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Innovation Strategies and Sector Specificities: Focus on the Tourism Industry

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Abstract

Innovation strategies, whether technological, organizational, or sustainable, play a central role in the competitiveness of tourism sectors, a field characterized by distinct specificities (seasonality, competitive intensity, customer demands). This article examines how tourism stakeholders adjust their innovative approaches to these specific sectoral constraints. By synthesizing theories within the discipline, we study emerging innovation models (digitalization, ecotourism, personalization) and their varied effects on performance. The objective of this study is to identify the essential levers for innovation aligned with the realities and opportunities of the tourism sector.

Keywords

Innovation strategies, Organizational performance, Sustainability, Tourism industry, Digital transformation

INTRODUCTION

Today, innovation occupies a central place in the competitive dynamics of organizations, and is no longer limited to a simple technological lever, but has become a veritable catalyst for value creation, both within the company and with its stakeholders. In this article, we begin by tracing the conceptual foundations of innovation strategies, distinguishing the different typologies and highlighting their historical and theoretical evolution. We will then show how new information and communication technologies reinforce the ability of organizations to detect opportunities and structure an innovative approach, giving them greater flexibility to anticipate market changes.

On the other hand, our study focuses on the tourism industry, whose environment is characterized by exacerbated competition and constantly changing traveler expectations, and the close link between innovation to adapt to changing traveler expectations and sector performance, highlighting its impact on competitiveness, resilience and sustainability. Digital solutions, personalization and sustainability are presented as key levers for transforming the offer and boosting competitiveness.

We will analyze the dimensions that enable us to assess the effectiveness of innovative strategies, namely indicators of profitability, resilience, customer satisfaction and business sustainability. The aim is to highlight how the integration of new organizational and technological practices can enhance a company's competitiveness and flexibility.

Innovation as a strategic lever: Conceptual foundations

Since Joseph Schumpeter's introduction of "new combinations", innovation has occupied a central place in economic theory. First marginalized in the 1950s-1960s, it regained prominence with the rise of information technology, venture capital and start-ups in the 1980s, ushering in a new cycle of innovation.

Historically, the term “Innovate” evolved as early as the 16th century to designate the action of creating something new and surprising, already marking the methodological and inventive duality of innovation.

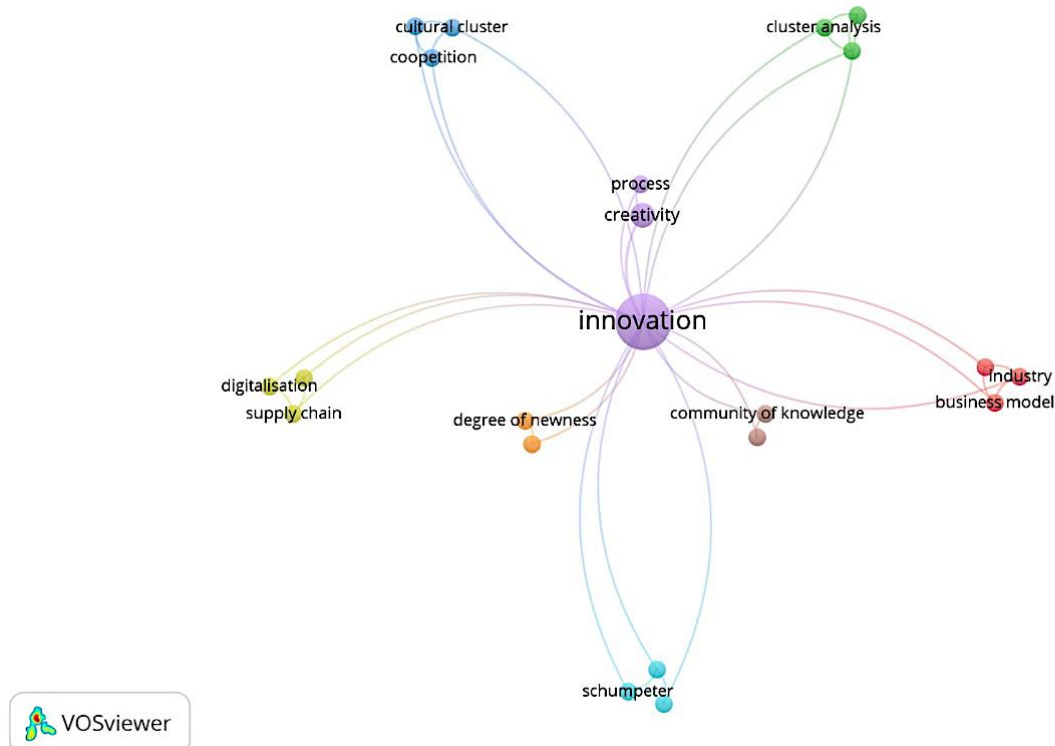


Fig. 1 General co-occurrence map of keywords on “innovation” (VOSviewer)

As Figure 1 illustrates, innovation occupies a central position, linked to several thematic sub-clusters:

- Theoretical roots (bottom, in light blue) around Schumpeter, attesting to the concept's historical anchorage.
- Processual and creative dimension (above center, in purple) with process and creativity, underlining the dual nature of innovation, both methodological and inventive.
- Cultural and relational environment (top left, blue-green) around cultural cluster and coopetition, highlighting the importance of inter-organizational networks and cooperative dynamics.
- Digital enablers (left, yellow) with digitization and supplychain, reflecting the growing role of NICTs in identifying and structuring innovative opportunities.
- Models and applications (right, red) around business model and industry, reflecting the concrete impact of innovation on sector competitiveness.
- Knowledge community (right of center, brown) with community of knowledge, highlighting the collective and cognitive aspect of novelty creation.
- Degree of novelty" dimension (bottom left, orange), recalling the distinction between incremental and radical innovation.

Progressively, innovation has been enriched by a structural and creative dimension, then transformed by New Information and Communication Technologies (NICT) and new modes of inter-company cooperation. It has also become anchored in concrete issues via the notions of business model and industrial performance.

Table 1 Summary table of the main innovation strategies

Innovation approach	Main authors / (Euvre)	Works Guiding idea Impact	Main benefit / Impact
Incremental innovation vs. radical innovation	Joe Tidd & John Bessant – Managing Innovation: Integrating Technological, Market and Organizational Change	Incremental: continuous improvements to existing products/processes; Radical: introduction of entirely new concepts or technologies, likely to transform the industry.	Incremental: gradual adaptation to the market. Radical: disruptive potential, leading position and obsolescence of competitors' offerings.
Open Innovation	Henry Chesbrough – Open Innovation: The New Imperative for Creating and Profiting from Technology	Open the company's borders to collaborate with external partners (universities, start-ups, competitors) and share know-how and resources.	Accelerates the innovation process, reduces R&D costs and risks, provides greater flexibility to respond to rapid market dynamics.
Sustainable Innovation	Geissdoerfer et al. – (Journal of Cleaner Production)	Integrating sustainability principles: minimizing the ecological footprint of products and processes while creating long-term value.	Competitive advantage with stakeholders sensitive to environmental issues, anticipation of regulations, enhanced reputation.

Researchers such as Borkakoti (1975) have demonstrated the structuring role of technological innovation in international trade, and Archibugi & Iammarino (1999) have emphasized its globalization since the 1980s. This globalization has made innovation a lever for global competitiveness, influenced by increased competition and technological advances.

Moreover, the rise of the service sector has broadened the scope of innovation, traditionally focused on manufacturing, forcing companies to adapt their strategies to the needs of the contemporary economy.

Today, innovation is omnipresent. Thinkers like Jeremy Rifkin see it as the foundation of a new industrial revolution, based on the collaborative economy and open technologies. However, innovation remains a complex and uncertain process, often discreet and gradual, that goes beyond the great media figures or spectacular inventions. It also affects social practices, organizational models and ecology.

Modern innovation must therefore be open, collaborative and user-centered, with the aim not only of creating something new, but above all of sustainably improving the way societies function.

The relationship between innovation and corporate competitiveness:

In a constantly changing economic context, where competition, technological advances and market instability are restructuring standards, innovation is becoming the foundation of competitiveness for companies. Innovation is more than just a competitive advantage; it is a strategic necessity for any entity wishing to ensure its survival and distinguish itself in the long term.

Whether through the introduction of innovative products, the use of daring business models or the improvement of operational methods, innovative initiatives endow companies with three major assets: the creation of unique value, the ability to anticipate market trends and flexibility in the face of sectoral transformations.

This development places innovation at the heart of companies' strategic plans, making it not only essential to their organizational performance, but also a driver of competitiveness within economic ecosystems as a whole.

The challenges and impact of innovation in a changing world

Innovation is no longer a privilege reserved for companies with substantial resources, but a vital necessity for all organizations, whatever their size. This requirement stems from a hyper-dynamic competitive environment, where differentiation is becoming the key to capturing ever more demanding consumers and anticipating market changes.

Today, innovation represents a global transformation lever for companies. A multi-dimensional innovation strategy enables companies to optimize their offering, reduce costs, increase margins and improve internal efficiency.

It also plays a key role in customer relations, enhancing attractiveness and loyalty through personalized, responsible solutions that integrate societal values such as sustainability.

Innovation is also a factor of organizational resilience, giving companies strategic agility in the face of crises, regulatory changes and technological evolutions.

In economic terms, it acts as a growth driver, facilitating access to new markets, revenue diversification and international expansion, while improving financial performance.

Innovation also enables business models to be transformed, thanks in particular to disruptive technologies and better anticipation of trends. It also leads to a redefinition of the rules in certain sectors, as illustrated by the concept of disruptive innovation.

Last but not least, the most innovative companies are moving towards internationalization and collaboration, integrating global R&D networks, strategic partnerships and open ecosystems to access resources and knowledge on a global scale.

In short, in today's economic landscape, innovation has gone beyond its simple function as a competitive tool to become the very DNA of successful organizations. Today, it is the main vector for: Strategic transformation, Organizational resilience, Sustainable growth, Sectoral influence

Companies that adopt innovation strategies in their business model not only adapt to change, they anticipate and shape it, rewriting the rules of the economic game to their advantage.

Classification and Typology of Innovation Strategies

Melissa A. Schilling (2016), in her book *Strategic Management of Technological Innovation*, introduces a typology of innovation strategies based on company orientation and allocated resources. She distinguishes between "first mover" and "follower" strategies. Pioneering strategies aim to bring innovations to market quickly, giving the company an early competitive edge, although they also entail risks associated with R&D costs and technological uncertainties. Follow-on strategies, on the other hand, enable companies to optimize their cost of innovation by adopting products or services once they have been tried and tested.

According to Schilling, "each type of strategy has its own advantages and risks, and must be chosen according to the company's resources, innovation capacity and competitive position". His typology thus provides a framework for companies to structure their approach to innovation and define the strategic orientations to be favored, depending on the objectives pursued and the resources available.

The role of NICTs in transforming innovation strategies

Digital NICT technologies have fundamentally redefined the paradigms of entrepreneurial innovation. As an integrated platform of data, connectivity and intelligence, they offer organizations an unprecedented capacity for strategic

intelligence and immediate access to data. By facilitating communications and establishing permanent connections, these digital tools open up unprecedented prospects for aligning innovation processes with today's market requirements. The integration of solutions such as artificial intelligence, massive data analysis, cloud computing and the Internet of Things is enabling companies to reassess their working methods and optimize their innovative approaches, whether incremental, radical or disruptive.

To summarize the main academic contributions on the impact of NICTs, we present a review of the thematic literature in Table 2.

Table 2 Literature review on the impact of NICTs on innovation strategies - *Sourced by own research*

Reference (Author, Year)	Technology / Focus NTIC	Main results	Implications for innovation strategy
Yoo et al. (2010)	Digital platforms, API	Modular, open architectures foster the emergence of ecosystems and accelerate co-creation with third parties.	Adopt open platforms and develop APIs to stimulate external innovation.
Bharadwaj et al. (2013)	Big Data Analytics	The strategic agility of data-driven firms translates into faster, more targeted innovation.	Integrate analytical skills and BI tools to guide innovation decisions.
Nambisan (2017)	Digital ecosystems	Online digital ecosystems multiply the speed and variety of innovation through partner interactions.	Structure communities and collaborative platforms to foster open innovation.
Vial (2019)	Digital transformation	Digitization is redefining business models and internal processes, placing NICTs at the heart of innovation strategy.	Implement cross-functional digital governance, aligning IT and business innovation.
Lee & Trimi (2018)	Artificial intelligence	AI in R&D (idea recommendation, simulations) reduces innovation cycles and experimental costs.	Integrate AI modules into innovation labs to accelerate prototyping.
Gölzer & Fritz (2017)	Internet of Things (IoT)	IoT provides real-time feedback from the field, guiding product and service innovations in a more refined way.	Deploy sensors and connected objects to capture user needs and rapidly adjust offers.
Papadopoulos et al. (2017)	Online collaborative monitoring	Social intelligence platforms improve opportunity detection and collective creativity.	Invest in intelligence and crowdsourcing tools to enrich the idea pipeline.
Chesbrough & Bogers (2014)	Open innovation & NTIC	Corporate portals and social networks catalyze open innovation by facilitating knowledge sharing.	Set up internal/external innovation portals and encourage the use of corporate social networks.

The results of the analysis in Table 2 confirm that NICTs are involved at every stage of the innovation process, from monitoring and opportunity identification to planning and operational implementation, and constitute a major competitive advantage when accompanied by appropriate governance and internal skills development.

The correlation between innovation strategies and company competitiveness

In theory, company growth is based on the combination of production factors. However, in an intensely competitive environment and in the face of ever more demanding consumers, innovation has become a decisive lever of competitive advantage (Damanpour & Evan, 1984; Ichijo & Nonaka, 2006).

The World Economic Forum underlines its importance by placing it among the 12 fundamental pillars of competitiveness (Feldman et al., 2019). Empirical research confirms that innovation significantly improves companies' productivity, performance and competitive position (Crépon et al., 1998; Mairesse et al., 2005).

According to the OECD (2005), innovation includes the introduction or significant improvement of products, processes, marketing or organizational methods. It enables companies to stand out from the crowd, strengthen their results, and sometimes even gain a dominant position in their market (Porter, 1986; Rhee et al., 2010).

However, research often remains focused on technological innovation, neglecting non-technological forms such as organizational and managerial innovation (Walker et al., 2011), even though the latter are essential for adapting to market changes and maintaining competitiveness (Petrakis et al., 2015; Riyadi & Sumardi, 2017).

In the African context, this ability to adapt is even more critical, as companies mainly adopt exogenous technologies. The development of managerial innovations specific to the local context therefore becomes a strategic factor for sustainability and resilience (Le Roy et al., 2013; Akis, 2015).

However, this increase in innovation capacity does not lead to a significant improvement in the overall competitiveness of African companies, highlighting the importance of close integration between innovation and corporate strategy. Thus, the implementation of innovative managerial methods is essential to increase productivity and face competition (Zanello et al., 2016).

Based on this premise, we can assume that there is a positive correlation between the degree of innovation of companies and their market performance. Industries that integrate innovation into their strategic plan generally display:

- greater resilience to economic crises
- greater capacity to conquer new markets

However, this positive correlation is conditional. The effect of innovation strategies on competitiveness depends in particular on:

- The ability to integrate knowledge
- The relevance of innovations to market expectations
- The quality of implementation within the organization

In today's context of digital transformation and ecological transition, this relationship acquires a new dimension. Companies able to combine technological innovation with sustainable innovation are building particularly strong and lasting competitive advantages.

In short, although the link between innovation strategies and competitiveness is clearly established, optimizing it requires a systemic approach tailored to the specific characteristics of each company. The most effective organizations are those that see innovation as a continuous process, integrated into their overall strategy.

Obstacles to adopting an innovation strategy to improve business performance

In today's economic climate, it is widely acknowledged that innovation is a key driver of competitiveness and business performance, but its implementation faces numerous internal and external challenges, particularly in developing or unstable economies. Here, organizations are often reluctant to commit fully to innovative approaches, due to both internal and external constraints.

On the internal side:

a. financial limits

Innovation, whether technological, organizational or marketing, requires considerable investment. Companies with sufficient financial resources can not only experiment with new ideas, but also implement them on a larger scale. However, in the Moroccan context, many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism sector face budgetary limitations, which hamper their ability to innovate. According to a study by Kamal and Achy (2021), lack of access to external financing is a recurring obstacle for these companies, particularly in less developed regions, such as certain rural areas close to Casablanca.

b. lack of expertise

This is a key aspect in the successful implementation of innovations. Companies need skilled human capital trained in new technologies and innovative practices to maximize results. Technological innovations, for example, often require expertise in information systems management and digitalization. In Morocco, some tourism companies have undertaken training programs to enhance their employees' skills in the use of digital tools, such as online booking systems or CRM platforms. According to Bouzidi and Mouline (2022), these initiatives are helping to increase business efficiency, although the lack of qualified staff remains a major constraint in many cases.

At the same time, external factors can present an unfavorable regulatory framework, and an underdeveloped innovation ecosystem or cultural norms that are not conducive to risk-taking are further obstacles. These are just a few examples.

c. Institutional support and public policies

Governments play a central role in promoting innovation, notably through subsidies, tax credits and training programs. In Morocco, initiatives such as the Industrial Acceleration Plan have been set up to support innovative companies in various sectors, including tourism. However, access to these aids is sometimes limited by administrative complexity and centralized resources. According to El Ouardi (2023), companies that benefit from public subsidies are generally more inclined to adopt innovations, although regional disparities in access to these programs remain a problem.

Technological advances are another lever influencing innovation. Advances in artificial intelligence, big data and the Internet of Things offer unprecedented opportunities to transform business models in the tourism sector. For example, predictive analytics tools enable companies to better understand customer needs and adapt their services accordingly. However, these technologies require significant initial investment and technical expertise, which limits their adoption by small businesses. In Morocco, players in the tourism sector are striving to bridge this gap by collaborating with technology start-ups to benefit from ready-to-use solutions.

d. Competitive dynamics

In an environment where companies are vying to attract customers, competitive pressure is driving the adoption of new strategies to differentiate themselves. For example, tourism companies in Casablanca find themselves in competition not only with each other, but also with international players. This situation is driving them to adopt innovative approaches, such as personalizing services or diversifying offerings, in order to remain competitive. Research by Porter and Heppelmann (2021) points out that companies operating in highly competitive markets are more likely to devote resources to innovation to meet rising customer expectations.

Interaction between innovation strategy and tourism business performance

As in the case of the global business study above, the tourism context is characterized by changes in traveler expectations, rapid digitalization and sustainability requirements, all of which represent a real challenge for the implementation of innovation strategies, which are proving to be an essential element in the competitiveness of tourism businesses. Once

limited to incremental improvements, innovation in the tourism sector now takes a variety of forms - technological, organizational and sustainable - that are radically altering the business models and strategies of the various players. The aim of our study is to explore the dynamic relationship between innovation strategies and the performance of tourism businesses, highlighting the mechanisms by which innovation fosters improved financial results, competitive positioning and resilience. We will study the various categories of innovation in the field, their multiple effects on performance, as well as the main obstacles to their application.

Our study will be based on a perspective analysis of emerging trends that will redefine future innovation strategies in the tourism sector. Thanks to this integrated approach, combining theory and practice, we aim to offer tourism professionals and researchers a framework for organized reflection to better understand contemporary issues linked to innovation in the sector and its effects on organizational performance.

How does technological innovation improve the performance of tourism players?

The tourism sector is a prime example of the digital evolution of innovation in the wake of COVID-19. In an environment where the user experience is paramount, digital tools enable unprecedented personalization of services. Data retrieved by booking sites and mobile applications offer a full understanding of travelers' tastes, facilitating tailored recommendations. Instant management of services, facilitated by mobile alerts and digital interfaces, significantly increases customer satisfaction.

Tourism marketing has also benefited from this digital transformation. Social networking platforms and online review sites offer immediate feedback from consumers, helping companies to quickly adapt their propositions. Online behavioral analysis enables highly precise advertising targeting, boosting campaign effectiveness while cutting costs. At the same time, connected technologies promote more sustainable tourism through intelligent energy management systems and visitor flow regulation devices. Cooperation between industry players has also evolved thanks to digital platforms. Collaborations between transport companies, accommodation providers and online agencies enable the creation of combined offers that enrich the traveler's experience while optimizing the use of resources. This digital interconnection between the different segments of the tourism value chain paves the way for continuous, adaptive service innovation.

In short, technological innovation plays a fundamental role in improving the performance of tourism professionals, influencing several critical aspects of their business. In practice, it acts on the components shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Areas of application for innovation in tourism

Area of impact	Levers of innovation (examples)	Key effects for the tourism sector
Improving the customer experience	- Personalizing services via AI & data analytics - Immersive experiences thanks to VR/AR	- Tailor-made offers, increased customer loyalty - High commitment, reduced pre-purchase uncertainty
Optimizing internal operations	- Automation of reservations, HR, maintenance ("smart hospitality")- Smart buildings: home automation & IoT sensors for energy efficiency	- Reduced costs and errors - Sustainable management of resources (water, energy), enhanced "green" image
Strengthening digital marketing	- Digital platforms, social networks, SEO/SEM for global visibility - Review & e-reputation management tools	- Access to a global audience at lower cost - Enhanced brand image, rapid response to customer feedback
Improving strategic decision-making	- Big Data & Business Intelligence to analyze trends and profitability - Predictive models for tourism flows, pricing (revenue management) and HR	- Real-time strategic adjustments - Optimization of prices and resources, anticipation of peak demand
Facilitating access and mobility	- Mobile applications for navigation, booking, itinerary management - Intelligent mobility: electric vehicles, shared transport, mobility apps	

Indeed, in an ever-changing tourism sector, technological innovation is much more than a competitive advantage: it is becoming a strategic requirement for maintaining competitiveness.

Sustainable innovation and tourist appeal

Sustainable tourism also represents a major focus for innovation in the sector. Face growing global concern about the environmental impact of tourism. This approach has led to initiatives aimed at reducing the ecological footprint of tourism businesses, notably through the adoption of eco-friendly technologies, the use of renewable energies and the responsible management of natural resources. Several hotels and travel agencies have adopted sustainable management practices such as water saving, waste management and energy reduction. A study by Cherkaoui and Slaoui (2022) 92 shows that certified "green" tourism businesses are experiencing growing consumer demand, particularly from younger, more environmentally aware market segments. The integration of environmental criteria into tourism practices is thus becoming a key factor in improving the international competitiveness of Moroccan companies.

Innovation challenges and opportunities in the tourism sector

Although innovation strategies offer many advantages, their implementation in the tourism sector faces various obstacles, whether organizational, financial, cultural or structural. To drive dynamic change and encourage tourism stakeholders to

adopt an innovative approach, it is essential to carry out an in-depth analysis of the main constraints to the adoption of innovation in this field.

These include, in particular, a lack of financial resources, infrastructure weaknesses and a shortage of skilled manpower. Despite the richness and diversity of the country's tourism offering, some operators are still finding it difficult to integrate advanced technologies, often due to their high cost or a lack of technical skills within their structures.

That said, the Moroccan tourism sector is clearly committed to modernization and adaptation to new global dynamics. The growing adoption of digital tools, the promotion of sustainable tourism, the use of digital marketing and the optimization of the customer experience are all strategic levers likely to boost the country's competitiveness.

Faced to today's challenges, it is crucial to continue developing innovative capabilities, while maintaining a balance between economic imperatives and sustainability requirements. With its heritage, natural and cultural assets, tourism in Morocco has considerable potential to consolidate its position on the international stage. However, this ambition can only be achieved through innovative, inclusive and responsible practices.

In an ever-changing global environment, innovation is a key lever for meeting the expectations of an increasingly demanding clientele and maintaining the attractiveness of Morocco's tourism sector.

Promoting innovation: Morocco's actions in the tourism sector

In a global context characterized by digital transformation, new traveler expectations and the challenges of sustainable development, innovation is proving to be an essential strategic lever for boosting the competitiveness of tourist destinations. Aware of these developments, Morocco has stepped up initiatives to modernize its tourism ecosystem, enhance the value of its heritage and meet the demands of an increasingly competitive and connected market.

Innovation in the tourism sector is not limited to the use of advanced technologies, but also includes the reconfiguration of offerings, the creation of immersive experiences, the adoption of sustainable practices, and the establishment of new models of governance and partnership. Faced with these challenges, Morocco has put in place a series of coordinated actions involving both public institutions and private players, with the aim of fostering the emergence of intelligent, inclusive and resilient tourism.

As part of a national benchmark, it is relevant to examine the concrete efforts made by the Kingdom to promote tourism innovation through various levers:

❖ Promoting responsible tourism

Trophées Maroc du Tourisme Durable (since 2008) reward initiatives in heritage protection, local development, sustainable events and environmental conservation.

❖ Travel Tech Ecosystem

Travel Tech Morocco, launched by the Confédération Nationale du Tourisme in 2022, organizes events (Rabat, Casablanca, Marrakech, Fez) to bring together startups, technology players and institutions, and drive the digital transformation of tourism.

❖ Strong partnerships with UNWTO

In 2025, Morocco signed an agreement with UNWTO aimed at digitalization and tourism investment, in particular to support SMEs and select 10,000 of them to benefit from digital support.

The UNWTO launched the “TourismDoing Business - Investing in Morocco” guide to help foreign investors.

❖ Competitions and startup incubation

SMIT and OMT organize national competitions for tourism startups: in 2023, 10 winners (e.g. Marocultour, Pikala Bikes); in 2025, 5 nuggets such as Ecodome and ATAR were also rewarded.

More than 414 innovative projects already incubated via a 156 M MAD SMIT program, covering gastronomy, gamification and digital tools.

❖ Modernized infrastructure

4 billion invested to strengthen the main airports (Casablanca, Rabat-Salé, Fès), a key element in supporting the growth and connectivity of national tourism.

❖ Digital marketing and connectivity

The ONMT - Moroccan National Tourist Office - is implementing its “Light in Action” strategy, focusing on four pillars including digital and marketing; planning an overhaul of the Visit Morocco portal, strengthening digital presence and influence marketing.

More than 11 million air seats secured and 120 new international routes created.

These initiatives testify to a strong political will to position Morocco as an African hub for tourism innovation, capable of adapting to global changes in the sector.

CONCLUSION

This study has enabled us to analyse in greater depth the impact of innovation strategies on the performance of Moroccan tourism organizations. It shows that innovation, whether incremental, radical or open, is a major lever of competitiveness and development for players in the sector.

The integration of digital technologies, notably via online platforms and mobile applications, plays a crucial role in optimizing the customer experience. This technological progress promotes not only visitor satisfaction, but also loyalty. The review highlights that improving internal processes boosts the productivity of tourism businesses and strengthens their ability to adjust to rapid market changes.

Moreover, innovative approaches in sustainable development—such as ecological and socially responsible initiatives—have proven to be significant assets on the international stage, enhancing the attractiveness of Moroccan organizations.

In conclusion, the results indicate that to create real value, innovation strategies must be part of a comprehensive and coherent vision aligned with the strategic orientations of the companies. Innovation should not be limited to a one-off response to market changes but should be seen as a continuous process integrated into the organizational culture.

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