

# VIRTUAL REALITY EXPERIENCES MAKE PEOPLE WANT TO TRAVEL MORE

According to the World Tourism Organization, 95% of the world's tourists are concentrated in 5% of the world's landmass. This is not without risks: saturation, pressure on infrastructures, difficult cohabitation with the inhabitants. Experts point out that virtual reality experiences may help solve this problem.

While some destinations fight mass tourism, many territories remain deprived of the benefits of visitors. However, they seem to benefit from the health crisis. **Since the appearance of the new coronavirus, travelers have favored domestic tourism and less-frequented regions.** The search for authentic experiences in the wilderness and outdoor activities have been popular since the summer of 2020.

According to the World Travel & Tourism Council, these trends will persist in the short term. This new interest from tourists opens up new perspectives for territories that have not been frequently visited in recent times. In this respect, new technologies can help them boost their attractiveness.

## **Monuments, Landscapes, Low Number of Visitors...**

A study focused on the Egyptian city of El Minya, which ranks third after Luxor and El Giza in the classification of places rich in monuments. There are Pharaonic, Greco-Roman, Islamic and Coptic buildings as well as museums and castles. The visitors also enjoy the alternation of magnificent landscapes among urban sites, agricultural lands, and deserts, which can be crossed by boat on the Nile.

Despite these assets, publicity in Egypt and abroad about El Minya Governorate remains non-existent and the place remains under-visited.

A quantitative survey was conducted in 2019 with 341 Egyptian nationals to identify the conditions for the effectiveness of experiencing the place virtually to influence individuals to visit it.

Each of the respondents visited one of six versions of the websites created for El Minya. These differed only in their degree of interactivity and liveliness. Photos or videos or 3D virtual tours for tourist attractions were sometimes included.

## **Experiencing the Atmosphere**

The results show that tourists seem to appreciate virtual reality experiences before choosing a destination.

Of course, the experience may vary from one individual to another: personal characteristics (e.g., preference for visual information, involvement in travel, familiarity with technology...) influence the intensity of this experience. However, a trend emerges.

By creating a "telepresence" experience, interactive videos and 3D virtual tours trigger positive affective states, positively influence the perceived value of the destination, and increase the intention to visit. Conversely, sites that only present 2D photos generated little desire to visit the destination.

To go further, semi-directive interviews allowed us to identify the reasons for the preference for

virtual visits. Different advantages were put forward by the respondents:

"With 3D, you travel on the site without leaving your home".

"3D shows us everything that will happen on site. Thanks to 3D, things are more 'concrete', as if they were real"

"The 3D tours are very useful because you can imagine yourself doing the activities available. If I feel happy during this online experience, of course, I will visit this destination".

Feeling the sensations of a walk in the wilderness, on the sea, in a rural environment or the production of local products thanks to 360° videos or 3D visits thus facilitate the decision-making process.

### **New Perspectives**

The use of virtual reality experiences is growing and according to a Bloomberg report, published in Feb 2020, virtual and augmented reality products will represent a global market of over \$571.42 billion by 2025.

Even if it is difficult to predict tourist behavior after the health crisis, it seems essential for the sector to capitalize on the recent evolution of behavior and to move towards increased use of digital technology.

Sales of virtual reality tools are currently on the rise. **They reflect the growing interest of global tourists for immersive experiences and open up new opportunities for less-visited tourist destinations.**

Many countries now have policies and plans in place to develop sustainable tourism by 2030.

"Under-tourism" has even become a tactic of increasing interest to marketers. It is about encouraging travelers weary of crowded destinations to choose less crowded tourist destinations as an alternative. Most experts confirm that virtual reality seems to be an effective way to achieve this.

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