



## **MASTER TOURISM**

« Tourism, Hospitality and Food Studies »

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# **SUSTAINABLE TOURISM : USING TRAVEL INFLUENCERS TO RAISE AWARENESS**

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**SUSTAINABLE TOURISM : USING TRAVEL  
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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media platforms have revolutionized the way people consume and share information. Moreover, over the last decade, they have become an increasingly powerful tool for marketing and promotion, and the emergence of social media influencers has created new possibilities for businesses and organizations to reach their target audiences. These social media influencers are individuals with a significant online following who use their influence to shape opinions, promote products or services, and engage their followers. Thus, influencer marketing has become a popular strategy for businesses to promote their products and services to a specific target audience, and the tourism industry is no exception. Indeed, these influencers have the ability to showcase destinations, hotels, and experiences to their followers, in a way that traditional advertising cannot replicate.

At the same time, concerns about sustainability and responsible tourism have become increasingly urgent, as the negative impacts of mass tourism on the environment and local communities have become more apparent. As the tourism industry is one of the largest and fastest-growing industries in the world, it is also one of the most resource-intensive and environmentally damaging. To face such an issue, more sustainable types of tourism have emerged, as a response to the negative impacts of mass tourism, thus seeking to promote environmentally and socially responsible travel practices.

This dissertation aims to explore the intersection of these two trends : the role of social media influencers and sustainable tourism. Indeed, given the potential for social media influencers to reach large audiences, there is an opportunity to leverage their influence to promote sustainable tourism and travel practices. Specifically, the research seeks to answer the following questions: To what extent can social media influencers raise awareness and educate their communities about sustainable tourism? How can they promote environmentally and socially responsible ways to travel?

To address these questions, the study will examine the use of influence marketing in the tourism industry, the potential of social media for raising awareness of sustainability issues, and the role of influencers in promoting sustainable travel practices.

The first part of this dissertation will provide an overview of the key concepts involved, including social media, influencers, influence marketing, sustainability, and sustainable tourism. By defining such concepts and phenomena, I aim to settle the social, economical, and environmental framework of this dissertation, in order to get a deeper knowledge concerning all these topics. Thus, I will be able to develop my main questions.

The second part will present the research hypotheses, which propose that influence marketing can be an effective way for tourism businesses and destinations to reach specific audiences, that social media can be a powerful tool for raising awareness of sustainability issues, and that influencers' authenticity and values can influence their ability to promote sustainable travel practices effectively. While presenting and developing my three hypotheses, I will mention and explain different types of theories, all based on the consumption behavior, which my hypothesis will rely on.

The final part of the dissertation will focus on a case study of the Occitanie region. The study will examine how the Leisure and Tourism Regional Committee of Occitanie is using influence marketing to promote sustainable travel practices in the area, and will assess the effectiveness of these efforts. Moreover, I will be able to face my hypothesis with this application field, by measuring the different strategies used by the region. Additionally, this part of the dissertation will also describe the methodology used to conduct an interview, in the framework of a qualitative study, but it will also describe the methodology that will be used in my second year's dissertation, including data collection methods such as interviews and surveys, as well as data analysis techniques.



**PART 1 : INTRODUCTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA,  
INFLUENCERS AND SUSTAINABILITY**

## INTRODUCTION

These last decades, our world was transformed by the evolution of new technologies. The birth of the Internet, the creation of social media and the increasing evolution of their use definitely impacted every aspect of our society and our way of life. The aim of this part is to introduce all the main topics of this dissertation, while highlighting the way they are related to the others.

The first chapter of this part of my dissertation will focus on the birth of social media, and all the consequences that such a new type of communication had on our society. As the popularity of such websites continued to increase through the years, some phenomenon started to appear, such as the social media influencers. Such people then became a key element of marketing strategies of most companies of the world, thus influencing our consumption behavior.

Thus, the second chapter will study more deeply what is an influencer specialized in travel content, who they are and what they share. Indeed, in order to understand the phenomenon they created, I will highlight what their aim is, and how brands and destinations might collaborate with them for promotion and marketing. Moreover, I will show that such a phenomenon was really impacted by the pandemics that struck the entire world, and the consequences that followed. Such an event definitely changed both the social media and traveling consumption, leading to our actual situation.

Finally, the third and last chapter of this part will focus on sustainable tourism. While defining what sustainability is, I will underline its importance in a field such as tourism, which depends at the same time on the ecological, economical and social situation of a destination. Nowadays, more and more popular destinations are thus the victims of a phenomenon called mass tourism, which, as I will highlight, might be emphasized by the social media and the influencers. Yet, lately, and especially after the pandemics, new ways to travel have become more and more popular while promoting sustainability.

# CHAPTER I : ADVENT OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND INFLUENCERS

## 1) BIRTH AND RULE OF SOCIAL MEDIAS : BIND THE PEOPLE

The World Wide Web, or Internet, which can be defined as the large system of connected computers around the world that allows people to share information and communicate with each other<sup>1</sup>, definitely revolutionized the way people used to interact with one another. From its outbreak during the 1970s until today, the Web, its goals and its usage evolved widely, going from a specialized tool reserved to a few to a global instrument : in January 2023, there were 5.16 billion internet users, which represent 64.4 percent of the global population<sup>2</sup>. Nowadays, what is considered as the Web 2.0 rests upon the concept of interactivity, as users actively share information, pictures and videos, which then can be modified and spread by others, thus enabling a new type of communication.

Such a process led to the birth of social media, which are defined as “all networks and media which enable social interaction within Web 2.0” (Knoblich and al., 2017, p. 149) and which include all “activities, practices and behaviors among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions” (Safko and Brake, 2009, p. 6). While favoring interactions between people from all around the world, each social media generally present both on websites and on mobile applications, appears as specialized in a particular area. Whether it is on the sharing of videos, pictures or short text documents, or whether it is reserved to educational, professional, or personal content, every social media aims to attract an intended audience depending on their expectations, and the type of social interactions they want to obtain. Thus, they enable people from all around the world to gather and to connect around similar interests, creating a kind of communication which was, until then, unimaginable. Moreover, while sharing their opinions and experiences, Guillaume Thevenot stated in his article about blogging, that “people are directly engaged and become the media themselves” (2007, p. 287).

Nowadays, social media plays a central role in our everyday life, especially for the younger generations which are immersed in new technologies sooner, even sometimes since their childhood. It is thus less and less unusual to see children with their own account on

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<sup>1</sup> Cambridge Dictionary, Definition of Internet, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/internet>, consulté le 6 février 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Statista, Number of internet and social media users worldwide as of January 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/#:~:text=As%20of%20January%202023%2C%20there%20were%20social%20media%20users>, 24 february 2023, consulté le 28 février 2023.

social media such as Instagram or Tiktok. According to the Digital 2022 Global Overview Report, more than 4.62 billion people were active social media users last year : it represents more than half of the global population, more precisely 58.1 percent<sup>3</sup>. As the same report explains that the average daily time spent using social media is around 2 hours and a half, it thus highlights the importance such platforms play in our daily life. Here is a list of the most used social platforms according to the Digital 2022 Report, with a short description for each of them<sup>4</sup> :

- Facebook : it is considered as one of the first popular social media. Launched in 2004, it allows users to create personal profiles, share photos and videos, send messages, and connect with friends and family. It also offers a range of features and tools for users, including groups, events, marketplace, and professional pages. In January 2022, it had grown to almost 3 billion users.
- Youtube : as a popular video-sharing website, it allows users to upload, share, and view videos, as well as interact with other users through comments and subscriptions. YouTube offers a vast library of content, including music videos, movie trailers or user-generated content. The platform also provides tools and features for content creators to produce and monetize their videos. Almost as old and as popular as Facebook, such a platform had 2.5 billion users in 2022.
- WhatsApp : this app allows users to send and receive text messages, voice messages, images, videos, and other types of media through an internet connection, rather than through traditional SMS messaging. It has become a popular communication tool for both personal and business use, with over 2 billion active users worldwide;
- Instagram : launched in 2010, it is now one of the most influential social media, thanks to its significant impact on visual culture, fashion, and digital marketing. Instagram allows users to share photos and videos, as well as interact with other users through comments, likes, and direct messages. In January 2022, more than 1.5 billion people used such a platform.

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<sup>3</sup> Data Reportal, Digital 2022 : Global overview report, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-global-overview-report>, 26 juin 2022, consulté le 6 février 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Data Reportal, Digital 2022 : Global overview report, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-global-overview-report>, 26 juin 2022, consulté le 6 février 2023.

- Wechat : if this social media is not familiar to a majority of people in the world, it still appears in the list of the most used platforms thanks to its popularity in Asia, and especially China. In the same way as WhatsApp, it allows users to send text and voice messages, make voice and video calls, and share photos, videos, and other types of media. In January 2022, it recalled more than 1 billion users.
- Tiktok : launched in 2016, it is one of the most viral social media in the world. As it allows users to send text and voice messages, make voice and video calls, and share photos, videos, and other types of media, it also includes a powerful algorithm that recommends content to users based on their interests and behavior. The platform has had a significant impact on popular culture, particularly among younger generations. In January 2022, it already had 1 billion users.

As the numbers continue to grow through the years, such a growth and the popularity of social media can be explained by many factors, such as the improvement of the new technologies which facilitates access to the web, or the prices of these technologies, which are slowly becoming more affordable (Dewing, 2013, p. 2). Yet, these last ten years, a new type of social media users appeared and largely participated in the phenomenal popularity of such platforms : the influencers.

## **2) INFLUENCERS : A SENSATIONAL PHENOMENA**

Indeed, even though a majority of social media users see them as a means to express their opinions, or to communicate with their friends, some people saw them as an opportunity to earn both money and popularity, even sometimes celebrity. Social media influencers are individuals who have gained a significant following on social media platforms, but what sets them apart from other users is their ability to influence their followers' opinions and behaviors. With a large and engaged following, influencers have the power to sway their audience's purchasing decisions, preferences, and attitudes towards certain products or services. Such an influence is defined by Springuel as the capacity to modify the expectations, the interests and the ambitions of someone else alongside one's own expectations, interests, and ambitions (2010, p. 2). Thus, from a sociological point of view, an

influencer is considered as a leader of opinion, as his experiences, his judgements, and the way he shares them, definitely affect his community's.

This concept of influence, is, as we will see it in the next chapter of this dissertation, a marketing tool related from the notion of “word of mouth”, which consists of the spread of informations or opinions by oral means (Chevalier, 2020, p.9). From this point of view, everyone might be in capacity to influence one another ; yet, by their large numbers of followers, social media influencers are able to increase their social circle and thus, their influence. Because of the impact they have on their followers and on their consumption behavior, they are considered as online personalities (Jourdain and Doki-Thonon, 2019, p. 16). Yet, on the contrary to other public figures or celebrities who own their popularity by more traditional media such as movies, music, or television, social media influencers are considered as “regular people” who have become famous because of the content they share on social platforms (Lou and Yuan, 2019). Their popularity is often based on their expertise or passion for a particular topic, for example fashion, beauty, lifestyle, food, or travel. As a result of their interests upon one of these topics and the way they express their opinion with a personalized tale, their followers view them as credible sources of information and seek out their recommendations on products, services, and other areas of interest. Their messages, posts, videos, or stories might be sponsored by different brands, depending on the identity and the content the influencer produces : these sponsored messages are considered as advertisements, and thus, are paid brand endorsements (Kapoor and al, 2021). Generally, the influencer will typically mention or feature the product and may provide their honest opinion or review of it. These posts will be marked with a disclosure to indicate that they are sponsored content and that the influencer received compensation for the endorsement. Indeed, it is important to note that sponsored influencers are required to disclose their partnership with brands and comply with advertising regulations in order to ensure transparency and protect consumers. In France, for example, sponsored influencers are required to disclose their partnerships with brands. The regulation regarding advertising in France is governed by the General Directorate for Competition, Consumer Affairs, and Fraud Control (DGCCRF) and the French Advertising Self-Regulatory Organization (ARPP). The purpose of these regulations is to protect consumers from misleading or deceptive advertising and ensure that sponsored content is clearly identified as such. Yet, these regulations do not prevent social media influencers from being one of the major marketing tools of our era, as we will see it in the next few pages.

Of course, the impact of the content shared by social media influencers differs depending on the size of their communities. Indeed, influencers can be categorized, not only by their interests and the recurrent theme of their social media, but also by their numbers of followers. According to a Launchmetrics study led in 2019, there would be 5 categories of influencers : the nano-influencers with less than 10 thousands followers, the micro-influencers who have between 10 and 100 thousands followers, the midtier influencers who have between 100 and 500 thousands followers, the macro-influencers who have between 500 thousands and 2 millions followers, and finally, the all-star influencers, with more than 2 millions followers <sup>5</sup>. The micro-influencers are the most abundant ones, as they represent almost 40 percent of all the influencers. Yet, the size of the community on its own is not always a true representation of the influence : indeed, the most important factor for influencers appears to be the engagement rate, a metric that measures the level of interaction and engagement that social media content generates among its audience. It is generally calculated as a percentage based on the number of likes, comments, shares, and other types of interactions that a piece of content receives, divided by the total number of followers that the influencer has (Goulet-Lanthier, 2018, p. 28). This calculation gives an indication of how many of the influencer's followers are actively engaging with their content and how this content resonates with his community. Such a metric is therefore essential for the brands, which consider social media and the influencers as a crucial tool in their marketing strategy, especially nowadays.

### **3) SOCIAL MEDIA AND INFLUENCER : REBIRTH OF MARKETING STRATEGIES**

#### *3.1) Definition of digital marketing*

The marketing of a brand or a company can be defined as the process of identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customer needs and wants through the creation, promotion, and distribution of goods and services. Ultimately, its goal is to create value for both the customer and the company by building strong relationships and generating revenue through the sale of products or services. These last decades, a new type of marketing emerged, thanks to the rise

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<sup>5</sup> Launchmetrics, 4 types d'influenceurs et les objectifs que vous pouvez atteindre grâce à chacun, [Types d'Influenceurs et objectifs que vous pouvez atteindre grâce à eux \(launchmetrics.com\)](https://www.launchmetrics.com/fr/types-d-influenceurs-et-objectifs-que-vous-pouvez-atteindre-grace-a-eux), 24 octobre 2019, consulté le 22 février 2023.

of new technologies : digital marketing, which focuses more specifically on the use of digital channels and technologies such as websites and social media.

As the concept of Web 2.0 and social media allowed people from all around the world to communicate, and to share opinions and experiences, the system of word of mouth mentioned earlier was amplified by increasing the size of the listeners (Bendahou, 2020). Such means led the consumers to use social media in order to get informations, so they could base their buying decisions upon experiences : thus, this phenomena obliged the brands and the companies to use such platforms in order to reach new potential customers, to develop a deeper relationships with them, and thus, to satisfy more demanding and more informed clients (Rodriguez and al, 2012, p. 365). As people started to use social media such as Facebook or Twitter to express their opinions toward an experience or a service they purchased, social media then became a major part of the companies' marketing strategy : indeed, thanks to those feedbacks, brands can increase their customers' loyalty by improving their services. It is what Rodriguez and al. define as relationship marketing, explaining that "One of the goals in relationship marketing is to create stronger customer relationships that enhance seller performance, including sales growth, marketer mass share and profits." (Rodriguez and al, 2012, p. 369). To create such a relationship, studies such as Lager's suggest that social media are the perfect tool as they enable a real interaction between the brand and the customers, allowing "them to feel like they have immediate and direct access to the company" (2009, p. 32). Thus, customers are not passive receivers of a product or a service anymore ; they play an active and important role in its promotion and its digital marketing. This is where the role of the influencers begins.

### *3.2) Influencer marketing*

Indeed, as already mentioned, influencers can have a significant impact on their followers' purchasing decisions, and brands are taking notice of this trend. On the contrary to most of the customers, social media influencers have a large amount of followers, enabling them to raise a brand awareness and to increase purchase behavior (Jang and al, 2021) ; these influencers thus become an independent third-party, holding an important position between brands or service providers and potential customers. They act like a bridge between the brand and the target audience by creating an engaging and authentic content that speaks directly to their followers and promotes the brand's products or services, but also by providing valuable insights and feedback to the brand about their audience's preferences and interests. Thus, as



Paval Kapoor and al. highlight it : “They play an important facilitating role for the service provider or brand by engaging and collaborating with followers in value co-creation activities.” (2021).

Yet, to reach a very large audience thanks to influencer marketing is not always the main goal of a brand or a company : indeed, if influencers appear as more likable, more credible and less expensive than usual advertising methods (Kapoor, 2021), they do not always represent a good investment for the brand. According to an article written by the French media Les Echos, one of the main reasons for brands to choose such a type of marketing is to convey more authentic values, while giving a more human and sincere brand image<sup>6</sup>. However, it's important to note that there are also potential drawbacks and risks associated with influencer marketing, the main risk appearing if the chosen influencers do not accurately represent a brand or its values, which can lead to reputational damage. Thus, the choice of the influencer who will appear as the ambassador should not only rest upon the size of his or her audience, but on the value he or she tends to share with the community. After all, it is one of the key benefits of influencer marketing : to reach a highly targeted audience. By choosing influencers whose followers align with their target audience and product or service offerings, brands are allowed to effectively reach and engage with potential customers.

As already mentioned earlier, the partnership between a brand and an influencer can take various forms, depending on the identity of his content and the social media used : it can take the form of sponsored posts or videos or product reviews, in which the influencer uses and praises a product or a service, either in exchange for remuneration or free products. Yet, some of these partnerships try to stand out by involving the audience itself : thanks to a giveaway or a contest introduced by an influencer, the brand gives the opportunity to his audience to win products or services. In exchange, they ask for the followers to like, comment or share some content, or to follow their account : such a compensation increases the engagement rates of the influencer, and continues to promote the brand.

Nowadays, influencer marketing is one of the most lucrative in the world. Indeed, such an industry grew from 1.7 billion dollars in 2016 to 16.4 billion dollars in 2022<sup>7</sup>. This undeniable increase is related to the growing popularity of social media, but also to the increasing numbers of influencers from all around the world. Such social media consumption has been caused by the context of the last few years, especially the global pandemic which

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<sup>6</sup> Les Echos, Marketing Influenceur : Instagram n'est pas réservé uniquement aux secteurs de la mode et de la beauté, [http://archives.lesechos.fr/archives/cercle/2017/09/16/cercle\\_173671.htm](http://archives.lesechos.fr/archives/cercle/2017/09/16/cercle_173671.htm), Septembre 2017, consulté le 28 février 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Influencer Marketing Hub, Key influencer marketing statistics to drive your strategy in 2023, <https://influencermarketinghub.com/influencer-marketing-statistics/>, January 2023, consulté le 28 février 2023.

affected the consumers' behavior. The most popular contents are generally concerning fashion, beauty, food and fitness : yet, these last few years, a new type of social media content started to stand out, with the emergence of travel influencers.

## CHAPTER 2 : INFLUENCERS AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE TRAVEL BUSINESS

### 1) TRAVEL INFLUENCERS DEFINITION AND SOCIOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW

As explained earlier, influencers, no matter the platforms they use or the size of their audience, generally focus their content on a specific theme, depending on their own personal interests and passions. As their name might imply, travel influencers produce some content based on travel, tourism, and culture, and are thus able to influence the opinion or behavior of their audience concerning travel-related choice. If all types of influencers tend to share their travel and their holidays on their social platforms, some of them really specialized themselves in this area. To do so, they use social media as a means to share their experiences, anecdotes, tips and advice, either on the choice of the destination itself, on the means of transport, or on the local food and activities.

Their testimonies appear to their community as very useful, but also trustful : according to a study conducted on Twitter, on the contrary to traditional advertising or celebrities, the level of trust put into influencers is similar to the trust consumers hold for their friends<sup>8</sup>. Thus, 34 percent of French people appear to trust travel influencers and travel bloggers more than traditional touristic websites, as 37 percent of young people admit being influenced by social media content for the choice of their destination<sup>9</sup>.

From a sociological point of view, travel influencers appear as a very interesting topic to study. Indeed, in his article *Travel-Related Influencer Content on Instagram: How Social Media Fuels Wanderlust and How to Mitigate the Effect*, Björn Asdecker compares two studies which both focus on how travel-related content posted on social media might influence consumers and their intention to visit a destination. These studies firstly explains how social media participated in the increase of social comparisons among its users, as Asdecker describes it :

Traditionally, social comparisons were mainly limited to personally-known, close people such as colleagues, friends, or family. However, the Internet and social media

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<sup>8</sup> Adweek, Twitter says users now trust influencers nearly as much as their friends, [Twitter Says Users Now Trust Influencers Nearly as Much as Their Friends \(adweek.com\)](https://www.adweek.com/digital/twitter-says-users-now-trust-influencers-nearly-as-much-as-their-friends/), Mai 2016, consulté le 1 mars 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Hospitality on, Influenceurs voyages : les nouveaux acteurs incontournables de la promotion touristique, <https://hospitality-on.com/fr/tourisme/influenceurs-voyages-les-nouveaux-acteurs-incontournables-de-la-promotion-touristique>, Mars 2022, consulté le 1er mars 2023.

have multiplied the sources of comparisons. For instance, Kerr et al. (2012) and Liu et al. (2019) found upward social comparison on social networking sites, which are predominantly used to share exceptional experiences, status, professional success, and happiness. Recommendation algorithms reinforce this effect, suggesting similar content based on users' previous behavior and preferences. (2022, p. 855)

In the same way, the study led by Latif and al. highlighted that such a social comparison was even more intense, and led to increase the intention to visit the destination exposed on social media posts, whether they are shared by friends or by influencers and no matter the social platform used (2020). Later in his study, Asdecker focuses on the envy produced by the feeling of inferiority led by the constant comparison increased by social media. Mentioning the work of Van de Ven entitled *Appraisal patterns of envy and related emotions*, Asdecker explains that there are two types of envy which depends on the deservingness of the mentioned superiority (2022, p. 855) : malicious envy, for example, is a destructive and harmful emotion which is based upon one's perception that someone's superiority - whether this one is physical, economical or social, is undeserved (Van de Ven, 2009). On the other hand, benign envy is a far more positive emotion, as it focuses on challenging oneself, perceiving that the other's superiority is deserved. As influencers are generally admired by their audience, their followers are thus more exposed to benign envy. Thus, such a study can explain the reason of the popularity of influencers specialized on travel content increased during this last decade, as Asdecker explains :

“Therefore, in this particular study context, benign envy is the relevant outcome of the underlying social comparison processes that needs to be examined. In that regard, benign envy serves as an explanatory mechanism. Travel-related content posted by influencers on Instagram inspires followers to self-improve and helps achieve a similar lifestyle, reinforcing the followers' wanderlust.” (2022, p. 854-855)

Indeed, nowadays, influencers specialized in travel-related content tend to thrive : some of the most popular one even have an audience higher than the 3 million followers, such as Murad Osmani, a Russian photographer now famous for the pictures of him and his wife traveling all around the world, with 3.5 millions of followers. In France, the most popular travel influencer appears to be Bruno Maltot, who collects more than 300 thousand followers on Instagram, and 450 thousand on TikTok. Moreover, the number of such accounts is booming, as such a work appears as the dream of a lot of people, as they are invited to

promote exotic and expensive destinations<sup>10</sup>. Yet, the destinations are not the only one to call on influencers for some promotions, as online travel agencies such as Expedia also used influencers and their audience to revive tourism all around the world, especially after the global pandemic which had a terrible impact on the tourism field.

## **2) POST-COVID ERA : NEW TYPES OF CONSUMERS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA AND TRAVELS**

### *2.1) The impact of COVID 19 on the tourism field*

As one might suspect, tourism was deeply affected by the COVID 19 pandemic and its consequences. Indeed, as the concept of tourism rests upon the idea of spatial movement of people, the impacts of travel restrictions in almost every country of the world definitely impacted this sector (Yu and al, 2021). According to the data collected by the World Tourism Organization, one of the main consequences was a 74 percent drop in international arrivals in 2020, and a worst decrease between January and 2021, with a drop of 85 percent in comparison with the same period in 2019 (Thomas, 2021). The closure of the borders, the lack of international flights and the quarantine requirements were just the first steps which led to the closure of many tourism-related businesses such as hotels, restaurants or travel agencies : such a lockdown forced them to experience financial losses and often, definite closure. Once the worst part of the pandemic was done, the economical context all around the world was very different from a few months before : with the financial losses, a lot of countries had some difficulties to get back on their feet. Nowadays, some countries still have not recovered from this period. Yet, if some people thought that this pandemic would end people's desire to travel because of the economic impact, the fear and the safety concerns, it has also created a pent-up demand for travel. As travel restrictions eased and vaccines became more widely available, many people were eager to resume travel and make up for lost time. However, the changing priorities and the border restrictions - some lasted longer as in New Zealand for example, led to a change in the way of travel, as we will see later.

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<sup>10</sup> Hospitality on, Influenceurs voyages : les nouveaux acteurs incontournables de la promotion touristique, <https://hospitality-on.com/fr/tourisme/influenceurs-voyages-les-nouveaux-acteurs-incontournables-de-la-promotion-touristique>, Mars 2022, consulté le 1er mars 2023.

## *2.2) The impact of COVID 19 on social media consumption*

On the other way around, the COVID pandemic also hugely impacted the consumption of social media. Indeed, with people spending more time at home due to lockdowns and social distancing measures, there has been an increase in social media usage. Many people have turned to social media platforms to stay connected with friends and family, stay informed about the latest news, and stay entertained. According to the Digital 2021 Global Overview Report, “Social media user numbers increased by more than 13 percent over the past year, with nearly half a billion new users taking the global user total to almost 4.2 billion by the start of 2021”<sup>11</sup>. Such a report even goes to calculate that in 2020, 1.3 million new users joined social media every day as the average time spent on mobile devices by day increased to more than 4 hours<sup>12</sup>. The pandemics thus definitely impacted the daily consumption of social media all around the world, giving an opportunity for new contents to rise, such as the platform TikTok, which downloads, in the first month of the global Coronavirus lockdowns, increased by 115 million. Thus, social media and its consumption evolved during the pandemic as the tourism sector was severely impacted. Yet, tourism-related businesses found a way to counter their fall by using these platforms to their advantage.

## *2.3) Social media's impact on tourism businesses*

Even before the global pandemic of COVID 19, social media had already dramatically transformed the tourism industry, as users were able to get, through them, most of the information needed in order to make travel-related decisions, whether it concerns the destination or the amenities (Bendahou, 2020). Yet, the choice of the destination appears as the main choice influenced by social media : according to the media Hospitality On, 34 percent of French people admit using social platforms to choose their destination<sup>13</sup>. Thus, even before the pandemic, social media were very influential in the sector of tourism, as

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<sup>11</sup> Data Reportal, Digital 2021 Global Overview Report, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-global-overview-report>, Janvier 2021, consulté le 4 mars 2023.

<sup>12</sup> Data Reportal, Digital 2021 Global Overview Report, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-global-overview-report>, Janvier 2021, consulté le 4 mars 2023.

<sup>13</sup> Hospitality on, Influenceurs voyages : les nouveaux acteurs incontournables de la promotion touristique, <https://hospitality-on.com/fr/tourisme/influenceurs-voyages-les-nouveaux-acteurs-incontournables-de-la-promotion-touristique>, Mars 2022, consulté le 1er mars 2023.

Hysa, Karasek and Zdonek explain it in their work entitled *Tool for Sustainable Tourism : Marketing in Society 5.0 idea* :

“Currently, tourists—while planning holidays—use new technologies that help them obtain information about a given place, services offered, and tourist attractions [...] Along with technological development, organizations more and more often use new technologies in this area, including social media. In 2019, the costs of digital advertising in the travel industry reached USD 5.5 trillion, representing 4.2% of total digital spending. This indicates a high value of expenses on conducting marketing activities, in which expenses on activities in the digital area are important.” (2021, p. 1018)

Yet, the social platforms really imposed themselves in the marketing strategy of travel-related business after the pandemics. As their possibilities were limited by the context and the restrictions, they had to adjust in order to counter the financial losses and the decreasing number of visitors. In an interview, Hamid Bentaher, the general manager of the Accor company in Maroc declared : “Talking about touristic experiences, the digital technology clearly transformed our relationships with time, with others and with travel experiences”<sup>14</sup> (Safaa and Housni, 2021). Thus, tourism offices made a new use of social media : for example, the tourism office of the Annecy Lake in the French Alps set up Facebook Lives in order to digitally welcome tourists, and to answer questions<sup>15</sup>. In the same way, the tourism office of Hyères on The French Riviera, increased its use of TikTok to promote the region<sup>16</sup>. During summer of 2022, the national French committee of tourism named Atout France used influencer marketing, and invited European influencers to visit different parts of the country, in order to revive national tourism<sup>17</sup>. Thus, if tourism destinations and businesses already used social media and influence marketing before the pandemic, this one definitely increased their importance, making them major tools of tourism marketing strategy. As Hamid Bentaher assures “However, we are realizing that crisis does not invent and create new tendencies ;

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<sup>14</sup> Translated from French by Lola Courneil. Original text : “ En termes d’expérience touristique, le numérique a clairement changé notre relation au temps, aux autres et à l’expérience du voyage.”

<sup>15</sup> Hospitality on, Influenceurs voyages : les nouveaux acteurs incontournables de la promotion touristique, <https://hospitality-on.com/fr/tourisme/influenceurs-voyages-les-nouveaux-acteurs-incontournables-de-la-promotion-touristique>, Mars 2022, consulté le 1er mars 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Hospitality on, Influenceurs voyages : les nouveaux acteurs incontournables de la promotion touristique, <https://hospitality-on.com/fr/tourisme/influenceurs-voyages-les-nouveaux-acteurs-incontournables-de-la-promotion-touristique>, Mars 2022, consulté le 1er mars 2023.

<sup>17</sup> Hospitality on, Influenceurs voyages : les nouveaux acteurs incontournables de la promotion touristique, <https://hospitality-on.com/fr/tourisme/influenceurs-voyages-les-nouveaux-acteurs-incontournables-de-la-promotion-touristique>, Mars 2022, consulté le 1er mars 2023.

they accelerate the already existing-ones”<sup>18</sup> (Safaa and Housni, 2021). Yet, influencers themselves need tools in order to participate in this promotion.

### **3) SPECIALIZED TOOLS : INSTAGRAM AND PINTEREST TO CREATE THE INSPIRATION, YOUTUBE AND TIKTOK TO GUIDE AND RECOMMEND**

Indeed, even though influencers tend to follow the trends and to have an account on more and more platforms, they still have to choose wisely, as these should always be related to their content and to the message they want to deliver. As new platforms continue to emerge, some of them continue to be unavoidable, as they are the *places-to-be* in order to perform marketing of influence. For travel influencers, these platforms tend to focus on visual content, as it is one of the main assets for tourism marketing - we will see later why.

#### *3.1) Social media and visual contents : Pinterest and Instagram*

The less famous of these useful platforms for travel influencers appears to be Pinterest. Often forgotten as a social media, it was launched in 2010 and is a platform that allows users to discover, collect and share visual content, primarily images and videos, on virtual boards. The goal of Pinterest is to help people find and save ideas for their personal or professional interests. Users can browse through a huge stream of visual content, and "pin" or save images and videos they like onto their own virtual boards organized by topic. Users can also follow other users' boards or specific topics that interest them. On such a platform, travel influencers are able to provide inspiration by sharing appealing visual content and boards that showcase their travel experiences. They also organize their boards by destination or theme and curate high-quality images that capture their audience's attention, as for example Expert Vagabond, an adventure and travel blogger, who uses Pinterest to create travel guides or tips while sharing his professional photographs. Thus, such a platform can play a significant role

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<sup>18</sup> Translated from French by Lola Courneil. Original text : “Toutefois, on se rend compte que les crises n’inventent pas et ne créent pas des nouvelles tendances, mais qu’elles accélèrent celles déjà existantes.”



in the decision-making process of traveling by providing users with a visual platform to research and plan their trips<sup>19</sup>.

Yet, concerning the sharing of pictures, it is the social platform of Instagram which appears to have the monopoly. Indeed, Instagram is one of the most popular social media, reaching 855 million users in 2019 and which was predicted to reach 1 billion users in 2023 (Yilmazdogan, 2021, p. 300). In majority preferred by generations Y and Z, Instagram allows its users to share photos and videos, as well as to interact with other users by liking, commenting, and sharing content. The platform has various features, including filters, stickers, and hashtags, that users can use to enhance their content and make it more discoverable. Defined as creative, as it focuses on visual content, it is not a simple window display : indeed, it is a real lever for brands (Chevalier, 2020, p. 25). Instagram is the major tool for influence marketing, as it gathers 80 percent of global influencers. In the same way as Pinterest, it allows its users to share high-quality photos and videos that showcase their travel experiences, while making sure their content stands out and captures their audience's attention. They use Instagram captions to share their thoughts, travel advice, and insights. They also use these captions to provide context for their photos and videos and to connect with their audience on a deeper level. By publishing attractive pictures which capture sensations, travel influencers are appealing to their audience's desire to travel (Abecassis, 2021, p. 23). Thus, this platform also appears as a great source of inspiration concerning travel decisions : users can search for travel-related hashtags or locations and discover beautiful photos and videos from other users. Moreover, thanks to the Shopping tags and Swipe up links, they might be in direct contact with promoted websites such as a particular tour company or hotel, making it easier for them to book the experience. On such a platform, travel influencers might have millions of followers, such as Murad Osmani, who we have already mentioned, who has more than 3 millions followers. These last few years, Instagram has extended to a few more types of content such as stories which offer the possibility to publish instantly any type of content that would be available 24 hours (Jourdain and Doki-Thonon, 2019, p. 48) or even Reels, which consists of short videos.

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<sup>19</sup> Pubosphere, Les réseaux sociaux, acteurs incontournables du tourisme, <https://pubosphere.fr/les-reseaux-sociaux-acteurs-incontournables-du-tourisme/>, Novembre 2019; consulté le 3 mars 2023.

### *3.2) Video content and birth of vlog : YouTube and TikTok*

In terms of video content, YouTube is the most popular social media. Indeed, thanks to this platform, users can upload, share, and view videos. Primarily used for sharing personal videos and home movies, it grew in popularity and became a hub for creative content and a way for users to build their own media brands. Today, YouTube has over 2 billion monthly active users and has become an essential part of the online entertainment and media landscape. Nowadays, it is the worldwide leader platform concerning the hosting and the broadcasting of videos, but it is also its own search engine where the users can directly search for the content they want to see (Abecassis, 2021, p. 18). If travel influencers can use Youtube as a way to share face cam videos in which they narrate their travels, giving travel tips and advice and even giving recommendations concerning a destination or its amenities and activities, the most popular and efficient content for them appears to be the vlog. A vlog, short for "video blog," is a type of blog where the content is primarily in the form of videos. Often personal and diary-like, influencers share their daily lives and experiences with their audience by filming it (Jourdain and Doki-Thonon, 2019, p. 48). As video-sharing platforms like YouTube became more popular, vlogging grew in popularity as well, and it became a way for creators to connect with their audience and share their experiences with the world. Today, vlogging has become a mainstream form of content creation, and one of the most viral trends about vlogging is travel vlogs. Travel vlogs document the experiences of vloggers as they travel to different destinations around the world : it has helped to popularize many destinations. Once again, the popularity of vlogs in travel-related content can be explained by it providing inspiration, advice and an authentic perspective that can help travelers to plan their own experiences.

Such content is also available on other platforms specialized in the sharing of video format, as for example Tiktok, that we already have mentioned. It allows users to create and share short-form videos, typically 15 to 60 seconds in length. TikTok's algorithm is designed to show users videos that it thinks they will enjoy, based on their viewing history and engagement on the app. On TikTok, the concept of vlogging rests upon the same idea as on YouTube, but there are still several differences such as the length of the video, the edition of the content - which is generally more visually engaging on TikTok, but also the type of audience, which is known to be younger on the latter. Yet, in the same way, travel influencers are still able to share their experiences, their opinions and their tips on destinations - some even go to use both of the platforms in order to reach the largest audience possible. One of

the most popular French influencers using TikTok is Bruno Maltor, who shares his content to his 475 thousand followers.

Thus, travel influencers have a lot of tools at their disposal in order to create travel-related content, whether this one is sponsored or not. They are thus active in the marketing strategies of destinations and tourism-related businesses, who are slowly recovering from the pandemic and its consequences. Yet, the future of such a field is still unsure, as the actual ecological, economical and sociological context forecast a lot of difficulties and obstacles in the next few decades.

## **CHAPTER 3 : SUSTAINABLE TRAVELS AND NEW CONCERNS**

### **1) DEFINING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**

#### *1.1) Definition of sustainability*

Considering the political, economical, environmental and social context of the last few decades which doesn't stop from getting worse, with more and more environmental disasters, wars and crises, the future of our planet, but also of the entire humanity, appears as clearly threatened. To try to counter the effects and consequences of such events, more and more people - both as individuals and professionals, are betting on a more sustainable way of life, in order to redress the balance. Such a worry really started out in the 1970s, as more and more concerns started to grow about the impact of human activities on the environment. The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in 1972, helped to bring the concept of sustainability to the forefront of international attention. In the following decades, sustainability became an important issue for policymakers, businesses, and communities around the world. The publication of the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, by the United Nations in 1987, helped to define sustainability as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations, 1987). Such a concept is considered as the matter of everyone, and every business field.

#### *1.2) Sustainability in tourism*

The tourism area is not an exception, as sustainability has been "an increasing concern for the tourism industry since the late 1980's" (Joo and al, 2020, p. 2). As sustainability relies on natural resources and ecosystems, it can be negatively impacted by tourism activities. If, in the 1990s, such a concern was mainly environmental because of the risks of harming the ecology of a site (Joo and al, 2020, p. 2), it has developed in numerous fields. Nowadays, the World Tourism organization defines sustainable tourism as a type of "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host

communities.”<sup>20</sup>. Indeed, as tourism is inevitably related to the surrounding environment, the local communities and the host country’s economy, it appears as necessary to raise awareness on such a subject in the entire world (Hysa and al, 2021, p. 1).

The first field concerned with sustainability is the more obvious one : the environment. Indeed, tourism can have significant environmental impacts, such as increased pollution, especially with transportation, for example air travel, which is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions or cruise ships that also generate large amounts of waste. Tourism can also lead to a degradation of natural resources such as water, but it can also lead to damaging local ecosystems through activities such as hiking, skiing, and boating. For example, boating can disturb marine wildlife and damage coral reefs. In order to be sustainable, destinations and tourism and travel-related businesses have to focus on the respect of nature under all its forms.

Sustainability also focuses on social concerns. Indeed, traditional tourism also has negative social impacts which complicate the life of local people. Because it can lead to overcrowding, tourism can lead to strained local infrastructure and resources, thus making it difficult for locals to access public spaces and facilities, leading to social inequalities between these two categories. Moreover, tourism can widely impact the culture of a place and of its people, whether it is by engaging in a disrespectful or inappropriate way, or to claim ownership of cultural practices that are not yours. Thus, sustainability also focuses on the well-being of local people, and on the interactions made between them and tourists.

Finally, sustainable concerns also focus on economic matters. Even though tourism can have a huge positive impact on a destination, it very often goes with negative ones, such economic inequalities that can be exacerbated with certain segments of the population benefiting more from tourism than others, as for example wealthy investors who may profit from tourist developments, while low-wage workers struggle to make ends meet. In the same way, leakage can have a very negative impact, as the money generated by tourism might not benefit the country but to international companies, as for example hotel chains.

These are of course only a few examples of the many negative consequences that might be generated by tourism. Thus, to create and organize more sustainable ways to travel might redress the balance, in order to counter the current trend of mass-tourism.

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<sup>20</sup> United Nations World Tourism Organization, Sustainable development, <https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development#:~:text=%22Tourism%20that%20takes%20full%20account,the%20environment%20and%20host%20communities%22>, consulté le 5 février 2023.

## 2) COUNTER THE EFFECT OF MASS TOURISM

Indeed, since the 1950s, mass tourism is a phenomenon that has experienced a massive increase in the Western societies, thanks to the “economic enrichment of industrialized societies and social progress and the reduction of working time” (Theng and al, 2015). Moreover, the progress of transport technologies and the birth of low-cost flights also participated in the popularization of travel and tourism. But what really is considered mass tourism ?

### *2.1) Definition of mass tourism and example*

Mass tourism is a type of tourism that involves large numbers of people visiting the same destination at the same time. It is characterized by standardized travel packages, low prices, and an emphasis on popular tourist attractions. Such a popularization leads to the saturation of the place and thus to environmental degradation, such as damage to fragile ecosystems and the decrease of natural resources. Generally associated with overcrowding, which can strain local resources and lead to a deterioration of the quality of life for residents, it can also result in cultural homogenization, as some destinations tend to focus on the preferences of tourists rather than preserving their unique cultural heritage. As Theng and al. explains it, mass tourism’s definition depends on the concerned territory, on its size, its resources and on the local population density (2015). Mass tourism is thus a phenomenon which appears when the boundaries of a territory might not have been respected, and lead to creating pressure on the local environment and infrastructure. Indeed, tourism activities tend to exacerbate both ecological and social stressors of a destination, combining the “rapid influx of tourists and little regulation of ecosystem-associated tourist activities” (Arkema and al, 2021, p.2). Nowadays, some of the most popular destinations have, or are still experiencing mass tourism, as for example famous European cities such as Amsterdam or Barcelona, or even the most famous of them, Venice, which has been a popular tourist destination for decades, attracting millions of visitors each year and which is now experiencing erosion and pollution issues, in the same way as worldwide wonders such as the famous Machu Picchu.

If such a phenomenon is only due to a destination’s popularity and its image, some factors do play a role in the importance of this popularity, including social media and

especially Instagram. Indeed, such platforms have made it easier for people to share travel experiences and inspire others to visit popular destinations. The visual culture enhanced by Instagram, in addition to the need of social validation, has led some places to be considered as “Instagrammable”. Such a place is a destination or attraction that is particularly photogenic and visually appealing, making it a popular choice for Instagram users to take photos and share them on the platform. For example, in 2018, the city of Amsterdam decided to remove one of its major touristic landmark, a sign with huge letters saying “I AMSTERDAM”, which was originally settled in 2004, on a square that connects 3 of the major museums in the city, in order to promote the city and its diversity. With the years, the rise of social media, and the popularization of selfies, such a place became one of the places-to-be for tourists, who wished to share their experience on social media<sup>21</sup>. As Amsterdam experienced mass tourism and its consequences, and as this sign was considered as an encouragement to such a phenomenon, it was finally removed<sup>22</sup>.

## *2.2) Social media impact on mass tourism*

The popularity of instagrammable places is generally impacted by influencers’ posts : by making some destinations trendy, they incite - often unintendedly, their followers to come to these places and to take similar pictures, leading to a kind of unhealthy mass mimicry which, of course, has an impact on the destination<sup>23</sup>. Such a phenomenon appears to be very common, as in April 2019, 42 percent of French travelers admitted that the choice of their destination was based upon their instagrammable potential, according to a search led by One Poll<sup>24</sup>. For example, Santorini, a small archipelago in Greece, has been constantly put under spotlights for the last ten years, as influencers from all around the world promoted its clear blue sea, its white houses and streets, and the incredible spot to admire the sunset. Such a promotion led to overtourism, with consequences such as environmental degradation, price increase for the local life, and cultural threats which finally impacted both the local people’s

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<sup>21</sup> Six-two, The famous I-Amsterdam sign has been removed and people are furious, <https://www.contiki.com/six-two/article/i-amsterdam-sign-removed/#:~:text=After%2014%20years%20outside%20of%20allege d%20'promotion%20of%20individualism'>, Janvier 2019, consulté le 4 mars 2023.

<sup>22</sup> Deezen, Amsterdam council removes “Iamsterdam” sign after it becomes selfie spot, <https://www.deezen.com/2018/12/05/i-amsterdam-sign-removed-council-mass-tourism/>, Décembre 2018, consulté le 4 mars 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Hospitality on, Influenceurs voyages : les nouveaux acteurs incontournables de la promotion touristique, <https://hospitality-on.com/fr/tourisme/influenceurs-voyages-les-nouveaux-acteurs-incontournables-de-la-promotion-touristique>, Mars 2022, consulté le 1er mars 2023.

<sup>24</sup> Pubosphere, Les réseaux sociaux, acteurs incontournables du tourisme, <https://pubosphere.fr/les-reseaux-sociaux-acteurs-incontournables-du-tourisme/>, Novembre 2019; consulté le 3 mars 2023.

life and the touristic experiences (Foteini, 2020, p. 40). Thus, as destinations from all over the world are facing such a phenomenon, the highlight is the need to find solutions, and more sustainable ways to travel.

### 3) NEW TRAVEL-RELATED TRENDS

Indeed, these last few years, the field of tourism was, in a way, reinvented by the worldwide context : the pandemic of COVID 19, the raising awareness about environmental degradation and sustainability, the increase of mass tourism... All these elements led to the questioning and challenging of our habits, our practices, and our notion of travel as we have always known it. Such a reassessment has led to the birth of new ways to travel, which appears closer to the new values produced by the increasing importance of sustainability in our daily life. We will see that these types of tourism exist for a variety of reasons, but they are all based on the idea that travel can be more than just a vacation. They are designed to offer travelers a more meaningful and authentic experience by allowing them to connect with local communities, cultures, and environments in a responsible and sustainable way. They aim to offer travelers a more enriching and fulfilling travel experience that goes beyond just sightseeing or relaxation. They offer a way to create positive social, economic, and environmental impacts while also allowing travelers to learn, grow, and connect with the world in a more meaningful way. Such a lifestyle and mindset tends to convince more and more people : Booking.com, the worldwide leader online travel agency stated that, in 2020, one third of their consumers said that “their desire to travel sustainably has increased as a result of COVID-19”<sup>25</sup>. Thus, the question we may ask is, what are in concrete terms these new types of tourism ?

#### 3.1) *Slow tourism*

The first I will focus on is probably the most famous one : the slow tourism. Slow tourism can be defined as a type of tourism that emphasizes taking things at a slower pace and focusing on the quality of the travel experience rather than the quantity of attractions

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<sup>25</sup> Booking.com, Emerging traveller trends and behaviours revealed, <https://partner.booking.com/en-gb/click-magazine/trends-insights/emerging-traveller-trends-and-behaviours-revealed>, September 2020, consulté le 5 mars 2023.



visited. It is often compared with mass tourism, which involves visiting many tourist sites in a short amount of time and can lead to overcrowding and all its negative consequences. Such a concept already existed before the pandemics, as Gardener already defined it as a lifestyle and a philosophy in 2009 :

“Slow travel is about making conscious choices. It is about deceleration rather than speed. The journey becomes the moment to relax, rather than a stressful interlude imposed between home and destination. Slow travel re-engineers time, transforming it into a commodity of abundance rather than scarcity. And slow travel also reshapes our relationship with places, encouraging and allowing us to engage more intimately with the communities through which we travel.”<sup>26</sup>

More than a mindset, such a concept also resonates with ecological and sustainable reasons, and it focuses on experiencing local culture, cuisine, and traditions while encouraging travelers to engage with the local community in order to gain a deeper understanding of the local culture and environment. Such a way to travel “can provide an alternative way of reaching social goals and keeping a balance between economic development, environmental protection, and social equity” (Manthiou and al, 2022). The deprivation of travel experiences during the pandemic and the numerous lock-downs participated in the increasing use of slow tourism.

### *3.2) Proximity tourism*

In the same way, COVID-19 has also played a significant role in the increase in the use of proximity tourism which can be defined as traveling to destinations that are close to home, often within a day's drive or accessible by public transportation. This type of tourism has become very popular during and after the pandemic due to travel restrictions, lockdowns and safety concerns, leading many travelers to choose to avoid air travel and instead opt for destinations that are closer to home. According to the World Tourism Organization, the “inbound tourist arrivals were down 44 per cent in the first four months of 2020, with a staggering 97 per cent decline in April”<sup>27</sup>. Moreover, the decrease of international tourists

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<sup>26</sup> Hidden Europe, A manifesto for slow travel, <https://www.hiddeneurope.eu/a-manifesto-for-slow-travel>, 2009, consulté le 5 mars 2023.

<sup>27</sup> UNWTO Report, How COVID 19 is changing the World : a statistical perspective volume 2, [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ccsa/documents/covid19-report-ccsa\\_vol2.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/ccsa/documents/covid19-report-ccsa_vol2.pdf), 2020

arrivals between 2020 and 2019 decreased by between 20 and 30 percent (Romagosa). Thus, proximity tourism, also known as local tourism or domestic tourism, has become more popular in recent years as a way for people to enjoy travel experiences without the expense of long-distance travel, as Romagosa explains it :

“In the context of growing insecurity and uncertainty, nearby destinations could be considered ‘less risky’ by many potential tourists who, having been noticeably affected by the economic crisis arising from the health crisis, have seen their purchasing power reduced.” (2020, p. 692)

Indeed, in addition to being more accessible for people with a limited budget, proximity tourism can also be more sustainable and environmentally friendly than long-distance travel, as it involves less carbon emissions and resource use, minimizing the impact on the environment. Finally, this type of tourism offers a way to explore and appreciate the local culture, history, and natural beauty of one's own region or country. By visiting nearby destinations, travelers can learn more about their own communities and support local businesses and economies. It thus also helps promote a greater sense of pride and appreciation for one's own culture and heritage.

### *3.3) Cultural tourism*

Talking about culture and heritage, let's focus on the cultural tourism, which, according to the World Tourism Organization can be defined as :

“A type of tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination. These attractions/products relate to a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> UNWTO, Tourism and culture, <https://www.unwto.org/tourism-and-culture>, consulté le 5 mars 2023.

Thus, cultural tourism is a type of tourism that focuses on experiencing and exploring the cultural heritage and diversity of a particular region or country : to do so, people travel to a destination specifically to learn about and experience the local culture, traditions, and way of life. It can include a very varied range of activities such as visiting museums and historical landmarks, religious sites, local markets, cultural festivals or performances : in fact, it concerns everything that provides opportunities for tourists to engage with local communities, learn about their habits and customs and develop a deeper appreciation and respect of their culture. The main objectives of such a type of tourism is to promote and preserve cultural heritage and traditions, and to provide economic benefits to the local communities. It can help to support local artisans, performers, and cultural organizations, and can also provide employment opportunities for people involved in the tourism industry. Moreover, on the contrary to other type of specific tourism which implementation depends on the destination, cultural tourism can a tool for every type of destination :

“One reason why cultural tourism in particular is a useful development tool for so many regions is the fact that every place has culture it can develop - unlike the development of beach tourism, which requires at least a coastline. The plentiful supply of cultural objects can also create major funding problems relating to the upkeep of historic structures and cultural venues. The solution to the funding problem may also be seen in the development of cultural tourism.” (Richards, 2003, p.3)

Thus, despite the difficulties the tourism field might encounter in order to renew itself, new sustainable and respectful - both socially and ecologically, trends continue to appear and to grow all around the world. The question we might ask now, is thus the problematic of this dissertation : how such trends and sustainable ways to travel can be promoted on social media, and especially by influencers ?

## CONCLUSION

Thus, the increasing popularity of social media, and the phenomenon that they produced such as influencers, forever changed our society, our way of life, and our consumption habits. The field of tourism and travel was not an exception to this rule. As travel was popularized and encouraged by social media, influencers specialized in touristic content became a more important phenomenon, first through their blogs, then through their social media accounts. They also became a key tool in the digital marketing strategy of both destinations and local touristic businesses, who saw in them a way to personalize their promotion while spending less money. Nowadays, as social media and new technologies are used by a major part of the population and appear as essential to our actual lifestyle, they are thus a compulsory tool for digital promotion of destinations.

Yet, these last few decades, and especially these last few years, as the environmental situation of our planet started to challenge our way of life, the concept of sustainability has become more and more important. Traveling while respecting the environmental, social and economic situation of the destination appear as essential, especially in a period where mass tourism degrades some of the most popular destinations of the world. As new types of responsible tourism tend to emerge, especially after the pandemics of COVID-19, the challenge is now to promote such ways to travel.

**PART 2 : TRAVEL INFLUENCERS' ROLE IN  
THE PROMOTION OF SUSTAINABLE  
TOURISM**

## INTRODUCTION

These last decades, and especially the very few last years, new phenomena such as mass tourism started to challenge our conception and our perception of what type of tourism a destination really needs, and thus, what type of promotion should be used. Indeed, some destinations are clearly damaged - both environmentally and socially, by a constantly increasing flow of tourists, who do not respect neither the ecosystem of the place, nor its inhabitants. As already explained, such behavior generates ecological, economical and social issues for the local governments and their people, highlighting the negative impact of tourism in certain parts of the world. Social media and influencers are especially blamed for the increase of such a phenomenon : as the influencers are followed by large communities and share their travels, they tend to encourage their followers to visit the same place by creating benign or malicious envy, as I explained in the first part of this dissertation. Moreover, their account and content are visible to everyone who might be interested, and thus, even if their content is firstly directed to their followers, they indirectly participate in mass promotion. If such an influence is seen as an important advantage of using influencers in the digital marketing strategy of a brand or a destination, it thus also has a clear negative aspect.

Yet, if social media influencers are blamed for their part in mass promotion, and thus, in mass tourism, it is important to highlight that such a power of influence can also be used in a more positive way. Indeed, more and more influencers specialized in travel content try to change their image and to counterbalance the effect of mass tourism, by promoting more sustainable ways to travel. Thus, facing this reversal of situation, here are the questions we might ask, followed by my three hypotheses :

**To what extent can social media influencers raise awareness and educate their communities about sustainable tourism ? How can they promote environmentally and socially responsible ways to travel ?**

**Hypothesis 1 : the marketing of influence enables tourism businesses and destinations to reach a certain type of audience.**

**Hypothesis 2 : social media enables to raise awareness of sustainability and environmental concerns.**

**Hypothesis 3 : influencers' sincerity prevails when it comes to awareness, thus sustainability might be one of their values in order to promote it in the right way.**

# CHAPTER I : THE USE OF MARKETING OF INFLUENCE IN THE FIELD OF TOURISM

## 1) THE ROLE OF VISUAL CONTENT FOR TOURISM PROMOTION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Digital marketing and communication hold a very important particular place in the promotion of the tourism fields : in order to attract tourists, destinations and local tourism businesses use social media and influencers as a lever to highlight and showcase their territory. Thus, visual content, whether it is pictures or videos, is the center pillar of their strategy.

On the Internet and on social media, visual content can be defined as “online content that’s primarily image based”, the form being various, such as “pictures, diagrams, charts, infographics, online videos, screenshots, memes and slide decks”<sup>29</sup>. Nowadays, more and more social media are completely based on the sharing of visual content : for some, such as Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, or TikTok, visual content appears as a fundamental part of their concept. Even on other famous social media such as Facebook or WhatsApp, the sharing of pictures, videos, memes, or stories is very common. But why such an important use of visual content ?

According to a study led by the company Digital Marketing Philippines, which was shared by *Hubspot*, visual content or images make better content to share on social media compared to blocks of text, because the brain processes visual information 60 000 times faster than the time it takes for the brain to decode the text<sup>30</sup>. Such a critical place of the visual content is because the majority of people are visual learners, and images and videos can convey a message or feeling much more effectively than written or spoken words alone. Thus, according to the same study, one’s posts on any social media could generate up to 94 percent more views if a compelling visual content is added to the publication. Such an increase is equal whether the visual content in question is a picture or a video. The last one holds a particular role in our society, especially for the youngest ones, as its popularity does

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<sup>29</sup> Backlinko, *What is visual content ?* , <https://backlinko.com/hub/content/visual>, consulté le 16 mars 2023.

<sup>30</sup> Hubspot, *12 Reasons to Integrate Visual Content Into Your Marketing Campaigns* <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/visual-content-marketing-infographic>, 2017, consulté le 16 mars 2023.

not stop to increase - particularly among the generation of 18-25 who are, on average, spending 9 hours a week to watch videos on social media <sup>31</sup>.

As such content started to take an increasing place on social media, it inevitably impacted digital marketing strategies all over the world. Of course, visual marketing already existed long before social media and the evolution of new technologies, and was already a major tool in advertising campaigns, as explained by Anne Boussarie, the French director of Getty Images, a photography agency and an image bank, as she praised the use of such content in marketing strategies : “Whether it goes through photography, different video format or even virtual reality, the visual communication enables to establish instantly a very special relationship with the target”<sup>32</sup>. Such a popular use and share of visual content might also be explained by the fact that the image does not encounter any linguistic borders, as it belongs to the universal language (Larzul, 2022, p.41). Yet, some studies also found other advantages of visual content that might explain such a recurrent use in marketing strategies. Jink Ge-Stadnyk and Ulrike Gretzel listed these advantageous functions, using different studies to analyze the importance of visual content :

“Moreover, existing literature reveals five main functions of visual message elements: 1) conveying additional information; 2) clarifying and illustrating the propositions presented in the text; 3) elevating the trustworthiness of the claims; 4) enticing consumers to consume the message, and 5) creating a favorable impression of the product (Taboada & Habel, 2013; Belch & Belch, 2007; Jaeger & MacFie, 2001).” (2018, p.3).

In a study entitled *Visual Factors On Social Media Influence Youth Tourist, Purchasing Decision*, the meta-analysis review highlighted that two main concepts increased the user engagement in social media, concerning visual content : the content in itself, and its context. As the first one is defined as “a visual version of a concept, strategy or idea”, the second one can be referring to a “presentation of content that improves the delivery of a message [...] such

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<sup>31</sup> Camille Jourdain, Marketing Digital, Social Media et Influence Marketing, *Communication visuelle sur les réseaux sociaux : comment être incontournable ?* <https://www.camillejourdain.fr/communication-visuelle-reseaux-sociaux-istock-getty-images/>, 2018, consulté le 16 mars 2023.

<sup>32</sup> Camille Jourdain, Marketing Digital, Social Media et Influence Marketing, *Communication visuelle sur les réseaux sociaux : comment être incontournable ?* <https://www.camillejourdain.fr/communication-visuelle-reseaux-sociaux-istock-getty-images/>, 2018, consulté le 16 mars 2023. Translated from French by Lola Courneil. Original text : “Qu’elle passe par la photographie, les différents formats de vidéo ou encore la réalité virtuelle, la communication visuelle permet d’établir en un instant un lien privilégié avec ses cibles...”



as single dominant color, image aesthetic, the combination of words, emoji and images, and video or animated images” (Hoon and al, 2021, p.10445). Such features thus appear as compulsory tools in order to produce a good digital marketing strategy concerning visual content and social media.

Concerning marketing in the tourism field, visual content is famous for holding the most important place. Nowadays, more than 66 percent of french tourists have admitted watching some videos in order to prepare their next travel<sup>33</sup>. Such an increased use of visual content for the promotion of travels appears logical and coherent with the field of tourism, as according to Burns and al, “tourism is an essentially visual experience” (2010, p. 15). Indeed, if tourism appears as a majorly visual experience, the best way to promote it on social media is to use visual content. The fact that such a promotion is generally used on social media which concepts are entirely based on the sharing of pictures and videos, such as YouTube, TikTok or Instagram, accentuate the significance of the visual strategy (Ge-Stadnyk & Gretzel, 2018, p.2). Visual content can also help to capture the essence of a destination and showcase its unique features, landmarks, and attractions. Thus, to share visual content for the destinations or the local tourist businesses, is a way to show a territory in its best lights, thus giving to the followers or viewer, an appealing desire to travel to such a place. An analysis of data made by TripAdvisor in 2019, one of the leader websites concerning travel services, explained that 79 percent of TripAdvisor travelers mentioned that pictures had a significant influence on travel commerce (Hoon and al, 2021, p.10435). Yet, we could thus wonder, what is generally represented in the visual content shared on social media, concerning tourism and travel. In the same study mentioned as earlier, Ge-Stadnyk and Gretzel analyzed the main visual content shared by Destinations Management Organizations :

“Landscape and nature are most prevalent, followed by food, people and architecture/buildings. Festivals, art objects and animals are least frequently used. Interestingly, landscape/nature and architecture/buildings visuals can be destination and non-destination-specific (e.g.the Eiffel Tower). Similarly, people depicted in images include not only locals and tourists but also people in general. While food mainly involves local cuisine, objects are general material things that are relevant to consumers’ travel or daily life (e.g. umbrella, calendar).” (2018, p.8)

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<sup>33</sup> Couloir Agence Audiovisuelle, *L'importance de la vidéo marketing dans le tourisme*, <https://www.couloir3.com/blog/importance-de-la-vidéo-marketing-dans-le-tourisme/>, 2021, consulté le 17 mars 2023.

Of course, such content can be shared by Destinations Management Organizations or local tourism businesses, but it can also come from individuals who already visited the territory, or who are currently doing so. Thanks to the popularization of social media, sharing visual content is accessible for everyone, even if it is particularly a role attributed to influencers. Moreover, it is considered as one of the main roles of travel influencers to share appealing visual content, in order to highlight a destination for their communities. Yet, we are going to see that not all the influencers do have the same impact on their communities.

## **2) THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGEMENT RATE FOR MICRO INFLUENCERS**

These last few years, the influencer job has been particularly popularized : with the evolution of the new technologies, the increasing popularity of social media, and the realization that such an activity could generate money and offer fame and many opportunities, it started to attract more and more people. As already mentioned in the first part of this dissertation, nowadays, the influencers are classified in 5 categories, depending on the size of their audience. Indeed, even though they can also be categorized depending on the main theme of their content, it is the number of followers who seems to be prioritized. Thus, brands and destinations might be tempted to work with the influencers who have the more important audience in order to attract as many people as possible. Yet, lately, a lot of studies have been led and proved that such a number is not the most important information, in order to produce a qualitative partnership and to produce benefits.

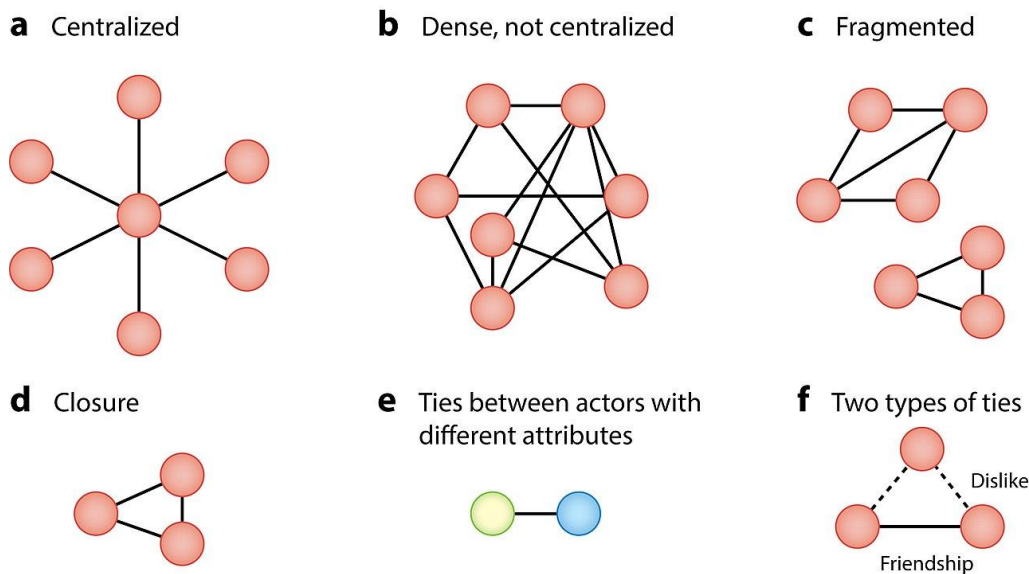
The Social Networks Analysis is “a branch of sociology that can be seen as a set of entities connected in a network through mathematics” (Mohd Rum & Yaakob, 2018, p.950). Such a theory exists since the early 20th century, but has particularly evolved during the 21st century, with the evolution of sociology (Freeman & Linton, 2004) : nowadays, it is a particularly widespread type of analysis which aims ‘to measure the relationship and flows between groups, organizations, people and other connected entities” (Mohd Rum & Yaakob, 2018, p.950). It is thus generally used to map the different relationships uniting a community, or a social entity, while measuring and comparing these relationships, and can be used “to obtain both a visual and a mathematical analysis of different structures”<sup>34</sup>. Its representation

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<sup>34</sup> Grin, How network analysis helps in finding the right influencers, <https://grin.co/blog/influencers-network-analysis/>, 2019, consulté le 19 mars 2023

takes the form of nodes - which represent the entities, the people or the organizations, that are related in a network of links and edges, which represent the relationships between the different nodes. Here is an example of a typical Social Network Analysis, with the various types of links and connections which can exist :

*Figure 1 : Network characteristics (Bodin and al, 2020)*



 Bodin Ö, et al. 2020.  
Annu. Rev. Environ. Resour. 45:471–95

In this type of representation, the position of the different nodes is really important : it both defines the role of the person it represents, but also the relationship it has with the other nodes.

Such a type of analysis is often applied in the studies of social media, and thus can help to determine the real influence potential of a person, or, in this case, of an influencer. Indeed, the identification of the right influencer is a really important tool in order to produce a successful campaign between a brand or a destination and an influencer. Yet, 73 percent of marketers consider this identification as one of their biggest challenge, when it comes to work with social media influencers<sup>35</sup>. This type of analysis thus appears as a compulsory tool in order to target the right influencer, and thus the right audience. In such a context, “it doesn’t consider reach or follower count as the only indicators of a person’s influence in their

<sup>35</sup>Econsultancy, The rise of influencers, <https://econsultancy.com/reports/the-rise-of-influencers/>, 2016, consulté le 19 mars 2023.

network [...]it uses a person's position in the network to determine how influential they are"<sup>36</sup>. Thus, instead of looking at the number of followers of some influencers, the analysis considers the quality of their community, in order to measure their influence. Such a measure of influence considering other statistics than the number of followers can be explained in this way :

“Let's say, on one hand, you have an Instagram user with 2 million Instagram followers. However, most of these followers are regular users who, in turn, don't have big audiences of their own. On the other hand, you have another user with a few thousand followers, many of whom are well-connected in other networks. Working with an influencer who belongs to the second category might be more rewarding in terms of reach and engagement.”<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, engagement rate thus appears as the most important metrics to take into account, especially for brands who wish to work with social media influencers. If it can be defined as “metrics that track how actively involved with your content your audience is”<sup>38</sup>, such a measurement differs from a website or a social media to another : it generally includes the number of clicks, likes, sharing, comments, or even the average time spent on a page. Concerning social media influencers, the category that is considered to have the best engagement rates are the micro-influencers : if their number of followers is smaller than for bigger influencers, they are particularly famous for the quality of their audience and their transparency towards them (Chevalier, 2020, p.38). A lot of studies tend to confirm that their engagement rate is far more important than the one observed on the posts of more famous influencers : some explain such a difference by their proximity with their audience<sup>39</sup>. Jourdain and Doki-Thonon even goes to explains : “They maintain a more authentication relationships with their followers and the other members of their communities” (2019, p.24)<sup>40</sup>. More than their engagement rate, brands and destinations should take into account the fact that micro-influencers' communities tend to be Niche markets : as these influencers' content

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<sup>36</sup> Grin, How network analysis helps in finding the right influencers, <https://grin.co/blog/influencers-network-analysis/>, 2019, consulté le 19 mars 2023

<sup>37</sup> Grin, How network analysis helps in finding the right influencers, <https://grin.co/blog/influencers-network-analysis/>, 2019, consulté le 19 mars 2023

<sup>38</sup> Sproutsocial, Engagement rate definition, <https://sproutsocial.com/glossary/engagement-rate/>, 2018, consulté le 20 mars 2023.

<sup>39</sup> Journal du Community Manager, Micro influencers : levier indispensables aux marques, <https://www.journalducmm.com/micro-influenceurs-levier-indispensable-aux-marques/>, 2019, consulté le 20 mars 2023.

<sup>40</sup> Translated from French by Lola Courneil. Original text : “Ils entretiennent une relation plus authentique avec leurs abonnés ou les autres membres d'une communauté.”

generally focuses around some very specific topics - such as travel, or fashion, or food, they tend to be an expert in this area. Their communities thus follow them for their expertise and for their interests : thus, by using micro-influencers in their promotion, brands can “tap into these highly curated communities, enabling a degree of targeting that’s impossible with micro-influencers”<sup>41</sup>. Thus, the Social Network Analysis, put in the context of social media influencers, highlights the importance of the engagement rate and the quality of the audience in the process of influence, rather than the number of followers.

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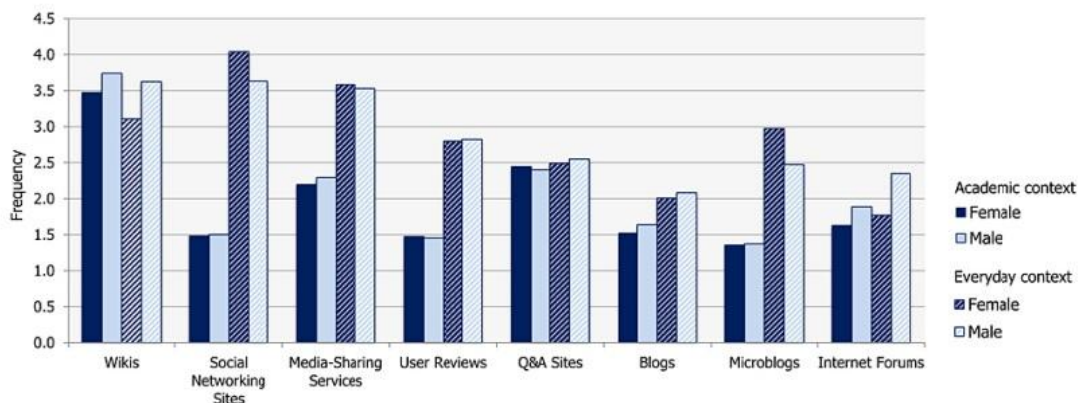
<sup>41</sup> Forbes, Micro-Influencers : When smaller is better, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2021/06/02/micro-influencers-when-smaller-is-better/?sh=6f663afc539b>, 2021, consulté le 21 mars 2023.

## CHAPTER II : SOCIAL MEDIA’S ROLE IN RAISING AWARENESS OF SUSTAINABILITY

### 1) SOCIAL MEDIA : EDUCATING AND DISSEMINATING INFORMATIONS

This last decade, the use of social media has constituted a turning point in our use of new technologies and of the Internet. Even though their main purpose was at first socialization, the increasing average time spent on social media necessarily assigns such platforms new features, and thus new roles. Thus, this increasing availability of communication allowed social media to become a source for the dissemination of news and information all around the world : social media and microblogs such as Twitter are especially found to be used for getting news (Holcomb and al. 2013). Indeed, nowadays, people tend to turn to social media in order to find information, as Kyung-Sun and Seiching explain it : “About 50% of online teens and over 80% of college students use social media for their academic as well as everyday life research, for example (Head and Eisenberg, 2009, 2010; Pew, 2012)” (2015, p.1). Such a popularity can be important to study in order to understand why social media are used for information seeking, and how it impacts our attitude. Kyung-Sun thus studied the frequency of such a use of social media in comparison to other types of websites, highlighting that, concerning every context, social media were the most used tool in order to seek information.

*Figure 2 : Frequency of taking evaluative actions, by context and sex (Kyung-Sun and Sei-Ching, 2015, p.3)*



In the study, Kyung-Sun proved that “social media as information sources in the everyday context” were more used than in the academic one, and that people “took evaluative actions more frequently in the former than in the latter” (2015, p.3). If such a behavior in human information seeking can be explained by the principle of least effort - the idea that people will necessarily choose the path with the least effort (Case, 2005) because they are not always considered as reliable sources, more and more people tend to consider social media as a real tool for information dissemination and for education. Some articles and educational website even goes to depict social media as an indispensable tool for education, especially nowadays, explaining that it “can expand your point of view on different subjects” and “gives you an opportunity of engaging with specialists to find solutions on topics that you may need assistance”<sup>42</sup>. Thus, in the context applied in this dissertation, as sustainability is an issue of our everyday context, social media appears as an important information-seeking tool concerning such a topic. Moreover, as we are going to see, people’s behavior concerning sustainability can be influenced by their environment, and thus, the way they are getting information about it.

The Social Cognitive Theory was first created and developed by Albert Bandura during the end of the 20th century and states that one’s learning “occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behavior.”<sup>43</sup> This theory thus focuses on the way a person acquires its behavior and how it is influenced by its environment.

“In a cyclical fashion, one’s behavior is determined by both the environment and one’s personal characteristics; personal characteristics are further shaped by behavior; and eventually one’s behavior and personality can influence one’s environment.” (Font and al, 2016, p.1)

One’s environment, its personal characteristics and its behavior are thus factors that influence its capacity to learn, but, as “causal factors, they need a time lag to exert their influence” (Sawitri and al, 2015, p.29). Yet, these factors are not the only central concept of such a theory : indeed, the personal agency, which can be defined as “the capacity of individuals to

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<sup>42</sup> The Asian School, Role of Social media in education, <https://www.theasianschool.net/blog/role-of-social-media-in-education/#4-impact-of-social-media-in-education->, 2023, consulté le 23 mars 2023.

<sup>43</sup> Behavioral Model Changes, The social cognitive theory, <https://sphweb.bumc.bu.edu/otlt/mph-modules/sb/behavioralchangetheories/behavioralchangetheories5.html>, 2022, consulté le 23 mars 2023.

intentionally choose, execute and manage their own actions to actualise expected outcomes”, is also essential (Sawitri and al, 2015, p.29). According to Sawitria, from this perspective, individuals are not influenced by external factors, they also are proactive : they thus “become both products and producers of their environment” (Sawitri and al, 2015, p.29).

If this theory has been mainly used in research concerning communication, it can also concern sustainability. Indeed, if, as explained, a person’s behavior is influenced by its environment and its personal characteristics, someone living in an environment where sustainability is one of the main concerns, would be more likely to be sensitive to such a concern, as Sawitri and al. explain it :

“Goals are more likely to be achieved when individuals experience strong contextual support and weak barriers. In contrast, non-supportive conditions can impede these processes of translating goals into actions. This means that the relationship between goals and actions is expected to be stronger in the presence of supportive versus restrictive contextual conditions.” (Sawitri and al, 2015, p.31)

From this perspective, social media could be considered as one of the contextual conditions which could support sustainable goals. Thus, raising sustainability awareness on different types of platforms could be considered as supportive contextual conditions, encouraging people to have a more pro-environmental behavior. Yet, the question we may ask is, are social media really influential on one’s behavior and attitude ?

## **2) THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOR**

Because of the increasing place social media holds in our everyday life, it has been the center of numerous research concerning its impact on our society, on our identity and on our behavior. Whether the results of the different studies and theories might differ, they all agree on the fact that social media do have an influence on human’s attitude : such an impact can concern our consumption behavior, but also our personal life, with for example the way we perceive ourselves. To explain such an impact, a lot of studies are based on Social identity theory, proposed by Tajfel and Turner in their work *Organizational identity: A reader* in 1979. Such a theory “posits that a portion of one’s self-concept is dependent on the importance and relevance placed on the group membership(s) to which an individual



belongs” (McKinley, 2014, p.2), and it thus provides insight into how group membership affects our behavior and attitudes toward others and how it shapes our sense of self. It also has implications for understanding intergroup conflict, prejudice, and discrimination, and for promoting social cohesion and diversity. From such a perspective, social media are a huge influence, as they provide users with the ability to connect with others who share similar interests and values, leading to the formation of virtual communities and social identities. These online communities can reinforce group norms, beliefs, and behaviors, which can influence individuals' consumption decisions and preferences : social media thus have an influence on our identity, which, according to some researchers and some philosophers, “ can be transformed both intendedly and unintendedly in the short and long term”<sup>44</sup>. Indeed, because of the evolution of new technologies, and our easy access to social media, these platforms have the power to transform our identity, as they can create a sense of social pressure to conform to certain lifestyles, trends, and products. Concerning a marketing point of view, users may be more likely to purchase products that are associated with their social identity or the identity of their virtual communities. Moreover, social media influencers can also influence consumption behavior by promoting certain products or brands, thereby reinforcing social norms and expectations around consumption. Such a theory from a marketing perspective can also be used from a sustainable point of view : in the same way that social media have an impact on our consumption behavior, they do also influence our environmental concerns and our attitude towards it. Thus, they can raise awareness and promote sustainable behaviors, such as reducing waste or supporting environmentally-friendly products and initiatives. Moreover, they also facilitate social movements and activism around sustainability issues, which can lead to systemic change. Yet, even though these platforms have the potential to promote positive change, it is important to be aware of its potential negative impacts and work towards using it in a responsible and sustainable way. Indeed, in the same way they can encourage positive sustainable behavior, they can also reinforce unsustainable consumption patterns, such as fast fashion, or, in the framework of this dissertation, mass tourism.

Yet, Social identity theory is not the only study that could answer such a hypothesis. In the same way as this one, the Social influence theory could also provide explanations concerning the influence of social media on behavior, as it focuses on how individuals' behavior, attitudes, and beliefs are influenced by the presence and actions of others in their

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<sup>44</sup>Rebellion research, What is social identity in social media, <https://www.rebellionresearch.com/what-is-social-identity-in-social-media>, 2022, consulté le 23 mars 2023.

social environment. Social influence theory can be defined as “any change in behavior, emotion or thinking that other individuals cause, even if their presence is only imagined, expected or implied, including the interpersonal processes that lead to behavior, emotion or thinking changes”<sup>45</sup>. To resume, such a theory has important implications for understanding a wide range of social phenomena, including conformity, obedience, and group polarization. It thus also has applications in areas such as marketing, persuasion, and social change. By understanding the mechanisms of social influence, we can better understand how to shape attitudes and behaviors in positive ways, such as promoting healthy behaviors, reducing prejudice, and, in the case of this dissertation, encouraging sustainable practices.

Considering the context of social media, such a theory appears relevant, as “social influence stems from social interactions which trigger the development of new attitudes and intentions due to significant changes in consumer behavior and makes social media an intensely valuable medium for marketing in the current business environment” (Usman & Okafor, 2019, p.88). Of course, social media influencers are one of the most important levers of such concept, as, thanks to such a phenomenon, they are now compulsory tools in most of marketing campaigns :

“Specifically, for social media, influential members being targeted in online word of mouth (WOM) campaigns can raise not only awareness, but also the actual adoptions or purchases. Social influence identification is essential for the demand and diffusion predictions of new products and technologies and for the social network based target marketing.” (Chen and al.,2019)

From a sustainable point of view, social influence could thus have the potential to impact our behavior and attitudes, as “from a social psychological perspective, climate change education is not an objective imparting of facts upon a passive individual but a socializing process” (Estrada and al, 2017, p.170). In the framework of my dissertation, such a socialization would thus appear in social media, which will expose educational content on the environmental impact of certain products or practices, leading to a greater understanding of the importance of sustainable behaviors, and which could encourage reducing waste, or, in the case of this dissertation, travel more sustainably. Thus, as Estrada and al, explain : “acquiring climate change knowledge can be seen as one variable in a social influence model that results in a

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<sup>45</sup>Studysmarter, Social influence, <https://www.studysmarter.co.uk/explanations/psychology/basic-psychology/social-influence/>, consulté le 23 mars 2023.

person feeling more integrated into a community that is concerned about climate change” (Estrada and al, 2017, p.171).

Both of these theories thus might prove my hypothesis, as they clearly highlight that our society is impacted by social media, and that these really influence our behavior and attitude, even concerning sustainable issues and the practices we can adopt to correct them.

### **3) THE NEED OF COLLABORATIVE EFFORT AND LONG-TERM ENGAGEMENT**

If raising awareness on sustainable issues and practices via social media can be a way to put a light on the need for our society to change its habits, such a phenomenon would lose its interest without two main elements : the collaborative effort, and the long term engagement. The first one can be defined as “research and development undertaken by the parties based upon mutually agreed upon product targets, timelines, strategies, division of responsibilities, allocation of resources, and funding”<sup>46</sup>. Such a concept can also be explained this way :

“Bringing companies, academia, government, civil society and other groups together to deliver on a common purpose is a powerful recipe for holistic thinking. We need diversity of perspectives to develop new solutions to seemingly intractable problems. Each participant in a collaboration brings unique expertise, skills and resources. When such collaboration is well-orchestrated, its potential to address systemic challenges can be remarkable.”<sup>47</sup>

In the same way, long-term engagement can appear as an important tool in the regularization of important issues, as these are generally complex, and can clearly not be resolved in a single time : it requires a collective effort over time. Concerning sustainability, achieving sustainable outcomes requires systemic change in the way we live, work, and consume. This change requires a long-term approach that involves sustained engagement, collaboration, and commitment. Sustainability being a continuous process of improvement and adaptation, it

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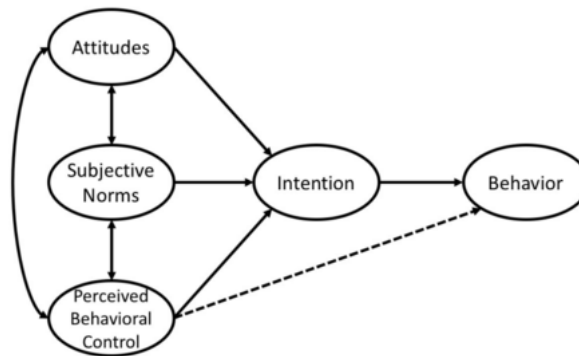
<sup>46</sup> Law Insider, Collaborative effort definition, <https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/collaborative-effort>, 2023, consulté le 23 mars 2023.

<sup>47</sup>The Sustainability Institute, The imperative of collaboration, <https://www.sustainability.com/thinking/the-imperative-of-collaboration/>, consulté le 23 mars 2023.

generally needs ongoing engagement and collaboration to identify and address emerging issues and challenges.

The main theory which could be concerned by such concepts is the famous Theory of Planned Behavior, which is a development of the Theory and Reasoned Action developed in 1975 by Fishbein and Ajzen, and which was first introduced in 1991 by Ajzen himself, in order to explain human attitude and on the intention to adopt a certain behavior (Octav-Ionut, 2015, p.18). Such a theory posits that an individual's behavioral intention is the best predictor of their actual behavior, and that this intention is influenced by three factors : attitude - defined as “an individual’s favorable or unfavorable evaluation of the behavior”, subjective norms - referring to the perceived social pressure towards the behavior, and the perceived behavioral control, which consists in the personal assessment of the feasibility of executing the behavior in a given context (Yuriev and al, 2020).

Figure 3 : The Theory of Planned Behavior model adapted from Ajzen 2005<sup>48</sup>



The use of such a theory in this hypothesis is not trivial : indeed, in the field of sustainability and environmental science, it has increasingly been “advocated as a key theory for predicting and promoting a variety of pro-environmental behaviors” (Si and al, 2019). By understanding the attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control that influence individuals' intentions, sustainability advocates could design interventions and messaging strategies that effectively promote sustainable behaviors - in the case of this dissertation, on social media, by creating digital marketing strategies relevant to the intentions of potential customers. For example, such a campaign could influence attitudes by highlighting the positive environmental outcomes of sustainable acts such as reducing waste, or in the case of this dissertation, favoring train travel to planes. In the same way, it could influence subjective

<sup>48</sup> ASNH, Theory of Planned Behavior, [https://ascnhighered.org/ASCN/change\\_theories/collection/planned\\_behavior.html#:~:text=The%20Theory%20of%20Planned%20Behavior%20assumes%20that%20individuals%20act%20rationally,for%20the%20decision%2Dmaking%20process,](https://ascnhighered.org/ASCN/change_theories/collection/planned_behavior.html#:~:text=The%20Theory%20of%20Planned%20Behavior%20assumes%20that%20individuals%20act%20rationally,for%20the%20decision%2Dmaking%20process,) consulté le 23 mars 2023.

norms by emphasizing the social norms to travel more sustainably regarding the environment and the people who live in the destinations, by featuring testimonials from community members. Finally, it could influence perceived behavioral control by providing convenient and accessible ways to travel more sustainably, such as continuing to develop train rails. All of these ideas could be featured on social media, thus showing that social media can participate in raising awareness around issues such as sustainability.

## **CHAPTER III : INFLUENCER’S AUTHENTICITY AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN SUSTAINABLE PROMOTION**

### **1) AUTHENTICITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS OF INFLUENCERS**

As already explained in the first part of this dissertation, the use of the marketing of influence increased alongside the evolution of new technologies and social media. As these became unavoidable components of our everyday life, this type of marketing had to adapt, in order to thrive in a society where such types of platforms are now the most influential type of media. Influencers thus became one of the most important tools of digital communication and marketing strategies, allowing businesses to reach a more targeted audience than the usual types of advertising, as they generally are considered as expert and credible on a certain topic. Thus, from a brand’s perspective, they appear as a tool they can use for promotion. Such a perspective might share the influencers in two categories, depending on the way brands want to use them :

“Brands view social influencers in one of two ways, as either (a) content creators to whom brands can outsource and grant free reign and full creative license to, or (b) paid promoters who take scripts and direction from brands to reach the influencer’s base of followers.” (Kapitan and al., 2022, p.342)

Comparing different studies, Kapitan and al. also explain that expertise - which can be defined as “knowledge, experiences, or skills in a specific field and has the ability to confer accurate information”, and trustworthiness - which is considered as “when a communicator intends to transmit accurate information, and is honest and not deceptive in what information they share” are the most important skills for an influencer to have, in order to produce important and relevant content for partnerships with brands (2022, p. 343). Yet, if these two elements are important, authenticity is also essential, as it builds trust and credibility between an influencer and its audience : if an influencer is perceived as authentic, its audience believes that their opinions and recommendations are genuine and unbiased, which leads to a higher level of engagement and conversion rates for the products or services they endorse. To be able to post content which “aligns with one’s true self is an important component of

influencer success.” (Kapitan and al., 2022, p.343). Considering partnership with brands, the influencers considered as authentic do really like the products or services proposed by the brand : more than mentioning them because they have been paid to do so, “they might have spoken about the product or service even before the brand even approached them [...] and might continue to talk about it even after the campaign is over and they are no longer being paid”<sup>49</sup>. Kapitan thus explains how the audience might perceive this difference :

“A behavior is perceived as being more authentic when it is attributed to intrinsic motivations as opposed to extrinsic pressures—that is, when an endorser acts as their true self [...] For instance, an endorser can be motivated to endorse a product in accord to (a) their own intrinsic desires and disposition, such as liking for or belief in a product, or (b) responding to the external situation, such as being paid US\$1 million to promote a product. When consumers infer that an endorser is promoting a product merely for a paycheck, it devalues the endorser’s effectiveness and diminishes WTP for the endorsed product.” (2022, p. 344)

Thus, my hypothesis is based on the idea that authenticity is compulsory in order to produce a successful and relevant campaign including influencers, especially when this campaign approaches sensitive topics such as sustainability.

This hypothesis can rely on the Persuasion theory, “a mass communication theory that deals with messages aimed at subtly changing the attitudes of receivers”<sup>50</sup>. It studies how people influence each other's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. There are several models of persuasion, but one of the most widely used is the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which suggests that there are two routes to persuasion: the central route and the peripheral route. If the central route involves a person being persuaded through logical arguments and evidence, the peripheral route involves a person being persuaded through cues such as attractiveness, credibility, and likability.

Concerning influence marketing, it uses both central and peripheral routes to persuade their audience. For example, when an influencer shares their opinion about a product or service and provides logical arguments and evidence to support their opinion, they are using

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<sup>49</sup>Influencer Marketing Hub, The Secret to Gaining Consumer Trust through Authentic Influencer Relationships, <https://influencermarketinghub.com/the-secret-to-gaining-consumer-trust-through-authentic-influencer-relationships/>, 2021, consulté le 23 mars 2023.

<sup>50</sup>The Business Professor, Persuasion theory explained, [https://thebusinessprofessor.com/en\\_US/communications-negotiations/persuasion-theory-explained](https://thebusinessprofessor.com/en_US/communications-negotiations/persuasion-theory-explained), 2022, consulté le 23 mars 2023.

the central route to persuasion, and this type of approach is likely to be more effective with an audience who is motivated and able to process the information. However, when the influencer uses cues such as their attractiveness, credibility, or likability to promote a product or service, they are using the peripheral route to persuasion. Indeed, the credibility and the authenticity of the communicator hold an important role in the acceptance of the message by the receiver : “the level of persuasion is low if the producer of the message is considered not credible or reliable”<sup>51</sup>. Therefore, the more authentic and transparent the influencer is, the more likely they are to use the central route to persuasion and build trust and credibility with their audience. By doing so, they can have a more significant impact on their audience's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.

## **2) VALUES AND BELIEFS AS A BASE FOR A SUCCESSFUL PROMOTION**

Thus, the idea of one’s authenticity can be defined as this one expresses its one true self and acts in such ways. In this perspective of authenticity, two concepts appear as really important : values, and beliefs. Values can be defined as “the principles that help you to decide what is right and wrong, and how to act in various situations”<sup>52</sup>, they thus refer to an individual's principles or standards of behavior. On the other hand, the idea of belief can be harder to define : it refers at the same time as “a state or habit of mind in which trust or confidence is placed in some person or thing” and as “something that is accepted, considered to be true, or held as an opinion”<sup>53</sup>. Considering the perspective of this hypothesis, and of my dissertation in general, both of these definitions enter into the idea of belief that I would like to focus on. Moreover, both the concept of values and beliefs are really similar, some even considering that beliefs are a type of value, as explained by Vinson and al. : “Very centrally held and enduring beliefs guide actions and judgments across specific situations and are referred to as global values” (1977, p.45). Finally, values definitely influence one’s choices regarding every aspect of one's life, suggesting that values are inevitably related to behavior (Vinson and al. 1977, p.45).

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<sup>51</sup>The Business Professor, Persuasion theory explained, [https://thebusinessprofessor.com/en\\_US/communications-negotiations/persuasion-theory-explained](https://thebusinessprofessor.com/en_US/communications-negotiations/persuasion-theory-explained), 2022, consulté le 23 mars 2023.

<sup>52</sup>Cambridge dictionary, Values definition, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/values>, consulté le 27 mars 2023.

<sup>53</sup>Merriam Webster Dictionary, Belief definition, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/belief>, consulté le 27 mars 2023.



Thus, concerning influencer marketing, an influencer's values and beliefs also influence their behavior and the content they create. If an influencer values transparency and honesty, they are more likely to be transparent about their sponsored content and disclose their partnerships with brands, which, we will see in the next subpart of this dissertation, can increase their credibility and authenticity. Moreover, when an influencer's values and beliefs align with those of their audience, they are more likely to be perceived as authentic. By sharing their personal beliefs and experiences, they can create a deeper connection with their audience, leading to increased trust and authenticity. Thus, to use an example that could enter the framework of this dissertation, if an influencer really values sustainability and shares content about eco-friendly products, or sustainable travel, their audience will perceive their promotion as more authentic. By doing so, the influencer can not only promote sustainable travel, but also inspire their audience to adopt similar behaviors and practices. We will see in the next part of this dissertation, with an interview I conducted, that such values do prevail in the promotion of sustainability.

Such a hypothesis could be related to the theory I mentioned in the last subpart, and especially to the Elaboration Likelihood Model : as already explained, according to this model, there are two different routes to persuasion : the central one, and the peripheral route. If the influencer's values and beliefs can influence which route to persuasion is more effective. If an influencer values sustainability and shares content about eco-friendly products, they are more likely to use the central route to persuasion and provide logical arguments and evidence to support their opinion. Thus, by being authentic, transparent, and aligned with their values and beliefs, they can increase their credibility and trust with their audience, leading to a more significant impact on their audience's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.

In the same way, in psychology, researchers consider that attitudes have four important functions : one of them is the Value-Expressive function of attitude. Such a function can be defined as the fact that “it enables an individual to express its central values and beliefs [...] which are acquired through interactions and experiences with others in the society” and that “an individual develops certain attitudes for the expression of these shared values and beliefs”<sup>54</sup>. It thus suggests that people are more likely to adopt attitudes and behaviors that express their values and beliefs, and they use these attitudes and behaviors to express themselves and their identity. In the case of travel influencers who promote

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<sup>54</sup>Study and exam, Functions of Attitudes, <https://www.studyandexam.com/attitude-function-pn.html>, consulté le 27 mars 2023.

sustainable ways to travel, their values and beliefs about sustainability can influence their attitude and behavior towards promoting sustainable travel. By expressing their values and beliefs through their attitude and behavior, they can create a value-expressive attitude towards sustainable travel in their audience. They can thus produce content that highlights the environmental impact of travel and how sustainable travel can reduce that impact, which can resonate with their audience who share similar values and beliefs. This attitude can then influence their audience's behavior, as they may adopt similar sustainable travel practices and products to express their values and beliefs.

### **3) TRANSPARENCY : BALANCE BETWEEN PARTNERSHIP AND LIES**

As already explained in the first part of this dissertation, the marketing of influence has experienced a huge increase these last few years, as the job, taking the spotlight in every marketing strategy. Yet, such a growing market also has its consequences : “However, the influencer marketing industry is gradually becoming oversaturated. We now see brands working with influencers simply because of their massive following, and influencers working with just any brand that can pay them.”<sup>55</sup>. Indeed, for a time, and even now, such practices became widespread, thus damaging both the image of the influencer job, but also the trust the audience placed in them. From this perspective, such a field finally decided to encourage a new behavior concerning partnerships, supporting the concept of transparency, which can be defined as “a situation in which business and financial activities are done in an open way without secrets, so that people can trust that they are fair and honest”<sup>56</sup>. Thus, in influencer marketing, it refers to the practice of being open and honest about the relationship between an influencer and the brand they are promoting. It involves disclosing any financial or material incentives the influencer has received in exchange for their promotion, as well as any other relevant information that may affect the credibility of their endorsement. More than helping to build trust and credibility with consumers, transparency is necessary to comply with advertising laws and regulations. In many countries, including France, US and UK, influencers are required by law to disclose any material connections they have to the brands

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<sup>55</sup>Forbes, How to maintain trust and transparency in influencer marketing, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2019/09/24/how-to-maintain-trust-and-transparency-in-influencer-marketing/?sh=612206894224>, 2019, consulté le 28 mars 2023.

<sup>56</sup>Cambridge dictionary, Transparency definition, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/transparency>, consulté le 28 mars 2023.

they promote. Failure to disclose such connections can result in legal and financial consequences. Even though such laws are more or less recent depending on the countries, they allow consumers to be better equipped to evaluate the credibility of an influencer's endorsement and make informed purchasing decisions. Despite the fact that some studies proved that posts or video with the mention "paid ad" can result in less positive attitudes and less engagement from the audience (Boerman et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2017; Weismueller et al., 2020; Woodroof et al., 2020) because "brand payment might no longer be seen as a testimony of how much an endorsed product is liked, used, or valued by the endorser", such a disclosing participates in the authenticity perception of an influencer (Kapitan and al., 2022, p.344). Indeed, transparency participates in the perception of authenticity : "Endorsers who fully disclose brand relationships and compensation via transparent authenticity practices are seen as honest about their compensation and about liking, using, and valuing endorsed products." (Kapitan and al., 2022, p.344).

Once again, such a part of the hypothesis can be related to the Elaboration Likelihood Model. As this one can be used to measure the degree of influence of an influencer by explaining which route the persuasion might take - the central or peripheral one, and as the transparency holds an important role in the concept of authenticity, the ELM might thus explain the importance of transparency in the field of influencer marketing. It mainly suggests that transparency can impact the processing of persuasive messages by consumers. For example, if an influencer is transparent about their affiliation with a brand and the incentives they have received, it can increase the relevance and credibility of the message, making it more likely that consumers will engage in the central route of processing. Therefore, by being transparent about their partnership, influencers can increase the likelihood that their audience will engage in the central route of processing, which can lead to more meaningful and lasting changes in attitudes and behaviors.

## CONCLUSION

The marketing of influence forever revolutionized our habits, our consumption behavior, and our everyday life. Its increasing use in the digital marketing and communication strategies of brands and destinations encourages the popularization of the job of influencer, and thus also participates in its deviations. In the actual context, the emergency around the issues of sustainability is more than a priority : in the field of tourism, sustainability takes place in different choices : the destination, the transport, but also the way to interact with the locals. But are social media and influencers a good way to promote such things ?

Relying on the importance of visual content, on the Social Network Analysis, my first hypothesis focuses on the use of influence marketing, made by the destinations and tourism business. I developed this part in order to highlight the importance of such a type of marketing in the tourism field : indeed, influencers clearly have the ability to showcase a destination or a tourism business to their followers, in a way that traditional advertising cannot replicate. Yet, as I explained, the choice of the influencer in question is not always a matter of follower, but of engagement rate. From this perspective, the use of micro-influencer appears more relevant.

On the other hand, the second hypothesis was based on the educational aspect of social media, and how these could promote sustainability. Relying on social theories based on the behavior, the attitudes, and the way these are impacted by our environment, I aimed to highlight the fact that sustainability could be promoted on such platforms, with some conditions, especially the idea that this promotion had to be for long-term, and thus, to be promoted by authentic people, committed to such a cause, which led to my final part.

As the third hypothesis focused on the need for sincerity and the authenticity from influencers in order to guarantee success for a campaign based on sustainability, I, once again, helped myself with social theories explaining the power of persuasion, and which elements increased or decreased this power depending on the context. Such theories helped me to highlight one of the main compulsory tools in the influencer market : authenticity.

**PART 3 : METHODOLOGY AND STUDY CASE  
OF OCCITANIE**

## INTRODUCTION

As the first part of this dissertation allowed me to settle and understand the actual context concerning the use of social media, the influence marketing and the promotion of sustainability in the field of tourism, the second one enabled me to develop my problematic, while explaining my three hypothesis and the different theories that will enter in my theoretical framework. Now, I would like to focus on the application field, by confronting the knowledge I acquired and my hypothesis with a concrete study case, in order to get some answers.

The first chapter of this part of my dissertation will focus on the study case, thus presenting the Occitanie region, which I choose to study as the tourism field is particularly important in such a diverse area of France. Thus, after I introduce the general situation of the region, I will focus on the tourism situation and then, on the digital marketing and communication strategy of the Leisure and Tourism Committee of Occitanie, in order to analyze the way they use influence marketing to promote sustainable tourism.

The second chapter will then face my hypothesis with the study case. I will detail the methodology I choose to use for my first year's dissertation, which is a qualitative study. After explaining what it includes, I will explain the main themes of the interview I conducted, and the reasons I chose to interview this person. Then, I will compare the data collected during this interview with my hypothesis, and the recurrent themes of my dissertation.

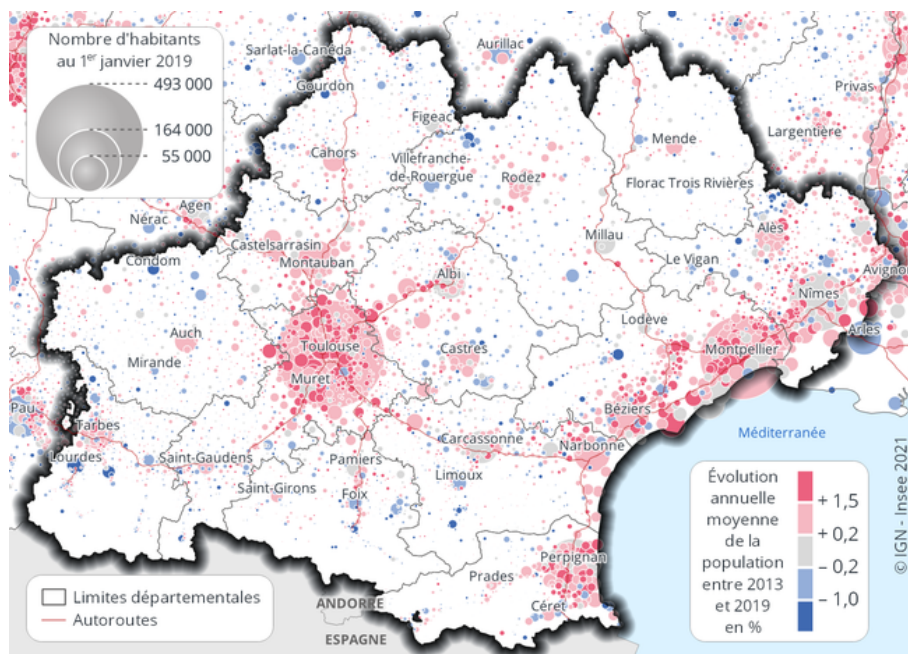
Finally, my third chapter will be based on my projects for the second year's dissertation. I will thus explain what methodology I plan to use for my research subject, and my dissertation, then I will detail my project concerning the 6 months internship : to work as a community manager in a sustainable tourism structure.

# CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCING TOURISM STRATEGY IN OCCITANIE

## 1) INTRODUCING OCCITANIE

The Occitanie region is both an administrative and cultural area of France which extends to more than 72 000 square kilometers, which correspond to 13 percent of the metropolitan territory : it is the third-largest French region after Nouvelle Aquitaine and Guyane. It has been established as a region after the territorial reform in 2014, and is the fusion of what was considered as Languedoc-Roussillon and Midi-Pyrénées : it is composed of 13 departments, and the administrative center is Toulouse, in Haute-Garonne. Its population on January 2023 reached more than 6 million inhabitants, but is unequally distributed : indeed, a big part of it is located in the two main cities, which are Toulouse and Montpellier, but also on the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea, thus leaving the rural zones mostly empty.

Figure 4 : Population of Occitanie Region on January the 1st 2019<sup>57</sup>



<sup>57</sup> Population municipale des communes au 1<sup>er</sup> janvier 2019 et évolution annuelle moyenne 2013-2019, INSEE, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/6011794>

From a geographic point of view, the Occitanie region is very diverse. As already mentioned, Toulouse and Montpellier are two big cities, with respectively around 500 000 and 300 000 inhabitants, but the cities of Nîmes and Perpignan also count more than 100 000 inhabitants. The region also has mountains, especially a major part of the Pyrenees mountains which separate France and Spain, with its highest one being the Vignemale mountain, with more than 3200 meters, but it also contains the south part of the Massif Central, with the Cevennes in the department of Lozères, Aveyron, Lot, and Tarn-et-Garonne. Thanks to its large and open coastline on the Mediterranean sea, which measures more than 215 kilometers and spread out in 4 departments, the region also has an access to the sea and thus, to commercial ports and seaside resorts. Despite this diversity, a huge part of the Occitanie territory is rural.

Yet, Occitanie is not only an administrative region, it is also a cultural one. Indeed, the region has a rich cultural heritage that dates back to ancient times, as the area was inhabited by the Celts, followed by the Romans, who founded numerous cities and left a lasting impact on the region's architecture, language, and culture. One of the main defining features of Occitanie is the Occitan language, which is a language spoken by around 1.5 million people in southern France, Catalonia, and parts of Italy. The language has a long and complex history, with roots in the Latin language spoken by the Romans. It was widely spoken in southern France until the 14th century, when it began to decline due to political and cultural changes. Yet, despite this decline, the Occitan language remains an important part of the region's cultural identity. Today, there are efforts to revive and promote the language, and many people in the region take pride in their Occitan heritage. More than a language and a history - with numerous invasions and a strong influence of the medieval period, the Occitanie also has its own gastronomy - with dishes such as Cassoulet or Foie gras, or cultural events with the Feria for example.

## **2) CURRENT SITUATION OF TOURISM IN OCCITANIE**

The tourism and leisure committee of Occitanie declares this region as the French tourism leader, as it is the region which attracts the most French tourists, thanks to the diversity of its territories, as Jean Pinard, the director of the committee, declares : “This diversity is our richness and participates to its attractivity.”<sup>58</sup>. Indeed, the touristic offer in

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<sup>58</sup> Translated from French by Lola Courneil. Original text : “Cette diversité fait notre richesse et concourt à son attractivité.” Destination Occitanie, Comité Régional du Tourisme et des loisirs, Rapport d’activité 2021.



such a region is quite large and diverse, thus attracting different types of people depending on their needs and desires for their travels. Thus, people who are attracted by the city break are able to visit either the big cities such as Montpellier, or even Toulouse, who promotes this type of tourism on their website by offering three types of city break visits depending on the interests of the tourist : this one can be either luxurious, cultural, or historical<sup>59</sup>. Yet, the city break type of tourism does not always focus on big metropolises, as some smaller cities might attract a lot of tourists, and the Occitanie region does offer such important places, such as Carcassonne and its medieval city which is classified at the UNESCO and in the Great French sites, or even the city of Lourdes, which holds an important place in the Catholic religion and in the pilgrimage of Saint Jacques de Compostelle. Yet, the committee of tourism in Occitanie also promotes other cities such as Albi or Rodez, which participate in the diversity of the offers within the tourism type of city break.

Moreover, the Occitanie region also thrives in the field of seasonal tourism. Thanks to its geography, it offers a various range of destinations both for winter and summer holidays. With its access to both Pyrenees mountains and Massif Central, the region counts 44 ski resorts for all ranges of prices. The region website particularly promotes places such as the Pic du midi, where an observatory allows one to watch the stars, or even L'Aubrac, a famous regional natural park. Despite the strong affluence during winter, most of these departments and resorts tend to diversify their offer, in order to attract tourists during the entire year<sup>60</sup>. Thus, departments such as Haute-Pyrenees, organize events and promote sports such as hiking in order to attract tourists when the winter is done. In the same way, the seaside of 220 kilometers which gives access to the Mediterranean sea is very popular during the summer, with its numerous beaches and marinas all along the coast. Whether it is the region of Camargue, with its famous horses, bulls and flamingos, or whether it is coastal resorts with a strong history such as Sète or Le Grau du Roi, such places have always attracted thousands of people during summers. The region is thus the first of France considering nights in outdoor hospitality, with 28 million nights in 2022. It is also the first region of France concerning the natural and historical heritage, as it is the region which counts the most sites listed by UNESCO, with 8 sites.

Yet, as the whole world was confronted to the pandemics of COVID 19, and as the worldwide tourism field has been hugely impacted by its consequences - lockdowns, the closing of borders, fear of the disease, the Occitanie region was not an exception to the rule.

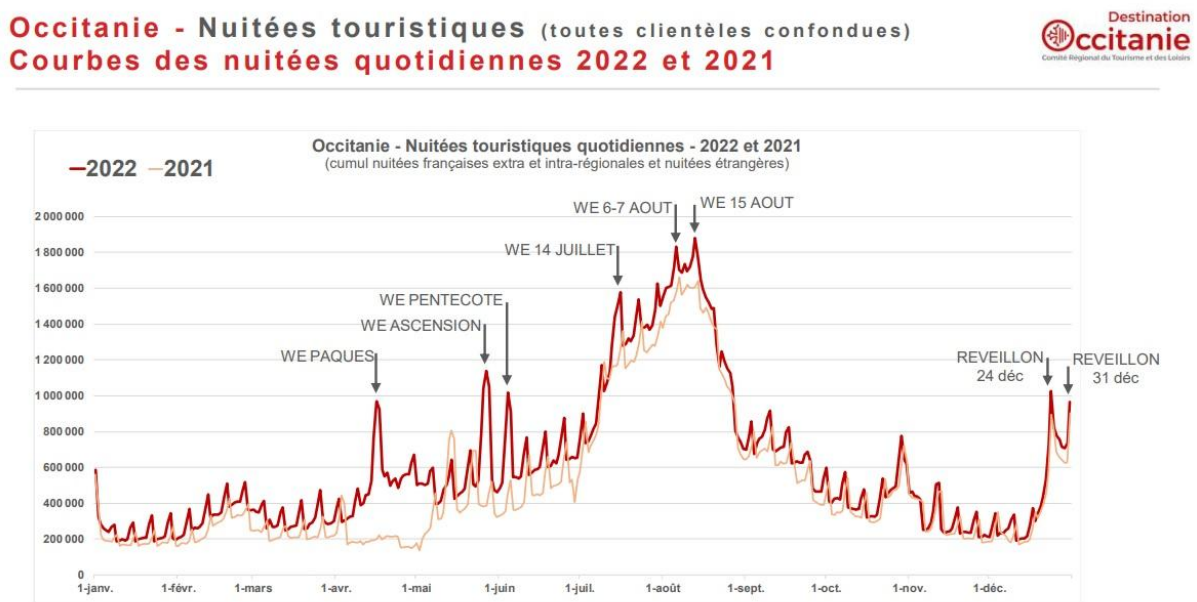
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<sup>59</sup> Visit Toulouse, City breaks, <https://www.toulouse-visit.com/city-breaks>, consulté le 20 mars 2023.

<sup>60</sup> Occitanie La Région, Rapport Chiffres clés du tourisme et des loisirs en occitanie, [https://www.laregion.fr/IMG/pdf/rencontres\\_tourisme\\_36p-2.pdf](https://www.laregion.fr/IMG/pdf/rencontres_tourisme_36p-2.pdf), consulté le 20 mars 2023.

Indeed, the year 2020 was terribly impacted by the first few months of the pandemic : in June 2020, the INSEE noticed a decrease of 73 percent of nights in French hotels in comparison with June 2019<sup>61</sup>. In 2021, for the same period, the occupation rates in French hotels were only about 35 percent, in comparison with 65 percent for 2019<sup>62</sup>. For the region of Occitanie, the turnover of 2021 was 27 percent higher than in 2020, yet, it stayed 20 percent lower than in 2019. If the tourism of the region, as the entire country, was impacted by the crisis and its consequences, we still can notice a slow recovery. Indeed, according to this chart shared by the tourism committee of Occitanie region, the year 2022 still counted more nights than in 2021.

Figure 5 : Courbes des nuitées quotidiennes 2022 et 2021 en Occitanie<sup>63</sup>



Source : FluxVision Tourisme – Orange Business Les nuitées françaises intrarégionales ne sont pas disponibles pour 2019 Observatoire - Pôle 3D

<sup>61</sup> INSEE, En juin 2020, 73 % de nuitées en moins dans les hôtels qu'en 2019 en France métropolitaine, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/4647413?sommaire=4625628>, 31/08/2020, consulté le 23 mars 2023.

<sup>62</sup> INSEE, La fréquentation hôtelière augmente au 2<sup>e</sup> trimestre 2021, mais reste largement inférieure à son niveau d'avant-crise, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/5425319?sommaire=4625628>, 21/09/2021, consulté le 23 mars 2023.

<sup>63</sup> Destination Occitanie, Bilan provisoire de fréquentation 2022, [https://pro.tourisme-occitanie.com/uploads/sites/10/2023/02/Bilan-frequentation-2022\\_V3.pdf](https://pro.tourisme-occitanie.com/uploads/sites/10/2023/02/Bilan-frequentation-2022_V3.pdf), 17/01/2023, consulté le 23 mars 2023.

### **3) TOURISM STRATEGY IN OCCITANIE : THE REGIONAL TOURISM COMMITTEE**

In France, the tourism of regions is directed by Regional Committees of Tourism (CRTs), they are public institutions that are responsible for promoting tourism in their respective regions. Thus, concerning the tourism strategy adopted by the Occitanie region, everything is decided by the Tourism and Leisure Committee of Occitanie. Such a committee was created in 2017, after the merging of the regions Midi Pyrénées and Languedoc Roussillon, in order to work in consultation with the regional council to develop the destination of Occitanie. The main goal of such an organization is to place the region as a leader in terms of French destination, while developing the sector of tourism in an equal way in every department. To do so, it works in partnerships with private and public tourism actors, such as tourism offices or local tourism businesses to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the region's tourism industry, and to develop strategies to maximize its potential. It thus participates in the development of the tourism industry, while supporting the local businesses and promoting the region to both a domestic and international level.

As explained on their website, but also in their status report of 2022, their strategy is particularly related to sustainability. Indeed, they declare themselves :

“In this actual context, the tourism growth model can not be only based on an increasing goal of economic benefits to a regional level. Our new approach rests upon a double stake which can appear contradictory : to favor the economic growth of the tourism field - both for businesses and the territory, while limiting the negative consequences it might produce.”<sup>64</sup>

Such a sustainable approach can be defined by different actions such as a commitment to CSR measures for the entire Committee, but also for the tourism offices and their employees. The Committee also decided to measure the ecological and economic impact of tourism on different territories, in order to generate a more sustainable way to travel, while the economic benefits would go back directly to the local communities. Our question will thus be, how

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<sup>64</sup> Translated from French by Lola Courneil. Original text : “Dans ce contexte, le modèle de croissance du tourisme ne peut plus se limiter à un objectif d’augmentation linéaire des retombées économiques à une échelle régionale. Cette approche nouvelle repose donc sur un double enjeu qui peut dans certains cas se révéler antinomique : favoriser le développement économique du secteur touristique (entreprises et territoires) tout en limitant les externalités négatives qu’il génère.” Destination Occitanie, Comité Régional du Tourisme et des loisirs, Rapport d’activité 2022, [https://pro.tourisme-occitanie.com/uploads/sites/10/2022/05/RA2021-exe-BD\\_compressed.pdf](https://pro.tourisme-occitanie.com/uploads/sites/10/2022/05/RA2021-exe-BD_compressed.pdf), consulté le 23 mars 2023.

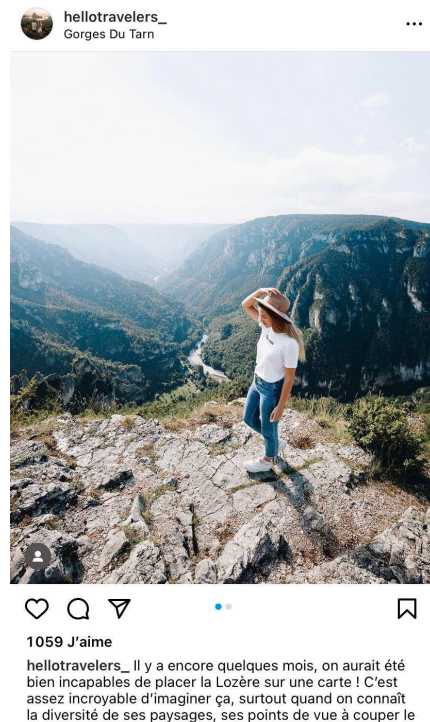
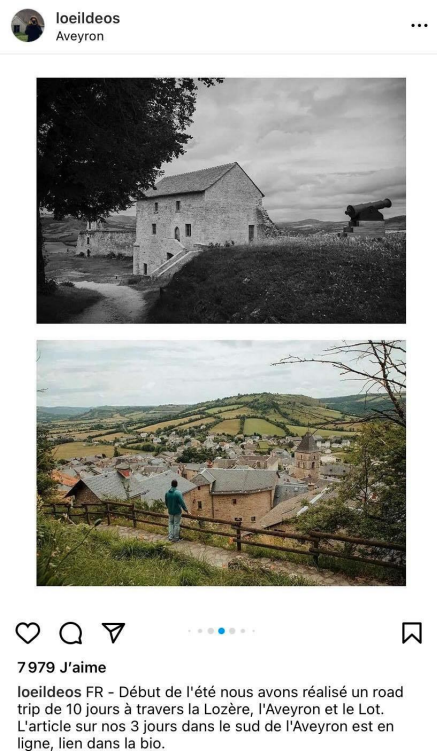
such goals are promoted and expressed through their digital communication strategy, and how the regional tourism committee of Occitanie does use travel influencers to do so ?

Concerning their use of social media, the Committee is present on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram. They do update their content quite regularly by promoting a lot of different destinations, but also the actions that they are putting in place in order to encourage more sustainable tourism in Occitanie. As explained in their 2021 status report, they created a campaign called “Campagne Active” in order to promote some departments that were generally neglected by tourists, especially in the last years. Indeed, departments such as Aveyron, Lot, or Lozères tended to attract less tourists than others, as for example Aude, Gard, or Hérault, which are more famous, either for their cultural heritage such as the Carcassonne medieval city, or their direct access to the Mediterranean Sea. Thus, in order to “rejuvenate the image of such destinations”, the Occitanie CRT “used social media influencers and bloggers” to promote the natural heritage and the numerous outdoor activities of such territories<sup>65</sup>. Such a campaign led to Instagram and blog posts on the account of travel influencers, which promoted the departments while showing their natural beauty.

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<sup>65</sup>Translated from French by Lola Courneil. Original text : “ Le CRTL et ses partenaires ont choisi de recourir à des influenceurs et blogueurs populaires afin de rajeunir l’image de cette destination misant à fond sur les activités de pleine nature et ses grands espaces naturels. ”  
Destination Occitanie, Comité Régional du Tourisme et des loisirs, Rapport d’activité 2022,  
[https://pro.tourisme-occitanie.com/uploads/sites/10/2022/05/RA2021-exe-BD\\_compressed.pdf](https://pro.tourisme-occitanie.com/uploads/sites/10/2022/05/RA2021-exe-BD_compressed.pdf), consulté le 23 mars 2023.

Figure 6 & 7 : Examples of partnerships between travel influencers and the CRTL of Occitanie.



Currently, the tourism committee of Occitanie is leading a new campaign using influencers to encourage sustainable travel. This time, while promoting various types of territory, the region also aims to modify the travel habits of most tourists, by encouraging them to take the train rather than the car. Indeed, since the end of the year 2022, the campaign Occitanie Rail Tour promotes train travel in the entire region, in order to visit both famous places and neglected ones. Such a campaign also encourages slow tourism, as it is declared on the main of this campaign on their website :

“Here, the seasons set the pace, and to perceive all the nuances of landscape and to discover the main cultural richness of the region, you have to take it slow, and to meet passionate women and men who are shaping and living in such places.”<sup>66</sup>

<sup>66</sup>Translated from French by Lola Courneil. Original text : “Ici, les saisons donnent le rythme, et c’est en mode slow qu’il faut voyager pour percevoir toutes les nuances paysagères, découvrir l’ampleur des richesses culturelles et aller à la rencontre des femmes et des hommes passionnés qui vivent au cœur de ces paysages et les façonnent.”  
Tourisme Occitanie, Occitanie Rail Tour : Le Fabuleux voyage en Occitanie,  
<https://www.tourisme-occitanie.com/destinations/fabuleux-voyages/en-train/>, consulté le 23 mars 2023.

If such a campaign will be also led with other means, such as national television, a new website, and even paper guides, it is currently mainly famous for the collaboration made between the Committee and travel influencers, which use their social media to promote it. One of them, who has around 25 thousands followers on his Instagram account and who also works at the Committee, explained during our interview :

“It will be the main pillar of our communication strategy for the years 2022 and 2023. Everything will be based on highlighting the train travel in Occitanie. It is also in partnership with the national rail network, and they will do a lot of different actions [...] I did five videos, which did around a million views on both my social media and the account of the Committee. It is a very good result.”<sup>67</sup>

The Occitanie region and its tourism and leisure committee are thus a perfect example of the implementation of a sustainable digital marketing strategy using social media and influencers to promote new responsible ways to travel, in an ecological, economical and social way.

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<sup>67</sup>Extract from an interview conducted for this dissertation.

Translated from French by Lola Courneil. Original text : “C’est en collaboration avec la SNCF. Ils mettent en place plein d’action. Ça ne s’arrête pas juste à la série de mini vidéos. J’ai fait cinq vidéos, sur lesquelles on a fait à peu près un million de vues sur les réseaux sociaux du comité régional du tourisme Occitanie et les miens. Donc c’est un résultat qui était plutôt cool.”

## CHAPTER 2 : METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

### 1) FACING HYPOTHESIS WITH THE FIELD OF APPLICATION

#### *1.1) The use of influencer marketing by the Occitanie region*

As mentioned in the first chapter of the third part of this dissertation, tourism in the Occitanie region is promoted by different means : influencer marketing is one of them. Indeed, as explained multiple times in this dissertation, such a type of marketing is almost compulsory nowadays : with the popularity and the multiple use of social media, to go without it could be considered as detrimental. Even though advertising, public relations, content marketing, and search engine optimization are very good ways to promote a destination, influencer marketing can give access to a new type of promotion, and thus a new type of audience. Moreover, in the case of the Occitanie region and its leisure and tourism committee, the choice of the influencers they decide to partner with is essential : if we take into consideration the different campaigns mentioned in the first chapter of this part, they mainly worked with nano and micro-influencers. Such a choice could confirm the first hypothesis, in which I explain the importance of their engagement rate : even though they do not have as many followers as more famous influencers, the partnership and thus, the campaign is more than successful. Thus, the choice of the influencer a brand or a destination decides to partner with is not trivial : to work with influencers such as the ones mentioned above - @Hellotravelers, @loeildeos or even @GuillaumePayen, benefits the region and its tourism attractivity.

#### *1.2) The promotion of sustainability in Occitanie via social media*

Sustainability appears as an important value concerning tourism and traveling in the Occitanie region. Indeed, as mentioned in the first chapter of this part of the dissertation, the Leisure and Tourism Committee of Occitanie declared in one of their report that one of their main goal was “to favor the economic growth of the tourism field - both for businesses and the territory, while limiting the negative consequences it might produce”<sup>68</sup>, which thus enters

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<sup>68</sup>Destination Occitanie, Comité Régional du Tourisme et des loisirs, Rapport d’activité 2022, [https://pro.tourisme-occitanie.com/uploads/sites/10/2022/05/RA2021-exe-BD\\_compressed.pdf](https://pro.tourisme-occitanie.com/uploads/sites/10/2022/05/RA2021-exe-BD_compressed.pdf), consulté le 23 mars 2023.

in a sustainable approach. Moreover, as I already explained, the region decided to put a light on the few departments which did not attract a lot of tourists, especially the Aveyron, the Lot and the Lozères : to do so, they used social media, and partnerships with different influencers, in order to highlight the beauty of such areas. Such a type of promotion permits to counter the effects of mass tourism, by showing that the Occitanie region is abundant in unknown territories which are worth the visit . In the same way, the campaign Occitanie Rail Tour promotes a sustainable way to travel in the region, by creating a partnership with the national rail company, but also by creating videos on social media, which are supposed to inspire people to do the same. These elements thus prove the hypothesis that sustainability can be promoted on social media.

### *1.3) The importance of authenticity and values in sustainable influence*

Such a hypothesis can hardly be confronted in my study case, at least, not in the framework of my first year's dissertation. Indeed, as I led only one interview with a travel influencer promoting sustainable tourism, I cannot clearly affirm that such a situation is the norm of every influencer promoting sustainability in general. Yet, in the framework of the qualitative study I conducted through this interview, the concept of value and authenticity is clearly an important point in the successful promotion of sustainability by influencers. I hope I will be able to study more deeply such an aspect of influencer marketing during the writing of my second year's dissertation.

## **2) METHODOLOGY**

### *2.1) Introduction to the different types of methodology and justification*

Depending on the subject and the problematic one desires to study, there exists various types of methodology, which more or less always corresponds to one's type of research. The choice concerning the methodology to apply especially depends on the type of data one's study requires, and the research design.

The two main types of methodology used in every type of studies are the qualitative and the quantitative studies. The first one aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the

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experiences, attitudes, and perspectives of individuals or groups, but also to explore and describe the complexity and richness of a particular phenomenon or context. It is particularly useful when the research question is exploratory in nature and seeks to understand a phenomenon in a detailed and nuanced way, and enables researchers to develop insights, theories, or models that can inform practice, policy, or further research.

On the other hand, the aim of leading a quantitative study is to gather numerical data and use statistical methods to analyze it in order to identify patterns, relationships, or differences in a particular population or phenomenon. Quantitative research is particularly useful when the research question is focused and specific, and seeks to test hypotheses or make predictions. Its goal is to use empirical evidence to draw conclusions, make evidence-based recommendations, or inform decision-making.

In the framework of my first year's dissertation, and, as my research only began, I decided to focus on a qualitative study. Indeed, my main goal was to deepen my knowledge, especially on the topics of sustainable tourism, travel influencers, and how to combine both of these fields : it was thus an evidence for me to conduct exploratory interviews, in order to get additional knowledge.

## *2.2) The qualitative study*

As I already explained, the qualitative study aims for a deep understanding around a precise topic or behavior. In order to understand a phenomenon, it focuses on a small sample size of data but explores it in depth, and uses interpretive analysis to identify the themes, patterns and relationships in the data : it thus involves the researcher's interpretation, excluding objectivity. Qualitative study is generally based on exploratory interviews, which aims to develop and deepen one's knowledge concerning some topics : to do so, the choice of the person one should interview is really important. Indeed, it is essential to discuss with people specialized in the topics one wants to study : more than getting new information, such interviews can lead to the modification or the improvement of hypotheses and other elements.

In the framework of my dissertation, the main goal would be to answer my main problem : to what extent can social media influencers raise awareness and educate their communities about sustainable tourism and how can they promote environmentally and socially responsible ways to travel ? Thus, my interviews' main goal was to obtain the point of view of experts in the world of influencer marketing, especially concerning travel influencers and the promotion of sustainable tourism. My objective was thus to understand

how to combine these two topics from a professional point of view, while leading successful sustainable campaigns.

Even though there are different types of interviews, I choose to focus on semi-structured interviews, which consist of using and following an interview guide, which focus on the main themes I wanted to approach, while giving the opportunity to the professionals I interviewed to develop their ideas and their point of views.

### **3) DATA COLLECTION**

#### *3.1) The interview guide*

As already mentioned, a semi-structured interview is a qualitative research method used to collect data from participants through open-ended questions while also providing some structure to the interview process. In such an interview, the interviewer has a list of predetermined questions or topics to cover but is also open to exploring related topics that may arise during the interview. They are a popular data collection method in qualitative research because they allow for flexibility and exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives. Unlike directive interviews where the questions are fixed, semi-structured interviews allow for follow-up questions and probing to obtain a deeper understanding of the participants' responses. The interview guide is thus an important tool as it has the role of a map, leading the interviewer in order to cover the key topics.

For this first year's dissertation, I built my interview guide around different questions inspired by my problematic, my hypothesis, but also around the knowledge I have collected during the readings and the writing of the first part of the dissertation. Indeed, this one helped me to learn more about the context around the different topics I wanted to approach, while highlighting the fact that I needed some professional answers in order to complete my knowledge, and the writing of this dissertation. The main themes of my interview guide were thus : travel influencers, the use of social media in the promotion of destinations, and sustainable tourism. My objectives were to obtain the point of view of travel influencers on their job, the impact of it on destinations, and to understand their interests in sustainable tourism and the place such a value took in their work.

Due to a lack of time and organization, I could only do one interview. Yet, the choice of the person I choose to interview appears to me as really relevant, as it was a way for me to

obtain my answers while also collecting information for my study case. Thus, I conducted an interview with a micro-influencers, who specializes in travel content, especially in France and in the region of Occitanie. He has more than 25 thousand followers on Instagram, and on more than 16 thousands on TikTok, and often works in partnership with the Leisure and Tourism Committee of the Occitanie region, in order to promote sustainable ways to travel in the area while highlighting destinations which are not always famous. To conduct such an interview helped me to perceive the point of view of a professional influencer, directly involved in the promotion of sustainable tourism.

### 3.2) Data collected

This interview thus helped to have the perspective of an influencer on subjects such as mass tourism and sustainability, which deepened the knowledge I acquired with the readings and the writing of the dissertation, and helped in the definition of my three hypotheses. The retranscription of this interview is available in the annexes. I can now analyze and confront the results of this interview with my hypothesis. The interview was conducted in French, but the extracts you will find in this table are translated by myself.

Themes	Extract from the interview	Analysis
<b>The role of social media</b>	<p>“There is also the idea of sharing, with a direct impact. You post something, and you have directly or indirectly some feedback : likes, comments, people asking questions about the destinations, asks for activities or advice [...] I like the fact that people share their own experiences.”</p> <p>“My favorite social media is Instagram. It is a classic</p>	<p>Communication and the possibility to share one’s experiences, advice and opinions is one of the main qualities which can explain the huge popularity of social media nowadays. In the same way, this idea of sharing holds a very important role in the popularity of influencer marketing.</p>

	<p>when it comes to travel. But I also really love Facebook, I think that there is a stronger connection with the community, I think it is more evolved, even though it is considered as "forgotten" social media now. And of course, there is Tiktok, which fast-tracks you and helps you have some visibility. So I would say these three are the most important, even if Instagram is the place to be for traveling. But don't forget facebook.”</p>	<p>Yet, the choice of social media is also really important : all of them do not convey the same image, and you can't share the same content on Instagram, or on LinkedIn for example. Thus, the choice of social media, where the influencers decide to share their content should be particularly relevant to the values they want to communicate, and the type of audience they want to attract.</p>
<p><b>Travel and tourism influence</b></p>	<p>"We were wandering a lot, and that's when I started taking a lot of pictures, and posting them directly on social media."</p> <p>"I think that a travel influencer is just someone who loves to travel and who loves to share his experiences on the Internet. That's my definition."</p>	<p>As mentioned in the first part of my dissertation, influencers are persons who are specialized in the content they do share : whether this one focuses on beauty, food, or travel, it firstly comes from their personal interests. In the interview, the influencer explains that he is particularly interested in visiting everything around the place he lives in : such a value is shared through his</p>

	<p>"For me, it's simple, and my concept is the same since I started : I share what I live, and what I live, is the place I'm living in. I wandered around it, in the car before, now especially on the train. I visit everything that is around 100 km, and I loved to do all these micro-adventures, everything I could find around me [...] My concept, my vision, my choice of destination, it is everything that is around me."</p> <p>"I love the historical heritage, the hikes, the places where you can swim, everything that is in proximity. Proximity is my main keyword."</p> <p>"I talk for myself, on my own scale. I know that if I am speaking of a place, it will be okay. Even with the word of mouth, it will only have a resonance of a few thousand or ten thousand people. It has a very</p>	<p>content, as he particularly promotes every type of destination within the Occitanie region.</p> <p>The influence of an influencer particularly depends on the size, but also on the quality of its community. As explained in my first hypothesis, even though an influencer does not have a lot of followers, the importance of his influence can be measured, not in the size of his community but in the quality and the interests of his</p>
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	<p>moderate impact on a place."</p>	<p>followers.</p>
<p><b>Mass tourism</b></p>	<p>"I know that there was a place in Charente Maritime, where influencers came and promoted a lot. It wasn't adapted to receive a lot of tourists : there weren't any car places, or trash cans... It wasn't adapted to so many people, and there were a lot of problems : people parked everywhere, it was over-crowded, it was polluted. It has damaged the entire nature. People need to be conscious that you should not share everything and every places."</p> <p>"I think that there is a phenomenon which is higher than the influencers : it's the phenomenon of Instagram, where everyone wants to take a picture in the same place. Maybe the influencer will arrive, take a picture, and that it will provoke such a phenomenon somewhere, people will want to do the same, but after, the snowball</p>	<p>The marketing of influence does participate in mass tourism : the promotion - sometimes excessive, of places which are not adapted to receive a lot of tourists is one of the main causes for mass tourism, and thus for the degradation of the environment, but also of the life of the people who live there annually.</p> <p>Yet, the marketing of influence is not the only responsible for such a phenomenon. Indeed, the phenomenon of Instagrammable places can be accentuated by influencers, yet, it also can exist without them. Mass tourism is thus also caused by the mass promotion which is the result of the use</p>

	<p>effect is independent from them. This type of effect already existed before social media and Instagram. A picture can be a big promotion, even if the person that took it is not an influencer. I think that the issue is not because of the influencers, but because of social media."</p>	<p>of social media for destination campaigns.</p>
<p><b>Sustainable tourism</b></p>	<p>"At the same time, in Ariege, there are a lot of places which are not very famous and which deserve to be, and which could be more adapted to welcome a lot of tourists."</p> <p>"From my perspective, the sustainable travel/tourism, firstly goes through the way you travel, the transports. I think that, today, we need to promote train travel. I really believe in such a way to travel, and I think it is the first thing to promote and to develop sustainable tourism."</p>	<p>Even though social media and influencers can participate in the negative impacts of mass promotion and thus mass tourism, a lot of places more adapted can be promoted through such means.</p> <p>To promote more sustainable ways to travel, especially transports, is a big tool in the promotion of sustainable tourism. For example, to favor trains and not planes is a way to reduce pollution. Yet, sustainability is not only about the environment, it is also about the social and economical aspects.</p>

	<p>"Moreover, I think that sustainability is not only pollution, but it also comes through the respect of a territory and the people who live in it."</p>	
<p><b>The promotion of sustainability</b></p>	<p>"I think that to promote sustainability, it is mainly a concern of your values. I think that, today, a lot of young people don't want to travel with planes, or at least, a lot less than before. Not like it was in 2015 or 2016, when people used to take the place every week-end to go to Greece or to Amsterdam. At least, it is very different in my entourage [...] It just depends on you personal values, the ones you want to transmit to your own community."</p>	<p>The promotion of sustainability has to rest upon personal values and interests. As explained in the development of my third hypothesis, values and authenticity are the foundations of a good type of influence, and thus, of a successful campaign, especially when it comes to promoting sustainable ways to travel.</p>



## CHAPTER 3 : CONTINUATION

### 1) METHODOLOGY FOR NEXT YEAR

Since I had a lot of reading sources for this year's dissertation, and because of a lack of time, I only realized one interview this year, which entered the framework of a qualitative study, which aimed to a deeper understanding of the promotion of sustainable tourism with the help of micro-influencers.

#### *1.1) Continuation of a qualitative research concerning the use of micro-influencers in the promotion of sustainable tourism*

Yet, next year, I would like to deepen this subject, by leading a larger qualitative research, which would result in more interviews with different micro-influencers specialized in sustainable travel content.

Moreover, to interview one or two community managers who are working in touristic structures which are promoting sustainable ways to travel would also allow me to have another perspective on the way destinations and businesses choose the influencers they would like to work with in order to have a coherent yet successful digital strategy. Those interviews will have the same main themes as the one I led this year, that is to say : the marketing of influence, the travel influencers, the impact of social media on destinations, the promotion of sustainability on social media and the promotion of sustainable tourism in general. These main themes will, of course, become more refined when my subject for next year's dissertation will be more clear.

#### *1.2) A quantitative research in order to understand the influence of travel influencers on sustainable tourism practices*

In order to complete my knowledge and my perspective for next year's dissertation, I would also like to lead a quantitative research. On the contrary of a qualitative research, a quantitative one does not focus on in-depth exploration of a specific phenomenon. The aim of a quantitative study is to gather numerical data that can be analyzed statistically to identify patterns, relationships, or differences in a particular phenomenon or population. It is

supposed to be as objective as possible, using standardized methods to collect and analyze data in order to minimize bias and subjectivity. Like it is supposed by its name, quantitative studies often require larger sample sizes to obtain statistically significant results, and is thus very different from a qualitative one, which uses a smaller sample to deeply analyze the content. The results aim to be generalizable to a larger population beyond the sample that was studied, and the analysis of the result is generally statistical or numerical, enabling to identify patterns or trends : in the case of my topics and my dissertation, the possible use of a quantitative research would allow me to analyze the impact of the promotion of sustainable tourism promotion via social media and travel influencers.

### *1.3) Use of a questionnaire*

The main tools to lead a quantitative study are generally surveys and questionnaires, which aims to take into consideration the opinion and the experiences shared by the sample of people who answered. In the perspective of next year's dissertation, I would like to conduct quantitative research based on a questionnaire, which would be more coherent with my desire to collect data concerning the behavior towards sustainable tourism and influencer marketing. The aims of this study will be to :

- understand one's perception of sustainable practices concerning travel and tourism
- measure the impact of travel influencers in the promotion of destinations, and more specifically sustainable destinations and ways to travel
- obtain one's perception concerning my hypothesis

Thus, the main themes approached in this questionnaire could be : the perception of travel influencers, the desire to participate in sustainable tourism, or even the use of influencer marketing. Of course, this questionnaire will be related to the application field of my dissertation, thus, to the Occitanie region, thus, how this one is perceived concerning sustainable tourism. The steps of the realization of such a questionnaire will of course be more precise, once the subject of next year's dissertation will be more clear.

## 2) 2ND YEAR INTERNSHIP

### 3.1) *The digital communication field*

All the readings I have already done and I will continue to do during my second year of my Master's degree, in addition to my study and my research, will bring me a lot of knowledge in the fields of communication, digital strategy, influence marketing and sustainable tourism promotion. Yet, even though this theoretical knowledge will enable me to work on my second year dissertation, I will definitely need professional knowledge in order to complete my understanding of all those fields.

To do so, I would like to do my second year internship as a community manager, who is responsible for building, growing, and managing online communities around a brand, product, or service. As their main role is to create and execute a digital communication strategy and a strong online presence while developing, managing and monitoring the content and the statistics on the social media, such missions would enable me to discover the professional perspective on these topics. Moreover, as my dissertation focuses on the marketing of influence in the tourism field, one of my essential requirements for my second year internship would be to work in a tourism structure which is used to partner with influencers in their promotion campaigns. As influencer marketing is the central topic of my dissertation, it would thus be enriching for my personal knowledge, my professional competences and of course, the writing of my dissertation, to see how such a partnership works, but also the process of the choice of the influencers and the consequences of such promotions.

### 3.2) *A sustainable touristic structure*

Moreover, I would like to work in a touristic structure which focuses on sustainability. Once again, such a topic is at the center of my dissertation, it is thus essential for me to see how professional companies and structures combine influencer marketing and sustainable tourism promotion. For example, to do my internship at the Tourism and Leisure Committee of the Occitanie region - on which I based my study case, would be very relevant, as, as I already mentioned, they do focus their current digital strategy on train travel and on different types of destinations, including some which are not very famous and which could still attract a lot of people. As they do work on such a campaign with influencers, and especially

micro-influencers, to do my internship in such a structure would be particularly relevant concerning my dissertation. Of course, to work with one of the many tourism offices in the Occitanie region would also allow me to participate in such a type of campaign.

## CONCLUSION

The Occitanie region is thus a very attractive French area, in which the tourism field holds a very important economic and social role. Yet, as a region with a very pronounced history, and such a geographical situation, some of its tourist sites are overwhelmed as others do not attract enough tourists because of a lack of promotion. The Leisure and Tourism Committee of the Occitanie region thus decided to lead different campaigns on social media, in order to promote a more sustainable travel in the area. To do so, they partnered with different travel influencers, especially nano and micro-influencers, and created campaigns to promote non-famous places, or even ways to travel more sustainably, by encouraging people to take the train for example.

My interview with one of these influencers also allowed me to understand more deeply the way travel influencers work, their reason to share their content and their favorite social media. All these information allowed me to, more or less, prove my hypothesis. Yet, these ones will probably be modified next year, as I will increasingly develop the subject of my dissertation, with a new methodology, using both qualitative and quantitative studies to collect and analyze data.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

Despite the general context in the entire world, the tourism industry continues to grow and evolve. As the effects of mass tourism are more and more condemned by politicians and media, the need to change our travel habits appears as an emergency. If the concept of sustainable tourism has increasingly grown these last few years, as different concepts around responsible ways to travel were highlighted, they are still neglected.

On the other hand, social media holds a more and more important place in our everyday life and in our habits of consumption. Firstly created in order to promote communication all around the world, they are now an essential tool in our life. The phenomenon of social media influencers is at the same time a reason, and a consequence to such a popularity, and their role in the marketing strategies of businesses and, in the case of this dissertation, destinations, continues to evolve.

The aim of this dissertation was thus to face these two phenomena, in order to explore the potential for social media influencers to promote sustainable tourism practices. To do so, I had to study the use of influence marketing in the tourism industry, the potential of social media for raising awareness of sustainability issues, and the role of influencers in promoting sustainable travel practices. The development of my hypotheses and of the theoretical framework thus helped me to show that social media influencers can play an important role in raising awareness of sustainability issues and encouraging travelers to engage in environmentally and socially responsible tourism practices.

One of the key findings of this research is the importance of influencers' authenticity and values in promoting sustainable travel practices. Influencers who are sincere and passionate about sustainability will be more effective in promoting sustainable travel practices to their audiences. Additionally, my dissertation suggests that influencers can be most effective when they are given the freedom to promote sustainable travel practices in a way that aligns with their personal brand and values. Such an hypothesis also relies on the interview I conducted with an influencer specialized in travel content.

The study of the Occitanie region in France, provided a practical example of how influence marketing can be used to promote sustainable travel practices. The regional tourism committee's use of influencers to promote sustainable travel practices was found to be effective in raising awareness of sustainability issues and encouraging visitors to engage in environmentally and socially responsible travel practices.

Overall, this research suggests that social media influencers have the potential to be powerful advocates for sustainable tourism practices. By leveraging their influence and authenticity, influencers can educate and inspire their audiences to travel in ways that are environmentally and socially responsible. As the tourism industry continues to grow and evolve, the role of influencers in promoting sustainable travel practices will likely become even more important, making it essential for businesses and organizations to consider the potential of influence marketing in their sustainable tourism strategies.

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*Appendix A : Transcript of the interview conducted with a travel influencer*

**This annexe is a transcription of an interview conducted in March 2023, the 14th, with a travel influencer, who has more than 24 thousand followers on Instagram, and more than 16 thousand followers on TikTok. His content is particularly based on the Occitanie region, as he focuses on sustainable ways to travel. This interview was conducted in French, thus the transcription is in French too. The parts quoted in the dissertation were translated by myself. In this transcript, the letter I corresponds to the interviewer, as the letter G corresponds to the travel influencer.**

I : Déjà, avant toute chose merci de m'accorder de ton temps pour répondre à mes questions. Pour recontextualiser, donc je suis actuellement en Master THFS à l'Isthia, et j'écris mon mémoire sur les influenceurs spécialisés dans le contenu de voyage, et plus précisément sur la manière dont ceux-ci peuvent éduquer et conseiller leurs communautés sur des manières de voyager plus responsables au niveau environnemental, mais aussi au niveau économique et humain. De plus, pour mon étude de cas, je souhaitais me concentrer sur la région Occitanie, et donc je souhaitais t'interroger puisque ton contenu est plus qu'en rapport avec ce thème. Je précise aussi que l'entretien sera retranscrit de façon anonyme et donc tout ce qui sera dit sera confidentiel.

I : Avant tout, est-ce que tu pourrais te présenter brièvement ?

**G : Ça fait longtemps que je ne me suis pas présenté. Je m'appelle G. , qu'est ce que je peux te dire? J'ai fait des études comme toi à l'université Toulouse Jean Jaurès, en master 1 et 2 Technologies de l'information, de la communication appliquées au développement des territoires touristiques et en parallèle de mes études, je fais, entre guillemets, influenceur, blogueur, voyage. Je me suis lancé sur les réseaux en 2016 de façon assez soutenue et je fais ça de façon pro depuis 2019. Donc je me suis lancée pendant mes études, et aujourd'hui, du coup, je suis diplômée de Master deux, et j'ai été embauché au Comité régional du tourisme et des loisirs d'Occitanie. Et je continue encore en parallèle mon activité d'influenceurs blogueurs voyage.**

I : Comment est ce que le métier d'influenceur t'es venu, et pourquoi avoir choisi de focaliser ton contenu sur le voyage ?

**G : Comment m'est venu le métier? Déjà, je pense que ça n'est pas venu comme un métier. Je me suis lancé en 2014, j'étais comme tout le monde en train de poster des petits trucs sur les réseaux. En deux mille seize, j'ai un peu pris un envol. J'étais pendant mes études en génie électrique et informatique industrielle, donc rien à voir avec le tourisme, et les réseaux, c'était un peu mon exutoire, ma façon de m'échapper, d'études qui ne me plaisaient pas trop et cetera. J'ai eu la chance de faire beaucoup de colonies de vacances avec le boulot de mes parents, donc je me suis replongé dans mes photos de voyage et je me suis mis à poster des photos de mes colonies de vacances**



sur une page Facebook d'abord, puis sur Insta, et c'est comme ça que j'ai commencé. Puis je me suis dit tiens, je peux prendre des photos à droite à gauche. J'ai toujours fait des randonnées avec mes parents et mes potes. A cette époque-là, je venais d'avoir dix-huit ans. Du coup, c'étaient les premières sorties genre avec mes potes qui venaient d'avoir le permis. On se promenait beaucoup et c'est là que j'ai commencé à prendre pas mal de photos et à les poster en direct sur les réseaux et cetera. Après, du coup j'ai repris des études qui m'ont plus, mais j'ai toujours gardé ça en parallèle, parce que du coup, j'aimais autant prendre des photos que les partager. De fil en aiguille, on a commencé à me contacter pour des petits trucs qui commençaient à devenir professionnel.

I : Pour toi, quel est le véritable rôle d'un influenceur voyage, en quoi cela consiste-t-il clairement ?

**G : Le rôle d'influence en voyage? Moi je ne sais pas s'il y a vraiment un rôle en particulier. Je pense que c'est juste quelqu'un qui aime voyager et qui aime partager ses expériences sur Internet. Je dirais que c'est ça, la définition.**

I : De ton côté, que préfères-tu dans le fait de partager ton contenu, tes conseils et tes destinations ?

**G : Qu'est ce que je préfère dans le fait de partager? C'est une très bonne question que je ne me suis pas forcément posée. Déjà, ça fait un peu un style d'albums. Enfin pour moi, dans le sens où sur Instagram sur Facebook, le fait de tout poster, c'est comme si c'était un album photo. Et puis du coup, tous les ans, ça te rappelle des souvenirs et tu peux retrouver toutes les expériences, dans un endroit qui t'appartient. Il y a aussi l'idée de partage, il y a un impact direct. Tu postes et tu reçois indirectement des retours, soit des likes tout simples, soit des commentaires, des échanges, des gens qui posent des questions sur ta destination, les activités, qui demandent des conseils, et puis même sans même sans parler de retour d'expérience sur ce que moi j'ai vécu. J'aime le fait que les gens partagent leur propre retour d'expérience sur ce qu'ils font. C'est ça que j'aime bien, c'est l'échange, quoi.**

I : J'ai vu que tu étais présent sur pas mal de réseaux sociaux, comme Instagram, Tiktok, Twitter et même LinkedIn. Pour toi, lesquels sont les plus influents, et cohérents avec le contenu que tu partages et les messages que tu essaies de transmettre ? Pourquoi ?

**G : Je suis présent sur tous les réseaux sociaux qui existent aujourd'hui. Je le répète à chaque fois qu'on propose des collaborations. Pour beaucoup, c'est juste Instagram. Moi je pense que j'ai quand même réussi à développer le truc sur tous les réseaux, à peu près de façon homogène. Sur YouTube, ça décolle un petit peu, mais pas tant que ça, mais je suis présent sur tout : Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, Pinterest, Twitter, LinkedIn. LinkedIn franchement, ça marche super bien et les gens sont étonnés. Celui**

que je préfère, c'est quand même Instagram, c'est un peu le classique du voyage. Mais vraiment Facebook, je trouve qu'il y a une connexion qui est encore plus forte, la connexion avec les gens, je trouve qu'elle est vraiment plus poussée sur Facebook. C'est un réseau qui est oublié. Et puis forcément maintenant, il y a Tik Tok. Ça, ça propulse de façon folle. Donc moi je dirais les trois, même si Instagram, dans le domaine du voyage, ça reste un lieu où il faut être et celui où tout le monde regarde. Mais ne surtout pas oublier Facebook.

I : Comment choisis-tu les destinations que tu partages ? Sur quels critères ? Cette question englobe autant celles que tu partages par intérêts personnels, que celles avec qui tu es en partenariat.

G : De toute façon, moi mon concept, il est très simple et il n'a pas bougé depuis que j'ai commencé. Je partage ce que je vis et ce que je vois, c'est l'endroit où j'habite. Moi je suis breton. Du coup, j'ai fait beaucoup de petites balades avec mes parents au début, après avec mes potes, tout autour de chez moi. Je rayonne souvent en voiture, enfin, surtout avant, maintenant je prends pas mal le train. Je visitais tout ce que je trouvais dans un rayon de cent kilomètres autour de chez moi, toutes les micro-aventures que je pouvais trouver autour de chez moi et j'ai adoré faire ça, tous les week-end ou le plus souvent possible. Après, du coup, j'ai comme toi, j'ai fait des études dans le tourisme, à Foix. J'ai découvert l'univers de la montagne. J'ai passé trois ans là-bas, donc pareil, j'ai beaucoup, beaucoup, beaucoup, beaucoup rayonné en Ariège et un petit peu autour de Toulouse aussi. Mon angle, mon choix de destination c'est vraiment autour de chez moi. En fait, j'ai pas besoin de partir prendre le train ou l'avion à l'autre bout de la France ou du monde. Au début, ça va être le plus beau village qu'il peut y avoir autour de chez moi. J'aime bien le patrimoine, les randonnées, les endroits où tu peux te baigner vraiment, tout ce qui est à proximité. Proximité, je pense que c'est le mot que tu peux garder. Après, avec, j'ai profité de mes stages pour aller dans des endroits que je voulais visiter. Ça m'a permis de découvrir la côte bretonne que je connaissais pas. Après, j'ai habité à Biarritz pendant quatre mois. Du coup, j'ai découvert tout le Pays basque est un petit peu jusqu'au Béarn et après mon stage de master 2, j'ai migré à Montpellier, où je suis toujours du coup actuellement, et ça m'a permis de rayonner un peu partout.

I : Les influenceurs et les réseaux sont quand même beaucoup pointés du doigt quand on parle de tourisme de masses dans certaines destinations, ainsi que du phénomène d'endroit "instagrammable". Que penses-tu de cet impact négatif ?

G : C'est comme tout, il y a du positif et du négatif. Pour le négatif, c'est vrai que si tu as des endroits que je ne sais pas ce que je pourrais prendre comme exemple ... Je sais que par exemple à côté de chez moi, en Bretagne, il y a un endroit où il y a un lagon d'eau bleue, dans une ancienne carrière, juste à côté de Rennes qui n'est pas trop connu. Et je sais qu'il y avait un endroit comme ça en Charente Maritime, où des influenceurs qui étaient venus l'avaient promu au maximum. Sauf, c'est c'était pas adapté à recevoir des

**touristes parce qu'il n'y avait pas de parking, pas de poubelle, c'était pas du tout adapté recevoir du monde et il y avait plein de problèmes derrière. Les gens se garaient n'importe comment, c'était pollué, il y avait trop de monde. Ça a détérioré la nature et tout. Il faut s'y prendre conscience de ça. Il ne faut pas partager tout et n'importe quoi. Mais en même temps, par exemple, en Ariège, il y a quand même plein d'endroits qui ne sont pas trop connus et qui méritent de l'être et qui peuvent être tout à fait adaptés. Et puis après moi je parle à mon échelle, je sais que je parle d'un endroit, ça va. Même avec l'effet boule de neige, ça n'aura une répercussion que sur quelques milliers de personnes ou peut-être quelques dizaines de milliers de personnes. On reste comme sur un impact modéré sur un lieu.**

I : Toi-même tu partages beaucoup de contenu qui se focalisent beaucoup sur la nature, avec les randonnées, les balades etc. Aujourd'hui, certains de ces lieux sont un peu victimes de ce surtourisme, je pense notamment au Lac d'Oo qui n'est pas très loin d'ici, qui est aujourd'hui très populaire.

**G : Après je pense qu'il y a un phénomène au-delà des influenceurs. C'est vraiment le phénomène Instagram, où tout le monde veut sa photo à tel endroit. L'influenceur va arriver, il va peut-être déclencher ça dans un endroit. Il se prend en photo à tel endroit et ça va donner envie aux autres derrière de faire la même photo, mais après l'effet boule de neige est indépendant de la volonté de l'influenceur. Mais ce genre d'effet, ça existait déjà avant les réseaux et Instagram. Une photo peut donner un gros coup de boost à un endroit sans que la personne qui l'a prise soit influenceur. Du coup ça je pense que le problème c'est plus au niveau des réseaux sociaux qu'au niveau des influenceurs.**

I : Pour toi, personnellement, qu'est ce que c'est le "voyage/tourisme responsable" ?

**G : Pour moi, le voyage/tourisme responsable, ça passe déjà par le moyen de transport. Je pense qu'aujourd'hui, comme dans mon travail, on valorise vachement le fait de voyager en train en Occitanie, je bosse aussi avec la SNCF au niveau national pour valoriser ce moyen de transport. En tout cas j'y crois et je pense que c'est le premier point sur lequel on peut valoriser et développer le voyage responsable. Après le deuxième, je pense que c'est peut-être le fait de faire attention à l'endroit où tu vas, à titre individuel : les déchets, le fait de ne pas embêter les habitants. Je pense aux habitants de rues célèbres, qui sont embêtés par tous les touristes ou les instagrameurs qui veulent se prendre en photo devant leur porte etcetera. Je pense que la responsabilité, ça va pas seulement dans la pollution mais aussi dans le fait de respecter le territoire et les gens qui y vivent.**

I : Est ce que tu considères que le voyage responsable entre dans ta "ligne éditoriale" ? Comment essaie tu de le retransmettre dans ton contenu, à ton échelle ?

**G : C'est drôle parce qu'à chaque fois, on me catégorise d'influenceur voyage responsable. L'année dernière, Greenpeace m'avait mentionné comme l'un des neuf comptes Instagram à suivre pour voyager sans avions. Je pense qu'on met cette étiquette là mais je pense que c'est surtout dans tes valeurs personnelles de base. Enfin je pense qu'aujourd'hui il y a beaucoup de jeunes et des moins jeunes même qui utilisent de moins en moins l'avion. C'est plus comme en 2015/2016 où les gens prenaient l'avion tous les week-ends pour partir en Grèce, au Portugal, à Amsterdam, etc... Je pense que c'est plus trop ça, du moins, pas autour de moi.**

I : Pour toi, ça paraît logique, c'est dans tes valeurs.

**G : Exactement. Pas besoin de mettre une étiquette, ça dépend juste de tes valeurs personnelles et de celles que tu veux transmettre à ta communauté.**

I : Du coup, dernière question. Tu l'as rapidement mentionné plus tôt, mais en fin d'année 2022, tu as réalisé une série de posts et de vidéos sur le voyage en train en Occitanie, en partenariat avec le Comité régional du tourisme et des loisirs d'Occitanie. Peux-tu nous en parler ? Quel était le but ou la stratégie derrière cette série de vidéos ?

**G : La série s'appelle l'Occitanie Rail Tour, donc c'est avec le groupe de communication du CRT Occitanie. C'est le gros pilier de communication pour l'année 2022 et même 2023, donc tout sera axé sur le fait vraiment de valoriser le voyage en train en Occitanie. C'est en collaboration avec la SNCF. Ils mettent en place plein d'action. Ça ne s'arrête pas juste à la série de mini vidéos. J'ai fait cinq vidéos, sur lesquelles on a fait à peu près un million de vues sur les réseaux sociaux du comité régional du tourisme Occitanie et les miens. Donc c'est un résultat qui était plutôt cool. Au niveau de la stratégie, ils vont vraiment tout donner sur plusieurs moyens de communication. En dehors des réseaux sociaux et des influenceurs, ils sont en train de créer un site pour donner plein d'idées de balades, de randonnées, d'activités à faire, et de où dormir selon le train que tu veux prendre et l'endroit où tu es et où tu vas. Il y aura plein de suggestions de voyage. Ils vont faire des papiers, des guides, des affiches, mais aussi une campagne télévisée sur les chaînes nationales. Le but, c'est de vraiment faire un 360 et d'être présent partout.**

I : Je te remercie pour cette interview, c'était vraiment très intéressant. Merci d'avoir pris le temps de répondre à mes questions et de m'avoir un peu aidé dans la rédaction de mon mémoire.

**G : Il n'y a pas de quoi, si tu as d'autres questions, n'hésite pas !**

*Appendix B : Interview guide for travel influencers and results*

Themes	Extract from the interview	Analysis
<p><b>The role of social media</b></p>	<p>“There is also the idea of sharing, with a direct impact. You post something, and you have directly or indirectly some feedback : likes, comments, people asking questions about the destinations, asks for activities or advice [...] I like the fact that people share their own experiences.”</p> <p>“My favorite social media is Instagram. It is a classic when it comes to travel. But I also really love Facebook, I think that there is a stronger connection with the community, I think it is more evolved, even though it is considered as "forgotten" social media now. And of course, there is Tiktok, which fast-tracks you and helps you have some visibility. So I would say these three are the most important, even if Instagram</p>	<p>Communication and the possibility to share one’s experiences, advice and opinions is one of the main qualities which can explain the huge popularity of social media nowadays. In the same way, this idea of sharing holds a very important role in the popularity of influencer marketing.</p> <p>Yet, the choice of social media is also really important : all of them do not convey the same image, and you can’t share the same content on Instagram, or on LinkedIn for example. Thus, the choice of social media, where the influencers decide to share their content should be particularly relevant to the values they want to communicate, and the type of audience they want to attract.</p>

	<p>is the place to be for traveling. But don't forget facebook.”</p>	
<p><b>Travel and tourism influence</b></p>	<p>"We were wandering a lot, and that's when I started taking a lot of pictures, and posting them directly on social media."</p> <p>"I think that a travel influencer is just someone who loves to travel and who loves to share his experiences on the Internet. That's my definition."</p> <p>"For me, it's simple, and my concept is the same since I started : I share what I live, and what I live is the place I'm living in. I wandered around it, in the car before, now especially on the train. I visit everything that is around 100 km, and I loved to do all these micro-adventures, everything I could find around me [...] My concept, my vision, my choice of</p>	<p>As mentioned in the first part of my dissertation, influencers are persons who are specialized in the content they do share : whether this one focuses on beauty, food, or travel, it firstly comes from their personal interests. In the interview, the influencer explains that he is particularly interested in visiting everything around the place he lives in : such a value is shared through his content, as he particularly promotes every type of destination within the Occitanie region.</p>

	<p>destination, it is everything that is around me."</p> <p>"I love the historical heritage, the hikes, the places where you can swim, everything that is in proximity. Proximity is my main keyword."</p> <p>"I talk for myself, on my own scale. I know that if I am speaking of a place, it will be okay. Even with the word of mouth, it will only have a resonance of a few thousand or ten thousand people. It has a very moderate impact on a place."</p>	<p>The influence of an influencer particularly depends on the size, but also on the quality of its community. As explained in my first hypothesis, even though an influencer does not have a lot of followers, the importance of his influence can be measured, not in the size of his community but in the quality and the interests of his followers.</p>
<p><b>Mass tourism</b></p>	<p>"I know that there was a place in Charente Maritime, where influencers came and promoted a lot. It wasn't adapted to receive a lot of tourists : there weren't any car places, or trash cans... It wasn't adapted to so many people, and there were a lot of problems : people parked everywhere, it was over-crowded, it was</p>	<p>The marketing of influence does participate in mass tourism : the promotion - sometimes excessive, of places which are not adapted to receive a lot of tourists is one of the main causes for mass tourism, and thus for the degradation of the environment, but also of the life of the people who live there annually.</p>

	<p>polluted. It has damaged the entire nature. People need to be conscious that you should not share everything and every place."</p> <p>"I think that there is a phenomenon which is higher than the influencers : it's the phenomenon of Instagram, where everyone wants to take a picture in the same place. Maybe the influencer will arrive, take a picture, and that it will provoke such a phenomenon somewhere, people will want to do the same, but after, the snowball effect is independent from them. This type of effect already existed before social media and Instagram. A picture can be a big promotion, even if the person that took it is not an influencer. I think that the issue is not because of the influencers, but because of social media."</p>	<p>Yet, the marketing of influence is not the only responsible for such a phenomenon. Indeed, the phenomenon of Instagrammable places can be accentuated by influencers, yet, it also can exist without them. Mass tourism is thus also caused by the mass promotion which is the result of the use of social media for destination campaigns.</p>
<p><b>Sustainable tourism</b></p>	<p>"At the same time, in Ariege, there are a lot of places which are not very</p>	<p>Even though social media and influencers can participate in the negative</p>



	<p>famous and which deserve to be, and which could be more adapted to welcome a lot of tourists."</p> <p>"From my perspective, sustainable travel/tourism, firstly goes through the way you travel, the transports. I think that, today, we need to promote train travel. I really believe in such a way to travel, and I think it is the first thing to promote and to develop sustainable tourism."</p> <p>"Moreover, I think that sustainability is not only pollution, but it also comes through the respect of a territory and the people who live in it."</p>	<p>impacts of mass promotion and thus mass tourism, a lot of places more adapted can be promoted through such means.</p> <p>To promote more sustainable ways to travel, especially transports, is a big tool in the promotion of sustainable tourism. For example, to favor trains and not planes is a way to reduce pollution. Yet, sustainability is not only about the environment, it is also about the social and economical aspects.</p>
<p><b>The promotion of sustainability</b></p>	<p>"I think that to promote sustainability, it is mainly a concern of your values. I think that, today, a lot of young people don't want to travel with planes, or at least, a lot less than before. Not like it was in 2015 or 2016, when people used to</p>	<p>The promotion of sustainability has to rest upon personal values and interests. As explained in the development of my third hypothesis, values and authenticity are the foundations of a good type of influence, and thus, of a</p>

	<p>take the place every week-end to go to Greece or to Amsterdam. At least, it is very different in my entourage [...] It just depends on your personal values, the ones you want to transmit to your own community."</p>	<p>successful campaign, especially when it comes to promoting sustainable ways to travel.</p>
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## **ABSTRACT : SUSTAINABLE TOURISM : USING TRAVEL INFLUENCERS TO RAISE AWARENESS**

In recent years, social media influencers have emerged as powerful actors in the tourism industry, promoting destinations, travel products, and services to their large and loyal followings. At the same time, the tourism industry has faced growing criticism for its impact on the environment and local communities. Against this backdrop, this dissertation explores the potential for social media influencers to promote sustainable tourism practices. Specifically, it investigates the role of social media influencers in raising awareness and educating their followers about sustainable tourism, in order to see how they can promote environmentally and socially responsible ways to travel. While studying the Occitanie regional tourism committee strategy concerning digital communication, this research finds that social media influencers have the potential to be powerful advocates for sustainable tourism practices. However, the authenticity and values of the influencers are critical to their effectiveness in promoting sustainable travel practices. Overall, this dissertation sheds light on the potential of social media influencers in promoting sustainable tourism practices.

Key words : digital marketing, social media, influencer marketing, sustainable tourism.

## **RÉSUMÉ : TOURISME RESPONSABLE : LES INFLUENCEURS VOYAGES COMME OUTIL DE SENSIBILISATION**

Ces dernières années, les influenceurs des médias sociaux se sont imposés comme des acteurs puissants de l'industrie du tourisme, faisant la promotion de destinations et de services auprès de leurs nombreux adeptes fidèles. Dans le même temps, l'industrie du tourisme est de plus en plus critiquée pour son impact sur l'environnement et les communautés locales. Dans ce contexte, ce mémoire explore le potentiel des influenceurs à promouvoir des pratiques touristiques durables. Plus précisément, elle étudie le rôle des influenceurs spécialisés dans le voyage dans la sensibilisation et l'éducation de leurs adeptes au tourisme durable d'un point de vue environnemental et social. En étudiant la stratégie du comité régional du tourisme d'Occitanie, cette recherche montre que les influenceurs des médias sociaux ont le potentiel de devenir de puissants défenseurs des pratiques de tourisme durable.

Mots-clés : marketing digital, réseaux sociaux, marketing d'influence, tourisme responsable.