi Province: To the south: a gateway to the High Plateaus, located 110 km from the capital.

- El Tarf Province: To the northeast: a coastal tourist province, also bordering Tunisia, located 110 km from the capital.

3-2. Tourism advantages in Guelma:

Guelma is characterized by its diverse natural landscape, including mountains, dams, and forests, in addition to its cultural heritage represented by archaeological sites and local festivals.

3-2-1. Tourism in Guelma:

- Guelma is located in northeastern Algeria and is characterized by a unique, mixed, and flat terrain that facilitates the formation of thermal springs.
- It enjoys a Mediterranean climate, cold in winter and mild in summer, making its mineral baths a year-round tourist destination.

Among the most prominent swimming attractions in Guelma are:

- Hammam Debagh: Considered one of the most famous mineral baths in Algeria, it features a natural sulfur waterfall and an open-air therapeutic pool.
- Hammam N'Bail: Located amidst forests, its warm waters are rich in minerals beneficial for treating joint and rheumatic diseases.
- Hammam Ouled Ali: A popular site that attracts local visitors but suffers from inadequate infrastructure.

Swimming in Guelma is linked to natural therapy and thalasso therapy, where it is used for:

- Treating rheumatism, joint pain, and skin diseases
- Improving blood circulation and strengthening the immune system.
- The baths receive an increasing number of tourists, which has contributed to the revitalization of traditional crafts and related activities.

3-2-2. Biosprings:

The Guelma region is characterized by its abundance of exceptionally important thermal springs, distinguished by their water flow rate, temperature, and therapeutic properties. These springs vary from one area to another due to the nature of the underground rocks through which the water flows. Temperatures range from 34 to 97 degrees Celsius. They are diverse in their chemical and physical composition and possess tremendous therapeutic properties. The province officially boasts 13 thermal springs, spread across 5 municipalities, 12 of which are utilized using modern methods and others using traditional methods. (Guelma)

Table N°01: Various thermal baths and their characteristics in the province of Guelma

Therapeutic properties	the sources	temperature, flow	temperature	flow rate (t/s).
Hamman al-Dhabagh	Shadah	97	12	Rheumatic diseases, nerve diseases, skin diseases, respiratory diseases, ear, nose and throat diseases
	Al-Baqbayqa	97	18	
	Ain Al-Shifa	95	12	
	Ain Al-Shafiya	96	12	
	Ben Naji	96	06	
Heliopolis	Al Nakhla	57	16	Respiratory diseases, rheumatism, and neurological and vascular diseases
	AL Nakhlateen	52	08	
	Al Defla	56	08	
Ain al-Arabi	Al Karfa	52	11	Diseases of the urinary system, skin and rheumatism.
	Balhashani	52	08	
Hamman al-Nabil	The Nabail 1	40	06	Rheumatic diseases, nerve diseases, skin diseases, respiratory diseases, ear, nose and throat diseases
	The Nabail 2	40	06	
Bouhachana	Asasla	34	04	/

Source: Ministry of Tourism and Traditional Industries, Directorate of Tourism and Traditional Industries of Guelma Province.

Hamman Debagh Municipality: More than 10 important thermal springs are scattered around the right bank of the Shaddakha stream, stretching for 5 to 6 kilometers, half of which lies above the waterfall plateau. The water temperature of the waterfall springs reaches 97 degrees Celsius, making it the second hottest water in the world after Iceland.

3-2-3. Classified Sites and Monuments in the Wilaya of Guelma:

The number of classified sites in the Wilaya of Guelma is currently 14 archaeological and natural sites, classified between 1900 and 1999. Two additional sites, located in the city of Guelma, are proposed for classification.

Table 2: Archaeological Sites and Their Classification in the Wilaya of Guelma

Site and classified landmarks	Municipalities	Classification Date
Roman Theater	Guelma	1900
Roman Baths	Guelma	1900
Tombs and Funerary Caves	Roknia	1900
Caves of Mount Taya	Bouhamdane	1927/12/19
Roman City of Tibilis	Slaoua Announa	1952/10/22
Roman Pool	Heliopolis	1954/02/17
Hammam Dbagh (formerly Hammam El Maskhoutin)	Hammam Debagh	1993/06/27
Military Barracks Wall	Guelma	1999/11/03
Khanga El Hadjar	Slaoua Announa	1999/11/03
Ain Neshma	Ben Djerrah	1999/11/03
Stone Terraces of Bechniour	Ain Larbi	1999/11/03
Bouatfan Fort	Ain Larbi	1999/11/03
Ancient Kef Bouziounztara	Bouhachana	1999/11/03
Zawiya of Sheikh El Hafnawi in Diar	Beni Mezline	1999/11/03

Proposed classification criteria	Municipalities
The Old Mosque	Guelma
The Regional Theater	Guelma

Source: Ministry of Tourism and Traditional Industries, Directorate of Tourism and Traditional Industries of Guelma Province.

3-2-4. Proposed Strategies for Activating Tourism Marketing in Guelma Province:

- **Developing the Local Tourism Product:** It is essential to diversify tourism offerings to include wellness, cultural, ecotourism, and other types of tourism. This requires improving infrastructure and developing accompanying services (Mansouri, 2020).
- **Digital Tourism Promotion:** Utilizing social media, tourist websites, and search engines to promote tourist attractions through professional photos, introductory videos, and engaging content. Studies have shown that 72% of travelers rely on the internet to choose their destinations (Global, Global Tourism Trends Report, 2021).

- **Public-Private Partnership Strategy:** Sustainable tourism development can only be achieved through cooperation between the private and public sectors to find the best and most effective way to utilize tourism resources, so that each sector can play its essential and indispensable role in the development and advancement of tourism. The state and local communities are responsible for developing the region and protecting tourist areas, including: developing infrastructure (roads, airports, etc.), organizing public services, and providing security. The private sector's role in tourism development is represented by tourism exploitation and investment and engaging in the trade of tourism goods and services (Fatima, 2010/2011).
- **Technology is being utilized in tourism marketing in the Guelma region,** where some electronic tools such as websites and social media are used, but internet access and technological services are limited (Statistics, 2023).

3-2-5. Challenges Facing Tourism Marketing in the Guelma Region:

- Lack of funding and government support; weak e-marketing; fragile hotel and transportation services; and the need to develop health resorts and modern spas. Promoting therapeutic swimming as a specialized tourism product. (Asia, 2022)
- Lack of investment in the tourism sector.
- Absence of a comprehensive marketing plan at the state level.
- Weak coordination between local and national authorities.
- Weak tourism awareness among local residents. (Al-Qader, Contemporary Tourism Marketing, 2017)

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that tourism marketing is a crucial factor in the success and development of the tourism sector, as it contributes to attracting visitors and achieving economic and social development. With technological advancements, marketing has become more complex and requires well-thought-out and integrated plans that keep pace with the demands of the global market. Therefore, stakeholders must enhance their capabilities in the field of tourism marketing to ensure sustainable growth and competitiveness.

Tourism marketing is no longer merely about promoting destinations; it has become a science and an integrated strategy that contributes to comprehensive tourism development. By understanding the theoretical framework of tourism marketing, tourism performance can be improved, and available resources can be utilized effectively and sustainably.

Guelma can benefit from the Norwegian experience by developing its infrastructure and modernizing its tourism marketing tools, while preserving its heritage and wellness character. The Algerian province of Guelma stands as a prime example of its unique natural and historical potential. Despite these assets, tourism in Guelma remains below its potential, necessitating the development of effective tourism marketing strategies that contribute to leveraging and promoting these assets intelligently and innovatively.

Although Guelma possesses significant tourism potential, realizing this potential requires effective and sustainable marketing strategies built on scientific foundations and utilizing modern tools, particularly digital ones. Furthermore, it is essential to involve all local stakeholders in the process of building a comprehensive and distinctive tourism image.

4-1. Testing the study hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Based on statistical data on the number of tourists in recent years and tourism marketing efforts such as promotional campaigns and contributions to infrastructure improvement, a relationship appears to exist between spending on tourism marketing and the number of tourists or tourism revenue. The diversity of tourism marketing methods and the number of tourists arriving in Guelma are positive, thus confirming the validity of the first hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: Advertising campaigns targeting medical tourism will be used to determine whether visitors are already familiar with these sites. Measuring the number of visitors to therapeutic sites compared to their capacity, as well as tourism officials'

assessment of the number of qualified staff in tourism marketing and an analysis of existing training programs in local institutions. Comparing the specialized human resources in Guelma with those in other, more developed tourism-related provinces reveals a weakness in the resource and its insufficient utilization in the tourism sector in Guelma, thus confirming the second hypothesis.

4-2. Study Results:

- There is an insufficient utilization of modern technological capabilities, which represents a significant opportunity for tourism development.
- Weakness in utilizing modern technologies such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence in marketing.
- Guelma relies on traditional advertising campaigns and partnerships with travel agencies, in addition to limited use of social media.

4-3. Study Recommendations:

- Develop a comprehensive tourism marketing plan that includes a study of the target market.
- Encourage domestic tourism by reducing prices and improving services.
- Involve the local community in tourism activities.
- Establish partnerships with universities and institutes to develop research in tourism marketing.

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