



## **Facebook as a Tourism Promotion Tool: Its Role in Encouraging Algerian Desert Tourism among Young People**

*A Field Study Conducted in the City of Sétif*

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the role of Facebook as a digital tourism media platform in promoting and encouraging Algerian desert tourism among young people. To achieve this objective, a field study was conducted on a sample of young Facebook users in the city of Sétif. A questionnaire was employed as the primary data collection instrument, comprising a set of questions designed to address the main research problem.

The findings reveal that Facebook ranks first -alongside YouTube- among social networking platforms used by young people to explore and discover various desert tourist destinations. The results also indicate that user-generated content shared on social media, particularly photographs and videos exchanged among friends, represents an effective and influential promotional tool for desert tourism. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the need for tourism professionals and institutions to actively manage their social media pages to enhance their promotional impact and ensure a more professional and strategic approach to communication.

**Keywords:** Desert tourism; Facebook; Youth; Social media marketing; Digital communication; Tourism promotion.

## Introduction

Tourism activity has become one of the major concerns of many countries today due to the significant revenues generated by this sector on the one hand, and the comfort, leisure, and recreation it provides for large numbers of people seeking relaxation and enjoyment on the other. Tourism is considered a human phenomenon that dates back to ancient times; it is as old as humanity itself and deeply rooted in the history of nations and civilizations (Al-Dughaim, 2012).

It is well known that human beings are characterized by dynamism and mobility, and they naturally tend to change their environment rather than remain in the same place and condition. Travel offers individuals a sense of security and stability, as well as pleasure, relaxation, entertainment, and recreation. However, the tourism sector in Algeria remained neglected for many years, particularly due to the difficult conditions the country experienced during the past decades, especially the period known as the “Black Decade.” This period instilled fear and anxiety among Algerians, making travel for tourism purposes from one place to another a difficult and often unattainable dream. In recent years, with the return of security and stability, Algerians’ perceptions of tourism have changed significantly. Many Algerian families now prefer to spend their holidays within the country, visiting various destinations such as forests, mountains, and desert areas during winter, as well as the country’s attractive beaches during the summer season.

Mass media and communication technologies have played an important role in the tourism sector through advertising and promotion using print, audio, and visual media, exhibitions, films, and other communication tools. These media have contributed to introducing tourist destinations, promoting tourism services, and raising tourism awareness related to tourism activities. In the contemporary digital environment, communication practices are increasingly shaped by screen-based technologies and algorithmic platforms. Recent research highlights that digital media—particularly smartphone-centered and social networking environments—do not merely transmit information but actively structure users’ perceptions, attention, and decision-making processes (Cheriti, 2025). In this sense, social networking sites such as Facebook function as cognitive and cultural mediators, influencing how users interpret visual content, evaluate destinations, and construct tourism imaginaries.

As Cheriti (2025) explains, prolonged engagement with digital platforms fosters new forms of screen-centered interaction, where images, short videos, and algorithmically prioritized content play a decisive role in shaping attitudes and behavioral intentions. This dynamic is particularly relevant to tourism promotion, where visual storytelling and peer-generated content strongly affect users’ motivations to travel and explore new destinations.

As a result of major technological developments in the field of information and communication, electronic media and social networking sites have emerged, creating a qualitative shift in the world of communication. These platforms have connected distant parts of the world, facilitated interaction among societies, and enabled the exchange of opinions, ideas, and interests. Users have benefited from the diverse services provided by these

networks, including the ability to express concerns and share photos and videos, which have become important sources of information for many users.

Within this context, several tourism institutions and facilities have benefited from social networking platforms -particularly Facebook- as a promotional tool used to introduce and promote various tourist regions and cities, as well as their cultural heritage. This has contributed significantly to improving Algeria's tourism image both locally and internationally. Tourism in Algeria is diverse and includes thermal, mountain, religious, and cultural tourism. Among the most important forms is desert tourism, as Algeria possesses a vast desert that attracts a large number of tourists, especially foreigners. Accordingly, this study seeks to explore the opinions of Facebook users regarding the extent to which this platform encourages them to visit and discover desert regions.

Based on this, the research problem of the study is formulated as follows:

- How does Facebook contribute to promoting a culture of desert tourism among young users?

The main research question gives rise to a set of sub-questions, which can be formulated as follows:

- What is meant by desert tourism?

- Do young people rely on social networking sites in the field of tourism?

- What role does Facebook play, compared to other social networking platforms, in encouraging Algerian desert tourism?

### **Significance of the Study**

The importance of this study stems from the significant role that social networking sites, particularly Facebook, can play in informing users and encouraging them to engage in desert tourism in Algeria. It has become common for many Algerians to prefer traveling abroad for their holidays, despite the fact that their country possesses exceptionally attractive tourist destinations that remain unknown to a large segment of the population. In this context, Facebook plays a vital role through the diverse content published on its pages, including photographs, videos, and other shared materials, which contribute to promoting Algerian desert tourism and improving its image both at the local and international levels.

### **Methodological Procedures**

#### **Type and Method of the Study**

The present study falls within the framework of descriptive research, which is based on the collection, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of data in accordance with the objectives defined by the researcher. Descriptive studies aim to provide both quantitative and qualitative descriptions of various phenomena. In media studies, this type of research is widely used to describe individuals and groups, analyze attitudes, motivations, needs, patterns of media use, preferences, and levels of interest (Abdelhamid, 2002). The research method is defined as the

systematic approach through which the researcher seeks to uncover the truth in studying a particular problem by following a set of scientific rules (Zerouati, 2002). It is also described as the path taken by the researcher to reach specific conclusions (Bouhouch, 1991), or as the art of organizing a series of ideas either to discover or to demonstrate a particular truth (Bouziyan, 1990).

For the purposes of this study, the survey method was deemed the most appropriate. In order to avoid conducting a comprehensive survey—which would require more time and effort—the study adopted a sample survey approach. This method is particularly suitable for descriptive studies that aim to describe the structure and characteristics of media audiences... and their behavioral patterns. This approach also aligns with the objectives of the study, as it allows for the collection and analysis of data related to Facebook users and helps determine the extent to which this platform contributes to providing them with a tourism culture related to the Algerian desert.

### **Research Population and Sample**

The study population consists of young Facebook users in the city of Sétif. Due to the large size of the population, the difficulty of reaching all users, and time constraints related to the implementation of the study, the researcher opted for a purposive sampling method. The sample consisted of 111 respondents from the city of Sétif.

Two main conditions were established for selecting the sample: first, participants had to possess a personal Facebook account; second, they had to follow pages related to tourism.

## **I. Theoretical Framework of the Study**

### **Concept of Desert Tourism**

Before defining desert tourism, it is necessary to briefly introduce the general concept of tourism.

Tourism. Definitions of tourism vary depending on the perspective from which it is examined. It has been described as a social phenomenon, an economic phenomenon, and as a factor contributing to the development of human relations and cultural growth. Among the notable definitions is that proposed by the German scholar Göber Fröiler (1903), who defined tourism as:

*“A phenomenon of our time arising from the growing need for rest and a change of environment, the development of an appreciation of natural beauty, and the sense of joy and pleasure derived from staying in areas with distinctive natural characteristics. It also results from the growth of communication, particularly among peoples and different social groups, which emerged as a consequence of the expansion of trade and industry—whether large, medium, or small—and the advancement of mass media.”*

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines tourism as the movement of individuals from one place to another for various purposes, for a period exceeding 24 hours and not exceeding one year. Desert tourism. Desert tourism is considered a form of ecotourism that aims to visit desert and archaeological areas and explore ancient sites located deep within the desert sands (Kerkouche, 2012). According to Algerian legislation, desert tourism is defined as “any tourist stay in a desert environment that is based on the exploitation of various natural, historical, and cultural resources, accompanied by activities related to this environment such as entertainment, leisure, and exploration.” Desert tourism is viewed as a new tourism product that deserves increased attention and development due to its importance in supporting economic and social development.

## **II. The Reality of Desert Tourism in Algeria**

The importance of desert tourism in Algeria is reflected in the diversity of its sectors and activities, including ecotourism, cultural and heritage tourism, as well as safari and exploration tourism. Desert tourism serves as a source of national income, contributes to the inflow of foreign capital, and generates hard currency through the arrival of foreign tourists. Focusing on this sector also helps to break the isolation of remote desert regions, transforming them into active and dynamic areas, thereby linking them to major urban centers. Furthermore, it promotes the cultural heritage of these regions through the display and marketing of traditional crafts. These factors collectively contribute to environmental preservation, protection of wildlife, and conservation of archaeological sites (Sebti, 2012).

To understand the current state of desert tourism in Algeria, it is essential to consider the country’s natural, cultural, and historical assets. Algeria possesses significant cultural, historical, and natural wealth, encompassing numerous high-value tourist sites with remarkable aesthetic qualities. Its strategic geographic location and favorable climate further position it as a leading tourism destination. Located in North Africa, Algeria is the largest country on the continent, sharing extensive borders with seven neighboring countries across the east, west, north, and south, which contributes to its rich cultural diversity (Sebti, 2012).

The southern region accounts for approximately 20% of Algeria’s total area and features a rich and diverse desert tourism product that must be protected and sustainably utilized to promote desert tourism. Southern Algeria is characterized by numerous scattered oases, palm groves, fertile soil, sand dunes, misty landscapes, springs, and rocky plains. Key desert areas include Adrar, Illizi, Tamanrasset, Tindouf, Oued M’zab, Hoggar, Tassili, Djanet, Ouargla, and Béchar (Sebti, 2012). Algeria also possesses a rich cultural and historical heritage, reflecting the succession of human civilizations and historical stages across the region. Many cultural and natural sites have been recognized by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites, including the Hoggar and Tassili regions.

The vast southern region is home to numerous historical landmarks, palaces, and prehistoric rock engravings found in various desert provinces. Notable examples include the Written Rock in Naâma, Tinhanan in Tamanrasset, the old palace in Tiout, Timimoun Palace, Roman ruins in Biskra, and rock inscriptions in Béchar, Illizi, Hoggar, and Risha in Laghouat. In addition, the region contains historic Islamic corners and mosques with distinct architectural

designs, such as the Tijaniyah corner in Laghouat, along with traditional urban constructions in Ghardaia and other provinces (Salami, n.d.).

Despite Algeria's rich natural, cultural, and historical assets, desert tourism faces several challenges that hinder its development. The main obstacles include:

- a) Lack of tourism awareness among the population.
- b) Instability in the management and organizational structure of the tourism sector.
- c) Insufficient infrastructure and basic facilities for the tourism industry.
- d) Limited governmental attention to the tourism sector.
- e) Security conditions experienced in Algeria in previous decades (Tghlissia & Bougazhi, 2012).

### **III. Social Networks and Tourism**

#### **An Overview of Social Networking Sites**

Social networks (English: social networks) are websites that allow individuals who share similar interests to connect, share information, photos, and videos. These platforms rely on online communication tools to enable interaction among friends, family, and colleagues (Al-Hiyari, 2021). Social networking first emerged in the United States as a way for school students to interact. The first social networking site for American students, Classmates.com, appeared in 1995. The site divided the American population into states, each state into regions, and each region into schools. Users could search for their school and reconnect with classmates to share concerns and information (Shdan, 2015).

This was followed by another early social networking attempt, SixDegrees.com, launched in the fall of 1997. This platform focused on direct connections between individuals regardless of academic, ethnic, or religious affiliation, marking the beginning of borderless social networking. It allowed users to create personal profiles and send private messages. However, the platform eventually shut down due to insufficient funding for its services (Shdan, 2015).

#### **The Emergence of Facebook and Social Networking Sites**

Following the introduction of social networking platforms in the 1990s, several niche social networks emerged targeting specific groups, such as AsianAvenue.com for Asian Americans and BlackPlanet.com for African Americans. However, these platforms did not achieve significant success between 1997 and 2000 (Shdan, 2015). Facebook, on the other hand, became one of the most important and widely used social networking platforms. It is not merely a social forum but a technological base that allows users to perform a wide range of activities online (Sadiq, 2012). Facebook was created in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, a student at Harvard University. The platform's name was inspired by the "face books" distributed at universities at the time to help students meet and connect with each other, especially upon graduation. Initially, Facebook was limited to Harvard University but gradually expanded to other universities, schools, and organizations (Shaqra, 2012).

Today, Facebook functions as a virtual community where users choose their friends and communicate after mutual consent. Beyond personal use, the platform offers broader services for businesses and organizations, enabling them to display products and advertise services, thus introducing a new form of digital marketing. Facebook currently leads in usage in many countries, including Algeria, where it is widely used across various segments of society. Statistics from December 2019 to December 2020 indicate that Facebook users accounted for 29.22% of social media users, followed by YouTube at 11.21%, Twitter at 2.21%, Pinterest at 2.21%, Instagram at 0.92%, and LinkedIn at 0.02% (StatCounter, 2020).

### **Characteristics of Social Networking Sites**

Social networking sites are characterized by an interconnected network structure, linking users not only to one another but also to other social networking platforms. This interconnectedness facilitates and accelerates the flow of information across networks (Shdan, 2015; Sadiq, 2012; Shaqra, 2012).

- a) Most social media platforms provide open services that allow user interaction, content creation, or editing of pages. They encourage voting, commenting, and information sharing, and there are rarely barriers preventing access to or use of the content (Shdan, 2015).
- b) Pages on social networks typically function by providing information about a product, person, or event. Users can browse these pages through specific categories, and if they are interested, they may add the page to their personal profile.
- c) Many social media platforms also offer the option to create interest-based groups. These groups can be established with a specific name and purpose. The platform provides the group owner and members with a space similar to a mini discussion forum, a photo album, and tools to organize events (événements) where members can be invited, and attendance tracked. This structure enables users to communicate, share experiences, and coordinate activities efficiently (Shdan, 2015).
- d)

### **IV. The Role of Facebook in Promoting Desert Tourism among Algerians**

Data from tourism forums indicate that social media platforms play an increasingly significant role in promoting desert tourist destinations, functioning similarly to advertising channels. Consumers often obtain direct information about tourism products from individuals with personal experience, frequently shared voluntarily without compensation through photos, videos, and reports.

The importance of social media in desert tourism has grown with the rise of electronic tourism, which has become essential today. Online promotion is fast and efficient, significantly reducing the costs associated with traditional marketing campaigns that can reach millions. Digital marketing aligns with contemporary trends, particularly as social media users are present everywhere. Facebook has also enabled the development of innovative tourism programs, helping to break the routine of traditional packages and continuously meeting the evolving needs of tourists. Social networks enjoy considerable credibility among decision-makers, tourism companies, hotels, and service providers, who use

these platforms to market their tourism products. In some cases, this has allowed users to bypass travel agencies entirely, making direct bookings with tourism establishments or airlines.

Consequently, some Facebook pages have played a vital role in introducing previously unknown or overlooked desert tourist sites by sharing photos of natural landscapes or videos captured by friends during their visits (Shdan, 2015).

Some Facebook pages are specifically dedicated to promoting tourist destinations, such as Tourism and Travel in Algeria, Algeria Tourism, Tourism in Algeria, and the tourism magazine Assihar, which maintains an active Facebook page sharing photos, videos, and links to various tourist sites, particularly in the vast Algerian desert (Assihar, n.d.).

It is important to note that e-tourism, whether via social networks or dedicated online platforms, requires several prerequisites for effective implementation, especially in developing countries. These requirements extend beyond the existing tourism infrastructure to include:

- a) Institutional and organizational frameworks: Coordination between ministries and relevant authorities to integrate e-commerce applications into all tourism operations.
- b) Research and knowledge dissemination: Access to global research on e-tourism and e-commerce applications in various tourism sectors, made available to tourism companies and projects.
- c) Readiness assessment: Evaluating the preparedness of tourism companies, travel agencies, hotels, and other intermediaries to implement e-tourism, identifying financial, human, and technical constraints, and proposing solutions, including the role of government bodies.
- d) Support for small enterprises: Providing material and technical support to small tourism companies and hotels that face financial or expertise limitations, including hardware, software, and employee training.
- e) Monitoring potential negative impacts: Studying the long-term effects of e-tourism expansion on the traditional tourism sector, which may reduce benefits for traditional intermediaries such as tour operators, travel agencies, booking networks, and distributors who traditionally connect service providers like hotels, restaurants, airlines, and tourist attractions in integrated packages.

Facebook represents a key aspect of this evolution, enabling the adoption of innovative tourism programs. This flexibility helps break the routine of traditional tourism offerings and continuously meets the evolving expectations of tourists. The growing importance of Facebook in promoting desert tourism among Algerian youth can be understood within contemporary media theory. Social networking platforms do not merely transmit tourism information but function as active media that shape perception, experience, and cultural imagination. Drawing on McLuhan's concept that "the medium is the message," Cheriti (2025) argues that digital and AI-driven media actively structure how audiences interpret content and make decisions. In this sense, Facebook contributes to constructing a tourism

culture by visually framing desert destinations, prioritizing specific narratives, and influencing users' cognitive and emotional engagement with tourism spaces .

## Discussion

The results of the field study indicate that the youth sample primarily rely on social networking sites to explore desert tourist destinations in Algeria. Traditional media, such as radio and television, follow in importance, while a smaller proportion of respondents use tourism magazines or other sources.

For example, the Assihar tourism magazine maintains a Facebook page that publishes videos, photos, and links to various tourist sites across Algeria, with particular focus on the country's vast deserts. The page currently has 45,461 likes and 22,172 followers, providing an accessible source of information and inspiration for potential tourists (Assihar, n.d.; Oushan, n.d.).

- a) Respondents indicated that they rely on their friends and acquaintances to obtain information about tourism, both domestically and internationally. This underscores the significant role that social networks play today as an alternative to traditional media and highlights the emergence of virtual tourism via the Internet. Virtual tourism contributes to promoting and familiarizing tourists with destinations by offering rich and rapidly accessible information about various tourist areas.
- b) The study revealed that Facebook and YouTube ranked first among social networks used to learn about Algerian desert tourism. Respondents primarily use these platforms to access information regarding the services provided by various travel agencies and hotel establishments. Instagram followed, with other dedicated tourism websites ranking lower. The main reasons for this preference are the popularity and wide usage of Facebook and YouTube among Algerians. According to an international report published by Echorouk Online, as of January 2023, Facebook had over 21 million subscribers in Algeria, representing 23.2% of the population aged over 18 (Echorouk Online, 2023).
- c) The respondents confirmed that photos and videos shared on Facebook featuring desert tourist destinations stimulated their interest in visiting these locations. This demonstrates the effective role of visual content and links published on tourism-related pages in attracting potential tourists and creating curiosity about these sites.
- d) Additionally, respondents indicated a preference for visiting locations previously explored by their online friends, using their experiences as a source of practical information about suitable destinations, the quality of hotel services, pricing, and other relevant details.

- e) Respondents are also highly influenced by positive or negative feedback shared by friends regarding desert tourist destinations, including the quality of tourism services. This feedback often determines whether they decide to visit particular locations.
- f) Moreover, respondents tend to share photos and videos of their own trips on Facebook to inform their friends about different destinations, encourage them to travel, and express admiration for the aesthetic appeal of various desert areas in Algeria.
- g) However, the study also highlighted that existing posts do not fully meet the needs of page visitors. Information is often insufficient, and guidance or answers to specific questions regarding prices, service quality, tour programs, and the nature of tourist sites are frequently lacking (Echorouk Online, 2023).

The limited interaction on tourism-related Facebook pages and groups is largely due to the fact that administrators are often not professional tourism promoters or practitioners. Most of them are young enthusiasts of desert tourism or local residents who aim to introduce certain areas in their provinces out of personal interest rather than professional expertise (Shdan, 2015).

Respondents emphasized that Facebook is an extremely important tool, particularly in light of recent technological advancements, for spreading awareness and promoting desert tourism among users. They highlighted the necessity for qualified tourism professionals to supervise Facebook pages. Such specialists would possess the skills and capabilities to effectively conduct electronic promotion, attracting both domestic and international tourists. Professional oversight ensures that users receive comprehensive information on tourist activities, including advertisements for events, festivals, and tourism exhibitions targeting both local and international markets.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the use of social networks to promote tourism culture among users has become a necessity driven by recent technological developments. Social media platforms, particularly Facebook, are among the most important tools for modern tourism marketing.

## **Recommendations**

- 1 Leverage information and communication technologies, especially social media of all types, to develop desert tourism culture among Algerians by promoting southern Algeria and other tourist destinations in engaging and efficient ways.
- 2 Encourage tourism agencies to actively use these platforms to raise awareness of desert tourism and to promote their services effectively.

- 3 Relevant authorities, particularly the Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts, should develop strategic plans to advance desert tourism, utilizing the capabilities offered by various social media networks.

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