

Impact of influencer marketing on the economic performance of a territory: Case of the Dakhla Oued Eddahab Region

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Abstract. *This study examines the role of influencer marketing as a strategic communication tool to improve the economic performance of territories, with a particular focus on the Dakhla-Oued Eddahab region in Morocco. While influencer marketing has been widely applied in commercial contexts, its integration into territorial governance remains underexplored. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as territorial governance, territorial capital, social network theory, and agenda-setting, this research adopts a qualitative methodology based on 12 semi-structured interviews with institutional actors, local entrepreneurs, tourism professionals, and digital influencers. The analysis reveals that influencer marketing contributes to territorial promotion by improving visibility, strengthening cultural identity and stimulating local economic activities, especially in the areas of tourism and entrepreneurship. However, the findings also highlight critical challenges, including distortions in cultural representation, ethical concerns, and unequal access to visibility. The study highlights the need for structured and ethically guided strategies to integrate influencer marketing into territorial development policies, to ensure sustainable, inclusive and culturally sensitive outcomes.*

Keywords: *influencer marketing, territorial brand, economic performance, governance, Dakhla-Oued Eddahab*

I. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected world, where the visibility and reputation of territories are becoming fundamental levers of competitiveness, territorial marketing strategies are being profoundly renewed by the irruption of digital technology and the rise of influencer practices. Influencer marketing, initially developed in commercial spheres, has gradually established itself as a strategic instrument in public policies, particularly at the local level. By mobilizing individuals or communities with a strong power of prescription on digital platforms, this approach aims to build an attractive territorial image, capture the attention of target audiences and stimulate their engagement. While its effects on symbolic attractiveness are now better documented, its real

influence on the economic performance of territories is still little explored in the scientific literature.

This question is particularly relevant in the case of the Dakhla-Oued Eddahab region, a Moroccan territory in full transformation, at the crossroads of national and international strategic issues. With a strong potential for the blue economy, ecotourism and cross-border trade, the region is receiving increasing attention from public and private actors. In this context, influencer marketing campaigns have multiplied in recent years, carried out by local authorities as well as by national and local influencers, with the aim of promoting economic opportunities, investment projects, and local resources. However, beyond the effects of visibility, the central question of their measurable economic efficiency arises: do these schemes really contribute to increasing investment flows, supporting local entrepreneurial dynamics, or improving territorial economic performance indicators?

This research proposes to question the impact of influencer marketing on the economic performance of a territory, by adopting both a conceptual and empirical approach focused on the Dakhla-Oued Eddahab region. It is part of a twofold perspective: on the one hand, to understand the mechanisms by which influence strategies participate in the construction of a territorial competitive advantage; on the other hand, to assess the perceived and measurable effects of these strategies on the economic dimensions of local development, such as private investment, tourist attractiveness, employment or value creation.

In order to respond to these issues, the study is based on a critical review of theoretical models relating to territorial governance, public marketing and local economic performance, complemented by a field survey conducted among institutional, economic and communication actors in the region. The objective is to highlight the possible links between communication of influence, territorial strategy and economic development, while identifying the success factors, limits and conditions of sustainability of these systems.

Through this approach, this contribution intends to enrich the scientific reflection on the new instruments of territorial management in the digital age, and to provide operational avenues to local decision-makers for the efficient use of influencer marketing as a vector of inclusive and sustainable economic development.

1. Influencer marketing in the territories

In the digital age and participatory communication, influencer marketing has established itself as a central lever in communication strategies, not only for companies, but also for public actors. This concept refers to all actions that consist of mobilizing people with a strong audience and recognized credibility with a target audience, the "influencers", in order to transmit messages, enhance an image or encourage behavior. While its first applications were mainly commercial, influencer marketing is now expanding rapidly in non-market sectors, particularly in local and territorial public policies.

In this context, many local authorities, development agencies, or tourist offices are taking up this practice to increase their visibility, promote their territory and strengthen their attractiveness. These influencer campaigns are often focused on promoting the cultural, economic or natural assets of a territory, through visual content, stories of experience or partnerships with local or national influencers. The objective is no longer just to communicate, but to capture attention, generate support and engage citizens and visitors alike in a dynamic of collective enhancement of the territory.

1.1. Definition of territorial marketing

Influencer marketing is a communication strategy based on the use of social influence exercised by individuals or entities with a loyal, engaged and targeted audience, particularly on digital platforms. These individuals, called influencers, are perceived by their community as trusted prescribers, capable of recommending, guiding or shaping the opinions and behaviors of their followers (Freberg et al., 2011). Unlike traditional forms of institutional communication, influencer marketing is part of a logic of relational intermediation, where proximity, authenticity and interaction are central to the process of persuasion.

In the territorial field, this strategy is manifested by the mobilization of influencers, whether local, national or thematic, to strengthen the visibility of a territory, enhance its image, and attract specific audiences (tourists, investors, citizens, etc.). Influencer marketing then becomes a territorial communication tool, used by local authorities, development agencies, or tourist offices, in order to disseminate attractive narratives, create positive representations of the territory and engage communities in a logic of identity co-construction (Bastos & Casais, 2019; Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013).

This approach presupposes a paradigm shift in the relationship between public institutions and populations. It breaks with top-down and unilateral communication, promoting horizontal, participatory and immersive communication. It can thus contribute to building a territorial brand image perceived as more credible and engaging, by relying on influential figures who embody the values, specificities or ambitions of the territory. In this respect, influencer marketing is fully in line with the contemporary logics of territorial marketing and government through image, where reputation and differentiation become strategic resources for territories (Hudson & Thal, 2013; Lucarelli & Berg, 2011).

However, its use in the public sector also raises ethical, methodological and operational challenges: selection of influencers, transparency of partnerships, measurement of impact, adequacy with public values, or reputational risk management. These questions invite us to think of influencer marketing not as a simple promotional tool, but as a strategic vector integrated into contemporary territorial governance.

1.2. The use of influencer marketing by local actors

At a time when territories are engaged in increased competition to attract investment, tourists, talent and projects, territorial actors are adopting innovative communication strategies, of which influencer marketing is becoming a privileged lever. Initially used in the commercial sectors, this system is now integrated into local public policies, in particular by local authorities, development agencies, tourist offices, as well as certain parapublic structures (Bastos & Casais, 2019; Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2008).

These institutions rely on local or national influencers to promote the image of their territory, enhance its cultural, natural or economic specificities, and engage citizens in a dynamic of participation and identity appropriation. For example, many regions and cities collaborate with content creators on Instagram, YouTube or TikTok to spread positive representations of the territory, through immersive narratives and authentic experiences (Lucarelli & Berg, 2011). These partnerships make it possible to reach younger and connected audiences, who are often not very receptive to traditional institutional campaigns (Hudson & Thal, 2013).

In a logic of territorial marketing, these actions aim to strengthen the overall attractiveness of the territory: attract new visitors, support local economic dynamics (tourism, crafts, agriculture, etc.), or encourage the installation of new residents or investors. Digital influence thus becomes a tool for storytelling the territory (territorial storytelling), based on emotion, proximity and recommendation perceived as authentic (Kalandides, 2011).

However, this use raises important issues: choice of influencers, alignment of the discourse with public values, measurement of the real economic impact, and ethical framework for collaborations. The increasing professionalization of systems is thus encouraging public actors to adopt more structured strategies, integrating influencer marketing into a broader vision of communication governance and territorial enhancement (Zenker & Erfgen, 2014).

1.3. Objectives of influencer marketing

In a territorial context marked by rapid economic, social and environmental changes, local authorities are faced with the need to rethink their communication strategies to better meet the varied expectations of target audiences (Durand, 2021). These strategies must not only reflect the territory's own identity, but also promote the creation of a lasting link with residents, visitors and institutional partners, in a logic of shared territorial development (Martin & Leroy, 2018). Territorial communication thus plays a key role in strengthening social cohesion and improving the visibility of the territory, particularly in the face of increased competition between different regions or cities to attract investment and tourism (Bazin, 2020).

In addition, the diversification of communication media, particularly with the emergence of social networks and digital platforms, as well as the growing information saturation, make

it essential to adopt innovative and multichannel approaches (Lemoine & Petit, 2019). In this context, captivating the attention of different audiences is a major challenge, as is promoting active involvement and real participation that goes beyond the simple passive reception of the message (Moreau, 2020). These challenges require the implementation of integrated and coherent strategies, capable of establishing genuine dialogue and interaction, which are essential elements for the revitalization, sustainability and enhancement of the territory in the long term.

- **Enhancing the image of the territory:** Enhancing the territorial image is a strategic approach aimed at building and disseminating a positive, distinctive and coherent representation of the territory to its various stakeholders. This enhancement is based on the identification and highlighting of the intrinsic assets of the territory, whether cultural, historical, economic, environmental or social (Durand, 2021). It is a real identity construction that contributes to forging a solid reputation, an essential factor in the competition between territories to attract tourists, investors and new residents. In addition, a valued image reinforces the sense of belonging of the inhabitants, thus consolidating social cohesion. Valorisation requires controlled and multi-channel communication, integrating traditional media, social networks, but also symbolic events and territorial storytelling actions. This integrated approach makes it possible to generate a positive and lasting perception, increase awareness and promote the overall attractiveness of the territory (Lemoine & Petit, 2019). In addition, it prepares the territory to meet the expectations of diverse audiences and to anticipate future socio-economic developments.

- **Attract the attention of target audiences:** In a saturated and competitive information environment, attracting attention is a major challenge for any territorial communication strategy. This step is essential to capture the initial interest of target audiences, citizens, visitors, companies, institutional partners, and thus guarantee the visibility of the messages and initiatives carried by the territory (Martin & Leroy, 2018). The effectiveness of this attraction is based on the use of innovative, interactive tools and content adapted to the specificities of the public and communication media. This includes the creation of creative campaigns, the use of digital marketing, dissemination via social networks, as well as the organization of attractive and mediatized events. In addition, the ability to arouse curiosity and provoke a positive emotion plays a decisive role in memorizing messages and building a dynamic territorial image. Attracting attention is not limited to the simple exhibition, but also aims to establish a lasting relationship with the public, a *sine qua non* condition for their subsequent engagement.

- **Engaging citizens and visitors:** The engagement of citizens and visitors is a key lever in territorial governance and the sustainable development of the territory. The aim is to actively involve these actors in local life, by promoting their participation in decisions, projects and initiatives that concern them directly (Moreau, 2020). This participatory approach helps to strengthen the sense of belonging, to increase the legitimacy of public policies and to improve the quality of decisions by better taking into account the needs and expectations of stakeholders. To this end, engagement mechanisms can take various forms: public consultations, collaborative workshops, participatory digital platforms, citizen events, etc. Beyond the democratic dimension, the commitment creates a collective and solidarity dynamic that

stimulates social cohesion and territorial resilience. In addition, committed citizens and visitors become ambassadors of the territory, positively spreading its image to the outside world and contributing to its influence. This sustainable mobilization is therefore an essential driver for attractiveness, competitiveness and territorial vitality.

2. Economic performance of a territory

The economic performance of territories is a central issue in a context marked by globalisation, technological transformations and competition between regions and cities (Dupont & Lefèvre, 2019). This notion refers to the ability of a territory to effectively mobilize its resources to generate wealth, create jobs and attract investment. It goes beyond the simple measurement of local gross domestic product (GDP) to integrate qualitative dimensions such as economic diversification, innovation and resilience to economic change (Martin, 2020). Consequently, territorial economic performance is a key indicator to guide public policies and promote balanced and sustainable development.

In addition, the increasing complexity of territorial dynamics requires a multidimensional and integrated approach to economic performance (Garnier, 2018). The latter takes into account not only the economic results, but also the structural, social and environmental factors that influence the competitiveness and attractiveness of territories. In addition, the evaluation of economic performance is based on the mobilization of local actors and the quality of the infrastructure, services and living environment offered (Lemoine & Petit, 2019). Thus, understanding and measuring territorial economic performance is a major challenge to ensure the coherence of territorial strategies and support local development in a context of increased competition.

2.1. Definition of the economic performance of a territory

Territorial economic performance refers to the ability of a territory to generate, in a sustainable and balanced way, dynamic economic activity, to create jobs and attract investment, while ensuring the quality of life of its inhabitants and the sustainability of its resources (Dupont & Lefèvre, 2019). This notion, although often associated with traditional quantitative indicators such as regional gross domestic product (GDP), the employment rate or the level of investment, also encompasses essential qualitative dimensions. These include the diversification of economic sectors, innovation, the competitiveness of local businesses, as well as the territory's ability to resist and adapt to economic, social and environmental changes (Martin, 2020). Indeed, an economically efficient territory is not limited to producing wealth, but must also guarantee inclusive growth that respects social and environmental balances.

In addition, territorial economic performance is closely linked to local governance and public policies implemented by territorial actors, whether public, private or associative (Garnier, 2018). The effectiveness of these strategies conditions the territory's ability to strengthen its attractiveness, in particular through the development of adapted infrastructure, the training of a qualified workforce, and the establishment of a framework conducive to innovation and entrepreneurship (Lemoine & Petit, 2019). It also implies an integrated approach, taking into account the interactions between the economic, social and environmental dimensions to promote sustainable development. Thus, territorial economic performance is part of a systemic perspective, which considers not only immediate results, but also the

resilience of the territory in the face of crises, social cohesion and the ability to adapt to global transformations (Bazin, 2020). This multidimensional approach makes it possible to guide local strategic planning and to better respond to the complex issues facing contemporary territories.

2.2. Key indicators of economic performance

The evaluation of territorial economic performance is based on several key indicators that make it possible to measure the vitality and dynamism of a territory. Among these indicators, investment occupies a central place, as it reflects the region's ability to attract capital, whether public or private, necessary for the development of infrastructure, equipment and economic activities (Dupont & Lefèvre, 2019). Investment is therefore an essential lever for stimulating economic growth and strengthening local competitiveness.

Employment is another fundamental indicator, directly linked to territorial economic performance. The employment rate, the unemployment rate and the quality of the jobs offered are key elements that reflect the territory's ability to generate professional opportunities for its inhabitants (Martin, 2020). In addition, tourism represents a strategic sector for many territories, particularly those with cultural, natural or heritage assets. The flow of tourists, the number of visitors to the sites and the revenue generated are valuable indicators for assessing the attractiveness and economic performance of a region (Garnier, 2018).

In addition, the creation of companies is a dynamic indicator that testifies to the entrepreneurial spirit and the capacity for innovation of the territory. A high rate of business creation reflects an environment conducive to economic initiative, the diversity of activities and the generation of new jobs (Lemoine & Petit, 2019). These combined indicators offer a global and multifaceted vision of territorial economic performance, making it possible to guide public policies and development strategies adapted to local specificities.

Table 1: Overview of the major indicators of local economic performance

Indicator	Description	Importance	Typical data sources
Investment	Amount of public and private capital injected into the territory for economic development	Stimulates growth, modernizes infrastructure and supports innovation (Dupont & Lefèvre, 2019)	Local statistics, investment agencies
Employment	Employment rate, unemployment rate, quality of jobs offered	Key indicator of economic health and social cohesion (Martin, 2020)	National statistical services, local surveys

Tourism	Number of visitors, overnight stays, tourism revenue	Measures the attractiveness of the territory and its economic benefits (Garnier, 2018)	Tourist Offices, Ministries of Tourism
Setting up a business	Number of new businesses created in the territory	Bears witness to entrepreneurial dynamics and local innovation (Lemoine & Petit, 2019)	Commercial registers, chambers of commerce

Source: prepared by the authors

The combined analysis of these indicators makes it possible to obtain an overall and nuanced assessment of the economic performance of a territory. While investment and business creation reflect the region's ability to innovate and develop, employment directly reflects the social benefits of this growth. Tourism, on the other hand, is often a strategic sector for regions with specific natural or cultural assets, contributing to economic diversification and the generation of additional income. Together, these indicators provide a valuable analytical framework to guide political and economic decisions, tailoring strategies to the specific strengths and weaknesses of each territory.

2.3. Towards integrated territorial performance: when the key factors align

The performance of a territory, whether economic, touristic or social, depends largely on several interconnected factors. Among these, infrastructure plays a key role. Indeed, modern and adapted infrastructure facilitates the mobility of people and goods, improves access to services, and is an essential lever for economic development (Dupont, 2020). For example, the quality of transport networks, telecommunications and public facilities directly influences a territory's ability to attract investors and visitors (Martin & Leclerc, 2019).

Moreover, the image of the territory is an immaterial but just as decisive factor. The image perceived by the target audiences, whether they are tourists, entrepreneurs or residents, conditions their investment or stay decisions (Durand, 2018). A positive image, built through targeted communication campaigns and territorial branding actions, helps to strengthen the notoriety and reputation of the territory (Smith & Brown, 2021).

Territorial attractiveness, often analysed as a combined result of quality of life, economic opportunities, and the services offered, is another key factor. According to Lefebvre's (2017) study, the most attractive territories know how to combine a business-friendly environment with a cultural and social richness appreciated by the population. This attractiveness has a direct influence on migratory flows,

investments, and therefore the overall performance of the territory.

In addition, institutional and promotional communication plays a strategic role in the development of the territory. Effective communication, integrating digital tools and social networks, makes it possible to quickly disseminate a coherent and rewarding image, to engage local and external stakeholders, and to strengthen the visibility of the territory in a competitive environment (Nguyen & Thomas, 2022).

Thus, territorial performance is the result of a synergy between these factors: solid infrastructure, a well-groomed image, assertive attractiveness and dynamic communication, which must be integrated into a coherent overall strategy to maximize results.



Fig 1: Integrated diagram of territorial performance factors

Source: prepared by the authors

Moreover, it is important to emphasize that these factors do not operate in isolation, but are interdependent and influence each other. For example, high-performance infrastructure can enhance the image of a territory by facilitating access and improving user comfort, which in turn increases its attractiveness to investors and tourists. At the same time, well-orchestrated communication not only promotes the territory's infrastructure and assets, but also manages its reputation in times of crisis or transformation, thus strengthening the trust of stakeholders (Healey, 2006). This interdependence underlines the need for an integrated and coordinated approach to ensure sustainable and resilient territorial performance.

Moreover, in a context of globalization and increased competition between territories, the ability to innovate in the management of these factors is becoming a major competitive advantage. The integration of new technologies into infrastructure, the use of innovative digital communication strategies, and the development of participatory initiatives that promote public support are all elements that make it possible to adapt territorial performance to contemporary issues (Florida, 2002; Nguyen & Thomas, 2022). Thus, the success of a territory also depends on its ability to evolve and anticipate the expectations of the various stakeholders, by implementing flexible and proactive policies.

3. Literature review on influencer marketing and economic performance

The study of the interactions between influencer marketing and territorial economic performance mobilizes several theoretical frameworks from the social sciences, communication and territorial management. These approaches make it possible to understand the mechanisms by

which influence strategies contribute to the enhancement and dynamism of territories.

3.1. The theory of territorial governance

Territorial governance is defined as a mode of coordination and regulation involving the collaboration of multiple public, private and associative actors working at different scales within a given territory (Pierre & Peters, 2000). This theory goes beyond classical administrative management by integrating participatory, negotiated and often collaborative processes (Healey, 1997). It highlights the ability of a territory to mobilise and organise its human, institutional and material resources to face economic and social challenges.

In this context, influencer marketing appears to be a strategic lever for territorial governance. By facilitating targeted communication and the mobilisation of stakeholders, it makes it possible to strengthen the legitimacy of local initiatives and to amplify the visibility of the territory. By bringing together different actors (local authorities, companies, influencers), this strategy promotes the emergence of a common and shared vision, an essential condition for sustainable and coherent economic development. For example, influencer campaigns make it possible to promote local projects, attract new investors or tourists, and create a sense of belonging among the population. Thus, influencer marketing is not limited to a simple communication operation, but is part of an integrated governance process, where participation and cooperation are key factors in economic performance (Pierre, 2011).

3.2. The theory of territorial capital

The theory of territorial capital postulates that the attractiveness and competitiveness of a territory are based on a set of specific resources, tangible and intangible, which form a single territorial capital (Deschamps, 2003). This capital includes infrastructure, natural resources, but also intangible dimensions such as the quality of human capital, the institutional network and reputation. The ability of a territory to develop this capital determines its success in economic competition.

Influencer marketing intervenes here as a vector for enhancing the intangible capital of the territory. By disseminating a positive and differentiated image, it contributes to building an attractive territorial identity, thus promoting the recognition and trust of external actors. Through the creation of engaging content and the mobilization of local or national influencers, this strategy makes it possible to tell a strong territorial story, which highlights cultural, economic and social assets. This narrative helps to differentiate the territory in a competitive environment, attracting investment, talent and visitors (Becattini, 1991). Therefore, influencer marketing is a strategic tool that activates intangible territorial capital to generate concrete effects on local economic performance.

3.3. Social network theory

Social network theory highlights the importance of interpersonal and interorganizational relationships in the flow of information, innovation, and reputational building (Granovetter, 1973). It emphasizes that individuals or groups occupying central positions in a network of influence have significant power to guide opinions and behaviors.

In the territorial context, digital influencers represent those strategic nodes capable of amplifying messages on social platforms, creating engagement and facilitating the rapid flow of information. Influencer marketing leverages this structure by identifying and mobilizing these actors to maximize the reach and impact of territorial campaigns. By stimulating community participation and buy-in, it helps to strengthen social cohesion and local economic dynamics (Burt, 2005). In addition, the dissemination of a coherent and positive image via these networks contributes to the construction of a solid territorial reputation, a key factor in attractiveness and therefore in economic performance.

3.4. The theory of territorial agenda-setting

Stemming from the pioneering work of McCombs and Shaw (1972), agenda-setting theory analyzes the role of the media and influential actors in the selection and prioritization of subjects of collective attention. Applied to the territory, it explains how certain themes, images or territorial projects can be put forward in order to shape public perception.

Influencer marketing is a powerful instrument in this process. Through targeted communication strategies, it makes it possible to create and disseminate a coherent territorial agenda, highlighting key themes such as sustainable development, innovation, or tourist attractiveness. This framing influences not only the way in which the public perceives the territory, but also their behaviour, particularly in terms of investment or visits (Parsons, 2013). By controlling the media and digital agenda, influencer marketing helps to orient the image of the territory favourably, which has a direct impact on its economic performance.

4. Research Methodology

Faced with the increasing complexity of digital devices in territorial governance, this research adopts a qualitative approach in order to understand the social, discursive and strategic dynamics that underlie the use of influencer marketing in a specific territorial context. This methodological choice is motivated by the very nature of the problem, which concerns processes that are difficult to quantify: subjective perceptions, social representations, legitimation logics, identity narratives and visibility dynamics. Rather than seeking to measure the impact of influence campaigns on economic indicators in a linear manner, the study aims to understand how territorial actors perceive, mobilise and evaluate these strategies, in a logic of social construction of development. The Dakhla-Oued Eddahab region, chosen as a field of study, represents a relevant case of a changing territory, strongly exposed to the logic of attractiveness, image and digital storytelling. The objective is therefore to question the symbolic and institutional effects of influence campaigns on the territorial fabric, beyond the simple measurable economic benefits.

The production of empirical data was based on semi-structured interviews conducted with a reasoned sample of strategic actors involved in governance, communication or the territorial economy. This sample includes: local elected officials responsible for territorial marketing or tourism, digital influencers who have collaborated on campaigns in the region, managers of public communication agencies, entrepreneurs benefiting from territorial promotion initiatives, as well as representatives of parastatal development organizations. These interviews, conducted between March and May 2025, collected rich data on the representations, motivations and strategies of the actors concerned. Each

interview was prepared using a thematic interview guide covering several axes: the perception of influencer marketing, the forms of collaboration between institutions and influencers, the perceived effects on territorial attractiveness, the impact on civic engagement and the ethical issues raised. All interviews were recorded, transcribed in full and anonymized in order to respect the principles of research ethics. In addition, a content analysis was conducted on a selection of digital publications (Instagram posts, YouTube videos, institutional reports) from campaigns targeted in Dakhla, with the aim of studying the visual narratives, emotional registers and elements of territorial storytelling mobilized.

The data analysis followed an inductive thematic analysis method, drawing on the principles of Grounded Theory, in order to surface the categories from the data itself rather than from a predefined framework. After a floating reading and an initial free coding of the interviews, recurring categories were identified, such as: perceived image of the territory, authenticity of influencers, instrumentalization of emotion, legitimacy of public policies, identity issues, or ethical contradictions. These themes were then organized into transversal analytical axes allowing to cross points of view according to the status of the actors (institutional, private, communicative). This analysis has made it possible to identify narrative and strategic logics that guide the way in which the territory is told, sold and governed through the tools of influence. By restoring the words of the actors and highlighting the diversity of uses, resistances and appropriations of influencer marketing, this methodology aims to enrich reflections on contemporary changes in territorial public communication. It also offers a critical look at the tensions between visibility, economic performance and local anchoring in emerging territories.

5. Empirical results

As part of this research, 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted with actors directly involved in the territorial dynamics of the Dakhla-Oued Eddahab region. The sample was constructed according to a logic of diversification of profiles, in order to cross institutional, economic, communicative and community points of view. It includes local elected officials, influencers active on digital platforms, managers of territorial communication agencies, entrepreneurs, as well as players in the tourism sector. These interviews, which lasted between 35 and 60 minutes, were conducted on the basis of an interview guide structured around four main analytical axes. The first axis aimed to explore the perception of influencer marketing as a strategic tool in territorial development. The second focused on the practices and modalities of local use of this approach: types of content disseminated, privileged digital channels, profiles of influencers mobilized. The third axis focused on the perceived effects of influencer marketing on the region's economic performance, particularly in terms of attractiveness, investment, tourism or entrepreneurship. Finally, a fourth axis critically addressed the issues, limits and conditions of legitimacy of these practices, in particular through questions of ethics, authenticity and local anchoring. This structuring made it possible to collect rich and nuanced qualitative data, while ensuring consistency of analysis between the different interviews conducted.

As part of this qualitative study conducted in the Dakhla-Oued Eddahab region, an interview guide was structured around four thematic axes, the first of which focuses on the



Fig 4: Word cloud of responses relating to the economic effects of influencer marketing (Axis 3)

Source: JupyterLab

The analysis of the word cloud reveals a strong presence of lexemes related to commercial performance, such as "reservations", "customers", "sales", "visibility", "profile", "workshop", "contract", "notoriety", "orders" or "partnerships". These terms indicate that local players perceive influencer marketing as a direct or even measurable lever for economic activation. The recurrence of the word "bookings" reflects a clear impact for tourism and accommodation professionals, often mentioned as the first beneficiaries of digital campaigns. This data is reinforced by the terms "customers" and "orders", which refer to actual commercial interactions, sometimes even internationally, as illustrated by the mention of foreign buyers. The high occurrence of "visibility" and "notoriety" signals a recognition of less immediately monetary, but just as strategic, effects in terms of brand image. These symbolic dimensions appear to be closely linked to the digital tools used, in particular social profiles and videos shared by influencers, contributing to increased media coverage of the territory and its economic actors. Finally, the words "partnerships" and "contract" suggest a structural dimension of impact, with the possibility of more sustainable institutional or commercial opportunities. This suggests that influencer marketing, beyond ephemeral visibility, is part of medium-term local development logics, in particular through the networking of actors and the gradual professionalization of initiatives. The fourth axis of the interview guide aimed to question the reservations, criticisms and concerns that can be raised by the uses of influencer marketing in a territorial context. Unlike the previous axes focused on uses or positive impacts, this part aimed to explore the grey areas, cultural tensions, and ethical issues felt by the local actors interviewed. The word cloud below summarises the dominant lexical fields mentioned during the interviews concerning the risks of drift or instrumentalisation of the territory.



Fig 5: Word cloud of responses related to the limits and legitimacy of influencer marketing (Axis 4)

Source: JupyterLab

The analysis of the word cloud highlights terms that are suggestive of structural or symbolic criticisms, including: "culture", "image", "abuse", "problem", "reality", "message", "tourists", "distorted", "authorities", "expectations", or "inequality". These occurrences bear witness to a reflexive discourse of local actors, aware of the ambivalent effects of influence strategies. The word "culture" appears to be central: it refers to a fear of distortion or oversimplification of local identity, often staged in a spectacular or superficial way to seduce an external audience. This concern is reinforced by the emergence of words such as "distorted" or "reality", suggesting that the image projected by certain content is sometimes out of step with authentic local life.

The notions of "abuse" and "problem" reflect a lack of regulation or ethical framework, evoked through stories where some influencers have acted opportunistically, without respect for cultural or economic contexts. The word "authorities" reflects this lack of institutional supervision or participation, making initiatives sometimes disorganized or even counterproductive. Finally, the terms "inequality", "expectations", "audience" and "message" refer to more systemic dimensions: campaigns can benefit some actors to the detriment of others, create unrealistic expectations among visitors, or convey standardised discourses that are not very representative. Influencer marketing is thus perceived as an ambivalent opportunity, both useful and potentially threatening to the balance of the territory.

As part of this qualitative study conducted in the Dakhla-Oued Eddahab region, four thematic axes structured the interview guide and guided the analysis of the data collected. Each axis corresponds to a specific dimension of influencer marketing as a tool for territorial enhancement: its perception by local actors, its concrete uses and associated strategies, its perceived economic effects, as well as the limits and ethical questions it raises. The table below provides a comparative summary of the results for each of the axes. It relates the dominant themes identified in the speeches, the recurring keywords from the word clouds, as well as the main tensions or crossovers that have arisen between the different dimensions. This perspective allows us to better understand the articulation between the representations, practices and issues associated with influencer marketing in a specific territorial context.

Table 2: Summary table

Axle	Main themes	Dominant keywords	Tensions or crossings
Axis 1: Perception	Emotional communication, proximity, cultural enhancement	Dakhla, video, traditions, young people, faces	Tensions with folklorized representations (Axis 4)
Axis 2: Uses & strategies	Strategic Targeting, Local Creators, Short/Long Formats	campaign, creators, TikTok, YouTube, youth, markets	Exclusion of certain groups, risk of appropriation (Axis 4)
Axis 3: Economic impacts	Increase in bookings, visibility, concrete benefits	Reservations, customers, visibility, notoriety, partnerships	Need for more rigorous evaluation (Axis 4)
Axis 4: Limits and legitimacy	Risk of deformation, inequalities of access, lack of regulation	culture, abuse, image, tourists, message, distorted, authorities	Need for an ethical and institutional framework (strengthens Axis 2)

The qualitative analysis conducted on the basis of interviews conducted in the Dakhla-Oued Eddahab region has made it possible to identify a nuanced and rich vision of the role that influencer marketing plays in the dynamics of territorial communication and local development. Through the four axes explored, the data reveal a progressive appropriation of this tool by local actors, often with creativity and adaptability, but also with caution and critical thinking. The results show that influencer marketing is perceived positively as a vector of identity enhancement, economic promotion and generational commitment. It now appears to be integrated into structured strategies, with targeted choices of platforms, content, and audiences. However, this appropriation is accompanied by a growing need for regulation, supervision and evaluation, in order to avoid abuses linked to overrepresentation, cultural distortion, or unequal access to visibility. All the responses therefore highlight a structuring ambivalence: while influencer marketing represents an opportunity for positive transformation for territories, it in return implies increased vigilance in terms of ethics, representativeness and sustainability of practices. This double reading opens the way to a broader reflection on the social and cultural legitimacy of new digital communication tools in local development policies.

Conclusion

At the end of this exploratory research on the impact of influencer marketing in the territorial context of Dakhla-Oued Eddahab, several major lessons can be drawn. The study demonstrated that influencer marketing is not simply a passing digital trend, but a strategic communication tool with perceptible effects on the visibility, attractiveness and

economic performance of a territory. The local actors we met, craftsmen, entrepreneurs, institutions or creators, testify to a growing adoption of these practices, often in connection with a desire to enhance local identity, diversify audiences and stimulate economic activity. The use of short formats (Reels, Stories, TikTok) or more narrative content (YouTube, testimonials) reveals a creative adaptation to the contemporary codes of digital communication, while maintaining a strong link with the cultural specificities of the territory. However, this dynamic is accompanied by significant limitations and challenges, particularly in terms of regulation, coherence of messages, protection of intangible heritage and equitable access to visibility. The risk of folklorization, commercial over-representation or disconnection with local realities calls for a better institutional structuring of these initiatives, by promoting training, ethical supervision and the evaluation of the benefits. Ultimately, influencer marketing appears to be a potential lever for territorial development, provided that it is thought of not only as a promotional tool, but as a means of local expression, inclusion and co-construction of identity. The case of Dakhla thus illustrates the possibilities of a deep-rooted digital communication, capable of articulating modernity and authenticity in a logic of sustainable and participatory development.

Although this research sheds significant light on the uses and effects of influencer marketing in a specific territorial context, it has a number of methodological and empirical limitations that should be rigorously highlighted.

On the one hand, the study is based on a qualitative approach based on a small sample of twelve semi-structured interviews, which limits the generalization of the results.

While the data collected offer a discursive richness that allows us to identify strong trends, they remain anchored in a particular socio-economic and cultural context, that of the Dakhla-Oued Eddahab region. A greater diversity of profiles, in particular by integrating more public decision-makers, tourists or territorial marketers, could make it possible to broaden the analysis. On the other hand, the research focused on the declarative perceptions of the actors, without cross-referencing with quantitative performance data (traffic, sales, measured awareness, engagement rate, etc.). The lack of methodological triangulation thus constitutes a limit to the robustness of the advanced correlations between influencer marketing and economic performance.

In terms of research perspectives, several avenues deserve to be explored. In particular, it would be relevant to conduct an interregional comparative study (for example with other regions of Morocco or North Africa) in order to identify differentiated models of appropriation of influencer marketing. In addition, a mixed approach integrating quantitative methods (surveys, analysis of social data, economic indicators) could make it possible to measure the real impact of these strategies more precisely. Finally, at a time when digital platforms are rapidly evolving, future research could focus on emerging forms of territorial influence (micro-influencers, local ambassadors, participatory tourism), but also on the ethical, cultural and political issues raised by the intensification of this digital visibility in territories.

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