

SSA Paper

2023

Belkaid Othmane

Faculty of Commerce, Hospitality and Tourism

**The role of customer experience in enhancing the competitiveness of
the Moroccan tourism industry**

‘Case of: Essaouira & Marrakech’

**Az ügyfélélmény szerepe a marokkói turisztikai ágazat
versenyképességének növelésében**

„Essaouira és Marrakech esete”

Dr. Kornélia Kiss - Department of Tourism - head of department,

Associate professor PhD

Dr. Norbert Magyar - Business Analysis Methodology Department –

Associate professor PhD

Date of closing the manuscript: 2023 November 7th

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES.....	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Justification of the chosen subject.....	2
1.2 Problem Statement:	4
1.3 Main Research Questions:	5
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	5
2.1 Customer Experience Overview.....	6
2.2 Theoretical Foundations of Customer Experience	8
2.3 Customer Experience and its relevance in enhancing businesses' competitiveness	13
2.3.1 Customer Experience: tourist's point of view.....	14
2.3.2 Customer Experience: Business' point of view	15
2.4 Customer Experience and the enhancement of the competitiveness of the tourism industry in a destination.....	16
2.5 Morocco's Main Competitors.....	17
3 DATA COLLECTION AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	21
3.1 Morocco as a tourist destination – Marrakech & Essaouira.....	21
3.2 Primary Research.....	23
4 RESULTS, FINDINGS & ANALYSIS.....	25
4.1 Tourist Results:.....	25
4.2 General Manager's perspective:	37
4.3 Advice to the industry businesses:	41
5 CONCLUSION	43
6 LIST OF REFERENCES.....	45
7 APENDIX.....	48
I. Questionnaires	48
II. Interview questions	52

LIST OF FIGURES

Figures:

Figure 1: Share of the GDP of tourism sector in Morocco From 2013 to 2028

Figure 2: Service Dominant Logic Process

Figure 3: Customer Journey Stages

Figure 4: Customer Experience Pyramid

Figure 5: Customer Experience 6 pillars

Figure 6: The effect of neglecting CX

Figure 7: International arrivals in top African countries from 2019 – 2021

Picture 1: Marrakech Old Medina – Morocco

Picture 2: Essaouira Harbor – Morocco

CHART 1: Distribution of age

CHART 2: Nationality distribution

CHART 3: Number of days spent in Essaouira and Marrakech

CHART 4: SOURCES OF KNOWING ABOUT THE CITIES

CHART 5: Pre-Trip tourist's expectations

CHART 6: Trip tourist's expectations

CHART 7: Number of visits to Morocco

CHART 8: Quality of accommodation

CHART 9: Quality of accommodation and meeting

CHART 10: Overall Rating

CHART 11: Recommending ESU & RAK

Chart 12: Customer Experience and its influence on tourists to Revisit Essaouira & Marrakech

Chart 13: General Manager's responses about collection and feedback analysis to improve

1. INTRODUCTION

Morocco, located in North Africa, is a country known for its rich history, vibrant culture, and stunning landscapes. The Moroccan tourism industry is known for its diverse offerings, including traditional markets, ancient architecture, beautiful beaches, and scenic mountains. The country is also renowned for its hospitality and warm welcome to tourists, which has contributed to its reputation as a friendly and welcoming destination. According to Statista, the tourism industry has been an essential component of the country's economy for decades (Fig.1).

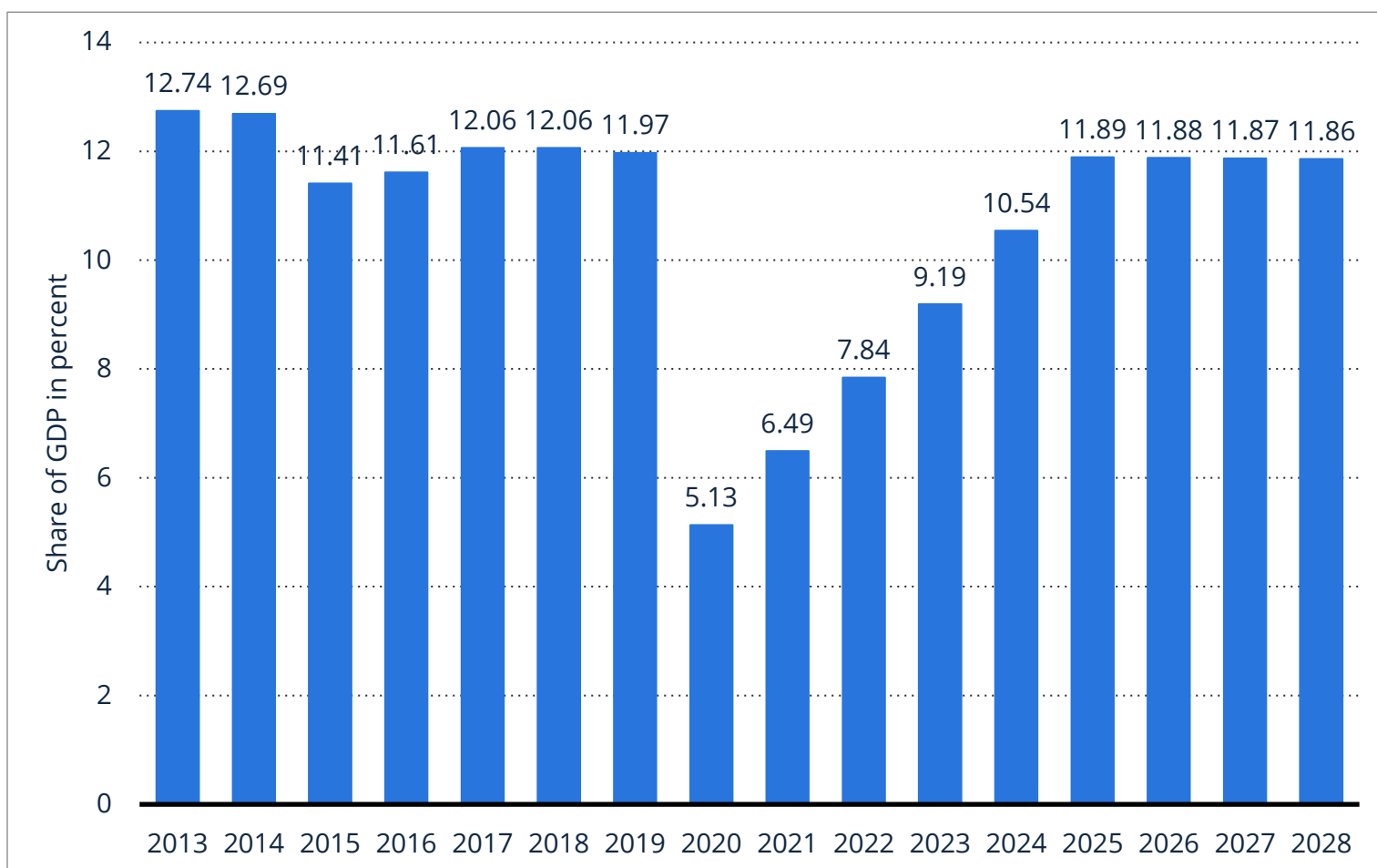


Figure 1: Share of the GDP of tourism sector in Morocco From 2013 to 2028

Source: (Statista.com, s.d.)

In recent years, the Moroccan government has made significant investments in infrastructure and tourism development, positioning the country as a top travel destination in the continent for international visitors (Statista.com, 2022).

One of the key words in this research will be customer experience, referring to the overall experience that a customer has when interacting with a business, including the services, products, and interactions with employees. In the tourism industry, customer experience encompasses all the touch points that a tourist has throughout their trip, from booking to departure. Providing a memorable and positive experience for customers can lead to increased customer loyalty, positive reviews, and recommendations, ultimately driving revenue growth for the business (lumoa.me, 2023).

Additionally, in today's highly competitive tourism market, providing an excellent customer experience has become increasingly crucial. Customers today have high expectations for their travel experiences and demand personalized and unique experiences. In response, the Moroccan tourism industry has recognized the importance of customer experience in attracting and retaining tourists, as well as enhancing the competitiveness of the industry.

The market that this research will analyze and develop (Morocco), is a perfect destination in the African continent with important numbers and statistics. According to Kaden (2023), the Spanish consulting firm, Morocco is ranked the third best place for tourism in the African continent. And according to OECD, tourism is an essential industry in Morocco, directly contributing MAD 82.1 billion or 7.1% of total GDP in 2019 and employing an estimated 565 000 people (5.0% of total employment). Furthermore, and after the COVID19 which worsen the ranking of Morocco's tourism in Africa from first to third, international arrivals in Morocco increased by 175% in 2022 to 10.2 million, the highest amount since 2019 with France being the leading country source market for Morocco in 2022 (GlobalData, 2023).

1.1 Justification of the chosen subject

The role of customer experience in the tourism industry is like a compass guiding the industry towards success, while simultaneously shaping the quality of services offered and the competitiveness of destinations like the Moroccan tourism sector. Imagine travelers looking for fun and memorable times. How they feel and what they think during their trips really matter, and when the experience is smooth and enjoyable, it makes people happy and makes them want to come back and tell others about it or, in other words, positive word-of-mouth endorsements because this is like a magic spell that brings more tourists and recommendations. As noted by Pine and Gilmore (1999), in their seminal work on the experience economy, the quality of customer experiences has become a pivotal factor in the tourism sector's ability to attract and retain visitors.

JRB Ritchie and GI Crouch (2003) from their book “the competitive destination – a sustainable tourism perspective”, emphasize the importance of destination competitiveness in the global tourism market.

Morocco's ability to differentiate itself through authentic cultural encounters aligns with their recommendations for creating a distinctive identity. Consequently, a robust focus on enhancing customer experience can elevate the overall service quality, prompting tourism stakeholders to continually innovate, personalize offerings, and exceed expectations. Moreover and as mentioned by Salvador Anton Clavé & Jaime Gil Aluja, (2002), where they provided a valuable framework for understanding the connection between customer experience CX and competitiveness in a global tourism market, this connection became particularly evident in the Moroccan context. By grouping authentic and culturally enriching encounters, the Moroccan tourism industry can differentiate itself from competitors, capitalize on its unique heritage, and establish a distinctive identity in the global tourism market.

This all adds up to why I chose this topic. I've chosen to study it because it's important in today's world not only in tourism. With everything becoming more connected and global, tourism has become a big deal, helping countries grow economically, share cultures, and connect with each other. Morocco is an amazing place, with a rich history as well as culture and diverse landscapes, it is considered like a hidden treasure waiting to be discovered. I'm interested in how the experiences tourists have, in a way, what they expect before coming, what they do while they're there, and how they feel after since it can shape how they see Morocco and whether they'll come back or not. Nowadays, tourists have a lot of choices and technology at their fingertips. So, for Morocco to stand out and do well, it needs to give tourists special and personalized experiences. That's what this research aims to explore ... how all these different aspects of customer experience come together, how they affect the competitiveness of Morocco in the tourism world, and how we can use this knowledge to make Morocco even more popular and amazing for travelers. Not forgetting that my curiosity is also linked to the professional world and how Hotels and Riads which are the go to for tourists coming to Morocco adapt to customizing the customer experience for a better result.

Research Aims and Objectives

The allure of Morocco has the potential to captivate the hearts of travelers seeking distinctive and authentic encounters. This study embarks on a journey to explore how these experiences intertwist with the industry's competitiveness, exploring into the complex interplay of expectations, emotions, and reflections that shape tourists' perceptions. By carefully exploring this complex connection, we aim to discover valuable insights that could shape the way for Morocco to not only stand out but flourish as a premier destination in the African continent, celebrated for its unique offerings and captivating experiences.

- 1- **Examine the Impact of Customer Experiences:** The primary aim of this study is to investigate the influence of customer experiences on the competitiveness of the Moroccan tourism industry. By comprehensively analyzing various aspects of customer interactions, emotions, and perceptions, this research aims to uncover the direct and indirect effects on the industry's overall competitiveness.
- 2- **Evaluate Cultural and Authentic Experiences:** This study seeks to assess the significance of culturally rich and authentic encounters in enhancing the competitiveness of the Moroccan tourism industry. By exploring how these unique experiences differentiate Morocco from its competitors, the research aims to provide insights into strategies that can effectively capitalize on the country's cultural heritage.
- 3- **Explore Digital Influences:** To investigate the impact of digital technologies, including online reviews, social media, and travel platforms, on tourists' perceptions and decisions regarding the Moroccan tourism industry, and to propose strategies for leveraging these platforms to enhance competitiveness.
- 4- **Propose Experience Enhancement Strategies:** To develop practical recommendations and strategies for the Moroccan tourism sector to enhance customer experiences and thereby strengthen its competitive position. This could involve suggestions for improving infrastructure, introducing cultural education initiatives, and fostering community engagement.

1.2 Problem Statement:

One critical aspect that has gained prominence is the role of customer experience in shaping the industry's success. Despite its recognized importance, there remains a gap in understanding how customer experience influences the competitiveness of the Moroccan tourism industry in general and not only businesses, particularly within the two famous touristic cities of Essaouira and Marrakech. While various studies have explored elements of customer experience and its impact on businesses, the specific dynamics within the Moroccan tourism industry, and the unique characteristics of Essaouira and Marrakech, necessitate a dedicated investigation. The interactions between tourists and the local environment, cultural heritage, accommodation services, transportation, and other facets of the tourism ecosystem collectively contribute to shaping the overall customer experience. Thus, a comprehensive exploration of the ways in which customer experience can be strategically leveraged to enhance the competitiveness of the Moroccan tourism industry is crucial for its sustained growth and success.

By addressing this research gap, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the specific factors that contribute to positive customer experiences in Essaouira and Marrakech, and how these experiences ultimately translate into enhanced competitiveness for the broader Moroccan tourism industry. Through an in-depth analysis of the perceptions, preferences, and

behaviors of tourists, as well as the strategies employed by local businesses and stakeholders, this research seeks to offer actionable recommendations that can inform the formulation of effective policies, marketing strategies, and service enhancements. Ultimately, the findings of this study will contribute to the holistic understanding of the intricate relationship between customer experience and the competitiveness of the Moroccan tourism industry, thereby guiding its sustainable development in an increasingly competitive global market.

1.3 Main Research Questions:

In an era defined by global connectivity and rapid shifts in consumer preferences, the Moroccan tourism industry stands at a pivotal juncture, poised between tradition and innovation, heritage and modernity. The Moroccan tourism industry faces both opportunities and challenges where adaptation is key. Before embarking this journey and to help us reach our research objectives, a series of questions were put in place to guide our way.

- 1- How does customer experience impact the competitiveness of the Moroccan tourism?
 - 1.1- How do tourists overall experience influence their decision to visit Morocco?
 - 1.2- Can positive experience directly lead to increased repeat visits to Morocco?
 - 1.3- What is put in place for tourists by establishments (Hotels & Riads) as well as the government to improve the quality of tourist's experience?
 - 1.4- Which tourism destinations are considered primary competitors to Morocco & what distinguishes them in terms of customer experience?
 - 1.5- What improvement can be made to the infrastructure of tourist destinations in Morocco to enhance the overall customer experience?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Moroccan tourism industry has witnessed significant growth over the years, positioning the country as a popular destination for both leisure and cultural travelers. Essential to the success of any tourism destination is the quality of the customer experience it offers. Customer experience has evolved into a critical factor that can significantly impact the competitiveness of a tourism destination. Enhancing the attractiveness of the Moroccan tourist offer requires not only hotel infrastructure built to international standards but also a comprehensive, diverse, and high-quality tourism offering. Customer experience is a crucial distinguishing factor, particularly in a highly competitive tourist zone. Aware of this imperative, hotels in Essaouira and Marrakech, as well as throughout Morocco, have made customer experience their battleground. It is a central priority to which Moroccan hotels attach great importance, placing it at the heart of their development strategy. To achieve this, hotel establishments have implemented a program to upgrade their tourism assets and enhance the customer experience. Thus, to meet the expectations of the domestic

clientele and anticipate the revival of international tourism activity in the medium and long term, Morocco has undertaken significant renovation work to upgrade its assets. The country has announced infrastructure development, collaborations with other nations, and even new strategies to enhance the customer experience and ensure non-negotiable quality and long lasting tourism improvement.

This review will provide a comprehensive understanding of the key concepts, theories, and empirical evidence related to customer experience and its influence on tourism competitiveness.

2.1 Customer Experience Overview

We cannot start our literature review without first delving into the foundational definitions that have emerged over the years from various scholars and experts. Lewis "Lou" Carbone is recognized as the individual who first introduced the term "customer experience" and is widely acknowledged as a pivotal figure in the development of the experience-oriented movement. His seminal article, "Engineering Customer Experiences," published in Marketing Management magazine in 1994, is considered the starting point for the emergence of the customer experience discipline (Everise, 2021).

Customer experience has evolved to become a primary focus in the field of tourism, impacting the strategies, perceptions, and interactions that determine destination success. In this section, we will elucidate some of the main definitions proposed by notable authors, establishing the framework for our complete literature study.

2.1.1 Definitions

Customer Experience "CX": A Journey of Definitions

Starting, in 1998, two scholars, B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, introduced a groundbreaking concept. They described customer experience as "a customer's holistic perception of their interaction with a company's brand or products, encompassing all aspects of the customer journey." This definition recognizes the multidimensional nature of CX, emphasizing that it extends far beyond mere transactions or isolated touch points. Instead, it encompasses all facets of the customer's engagement, from initial awareness and consideration to the actual purchase process and subsequent post-purchase interactions. Pine and Gilmore's definition is highlighting the growing importance of creating memorable and positive customer interactions as a key competitive strategy for businesses.

Fast forward to 2002, and the definition evolved. Berry, Carbone, and Haeckel brought a broader perspective, stating that "Customer Experience is the process and outcome resulting from the interaction between a customer and a company's people, products, processes, and systems." It emphasized the multifaceted nature of customer experience, highlighting the importance of not just the customer but also the company's internal elements. This holistic viewpoint stresses the importance of effectively managing and enhancing all aspects of the interaction between customers and the company in order to provide an exceptional and purposeful customer experience.

In 2007, Meyer and Schwager contributed their view, defining customer experience as "the customer's perceptions and related feelings caused by the one-off and cumulative effect of interactions with a supplier's employees, systems, channels, or products." This definition highlights that customer experience is complex and involves various aspects. It's not just about one interaction but the overall impact of many interactions over time. It also recognizes that emotions are important in shaping how customers feel about their experiences. This definition is a good starting point for understanding and managing customer experiences in a way that focuses on the customer and their feelings.

As time passed, in 2009, Verhoef, Lemon, Parasuraman, Roggeveen, Tsiros, and Schlesinger introduced a definition that focused on emotions and connections. They said, "Customer Experience is the emotional response and connection between a customer and a brand, influenced by all touch points and interactions throughout the customer journey." This definition highlights that customer experience is not just about single transactions or brief interactions; it involves a complex and ongoing relationship between customers and a brand. It also emphasizes that customer experience includes both emotional and practical aspects, showing how important it is for businesses to cultivate and improve this connection to build long-lasting and positive relationships with their customers.

In the modern era, in 2016, Lemon and Verhoef brought a comprehensive perspective. They defined customer experience as "the customer's perception of their rational, physical, emotional, subconscious, and psychological interaction with a brand over time." This definition shows that customer experience isn't just about one-time interactions; it's about how customers perceive a brand over time. It considers many different factors and emphasizes that customer experience is influenced by both tangible things (like products or services) and intangible things (like feelings and thoughts). This way of thinking stresses how important it is for a brand to make each interaction with customers a positive one throughout their journey to leave a good, lasting impression.

Through this chronological journey of definitions, we can observe an evolution in the understanding of customer experience. The definitions started with a focus on holistic perception and interaction but expanded to encompass processes, systems, emotions, and subconscious aspects. Over time, there was a growing recognition of the emotional aspect of customer experience and the impact of emotions on customers' perceptions and connections with brands. The more recent definitions emphasized that customer experience is not limited to a single interaction but extends over time, considering the cumulative effect of interactions. The latest definition presents

a comprehensive view, highlighting that customer experience involves rational, physical, emotional, subconscious, and psychological interactions. But CX has more to it than definitions, theoretical foundations were created through the years, as definitions evolved more and more aspects of customer experience started appearing from whom we will mention a following list that will help us understand even better the entire concept of CX.

2.2 Theoretical Foundations of Customer Experience

Customer experience (CX) is a multidimensional concept that has been shaped by various theoretical frameworks, models, and perspectives. These theoretical foundations provide insights into understanding the complexities of CX, its components, and its implications for businesses. The following are some of the key theoretical foundations that have contributed to the understanding of customer experience:

2.2.1 Service Dominant Logic (SD - Logic):

Service Dominant Logic is a paradigm shift in marketing that emphasizes the centrality of services in economic exchange. It posits that value is co-created through interactions between customers and organizations. In the context of Customer Experience, SDL highlights the importance of the customer's role in shaping their own experience. The focus is on understanding how customers derive value from the service or product, considering both functional and emotional aspects.

At the heart of SDL lies the notion of collaboration between customers and businesses as active participants in the value creation process. This paradigm acknowledges that customers are not passive recipients of pre-packaged value but rather engage with offerings to create value that is uniquely tailored to their needs and preferences. This shift in perspective encourages businesses to relinquish the one-sided control of value creation and instead embrace a more inclusive, interactive approach. Which is so accurate if we **try to link it to the tourism industry** because this perspective recognizes that each traveler brings a unique set of preferences, expectations, and aspirations to their journey. As such, the value derived from a tourism experience is not a one-size-fits-all proposition but a dynamic outcome of the interactions between travelers and the various elements of their trip.

SD - Logic aligns well with the idea of experiential tourism. As travelers look for genuine and life-changing experiences, the tourism sector can use SDL principles to create immersive activities that match personal desires (Fig.2). Whether this involves joining local customs, discovering less-known places of interest, or taking part in eco-friendly practices, these experiences become more special when travelers actively design them according to what they prefer (indeed.com, 2022).

SERVICE DOMINANT LOGIC

Core Narrative & Processes

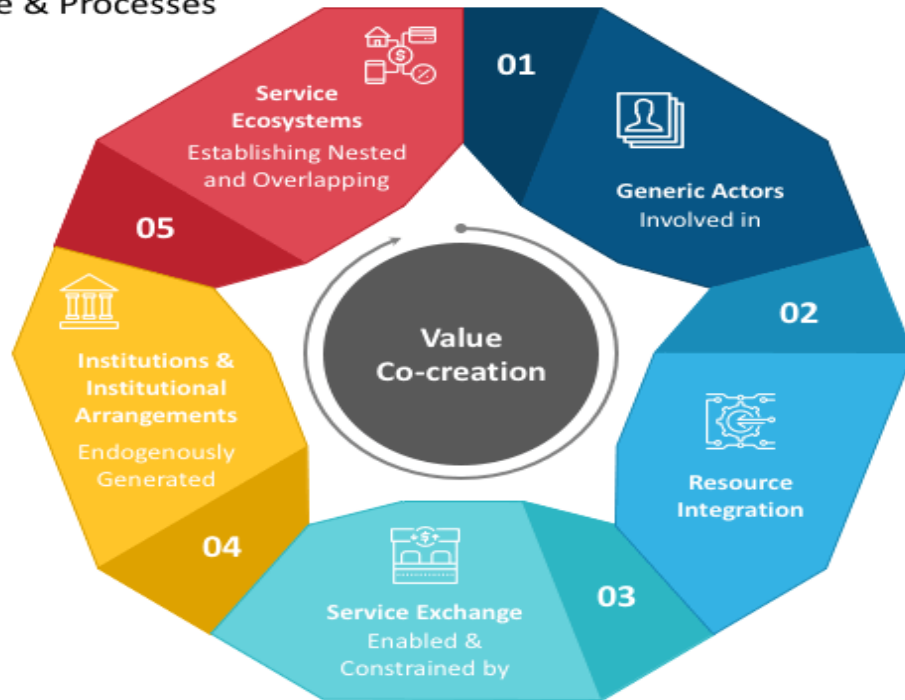


Figure 2: Service Dominant Logic Process

Source : SketchBubble (SketchBubble, s.d.)

2.2.2 Customer Journey Mapping:

Customer Journey Mapping involves visualizing and understanding the entire lifecycle of a customer's interactions with a company, from initial awareness to post-purchase stages (Fig.3). This approach helps identify touch points, pain points, and opportunities for enhancing Customer Experience. By analyzing different stages of the customer journey, organizations can tailor their strategies to address specific needs and emotions at each touch point (Ray, 2023).

Stages of a Customer Journey



Figure 3: Customer Journey Stages

Source: SiteCentre (Ray, 2023)

From the tourism perspective, **Customer Journey Mapping** is a technique that involves creating a visual representation of a tourist's complete interactions with a destination or tourism provider (Hotels, Riads, Hostels, Apartments ...) from the very first moment of awareness to the stages following their visit. This method assists in identifying the various points where tourists engage with the destination, face challenges, and have chances for improving their overall experience. By studying the different phases of a tourist's journey, tourism businesses can fine-tune their approaches to cater to particular requirements and feelings at each point of interaction. This strategic use of Customer Journey Mapping in tourism ensures that travelers receive tailored and satisfying experiences, whether it's discovering a destination's attractions for the first time, encountering any difficulties, or reflecting on their journey after it concludes.

2.2.3 The Pyramid of Customer Experience:

The Pyramid of Customer Experience is a model that categorizes CX into different tiers: fun, easy and useful. Each tier represents a different level of customer satisfaction and engagement. This model highlights the progression from basic functional satisfaction to creating emotionally resonant experiences that hold personal significance for customers.

- 1- The "Stage of Fun" in our customer journey signifies that being served by our company is a delightful and pleasurable experience, consistently evoking positive emotions. This phase emphasizes that customers find our services not just efficient but also enjoyable, creating a sense of delight and satisfaction that extends beyond mere functionality.

- 2- In the "Stage of Easy," we focus on ensuring that our customers encounter no challenges when setting up and using our products or services. This means that our offerings are designed to be user-friendly and hassle-free, reflecting our commitment to providing a seamless and straightforward experience for our customers.
- 3- The "Stage of Useful" underscores our dedication to delivering timely services that precisely meet the needs of our customers. It highlights that our services are not only punctual but also tailored to address the specific requirements of our customers, emphasizing the value and relevance of what we provide.

However, the intricate challenge lies in orchestrating these three dimensions simultaneously: Should an experience be useful and emotionally engaging but lack intuitive navigation, customers are inclined to abandon it due to frustration. Similarly, an experience that is useful and intuitive yet lacks emotional resonance fails to establish a lasting bond, leading customers to seek more fulfilling alternatives. Furthermore, even if an experience is intuitive and emotionally engaging, it's worth can be compromised if it doesn't deliver value. Thus, achieving an optimal equilibrium among all three aspects emerges as a complex balancing act. The intricate dance of usefulness, ease, and fun demands a comprehensive understanding of customer psychology. It underscores the vital importance of crafting experiences that harmoniously blend value, seamlessness, and emotional appeal, ensuring a holistic engagement that retains and delights customers (Tšernov, s.d.).

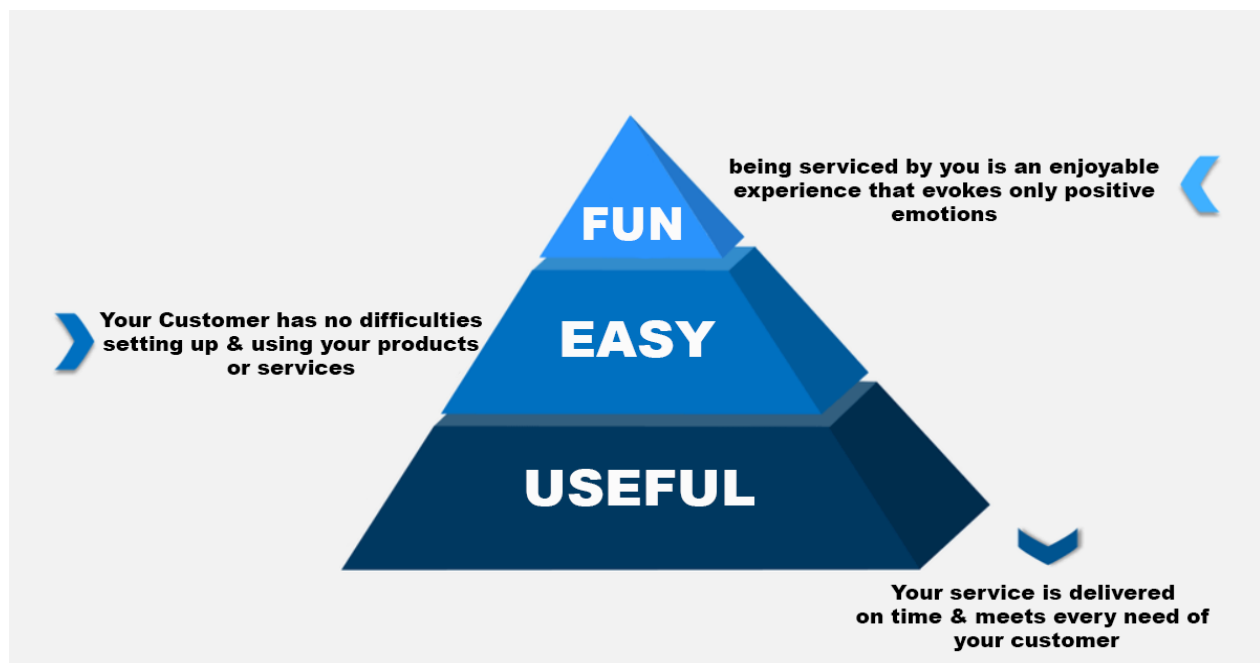


Figure 4: Customer Experience Pyramid

Source: Prepared by author based on Qminder.com (Tšernov, s.d.)

These theoretical foundations and many more collectively contribute to a deeper understanding of customer experience, highlighting the interplay between emotions, perceptions, interactions, and value creation. Integrating these theories helps organizations in tourism or any other field craft more meaningful and impactful CX strategies that resonate with customers on both rational and emotional levels as illustrated in figure 4.

2.2.4 The 6 Pillars of Customer Experience

As mentioned in their book “*the new competitive advantage – customer experience excellence*”, and according to KPMG "Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler" after 10 years of research, that the following are the fundamental components of an ideal customer experience (Fig.5).



Figure 5: Customer Experience 6 pillars

Source: (charitychoice.co.uk, 2017)

Analysis of Figure 5:

- 1- Integrity is rooted in an organization's consistent conduct that showcases reliability. It involves instances where organizations must publicly respond to challenging circumstances to build trust, as well as the cumulative impact of employees' individual actions in fostering trust within the organization. Ultimately, for all customers, what remains foremost in their thoughts is how well the organization consistently fulfills its commitments.

- 2- Customers hold certain anticipations regarding how their requirements will be fulfilled, and these anticipations are now more often influenced by the most impressive brands they have come across. Exceptional companies comprehend, fulfill, and occasionally surpass these anticipations. Some are capable of making unequivocal declarations of their intentions, thereby establishing anticipations ("never knowingly undersold*"), while others precisely establish and then pleasantly surprise customers by surpassing those expectations, such as promising a "48-hour delivery."
- 3- Resolution: Customer satisfaction after a problem arises is extremely important. Even if a company has excellent systems and protocols, there will still be occasional issues. Successful companies follow a procedure that not only swiftly corrects the customer's situation but also leaves the customer with a positive feeling about the situation. A genuine apology and swift action are two vital aspects of effectively resolving problems.
- 4- Customers have limited time and are more inclined to seek immediate satisfaction. Eliminating unnecessary hindrances and red tape to help customers achieve their goals swiftly and effortlessly has been proven to boost customer loyalty. Numerous businesses are exploring ways to leverage time as a means of gaining a competitive edge. Moreover, there are evident cost benefits associated with saving time, provided that it doesn't undermine other essential aspects.
- 5- Personalization stands as a crucial element in the majority of experiences. It entails showcasing an understanding of the unique circumstances of the customer and the willingness to tailor the experience accordingly. Utilizing the customer's name, providing individualized attention, possessing knowledge of their preferences, and considering past interactions all contribute to creating an experience that genuinely feels personalized.
- 6- Empathy is the ability to emotionally connect with and demonstrate that you comprehend another person's feelings. Behaviors that foster empathy play a crucial role in building robust relationships. These behaviors include acknowledging the customer's emotions and going a step further to address their feelings effectively.

2.3 Customer Experience and its relevance in enhancing businesses' competitiveness.

Customer experience plays a crucial role in enhancing businesses' competitiveness in today's dynamic and customer-centric marketplace. By prioritizing CX, companies can foster customer loyalty, generate positive word-of-mouth, and ultimately drive growth and success. Customer Experience has gained significant importance due to its relevance in enhancing a business's competitiveness and it can be a competitive advantage (3pillarglobal.com, 2021). Here's more reasons why:

- **Differentiation in a Crowded Market**

As markets become more saturated and products/services increasingly commoditized, providing exceptional customer experience becomes a key differentiator. A destination with a reputation for developing and offering outstanding Customer Experience can stand out from its competitors and attract tourists.

- **Customer Loyalty and Retention**

Customers are more likely to remain loyal to a brand that consistently meets or exceeds their expectations. Positive experiences foster emotional connections, making customers less likely to switch to competitors, even in the face of lower prices. In the world of tourism, hotel chains have adapted this reasoning to offer their loyal guests the same standards everywhere they go worldwide.

- **Word-of-Mouth and Advocacy**

Satisfied customers are more likely to share their positive experiences with friends, family, and on social media. This word-of-mouth marketing can have a significant impact on brand or destination reputation and lead to new customer acquisitions.

- **Personalization and Customization**

A focus on Customer Experience enables businesses to understand individual customer preferences and behaviors. This information can be used to deliver personalized experiences, which are highly valued by modern consumers. In the industry of tourism, prioritizing Customer Experience is paramount as it empowers hotels to gain insights into the unique preferences and behaviors of tourists. This knowledge serves as the foundation for crafting tailored and unforgettable experiences, catering to the diverse expectations of modern tourists who increasingly seek personalized journeys. By leveraging these insights, tourism businesses and destinations can not only differentiate themselves in a competitive landscape but also create lasting memories that lead to enhanced customer loyalty and positive word-of-mouth, driving the industry's growth and success.

2.3.1 Customer Experience: tourist's point of view

When you travel as a tourist, your overall experience matters a lot. Customer experience refers to how you feel and what you remember about your trip. It's not just about the places you visit, but also how comfortable and enjoyable your journey is. Imagine arriving at a hotel after a long flight, if the staff warmly welcomes you, helps with your luggage, and provides a clean room, you're likely to feel good about your choice. Exploring a new city becomes more exciting when you have easy-to-follow maps, friendly locals, and clear signs. Good customer experience makes your trip

special by considering your preferences. For example, if you're a food lover, discovering local restaurants with delicious cuisine adds to your experience. When tourism businesses understand what you like and dislike, they can create personalized adventures. Hotels started already using PMSs like MEWS for eg that actually offer them to create guests profiles or CVs just so they can make everything more or less personalized. This could mean suggesting activities that match your interests, providing multilingual guides, or ensuring safety while you explore. All these things together make your journey memorable and encourage you to tell your friends about it. So, as a tourist, pay attention to how businesses treat you ... it's all about making your trip fantastic from start to finish.

2.3.2 Customer Experience: Business' point of view

Customer Experience within the hotel industry represents a complex combination of services, interactions, and emotions that collectively define a guest's entire stay. It goes beyond just offering a place to stay, instead it encompasses a comprehensive journey that spans from the guest's expectations before arrival, to their experiences during their stay, and even the lasting memories after they've checked out. Right from the moment a guest steps into the hotel lobby, their perception of the establishment begins to take form, and every subsequent interaction and encounter plays a critical role in shaping their overall impression. Factors such as the warmth of the greeting at the front desk, the comfort of their accommodations, the quality of dining options, and the responsiveness of the staff all contribute to the overall CX. Furthermore, aspects like the efficiency of check-in and check-out procedures, the cleanliness and maintenance of the facilities, and the attentiveness to special requests also leave an impact on how the guest perceives their stay. Beyond these tangible elements, the emotional connection established between guests and the hotel staff further enhances the CX. A personalized, empathetic, and responsive approach that caters to the individual needs and preferences of guests can create a memorable impression, nurturing guest loyalty and garnering positive reviews. In the age of digital technology, the role of technology is also significant, ranging from online booking experiences to in-room amenities such as smart controls and digital concierge services. Ultimately, an exceptional hotel CX goes beyond the functional aspects of lodging to craft memorable, emotionally resonant experiences that not only make guests desire a return visit but also prompt them to recommend the establishment to others. The amalgamation of these elements constitutes the essence of a hotel's dedication to delivering an outstanding customer experience (Carter, 2023).

2.4 Customer Experience and the enhancement of the competitiveness of the tourism industry in a destination.

Customer experience plays a pivotal role in enhancing the tourism industry of a country in various ways. At a general level, it significantly impacts both tourists' perceptions and the overall reputation of the destination. One key way in which customer experience enhances the industry is by fostering a strong sense of satisfaction and loyalty among tourists. When travelers feel welcomed, valued, and catered to, they are more likely to return to the country for future vacations, thereby generating repeat business. This consistent influx of returning visitors can serve as a stable foundation for the tourism sector, ensuring a steady flow of revenue and contributing to the country's economic growth (datapeal.io, 2022).

Moreover, exceptional customer experiences have the power to amplify positive word-of-mouth marketing. Satisfied tourists are inclined to share their pleasant experiences with friends, family, and on social media platforms which is totally what we do as tourists ourselves. This organic promotion can greatly influence potential tourists' decisions, effectively serving as free advertising for the country's attractions, accommodations, and hospitality services. In today's interconnected world, a single glowing recommendation from a fellow traveler can reach a vast audience, sparking interest and driving tourism numbers up, not forgetting nowadays there is more and more Facebook groups for example where travelers share their bad and good experiences. By actively seeking feedback and insights from tourists, businesses and destinations can identify areas that need enhancement or new opportunities that align with evolving visitor preferences. This feedback loop encourages the development of unique and tailored offerings, catering to a diverse range of interests and ensuring that the country remains competitive in a global tourism market. Safety and security are also integral to the customer experience in tourism. A country that prioritizes the safety of its visitors through robust security measures and effective communication strategies can attract more tourists. Feeling safe while exploring a foreign land not only enhances the overall experience but also builds trust, further encouraging tourists to choose that destination over others.

But a bigger question related to this is, what would happen if a destination neglect customer experience?

The disadvantages of neglecting customer experience far outweigh any short-term benefits (Fig.6).



Figure 6: The effect of neglecting CX

Foremost, a poor customer experience can lead to decreased tourist satisfaction, resulting in negative word-of-mouth reviews and a tarnished reputation. This negative publicity can spread quickly in the digital age, dissuading potential visitors from choosing the destination and causing a decline in tourism numbers. Furthermore, neglecting customer experience can lead to a lack of repeat business. Without satisfied and loyal tourists, a country's tourism industry will struggle to maintain a consistent stream of revenue. This can contribute to economic instability and adversely affect local businesses that depend on tourism for their livelihoods. Moreover, an absence of focus on customer experience can hinder innovation and development. Ignoring the changing preferences and needs of tourists can result in outdated offerings, ultimately making the country less competitive in the global tourism market. This can lead to missed opportunities for growth, such as not tapping into emerging trends or failing to create unique experiences that could attract a wider range of visitors. Neglecting customer experience can also impact safety and security measures. If tourists don't feel safe while visiting a country, it can deter them from choosing that destination altogether. Inadequate safety measures and a lack of information can put both tourists and locals at risk, further damaging the country's reputation and credibility (Cornell, 2023).

2.5 Morocco's Main Competitors

Morocco competes with several other African nations for a share of the tourism market. The following it's Morocco's position in African tourism and its rankings among its main competitors in number of international arrivals. All the data below is according to Statista. The Data is from 2021 & 2022.

1) Egypt - 12.8 million international arrivals

Egypt stands as one of Morocco's main competitors in the African tourism industry and the closest to Morocco in terms of international arrivals as seen in figure 7. The country's long and illustrious history, anchored by the iconic pyramids, Sphinx, and the temples of Luxor and Karnak, draws tourists from across the globe. Egypt ranks consistently high among African nations in terms of tourist arrivals and revenue (statista.com, s.d.). The tourism products and services in Egypt are deeply rooted in its historical treasures. Visitors can explore the ancient wonders of Giza, Luxor,

and Aswan. Additionally, the Red Sea Riviera provides world-class diving and beach resorts, attracting beach enthusiasts. Egypt's advantage lies in its unmatched historical legacy and diverse landscapes, including the Sahara Desert and the stunning Red Sea coast. Morocco, on the other hand, boasts cultural diversity and unique landscapes like the Atlas Mountains and the Sahara Desert (lonelyplanet.com, s.d.). Morocco often competes with Egypt for visitors interested in history and culture, but the experiences vary significantly.

2) South Africa – 10.23 million international arrivals

South Africa is another strong contender in African tourism with 10.23 million international arrivals (figure 7). It's known for its wildlife safaris, stunning national parks, and vibrant cities. The country ranks high in terms of tourism arrivals and offers diverse tourism products and services. South Africa's wildlife safaris in Kruger National Park and Addo Elephant National Park are major draws. Cape Town, with its iconic Table Mountain and vibrant arts scene, is also a popular destination. The country provides rich cultural experiences through the diversity of its people and heritage. While Morocco doesn't compete directly with South Africa's wildlife offerings, it holds its own charm with the allure of the Sahara Desert and the historic cities of Marrakech and Fes. Morocco's strong suit lies in its blend of culture, history, and landscapes, providing a unique North African experience that distinguishes it from South Africa.

3) Tunisia - 9.43 million international arrivals

Tunisia, 9.43 million international arrivals (figure 7), with its Mediterranean coastline, ancient ruins, and historical significance, represents another competitor to Moroccan tourism. The country ranks relatively high among African destinations in terms of tourism appeal. Tunisia's key tourism products and services include the ruins of Carthage, the medina of Tunis, and the stunning beaches in places like Hammamet and Djerba. The country has a rich history and cultural heritage, including influences from Arab, Berber, and European civilizations.

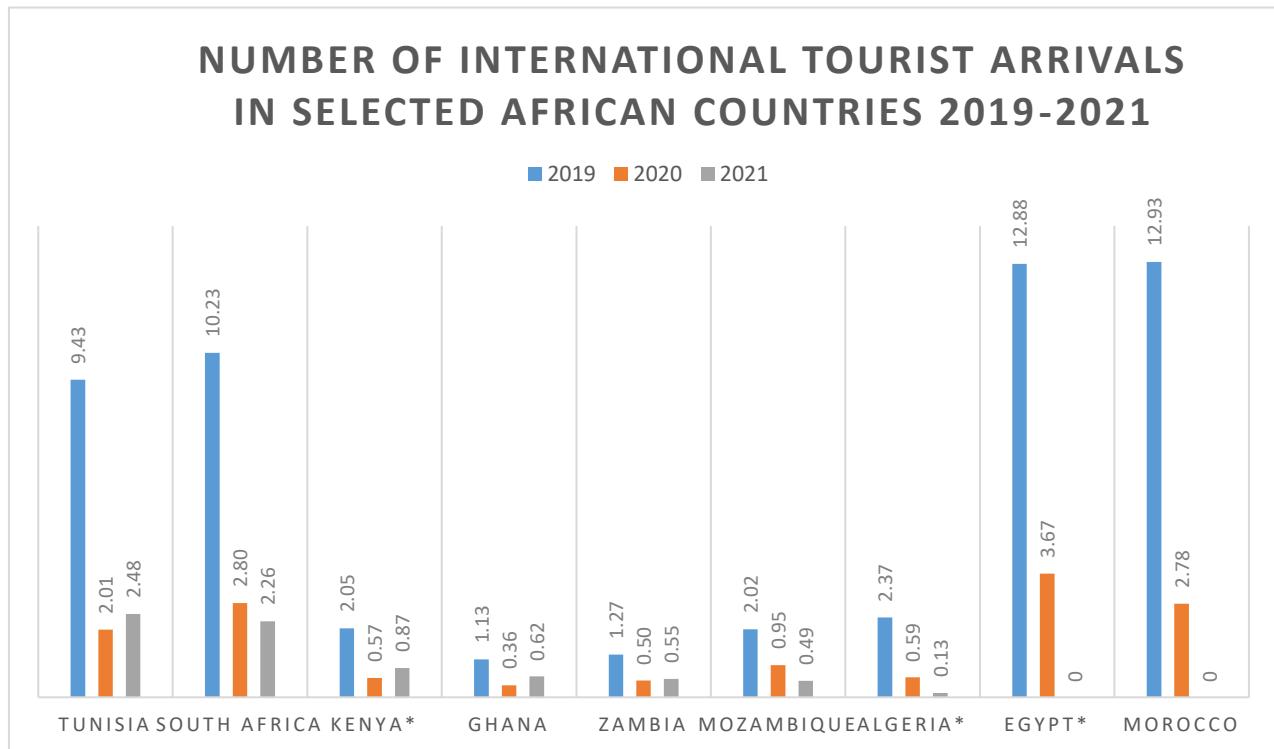


Figure 7: International arrivals in top African countries from 2019 - 2021

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/261740/countries-in-africa-ranked-by-international-tourist-arrivals/>

Morocco distinguishes itself from Egypt, South Africa, and Tunisia in its tourist offerings through a captivating blend of cultural richness and historical allure. The country's vibrant cities, such as Marrakech and Essaouira, provide a unique fusion of tradition and modernity, offering immersive experiences in the midst of intricate architecture, bustling markets, and the enchanting ambiance of the medinas. Morocco's picturesque deserts, majestic Atlas Mountains, and charming coastal towns contribute to a varied landscape that appeals to nature enthusiasts and adventure seekers alike. Its cuisine, a delectable blend of flavors influenced by Berber, Arab, and French traditions, provides an authentic gastronomic journey. Moreover, Morocco's commitment to preserving its cultural heritage and showcasing its unique traditions and craftsmanship sets it apart as a destination where visitors can engage with local communities and experience the essence of Moroccan life. This cultural authenticity, combined with the country's adaptability to modern travel trends, creates a compelling and multifaceted tourist experience that distinguishes Morocco in the competitive landscape of North African tourism.

Suggestions on how Morocco can set itself apart.

Morocco, to set itself apart as a compelling tourist destination. To do so, it should focus on the following strategies:

Cultural Preservation and Promotion: Morocco should continue to prioritize the preservation and promotion of its cultural heritage. This can be achieved through initiatives that support local artisans, cultural festivals, and educational programs that showcase Moroccan traditions. Visitors should have the opportunity to engage with the local culture, whether through workshops, performances, or community interactions.

Sustainable Tourism: Promoting sustainable and responsible tourism practices is essential. Morocco can emphasize eco-friendly accommodations, support local environmental initiatives, and encourage responsible wildlife encounters. This not only preserves the natural beauty of the country but also attracts travelers seeking eco-conscious experiences.

Digital Presence: Embrace digital platforms to enhance visibility and accessibility. Utilizing social media, online reviews, and travel platforms can help Morocco reach a broader audience and shape positive perceptions. Engaging with travelers through digital channels and showcasing authentic experiences can be a compelling way to set the country apart.

Infrastructure Development: Continuous improvements in infrastructure, such as transportation, accommodations, and communication networks, are crucial. This ensures that tourists have convenient and comfortable access to various parts of the country, further enhancing their experience.

Community Involvement: Encourage community engagement and sustainable tourism practices. By involving local communities in tourism initiatives and ensuring that they reap the benefits, Morocco can create a more authentic and enriching experience for travelers.

Tailored Experiences: Develop customized tourism packages and experiences that cater to diverse interests, whether it's history, adventure, or culinary exploration. Tailoring experiences to meet the preferences of individual tourists can set Morocco apart as a versatile and welcoming destination.

3 DATA COLLECTION AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Morocco as a tourist destination – Marrakech & Essaouira

Morocco, known for its fascinating history, lively culture, and various landscapes, has become a popular place for tourists worldwide, offering an immersive experience. Two famous cities, ranked among the top five visited cities in Morocco, Marrakech and Essaouira, are outstanding instances of Moroccan places that do exceptionally well in giving great experiences to visitors (journeybeyondtravel.com, s.d.).

Marrakech, often referred to as the "Red City," has indeed earned its reputation as the tourism capital of Morocco, attracting a diverse array of travelers drawn by its rich cultural heritage, stunning architecture, and unique blend of tradition and modernity. Beyond its historical significance, Marrakech has also captured the attention of celebrities and influential figures, leading to the establishment of luxurious hotels that add to the city's allure. One of the notable aspects that has contributed to Marrakech's prominence is its ability to create a harmonious blend of old-world charm and contemporary luxury. This enchanting fusion has attracted the interest of famous personalities, including well-known names from the entertainment and business industries (visitmorocco.com, s.d.).

Cristiano Ronaldo, the renowned footballer, chose Marrakech as a location to open his CR7 boutique hotel, infusing his brand's distinctive style into the city's hospitality landscape. Similarly, legendary actor Robert De Niro partnered to establish The Nobu Hotel in Marrakech, bringing a touch of Hollywood glamour to the city's offerings.

These celebrity-driven establishments have not only elevated Marrakech's status on the global tourism map but have also contributed to the diversification of the city's accommodations. The presence of such prestigious hotels creates a magnetic pull for travelers seeking an exquisite blend of opulence and Moroccan authenticity. These establishments often encapsulate the city's cultural essence, offering guests a chance to immerse themselves in Marrakech's vibrant atmosphere while enjoying world-class amenities and services. However, while the influence of celebrities and their hotel ventures has undoubtedly added to Marrakech's appeal, it's important to recognize that the city's allure extends far beyond these establishments. Marrakech's historical sites, bustling markets, and architectural wonders like the Bahia Palace and the Koutoubia Mosque have been drawing travelers for centuries. The medina's narrow streets, bustling souks, and vibrant Jemaa el-Fnaa square provide a unique sensory experience that showcases the heart of Moroccan culture.



Picture 1: Marrakech Old Medina - Morocco

Source: Planetofhotels.com (planetofhotels.com, 2022)

Moving towards the coastal town of Essaouira, a coastal gem nestled along the Atlantic shores of Morocco, holds its own unique charm and allure in the country's tourism landscape. While perhaps not as widely recognized as Marrakech on a global scale, Essaouira has managed to carve out a distinctive identity that appeals to those seeking a tranquil escape, artistic inspiration, and a more laid-back Moroccan experience. The city's appeal is not only rooted in its picturesque setting but also in its growing popularity among renowned figures, contributing to the development of exceptional hotel offerings. Essaouira's reputation as an artistic hub and a haven for musicians and creative has played a pivotal role in attracting notable personalities and influential individuals. Its medina, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, captivates visitors with its whitewashed buildings, blue accents, and the soothing sound of the waves crashing against the ancient city walls (unesco.org, s.d.).

This ambiance has drawn the attention of artists, writers, and musicians seeking an environment that sparks inspiration and encourages creative expression. Jimi Hendrix, the legendary musician, found solace and creative energy in Essaouira, leaving an indelible mark on the city's cultural narrative (Saeed, 2020). The city's appeal has also extended to renowned figures in the culinary world. Moroccan-born chef Yotam Ottolenghi, known for his innovative Middle Eastern cuisine, was inspired by the flavors and local produce of Essaouira. This inspiration culminated in the opening of his restaurant, "Keshk," in the city, further emphasizing Essaouira's growing reputation as a culinary destination. Essaouira's transformation into a hub for art, music, and culinary exploration has naturally paved the way for the establishment of hotels that cater to a more discerning and creative clientele. These accommodations blend seamlessly into the city's fabric, offering a range of experiences that capture the essence of Essaouira's laid-back coastal

vibe. From boutique Riads with artistic touches to luxury beachfront resorts, the city's hotels provide guests with a chance to relax and immerse themselves in the local culture.

Essaouira has emerged also as a favored destination for filmmakers seeking an evocative backdrop. Its charming medina, stunning beaches, and distinctive architecture have graced the silver screen, captivating audiences worldwide. The city's unique ambiance has drawn filmmakers, with notable movies like "Othello" (starring Laurence Olivier), "Game of Thrones," and "John Wick 3" using Essaouira's captivating landscape to set their scenes. With its timeless beauty and cinematic potential, Essaouira continues to be a sought-after destination for filmmakers aiming to capture the essence of Morocco's coastal charm on camera.



Picture 2: Essaouira Harbor - Morocco

Source: introducingmarrakech.com (introducingmarrakech.com, s.d.)

3.2 Primary Research

3.2.1 Methodology and data collection

This study employed a mixed-methods approach that combined both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The primary focus of data collection involved analyzing existing data related to the Moroccan tourism industry, including metrics like visitor numbers, hotel occupancy rates, and tourism revenues. These data points were thoroughly examined to identify trends and patterns that were pertinent to customer experience and overall competitiveness within the industry.

Furthermore, to gain deeper insights, interviews and questionnaires were conducted with interviews for general managers and Riad owners and questionnaires to tourists across various hotels in Marrakech and Essaouira. This step aimed to uncover the specific measures and provisions in place for tourists visiting these destinations and how the customer experience in these two cities could affect the tourism industry in general, keeping in mind that Essaouira and Marrakech belonged to the most contributing region touristically in Morocco, which, in our

opinion, could affect the entire tourism industry. Additionally, a separate questionnaire was administered to tourists, enabling a comparative analysis between their expectations and actual experiences.

In tandem with data analysis, qualitative information was gathered through field research. This entailed conducting observations and immersive fieldwork to gain a firsthand understanding of the customer experience within the Moroccan tourism sector. This qualitative approach was complemented by insights drawn from professional sources based on prior experiences. Additionally, this methodology involved on-site visits to various tourism destinations and attractions, further enriching the research findings as well as observing the customer experience and conducting interviews with tourists and industry stakeholders on site.

3.2.2 Data Process

In the process of conducting this research, a well-structured and comprehensive methodology was employed, which involved a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The objective was to gain a deeper understanding of the factors influencing customer experiences in the Moroccan tourism industry.

For the quantitative aspect of the research, questionnaires were utilized as a primary data collection tool. These questionnaires were distributed during the second week of October, and respondents were provided access to the surveys through a Google Forms link and QR code. The choice of this method was grounded in its efficiency and accessibility, allowing respondents to provide their input conveniently.

To delve deeper into the qualitative dimension of the research, interviews were conducted with individuals who hold key positions within the Moroccan tourism industry. These interviews provided valuable insights into the challenges and strategies of enhancing customer experiences. The individuals interviewed included Eric Molle, the General Manager of Heure Bleue in Essaouira, Abdeljalil Essafyani, the General Manager Assistant in Salut Maroc Riad, Hicham Toufelazz, the Owner of multiple Riads in Marrakech, and Yve Michel, the Owner of Dar l'Oussia. These experienced professionals offered diverse perspectives on the subject, enriching the research findings with practical insights and expertise from within the industry.

To analyze the collected data, various statistical tools and techniques, including data visualization through graphs and tables, were employed. The graphs and tables provided a clear presentation of key trends and patterns in the survey data, offering a quantitative foundation for the study's findings. Moreover, the data visualization techniques facilitated a more accessible presentation of complex information, making it easier to convey the results.

The questionnaire is a pivotal element in our research, designed to obtain valuable insights from participants regarding the role of customer experience in shaping the competitiveness of the Moroccan tourism industry, with a particular focus on the cities of Essaouira and Marrakech

(ANNEXE I). A noteworthy aspect of this questionnaire is its accessibility and inclusivity, as it is thoughtfully presented in both French and English, ensuring that a diverse range of participants can comfortably engage with it as well as the use of QR (ANNEXE II) code which increased the amount of response in the small period of time. The questionnaire taking only about 5 minutes to complete, respecting the time and contribution of the participants. The questionnaire is strategically divided into several sections, commencing with demographic information, including gender, age, nationality, and the number of previous visits to Morocco. It then progresses to gather data related to the current visit, such as the city being visited and the purpose and duration of the stay.

The core of the questionnaire centers around the concept of customer experience. It inquires about the sources through which participants learned about Essaouira and Marrakech, their pre-trip expectations, and how those expectations aligned with the actual experiences during the visit. The questionnaire explores aspects of the quality of accommodation and whether it met the expectations set before arrival. It delves into participants' engagement with local attractions and their satisfaction with the variety and accessibility of activities. The questionnaire also assesses the interactions with local residents and the effectiveness of communication despite potential language barriers. The participants' overall experience and likelihood to recommend Essaouira and Marrakech to others are measured on a satisfaction scale. Importantly, the questionnaire investigates the extent to which customer experience influences the participants' decision to revisit these destinations in the future.

Finally, an open-ended question invites participants to share any specific aspects of their trip that exceeded their expectations. This section allows for qualitative feedback, which can offer additional insights beyond the structured questions.

4 RESULTS, FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

4.1 Tourist Results:

To delve into the analysis of the data acquired from the tourists' perspectives through questionnaires, an in-depth understanding of their perspectives and preferences is required. These questionnaires are an important source of information about the dynamics of Moroccan tourism, notably in towns like Marrakech and Essaouira. The replies gathered directly from tourists provide insight into their expectations, impressions, and levels of satisfaction during their stay. This vital data allows us to investigate the areas of customer experience that contribute to Morocco's tourism industry's competitiveness, providing insight into the factors that form their travel experiences and impact their decisions. We will analyze the tourists' feedback to identify the strengths, opportunities, and areas for improvement that might improve their experiences, ultimately contributing to the Moroccan tourism landscape's continued evolution and success.

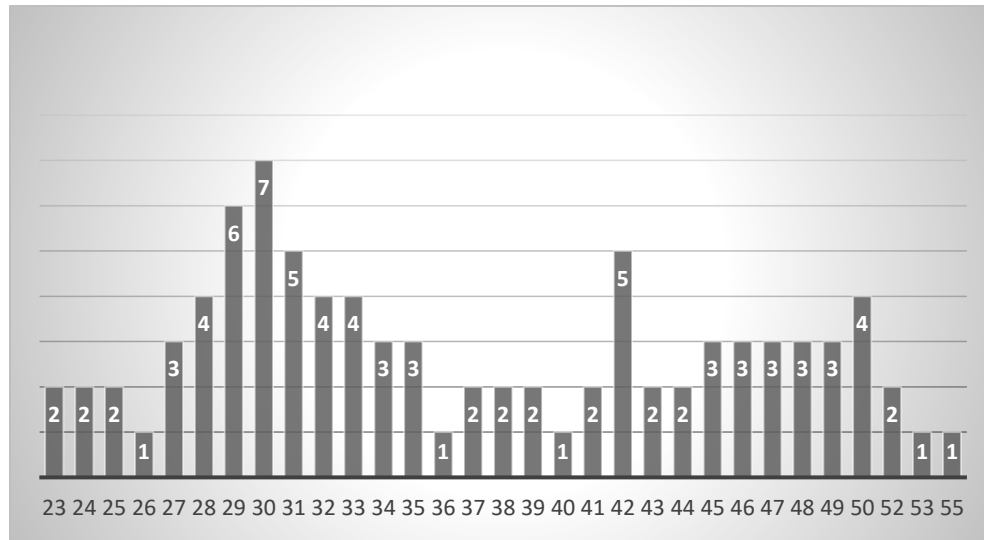


CHART 1: Distribution of age

Source: Own Research

The age distribution data shown in Chart 1, provided for this study offers valuable insights into the demographic composition of tourists in Morocco, particularly in the context of customer experience and the competitiveness of the country's tourism industry. Analyzing the data, it is evident that the majority of tourists fall within the age range of 29 to 35, with a notable number of individuals in their early to mid-30s. This suggests a diverse mix of tourists in terms of age, with a significant representation of the younger adult demographic.

The presence of tourists in their late 20s and early 30s signifies a group that may have higher disposable income, allowing for greater spending on accommodations, dining, and experiences. As a result, establishments in Morocco can tailor their services to cater to this age group's preferences, offering a wide array of activities and services that align with their interests and in terms of customer experience, this age distribution allows for a more personalized approach in tailoring services and experiences that resonate with different age groups. By understanding the preferences and expectations of each demographic, hotels, restaurants, and tour operators can enhance the overall customer experience, ensuring that it appeals to the varying needs and desires of tourists.

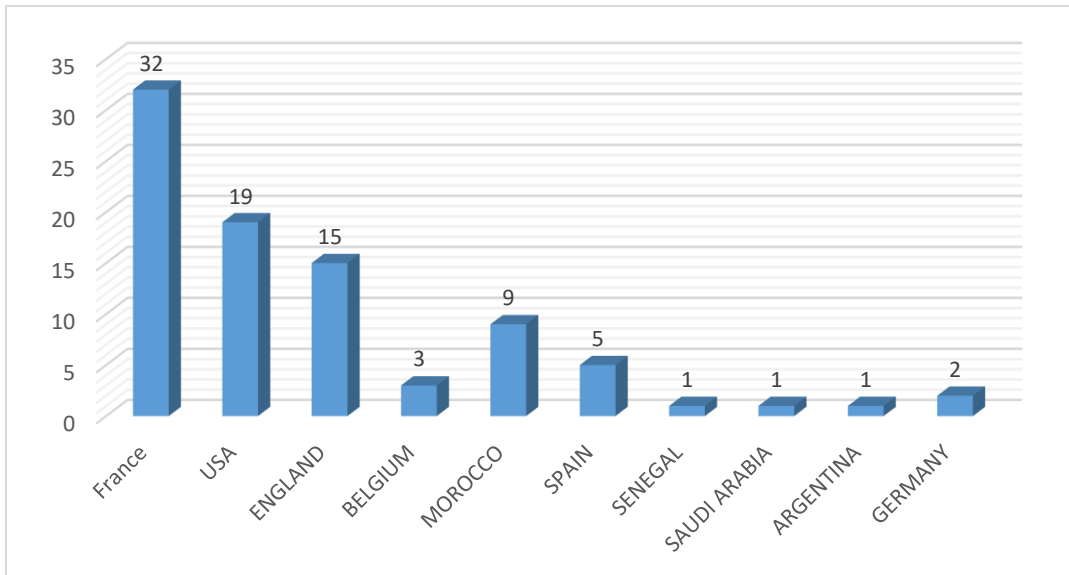


CHART 2: Nationality distribution

Source: Own Research

To start with, the data in chart 2 reveals a varied range of nationalities among tourists, with visitors from France, the United States, England, and a number of other countries. This variety is beneficial to the client experience because it reflects Morocco's broad appeal as a destination. A broad visitor base allows for extensive cross-cultural contact, which can improve the overall tourist experience. It facilitates cultural interchange, increasing the tourism experience by providing a diverse range of cultural perspectives and experiences. Furthermore, this diversity can boost Morocco's tourism industry's competitiveness. Moroccan businesses and establishments can modify their services to satisfy the demands of a global clientele by catering to the individual interests and needs of visitors from different countries. This adaptability and inclusivity can distinguish Morocco as a destination that values and respects its visitors' cultural nuances and preferences, generating favorable evaluations, word-of-mouth recommendations, and repeat visits.

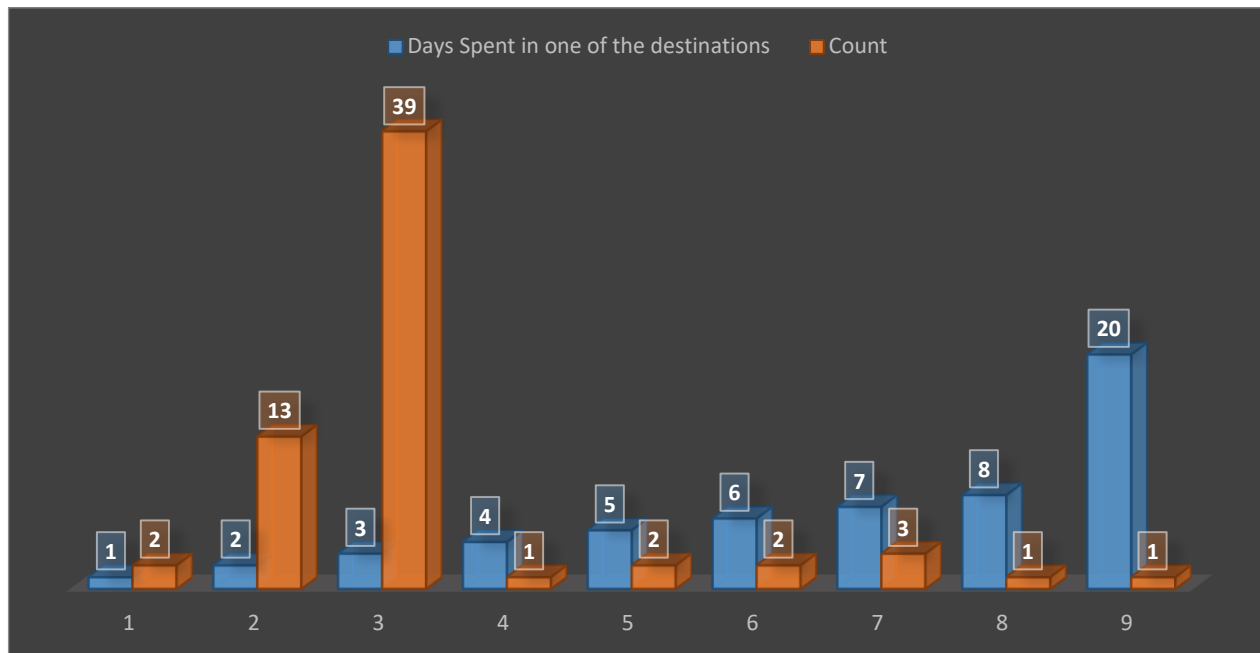


CHART 3: Number of days spent in Essaouira and Marrakech

Source: Own Research

The distribution of days spent suggests that a majority of tourists opt for relatively short stays, with 1 to 3 days being the most common duration. This pattern highlights the importance of making these brief visits highly engaging and memorable. By offering exciting and efficient itineraries for short-term travelers, local businesses and establishments can maximize the positive impact of these brief encounters, encouraging tourists to return for more extended stays in the future. Furthermore, the data indicates a few tourists staying for significantly longer periods (e.g., 20 days). For this segment of visitors, there is an opportunity to offer more extensive and diverse experiences, including deeper immersion in the local culture and exploration of less-traveled destinations. These extended stays can contribute to a more profound understanding of Morocco and foster a genuine connection with the country.

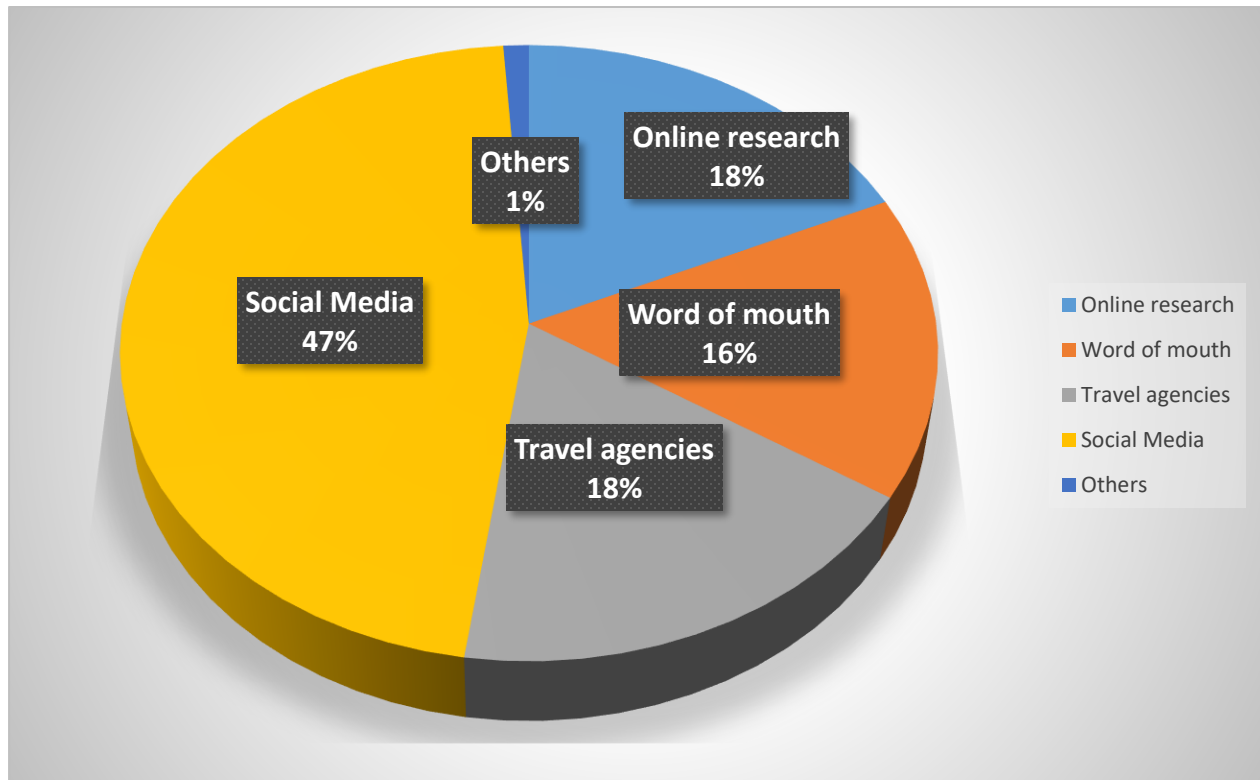


Chart 4: sources of knowledge about the cities

Source: own research

The findings indicate that the most prevalent source is social media (CHART 4), accounting for a significant 46.60% of the responses, followed closely by online research and travel agencies, each at 18.20%. Word of mouth considered a traditional yet influential channel for recommendations, and contributed 15.90%, while other sources accounted for 1.10%.

This data holds substantial implications for both the enhancement of customer experience and the competitiveness of Morocco's tourism industry. The substantial reliance on social media highlights the increasing influence of digital platforms in shaping tourists' perceptions and decisions. Therefore, it becomes imperative for establishments in Marrakech and Essaouira to actively engage with and manage their online presence, ensuring that they are accurately and positively represented on various social media platforms. It presents an opportunity for hotels, restaurants, and attractions to leverage social media for targeted marketing, real-time engagement, and content creation that showcases the unique offerings of these cities.

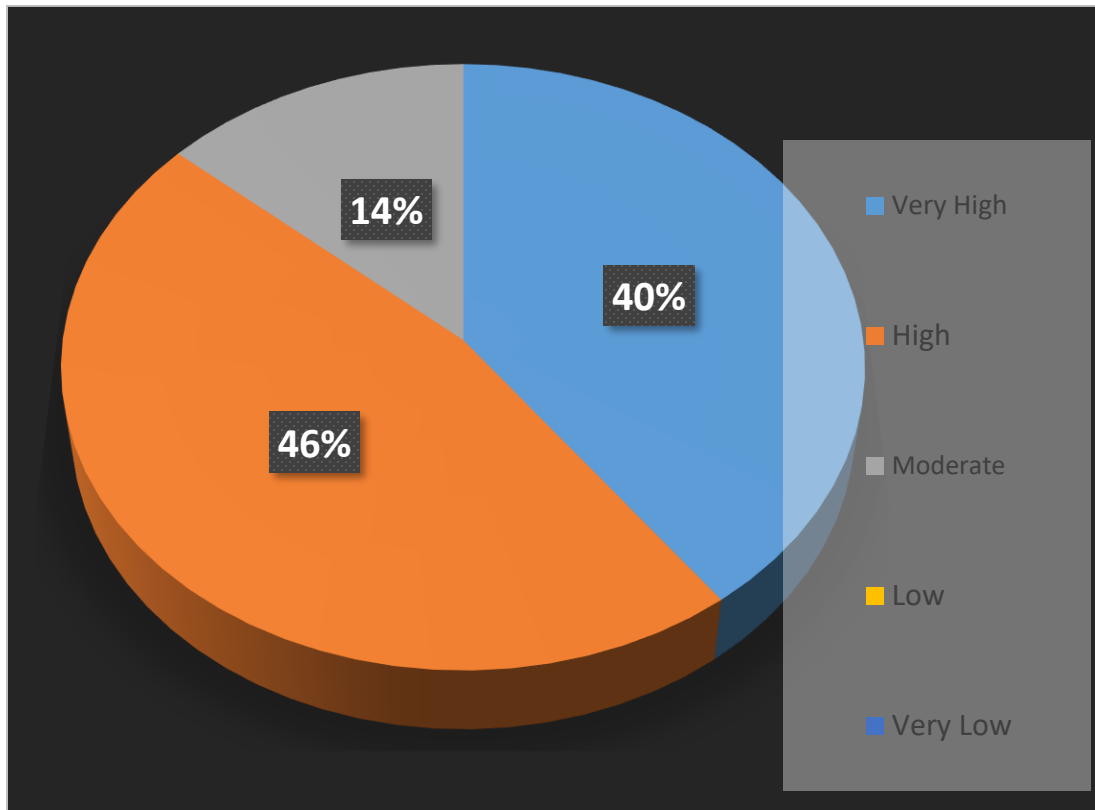


Chart 5: pre-trip tourist's expectations

Source: own research

As shown in chart 5 the majority of respondents, a significant 86.4%, expressed either "Very High" or "High" expectations, indicating a strong positive anticipation regarding their upcoming experience. This is highly encouraging from the standpoint of customer experience and the competitiveness of Morocco's tourism industry.

Tourists with very high or high expectations are more likely to be open to immersive experiences, willing to explore local culture which will be shown later during this research, and ready to appreciate the unique offerings that Morocco has to offer. This heightened anticipation can result in a more positive and memorable experience, as visitors are often inclined to actively seek and appreciate the local culture, traditions, and attractions. They are more likely to be satisfied with their trip, leave positive reviews, and recommend Morocco as a destination to others.

From a competitiveness perspective, these positive pre-trip expectations can significantly boost Morocco's standing in the global tourism market. Word-of-mouth recommendations and favorable reviews from satisfied tourists play a pivotal role in attracting new visitors. When tourists' high expectations are met or exceeded, it not only creates repeat visitors but also contributes to Morocco's positive image as a top-tier tourist destination. The main question is, are these expectations met or not?

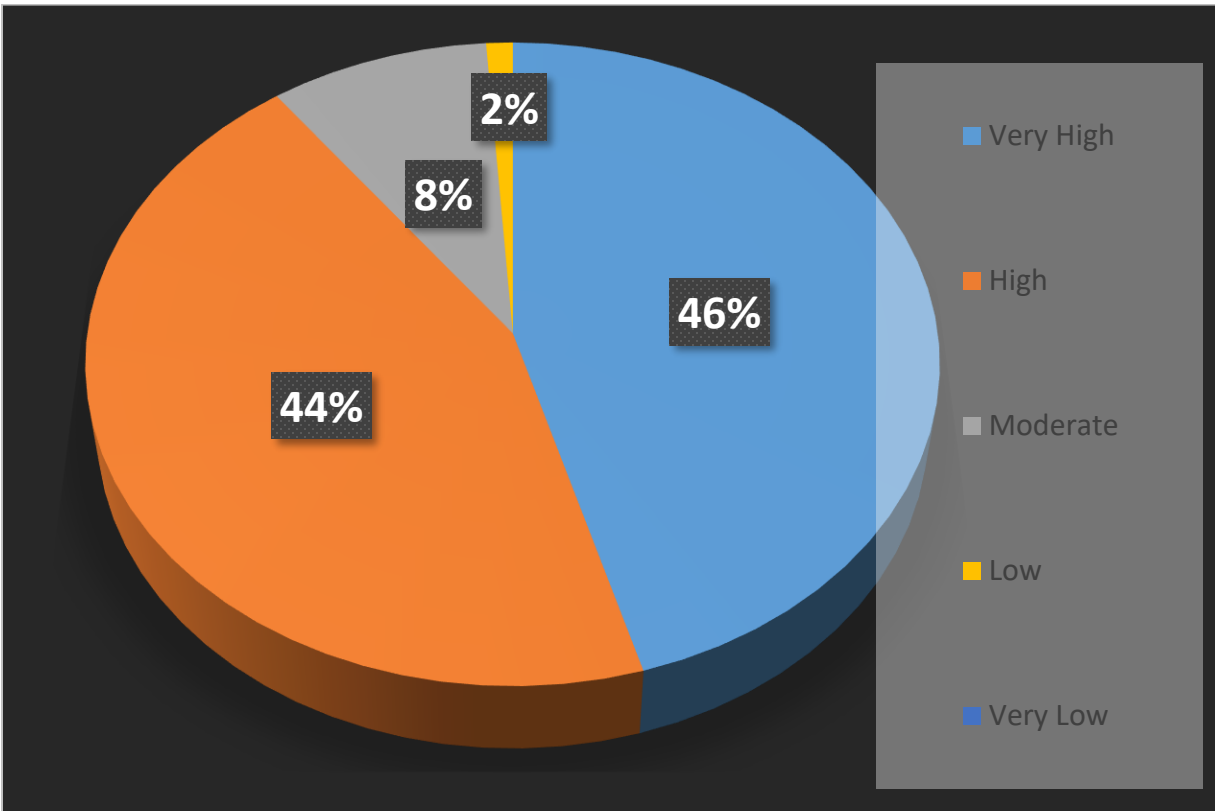


Chart 6: trip tourist's expectations

Source: own research

Notably, a significant 90% of respondents rated their trips as "Very High" or "High," (chart 6) indicating a high level of satisfaction and positive experiences during their stay. This aligns with the initial data on "Pre-trip expectations," where most tourists had set "Very High" or "High" expectations before their journey.

High trip ratings are crucial for Morocco's tourism industry, as they translate into positive reviews, repeat visits and recommendations to others. Satisfied tourists tend to become enthusiastic ambassadors for the destination, and their positive feedback can serve as a powerful marketing tool, attracting more travelers and enhancing Morocco's reputation as a preferred tourist spot. This positive feedback loop benefits the country's economy, local businesses, and the wider community.

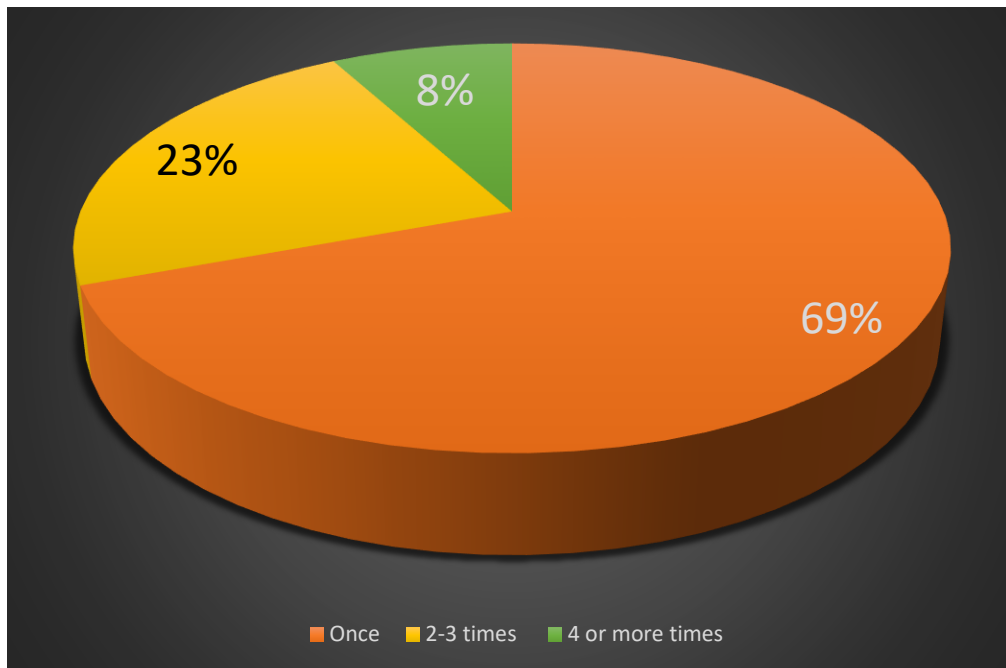


Chart 7: number of visits to morocco

Source: own research

On chart 7, the data on the frequency of tourists' visits to Morocco demonstrates a promising pattern for customer experience and repeat visits. Notably, a significant proportion of tourists visited the country more than once, with 20 respondents having visited 2-3 times and 7 respondents visiting four or more times. This trend suggests that a considerable number of tourists have had positive customer experiences during their initial trips, leading them to return to Morocco. The positive customer experiences, including exceptional services, cultural immersion, and a warm welcome, play a pivotal role in encouraging repeat visits. The services and quality of products offered can really affect the overall experience, which leads to our next chart that shows the numbers of tourists whom the quality of their accommodation didn't disappoint.

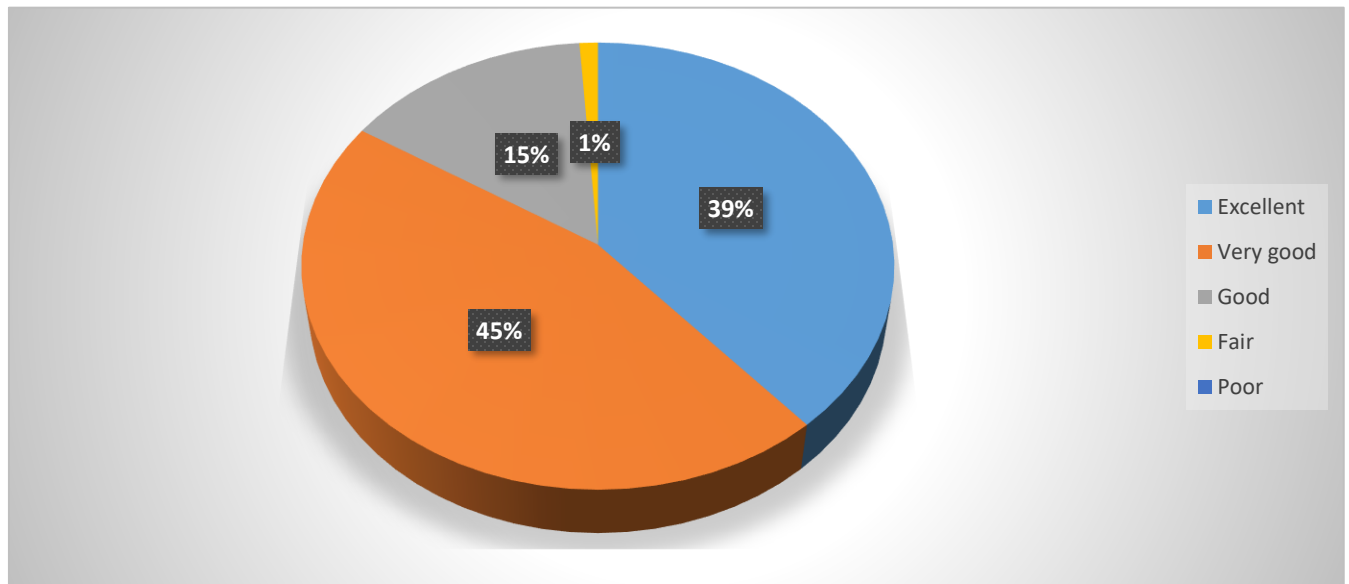


CHART 8: Quality of accommodation

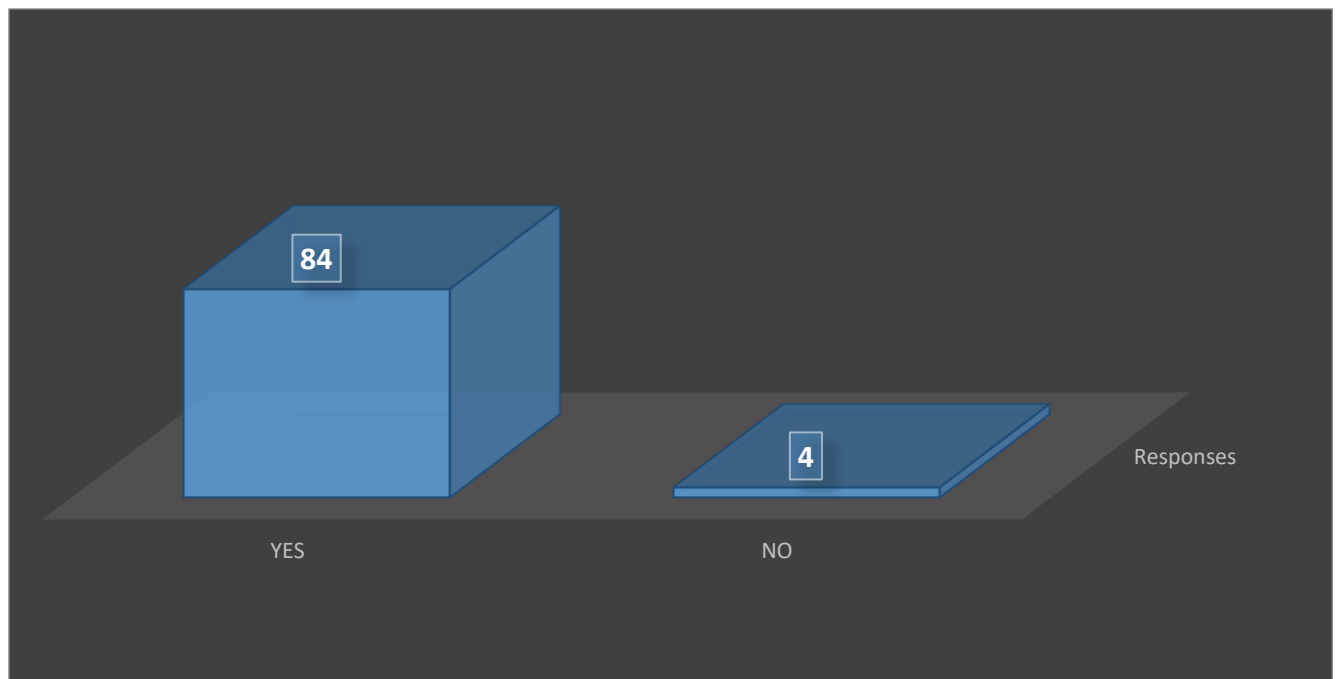


Chart 9: quality of accommodation and meeting expectations

Source: own research

The first dataset regarding the "Quality of Accommodation" in chart 8 presents an encouraging picture for customer experience in Moroccan tourism. The majority of respondents, a

significant 84.1%, rated their accommodation as either "Excellent" or "Very good." This reflects a high level of satisfaction with the quality of lodging, which is a crucial component of the overall customer experience. The fact that only a minimal percentage rated their accommodation as "Good" or "Fair" indicates that the majority of tourists are receiving accommodations that meet or exceed their expectations. The absence of "Poor" ratings further reinforces this positive trend. High-quality accommodations are a fundamental element in shaping a positive customer experience and, in turn, enhancing the competitiveness of Morocco's tourism. Satisfied guests are more likely to leave favorable reviews, recommend the destination to others, and become repeat visitors, thereby contributing to the overall success of the country's tourism industry.

The second dataset concerning whether the quality of accommodations met tourists' expectations in chart 9 is equally encouraging. An overwhelming majority, 95.5% of respondents, indicated that their expectations were met ("YES"). This suggests that the vast majority of tourists are experiencing a positive alignment between their pre-trip expectations and the actual quality of their accommodations during their stay in Morocco. This could dramatically in case of more tourists answering the questionnaire but for a majority of 88 tourist it is a promising number. When guests' expectations are met, it enhances their overall experience, increasing their satisfaction and likelihood of returning or recommending the destination to others. This positive feedback loop is a significant asset in the competitiveness of Morocco's tourism industry, as it fosters positive word-of-mouth, draws in new visitors, and reinforces the country's reputation as a reliable and exceptional tourist destination. The high percentage of positive responses in both datasets highlights the positive relation between the quality of accommodation and the alignment of guest expectations with their experiences.

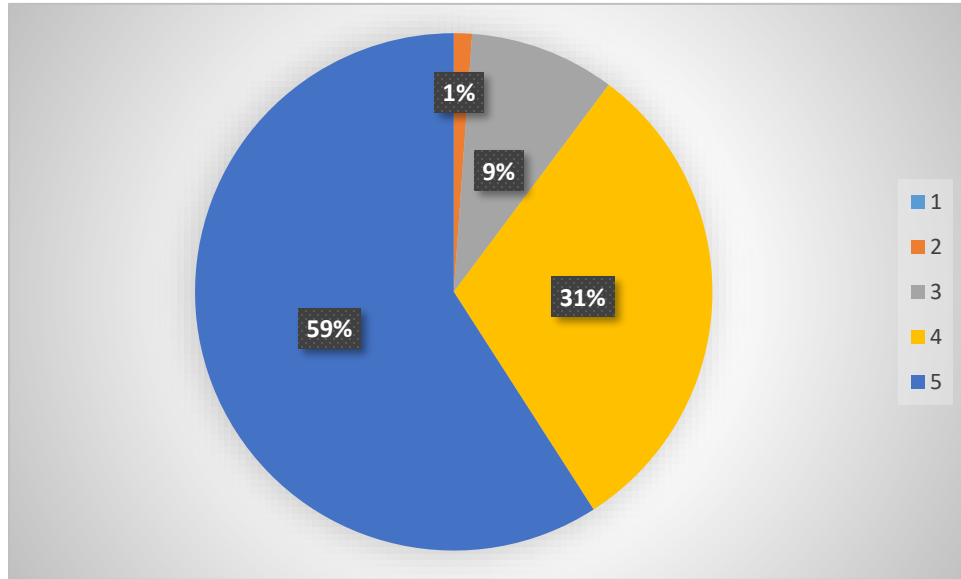


CHART 10: Overall Rating

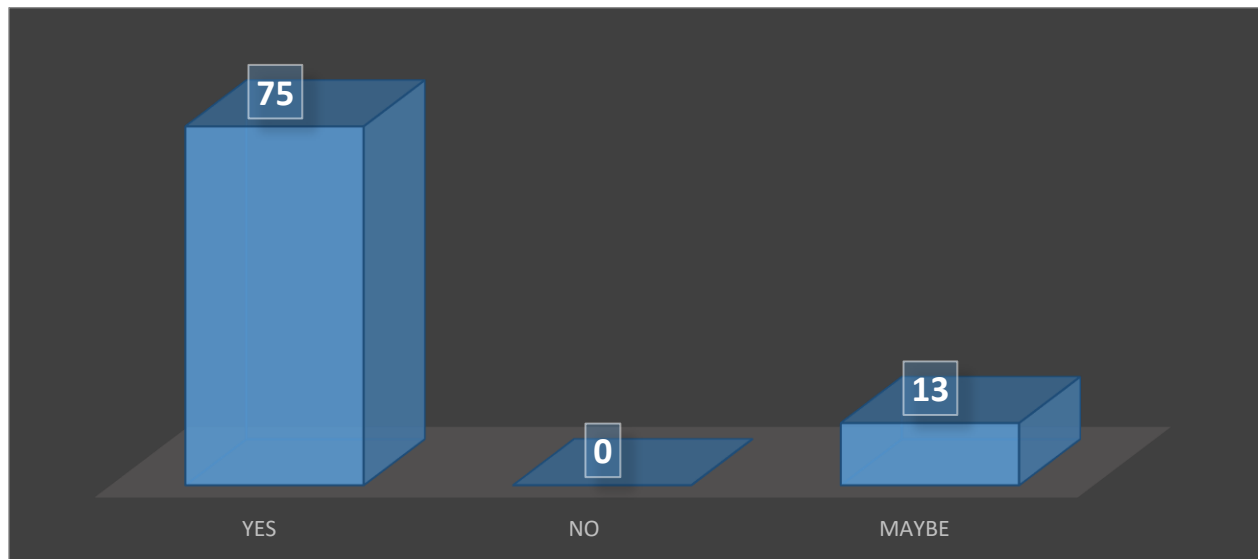


Chart 11: recommending ESU & RAK

Source: own research

The first dataset chart 10, representing the tourists' evaluation of their "Overall Experience" in Morocco, reveals a predominantly positive sentiment as a substantial 90% of respondents rated their experience as either "5" or "4," indicating a high level of satisfaction. A relatively small proportion, 9%, rated their experience as "3," while only one person rated it as "2," and there were no ratings of "1." This indicates that a significant majority of tourists had positive experiences

during their stay in Morocco. Such positive ratings are crucial in enhancing customer experiences and the competitiveness of Morocco's tourism industry. Satisfied visitors are more likely to leave favorable reviews, recommend the destination, and potentially return for future visits, contributing to the country's positive reputation as a tourist destination.

The second dataset in chart 11 regarding tourists' recommendations further reinforces the positive outlook. A striking 85.4% of respondents expressed a willingness to recommend either Essaouira or Marrakech to others, with a resounding "YES." This reflects a strong level of satisfaction and a positive overall experience. Importantly, there were no respondents who outright refused to recommend the destination ("NO"), and a smaller portion, 14.6%, expressed a more cautious "MAYBE." This data indicates that the majority of tourists are not only satisfied with their experiences in Morocco but are also enthusiastic about sharing their positive experiences with others. Such recommendations play a significant role in attracting new visitors and strengthening the competitiveness of Morocco's tourism industry. Positive word-of-mouth and recommendations from satisfied tourists are powerful marketing tools that enhance the country's reputation as an appealing and reliable tourist destination.

Both datasets demonstrate the positive relationship between tourists' overall experiences, recommendations, and the competitiveness of Morocco's tourism industry. High levels of satisfaction and enthusiastic recommendations are vital in attracting new tourists, retaining loyal visitors, and fostering a positive image of the destination, ultimately contributing to the country's tourism success which is shown by the next chart 12.

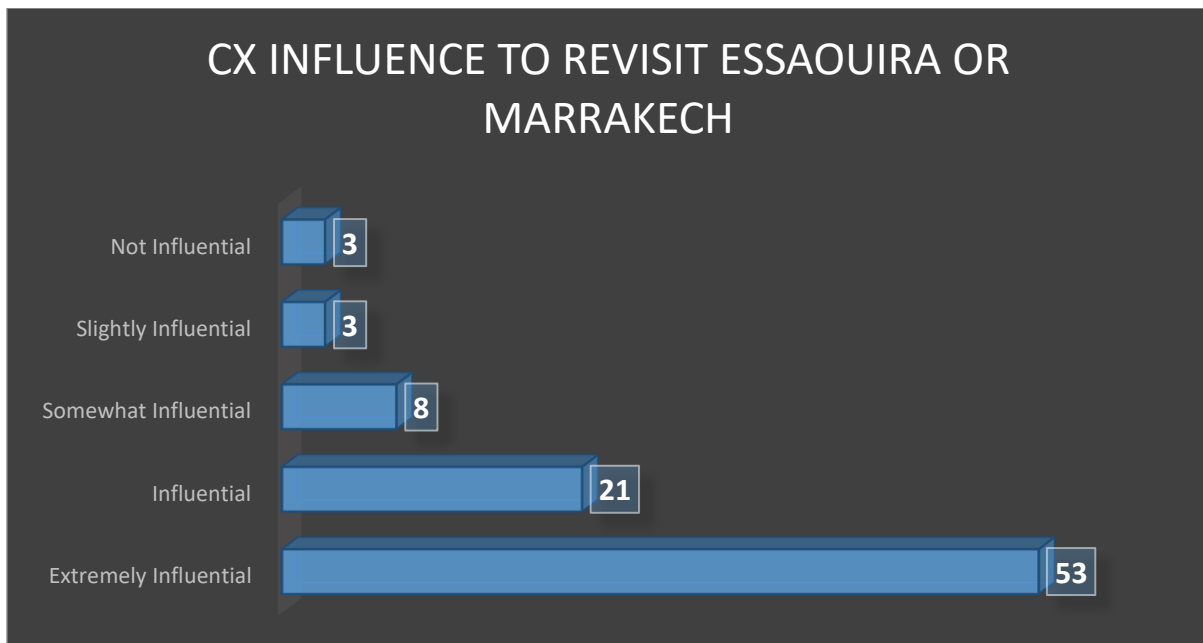


Chart 12: customer experience and its influence on tourists to revisit Essaouira & Marrakech

Source: own research

The data reflecting the influence of "Overall Customer Experience" on tourists' decisions to revisit Morocco (chart 12) provides a compelling insight into the connection between customer experience and the competitiveness of Morocco's tourism industry. The majority of respondents, a substantial 82.7%, find their customer experience to be "Extremely Influential" or "Influential" in their decision to return. This suggests that a positive and memorable customer experience significantly influences tourists' decisions to revisit the country. It underlines the pivotal role that providing exceptional services, cultural immersion, and warm hospitality plays in encouraging repeat visits. These high percentages also signify that Morocco has the potential to build a strong base of loyal, returning tourists, which is instrumental in enhancing the country's competitiveness within the global tourism market. Positive word-of-mouth from returning tourists contributes to attracting new visitors and solidifying Morocco's reputation as a preferred and competitive tourist destination.

4.2 General Manager's perspective:

To see why the results were high from the tourists' perspective we had to dig deeper especially from professionals, and we couldn't find anyone better than general managers who manage hotels or Riads in both cities either Essaouira or Marrakech. Starting with one of the main questions which was related to strategies or initiatives their establishments has implemented to enhance tourists' experiences. The responses provided by the four General Managers showcase various customer experience strategies and initiatives in Essaouira and Marrakech, which are instrumental in improving the overall tourist experience in the region. These strategies reflect a proactive and innovative approach taken by establishments in the area, and collectively, they have the potential to make a significant impact on Moroccan tourism.

Cultural Immersion and Sustainability: The first General Manager highlights cultural workshops, traditional Moroccan cooking classes, and the Clef Verte certification as key strategies. These initiatives not only provide tourists with an authentic Moroccan experience but also emphasize sustainability. This approach helps preserve the local culture while contributing to responsible tourism practices.

Personalization and Technology: The second General Manager focuses on personalization through a PMS (Property Management System), which enhances guests' preferences and ease up the stay due to the fact of creating profiles of the guests, that this last one has access to, to add more or less preferences.

Staff Training and Local Partnerships: The third General Manager underscores the importance of staff training and creating partnerships with local artisans and vendors. This approach not only ensures exceptional customer service but also offers guests exclusive access to culturally enriching experiences and locally crafted souvenirs, promoting the heritage of the region. This approach was also mentioned by other general managers.

Collaborations and Innovation: The fourth General Manager is actively exploring collaborations with local businesses and introducing innovative technologies. By fostering collaborations, establishments can broaden their offerings and enhance the overall guest experience. Introducing technology-driven innovations is key to staying competitive and meeting the evolving needs of tourists.

On the other hand, and to reach these strategies and initiatives require the hotels and Riads to have a really well skilled and trained human resources, which sometimes opposes challenges to the owners or general managers due to the fact that it's costing and the personal finds it hard in terms of commitments. Yet, the responses from the general managers in both cities highlight the emphasis on comprehensive training and development programs for staff to provide excellent customer service. This reflects a commitment to continually improving the customer experience in Moroccan hotels and Riads. They prioritize soft skills, cultural awareness, and on-the-job coaching to ensure staff members excel in their interactions with guests. These initiatives align with the broader trend in the Moroccan tourism industry, where hotels and Riads in both Essaouira and Marrakech are actively investing in tangible and intangible improvements to enhance the overall customer experience. By nurturing a highly trained and culturally sensitive workforce, establishments contribute to the positive reputation of Moroccan tourism, attracting more visitors and fostering a sustainable industry. But attracting more visitors, won't come with an easy price because to satisfy the changing need of tourists, a high amount of flexibility and personalization needs to be involved. That leads to our next segment where we asked the general managers of their opinion and active efforts put into tailoring specific preferences and needs of guests. The responses from the four General Managers showcase a consistent emphasis on personalization and customization of services to meet individual guest preferences and needs. They all use methods like pre-arrival questionnaires, active guest engagement, and the role of concierge teams to gather and understand guest preferences. These approaches enable the establishment to provide tailored experiences, such as arranging special activities or surprises based on the guest's interests. This commitment to personalization not only enhances the customer experience but also has a broader positive impact on Moroccan tourism. Tailoring services to guests' unique desires and needs contributes to the overall appeal of Morocco as a tourist destination, increasing its reputation for providing exceptional and memorable experiences, which, in turn, encourages more visitors to explore the country. And since adapting to guests' needs is challenging, hotels in Essaouira and Marrakech try to make this task slightly easier by the use of technology and the examination of the general managers' responses demonstrates a consistent concentration in both Essaouira and Marrakech on the important role of technology in boosting client experiences. The importance of technology is emphasized by all four managers, particularly in online booking systems and PMSs, this common thread represents a collaborative approach to using technology to improve the entire guest experience.

The utilization of online booking systems simplifies and expedites the reservation process, making it more convenient for guests. New property managements systems offer access to information, services, and more options providing a seamless and personalized stay. In-room

technology allows guests to control their environment, creating a comfortable and customized experience. This unified approach toward integrating technology into customer experiences across Essaouira and Marrakech not only improves the efficiency of hotel operations but also significantly enhances guest satisfaction. It underscores the commitment to embracing modern advancements in the hospitality industry, which can have a positive impact on Moroccan tourism by attracting and retaining more tech-savvy travelers while also improving the overall perception of the country as a tech-friendly destination.

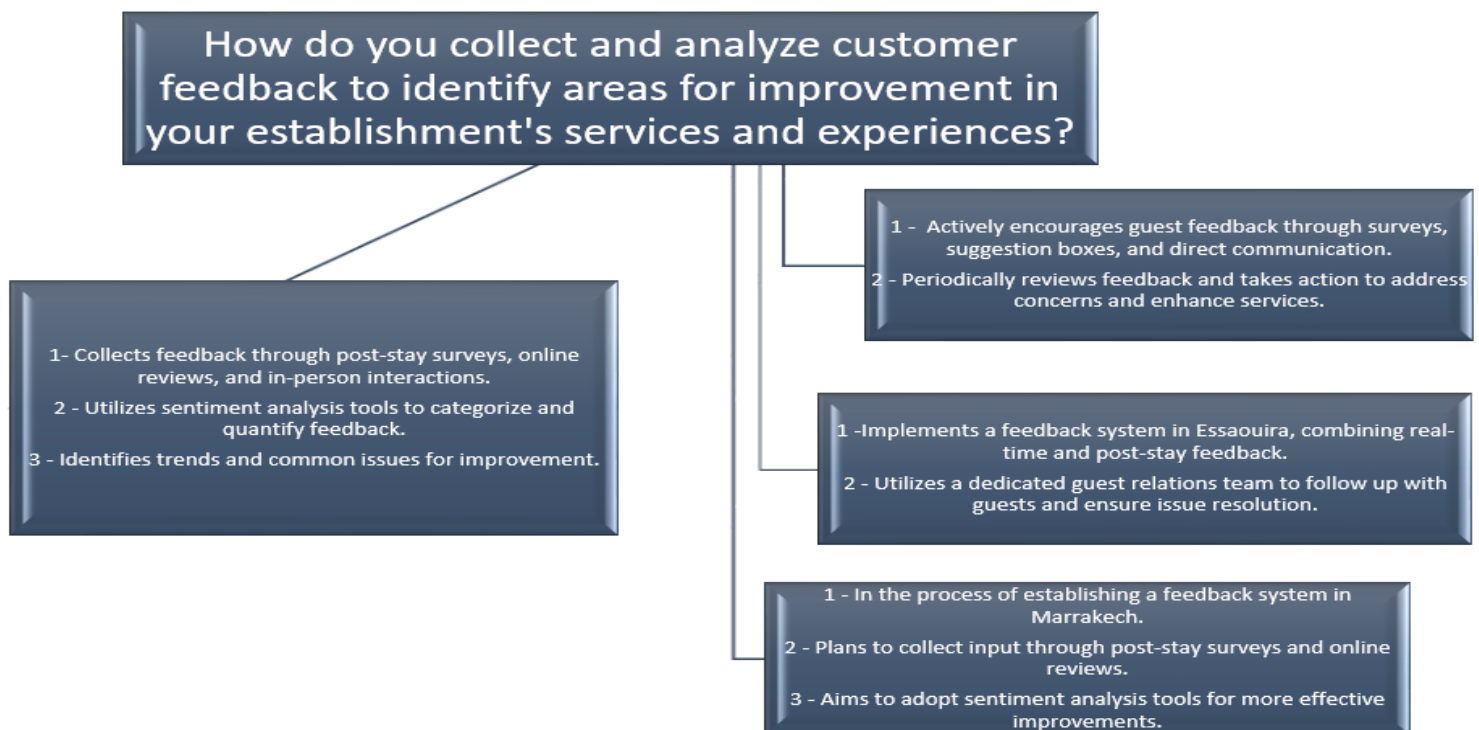


Chart 13: general manager's responses about collection and feedback analysis to improve services.

Source: own compilation

The feedback collection methods implemented by the general managers (chart13), as described, clearly align with guest satisfaction and an enhanced customer experience. By actively

encouraging guests to provide their input through a variety of channels such as surveys, suggestion boxes, online reviews, and in-person interactions, these establishments demonstrate their commitment to listening to the needs and preferences of tourists. This attentive approach allows tourists to feel that their voices are heard around the clock, creating a sense of being valued and cared for throughout their stay. Moreover, the use of sentiment analysis tools and dedicated guest relations teams shows the dedication to not only collect feedback but also to categorize and prioritize it for effective improvements. In this way, the establishments not only ensure a more personalized and satisfying experience for their guests but also contribute to building a stronger bond with them, thereby enhancing the overall customer experience.

Yet, there are challenges facing these industry professionals, to reach the full potential they claim; these challenges faced in implementing customer experience enhancements illustrate a dedicated commitment to improving guest satisfaction and this was seen in the tourist's responses previously in this research. The need to upgrade properties while preserving historical charm showcases their determination to balance tradition with modernity. As an example Mr. AbdelJalil from Salut Maroc said in his words *"One significant challenge we've encountered in implementing customer experience enhancements is the preservation of our historical properties. Our establishments in Essaouira are known for their unique historical charm, which we must maintain while meeting the increasing expectations of our guests. To overcome this challenge, we consulted preservation experts and conducted extensive research to ensure that any renovations or upgrades respected the heritage of the buildings"*. In Essaouira, where historical charm is a core attraction, striking a balance between maintaining heritage and meeting rising guest expectations can be complex. This approach reflects a commitment to preserving the authenticity that makes the establishment unique, while also enhancing customer experiences in a way that respects the cultural and architectural heritage of Essaouira.

The other challenge which the adaptation to rapidly evolving technology. It reflects their proactive approach to embracing technological advancements and enhancing the overall guest experience. Addressing the language barrier by hiring multilingual staff and providing language training highlights their commitment to effective communication with international guests. Additionally, the response to seasonality challenges by diversifying offerings and creating special packages underscores their agility in maintaining stable revenue streams. These adaptative strategies reveal that these establishments are not only focused on elevating guest experiences but are also adept at navigating various challenges, further contributing to a well-rounded and enhanced customer experience. The methods of measuring the effectiveness of customer experience strategies employed by these general managers reveal a balanced approach to evaluation, both positively and negatively. Utilizing metrics such as Net Promoter Score (NPS), guest satisfaction scores, and the rate of repeat bookings demonstrates their commitment to quantifiable success and building long-term relationships with guests. On the flip side, monitoring negative online reviews, complaints, and response times signifies a proactive stance in addressing challenges and areas needing improvement. These strategies align with the challenges discussed earlier, emphasizing that the establishments not only seek to enhance customer experiences but also actively assess and

adapt their strategies to overcome obstacles and deliver a more satisfactory and well-rounded guest experience.

The importance of customer experience in any industry especially the tourism one, is a vital component and the GMs interviewed are aware of how crucial it can be to their Hotels and Riads. They collectively emphasize the paramount importance of customer experience in attracting repeat visitors to Essaouira and Marrakech and maintaining the competitiveness of the tourism industry in these cities and in the entire country due to the importance of tourist arrivals that the region of Marrakech – Safi where these two cities belong. They underline that the uniqueness and cultural richness of these destinations hinge on offering exceptional, culturally immersive experiences to visitors. It's not merely the attractions but the quality of service, personalized interactions, and memorable experiences that set these establishments apart in highly competitive markets. Customer satisfaction is seen as the anchor of success, with each guest's experience contributing to positive word-of-mouth and the city's reputation. By focusing on consistently exceeding guest expectations, these general managers aim not only to secure repeat visits but also to attract new ones, ultimately sustaining the thriving tourism industry in these Moroccan cities. This aligns with their diligent approach to challenges, ensuring that each guest leaves with a favorable impression and a desire to return, further enhancing the overall customer experience.

4.3 Advice to the industry businesses:

The insights provided by the general managers with experience in the tourism industry offer valuable advice for other establishments looking to enhance their customer experience. One consistent theme in their advice is the emphasis on staff training and development. Ensuring that your team is well-equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to provide excellent service is fundamental in improving customer experiences. Building strong connections with the local community and collaborating with local businesses and artisans can create authentic and culturally immersive experiences for guests, making their stay more memorable. In addition to these principles, technology is highlighted as a means to streamline operations and enhance guest convenience. This aligns with the recognition that technology plays a vital role in enhancing customer experiences by offering convenience, personalization, and efficient services. Furthermore, the managers stress the importance of continuous improvement by actively seeking and acting upon guest feedback. This feedback loop allows for timely adjustments and ensures that the services meet the evolving needs and expectations of the guests. Furthermore, eco-friendly practices and community engagement are also presented as valuable strategies. Prioritizing sustainability not only aligns with the growing trend of responsible tourism but also enhances the appeal of the establishment, especially in a world increasingly conscious of environmental issues. The recommendations to leverage local culture and history are particularly significant for establishments in Essaouira and Marrakech, which are renowned for their rich heritage. This not

only offers guests a unique and authentic experience but also differentiates the establishment from competitors.

As a conclusion, the collective wisdom of these general managers reflects a comprehensive approach to enhancing customer experiences in the tourism industry. By focusing on staff training, technology adoption, local engagement, sustainability, and personalization, establishments can not only meet guest expectations but also exceed them, ultimately contributing to the growth of the Moroccan tourism sector.

5 CONCLUSION

The in-depth exploration of customer experience in the context of the Moroccan tourism industry has revealed valuable insights that directly address the objectives of the research. Throughout this research, we have diligently worked towards achieving our four main goals. Firstly, we investigated how customer experiences impact the competitiveness of Morocco's tourism industry, looking at how interactions, emotions, and perceptions influence the industry. Secondly, we studied how culturally rich and authentic experiences set Morocco apart from its competitors. Thirdly, we explored how digital tools like online reviews, social media, and travel platforms affect tourists' decisions about Morocco and offered strategies for using these tools to our advantage. Lastly, we suggested various practical strategies to enhance customer experiences in Moroccan tourism, which included improving infrastructure and community engagement. Together, these objectives have shaped a comprehensive and informative exploration of what makes Morocco competitive in the tourism industry, providing valuable advice for industry professionals and researchers.

To reach our objectives, a lot of methods has been used such as questionnaires were processed using Google Forms, and the resulting datasets were further organized and interpreted using Microsoft Excel. The choice of these methods was justified by their appropriateness for addressing the research objectives. Descriptive statistics allowed for a clear presentation of key trends and patterns in the survey data, providing a quantitative foundation for the study's findings. Moreover, data visualization in the form of graphs and tables facilitated a more accessible presentation of complex information, making it easier to communicate the results to the intended audience.

Customer experience significantly impacts the competitiveness of the Moroccan tourism industry. Our research, incorporating insights from general managers and tourists, provides a comprehensive perspective on this matter. Tourists' overall experiences are instrumental in influencing their decisions to visit Morocco. The positive experiences reported by the surveyed tourists suggest that a satisfying visit can indeed directly lead to increased repeat visits. This aligns with the perspective of general managers, who emphasized the significance of customer satisfaction in encouraging return visits and positive word-of-mouth, contributing to Morocco's competitiveness.

Both establishments (Hotels & Riads) and the government have measures in place to enhance the quality of tourists' experiences. As our discussions with general managers revealed, establishments employ technology, tailored services, and feedback systems to improve guest interactions and services. Additionally, they often collaborate with local businesses and integrate cultural aspects into the guest experience. The government plays a role in ensuring infrastructure improvements, which is a key factor in enhancing the overall customer experience.

Moving on to the primary competitors to Morocco, such as Egypt, Tunisia and South Africa, offer unique experiences, but Morocco distinguishes itself with its cultural richness,

historical charm, and diverse landscapes. Tourists visiting Morocco are drawn to its blend of tradition and modernity, its commitment to preserving cultural heritage, and its adaptability to digital influences.

In terms of improvements and to enhance the overall customer experience in Moroccan tourist destinations and address the challenge of visitors typically spending only 1-3 days on average in each location. Morocco has to either create solutions concerning giving access to these cities or try to make strategies that will encourage the tourists to extend their time of their stays.

In the case of the first solution several key improvements can be implemented. Efficient transportation links between major tourist destinations, such as high-speed rail or upgraded road networks, play a pivotal role in reducing travel times. This enables tourists to explore more within their limited time, increasing the value of their stay. Clear and multilingual signage at key tourist sites and public areas provides essential information, maps, and directions, aiding tourists in making the most of their short stays. Additionally, simplifying entry procedures, including visa processing and customs, can save valuable time upon arrival, contributing to a more favorable first impression and smoother experiences. Lastly, encouraging tourist-friendly accommodations to offer flexible check-in and check-out times ensures that visitors with tight schedules can maximize their time without the constraints of rigid accommodation policies. These enhancements collectively aim to motivate tourists to spend more time in Morocco, further enriching their experiences and supporting the country's competitiveness in the global tourism industry.

While this research has provided valuable insights into the role of customer experiences and competitiveness in the Moroccan tourism industry, there are some limitations to consider. The data collected mainly focuses on the perspectives of general managers and tourists in Essaouira and Marrakech, and while these destinations are significant, they may not fully represent the diversity of experiences across the entire country. Additionally, the research predominantly relies on qualitative data, and incorporating more extensive quantitative data could offer a more comprehensive analysis.

Further research in the context of Moroccan tourism could delve into the specific preferences and behaviors of different tourist segments, such as solo travelers, families, or adventure seekers. This research could explore how tailored experiences and services can cater to the diverse needs and desires of these groups. Additionally, investigating the long-term effects of customer experiences on destination loyalty and repeat visitation patterns could provide insights into building sustainable tourism relationships. Analyzing the impact of emerging technologies like augmented reality or sustainable tourism practices on customer experiences and the competitiveness of Morocco as a tourist destination could also be a valuable area of study.

6 LIST OF REFERENCES

3pillarglobal.com, CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE, 2021.
Available at: <https://www.3pillarglobal.com/insights/customer-experience-as-a-competitive-advantage/>

Berry, L. L., Carbone, L. P., & Haeckel, S. H. (2002). Managing the total customer experience. MIT Sloan Management Review, 43(3), 85-89.

OECD iLibrary, OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2022

Available at: [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/e3197856en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/e3197856en#:~:text=Tourism%20is%20an%20important%20sector,5.0%25%20of%20total%20employment\).](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/e3197856en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/e3197856en#:~:text=Tourism%20is%20an%20important%20sector,5.0%25%20of%20total%20employment).)

Carter, R., The State of CX in Travel and Hospitality for 2023, 2023

Available at: <https://www.cxtoday.com/contact-centre/the-state-of-cx-in-travel-and-hospitality-for-2023/>

charitychoice.co.uk, Customer experience: lessons from the commercial world, 2017

Available at: <https://www.charitychoice.co.uk/the-fundraiser/customer-experience-lessons-from-the-commercial-world/709>

Cornell, J., Top Advantages & Disadvantages of Customer Feedback Surveys 2023.

Available at: <https://www.proprofssurvey.com/blog/advantages-disadvantages-of-customer-feedback-surveys/>

datappeal.io, 6 best practices for optimising the reputation and competitiveness of your tourist destination, 2022.

Available at: <https://datappeal.io/6-best-practices-for-optimising-the-reputation-and-competitiveness-of-your-tourist-destination/#:~:text=The%20reputation%20of%20a%20destination,a%20restaurant%2C%20or%20a%20museum%3F>

Everise, The Evolution of the Customer Experience, 2021.

Available at: <https://insights.weareeverise.com/the-evolution-of-the-customer-experience#:~:text=Lewis%20%22Lou%22%20Carbone%20is%20credited,of%20the%20customer%20experience%20discipline.>

GlobalData, Top ten source markets for Morocco, 2023.

Available at: <https://www.hotelmanagement-network.com/data-insights/source-markets-morocco/>

Iancu, R. J. -. V., 2019. In: *The New Competitive Advantage Customer Experience EXCELLENCE*. s.l.:KPMG.

indeed.com, What is service dominant logic? (plus benefits to business),2022.

Available at: <https://uk.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/service-dominant-logic#:~:text=Service%20dominant%20logic%2C%20also%20known,theory%20in%20the%20early%202000s.>

introducingmarrakech.com, Essaouira, n.d.

Available at: <https://www.introducingmarrakech.com/essaouira>

journeybeyondtravel.com, Morocco Tourism: Destinations and Must-See Attractions, n.d.

Available at: <https://www.journeybeyondtravel.com/morocco/tourism>

Kaden, H., Morocco Is Third Most Attractive Tourist Destination in Africa, 2023.

Available at: <https://visaguide.world/news/morocco-is-third-most-attractive-tourist-destination-in-africa/#:~:text=Bloom%20Consulting%2C%20the%20Spanish%20consulting,fourth%20best%20country%20for%20trade.>

Lemon, K. N., & Verhoef, P. C. (2016). Understanding customer experience throughout the customer journey. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(6), 69-96.

lumoa.me, How Does Customer Experience Drive Business Growth?, 2023.

Available at: <https://www.lumoa.me/blog/customer-experience-key-to-revenue-growth/#:~:text=CX%20Greatly%20Improves%20Customer%20Retention,-Another%20benefit%20of&text=This%20is%20because%20satisfied%20customers,customers%20and%20grow%20your%20business.>

Meyer, C., & Schwager, A. (2007). Understanding customer experience. *Harvard Business Review*, 85(2), 116-126.

Pine II, B. J., & Gilmore, J. H. (1998). Welcome to the experience economy - CX definition. *Harvard Business Review*, 76(4), 97-105.

Pine II, B. & G. J., Welcome to the Experience Economy,1998.

Available at: <https://hbr.org/1998/07/welcome-to-the-experience-economy>

planetofhotels.com, Things to do in Marrakech — Top of the best wonders of the Red City 2022.

Available at: <https://planetofhotels.com/guide/en/blog/things-to-do-marrakech>

Ray, K., Customer Journey Mapping, 2023.

Available at: <https://www.sitecentre.com.au/blog/customer-journey-mapping>

Saeed, S., Why is Essaouira in Morocco so obsessed with Jimi Hendrix? 2020.

Available at: <https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/music/why-is-essaouira-in-morocco-so-obsessed-with-jimi-hendrix-1.1079145>

SketchBubble, Service Dominant Logic, n.d.

Available at: <https://www.sketchbubble.com/en/presentation-service-dominant-logic.html>

Statista.com, Tourism in Morocco, 2022.

Available at: <https://www.statista.com/study/101852/tourism-sector-in-morocco/>

Statista.com, Share of the GDP of the tourism sector in Morocco from 2013 to 2028, n.d.

Available at: <https://www.statista.com/forecasts/1153028/tourism-sector-gdp-share-forecast-in-morocco>

Tšernov, K., What is the Customer Experience Pyramid? n.d.

Available at: <https://www.qminder.com/blog/customer-service/customer-experience-pyramid/>

unesco.org, Medina of Essaouira (formerly Mogador), n.d.

Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/753/>

Verhoef, P. C., Lemon, K. N., Parasuraman, A., Roggeveen, A., Tsiros, M., & Schlesinger, L. A. (2009). Customer experience creation: Determinants, dynamics, and management strategies. *Journal of Retailing*, 85(1), 31-41.

visitmorocco.com, MARRAKECH, LA VILLE OCRE, n.d.

Available at: <https://www.visitmorocco.com/fr/voyage/marrakech>

7 APPENDIX

I. Questionnaires

ANNEXE I

This Questionnaire is in French and English / Ce Questionnaire est en français et en anglais.

Cher participant,

Ce questionnaire ne prendra que 5 minutes.

Nous sommes ravis de vous inviter à participer à notre étude de recherche portant sur le rôle de l'expérience client dans l'amélioration de la compétitivité de l'industrie touristique Marocaine, avec un accent particulier sur les villes d'Essaouira et de Marrakech.

Vos précieuses informations en tant que touriste sont essentielles pour nous aider à mieux comprendre comment les expériences clients influencent les décisions de voyage et contribuent à la croissance globale de ces destinations.

Merci de faire partie de nos recherches.

Dear Participant,

This questionnaire will take only 5 minutes.

We are delighted to invite you to participate in our research study focusing on the role of customer experience in enhancing the competitiveness of the Moroccan tourism industry, with a specific emphasis on the cities of Essaouira and Marrakech.

Your valuable insights as a tourist are essential to help us better understand how customer experiences influence travel decisions and contribute to the overall growth of these destinations.

Thank you for being a part of our research.

Demographics:

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other

2. How old are you: _____

3. Nationality: _____

4. How many times have you visited Morocco?

☐ Once ☐ 2-3 times ☐ 4 or more times

Travel Information:

5. Which city are you currently visiting?

☐ Essaouira ☐ Marrakech

6. Purpose of your visit:

☐ Leisure ☐ Business ☐ Cultural exploration ☐ Other (please specify: _____)

7. Duration of your stay (in days): _____

Customer Experience:

8. How did you learn about Essaouira/Marrakech as a travel destination?

☐ Online research ☐ Word of mouth ☐ Travel agency ☐ Social media ☐ other (please specify: _____)

9. Rate your pre-trip expectations of your experience in Essaouira/Marrakech:

☐ Very High ☐ High ☐ Moderate ☐ Low ☐ Very Low10. Rate your trip according to the expectations of your experience in Essaouira/Marrakech:

☐ Very High ☐ High ☐ Moderate ☐ Low ☐ Very Low11. Please rate the quality of your accommodation (Hotel, Riad, etc.) in terms of what was promoted by the hotel/Riad managers or booking departments before arrival:

☐ Excellent ☐ Very Good ☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor

12. Did the quality of your accommodation meet your expectations?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Local Attractions:

13. Which attractions/activities did you participate in during your stay?

☐ Historical sites ☐ Local markets ☐ Beach activities ☐ Guided tours ☐ Culinary experiences ☐ Spa/wellness ☐ Other (please specify: _____)

14. How satisfied were you with the variety and accessibility of attractions/activities in the city?

☐ Very Satisfied ☐ Satisfied ☐ Neutral ☐ Unsatisfied ☐ Very Unsatisfied

15. How would you rate the friendliness and helpfulness of the locals?

☐ Excellent ☐ Very Good ☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor

16. Were you able to easily communicate your needs despite any potential language barriers?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Overall Experience:

17. On a scale of 1 to 5, how satisfied are you with your overall experience in Essaouira/Marrakech?

(1 - Extremely Dissatisfied, 5 - Extremely Satisfied)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐

18. Would you recommend Essaouira/Marrakech to friends and family?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If no, Please clarify why?

Influence on Future Decisions:

19. How much does the overall customer experience influence your decision to revisit Essaouira/Marrakech in the future?

☐ Extremely Influential ☐ Influential ☐ Somewhat Influential ☐ Slightly Influential ☐ Not Influential

Additional Feedback:

21. Is there anything specific that exceeded your expectations during your trip to Essaouira/Marrakech?

ANNEXE II:



[https://forms.gle/LNr8quQ38Q2qqkG
TA](https://forms.gle/LNr8quQ38Q2qqkGTA)



II. Interview questions

ANNEXE III

Enhancing Customer Experience in Essaouira & Marrakech and its effect on the Moroccan Tourism industry.

Demographics and Background:

1. Name of the establishment: _____
2. Your position: _____
3. How many years have you been in the hospitality/tourism industry?

Customer Experience Strategies:

4. Could you briefly describe the primary customer experience strategies or initiatives your establishment has implemented to enhance tourists' experiences in Essaouira/Marrakech?

Service and Staff:

5. How do you ensure that your staff members are trained to provide excellent customer service? Please provide details about training programs or practices.

What mechanisms do you have in place to monitor and improve staff interactions with tourists? (Example. feedback systems, performance evaluations)

Personalization and Customization:

7. How do you tailor services to meet the specific preferences and needs of individual guests? Are there any examples you can provide?

Technology Integration:

8. What role does technology play in enhancing customer experience in your establishment? (Example. online booking, mobile apps, in-room technology)

Feedback Collection:

9. How do you collect and analyze customer feedback to identify areas for improvement in your establishment's services and experiences?

10. How do you incorporate the local culture and heritage of Essaouira/Marrakech into the guest experience? Are there any cultural events, activities, or offerings you provide?

Sustainability and Responsible Tourism:

11. In what ways does your establishment contribute to sustainable and responsible tourism practices?

Collaboration with Local Businesses:

12. Do you collaborate with local businesses (restaurants, shops, etc.) to enhance the overall guest experience? If yes, please provide examples of such collaborations.

Challenges and Adaptations:

13. What are some challenges you've faced in implementing customer experience enhancements, and how have you adapted to overcome these challenges?

Measuring Success:

14. How do you measure the effectiveness of your customer experience strategies? Are there specific metrics or indicators you use to evaluate success?

Future Enhancements:

15. What future plans or innovations do you envision to further enhance customer experiences in Essaouira/Marrakech?

Advice for the Industry:

16. Based on your experience, what advice would you give to other establishments looking to improve their customer experience in the tourism industry?

17. Can you describe the strategies and initiatives your establishment employs to enhance the overall customer experience for tourists in Essaouira/Marrakech?

18. How do you ensure that the marketing and promotional materials accurately represent the services and experiences offered by your hotel/Riad?

19. What kind of feedback mechanisms do you have in place to collect feedback from guests during their stay, and how do you use this feedback to improve customer experience?

20. How do you handle guest complaints or issues during their stay, and what steps do you take to resolve them promptly?

21. Can you describe any special cultural or local experiences you offer to enhance the authenticity of a visitor's trip to Essaouira/Marrakech?

22. How do you address language barriers between staff and tourists to ensure effective communication?

23. How important do you believe customer experience is in attracting repeat visitors to Essaouira/Marrakech and maintaining the competitiveness of the tourism industry in these cities?
24. What are some challenges or obstacles you face in delivering an exceptional customer experience, and how do you address these challenges?
25. Can you share any specific success stories or notable achievements related to customer experience improvements in your establishment?
26. In your opinion, how does the tourism industry in Essaouira/Marrakech compare to other destinations in Morocco or the region in terms of customer experience?
27. What do you see as the key trends or opportunities in the tourism industry in Essaouira/Marrakech related to customer experience enhancement?