



IMPACT OF DIGITAL MARKETING ON CUSTOMER SERVICE IN COMMERCIAL MICROENTERPRISES IN GUAYAQUIL AND LA LIBERTAD

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to analyze the impact of marketing strategies on customer service. The research was conducted with a quantitative, descriptive and cross-sectional approach, and a survey was used as a research technique. Probabilistic sampling was applied to select a group of microenterprises in the cities of Guayaquil and La Libertad. The most important results reveal that the quality of customer service is essential, being considered part of the marketing strategies that allow economic development and therefore a better positioning in the market, for this reason it is essential to continue with its application; that is, it is necessary to continue training the staff as a strategy for strengthening continuous improvement, in order to meet the management indicators and business objectives.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, microenterprises have had to adapt to new trends in the business environment, and have been constantly searching for strategies that allow them to stay in the market. In this area, digital marketing has taken an important role in reducing costs, increasing the speed and reliability of their operations. (Jones, Alderete, & Motta, 2013)..

In microenterprises, the close working relationship prevails, including family relationships; the versatility and flexibility that predominates due to their contact with the community. (Viteri, Maldonado, & Bernal, 2022) Therefore, digital marketing is an appropriate tool for the development of their activities, as it focuses on the use of social networks as a sales channel, promoting the brand, its sales and customer preferences for their products or services. (López, Beltrán, Morales, & Cavero, 2018)..

In this context it is essential to establish the factors that make digital marketing a basic axis in the development of microenterprises today; and, consequently to the correct application of this strategy, would represent the success or failure of the same, constituting as key to its competitiveness. Marketing by itself represents a set of activities, tasks, programs, projects that satisfy customers, seeking to increase market share, with the support of its digital variant that effect maximizes communication with its target audience.

Marketing is an exchange of value with others, generating an administrative and social process of acquiring goods and/or services between people and organizations. (Kotler, 2012). Its purpose is to create relationships, building user loyalty so that a sale is propitiated; that is, in essence, marketing builds good relationships between users or customers and these always promote benefits through the satisfaction of the needs of both parties. (Mejía & Ascencio, 2020).. A key for Kotler (2012), is to know well the concepts to be able to reach the customer, this author identifies a holistic marketing, which analyzes and typifies marketing, in concepts such as relationship marketing, integrated, internal marketing dimensions and even performance measurements. Therefore, its field of application is wide and choosing the right tools for the type of product or service, the type of customer, among others, is fundamental for the success of the business. The challenge for microentrepreneurs is then to know, identify and apply the strategies for their type of business. The evolution of society has resulted in the use of multiple technological inputs that support all activities ranging from education to trade, there is the birth of digital marketing.

Digital marketing or online marketing is defined as the one where the use of internet and social networks stands out, making it not only a transmission channel, but it becomes a dynamic tool, whose purpose is to activate the commercialization of goods and services (Ponce et al., 2020), that is, it is a facilitator of national and international trade given its strength to reach global markets. This type of marketing is powerful, it implies a total knowledge of the customer, his desires and needs, it works quickly, having control over the result, building loyalty and attracting new customers with competitive costs and even lower than those generated by traditional marketing means. (López, Beltrán, Morales, & Cavero, 2018).. Currently, the success of incipient organizations, ventures and even large companies have a high participation of digital marketing with the support of human resources, innovation, quality and above all the management capacity, since making timely decisions allows the synergy of all these elements. (Bowman, 2015).

So digital marketing has become a key piece for the business sector, allowing to reach customers more effectively, in order to know their expectations of the products or services offered online.

For an entrepreneur to apply this type of marketing, there are a series of benefits and also disadvantages (Table 1) that it is important to identify and determine the necessary action plans in order to mitigate the disadvantages that could arise and enhance the advantages that are also present in this type of marketing.

Table 1 Advantages

Advantages
Lower expenses are incurred
Minimum initial investment
High diffusion capacity
High efficiency, generating results quickly
Fast reach
High capacity to segment the market
Existence of tools to control results

Source: Adapted from ROCKCONTENT (2019) and. (Rodríguez, Camargo, González, & Gorrín, 2015).

For Lavanda, Martínez, & Reyes (2021) its main advantage is that it requires a small budget, it reaches a large number of consumers, and because it is flexible and dynamic, it can be updated very quickly and adapted to the digital platforms that appear daily.

Table 2 Disadvantages

Disadvantages
Constant creation of content
Non-digitization of the target customer
Lack of knowledge of Big Data, CRM, Business Analytics, etc.
Connectivity Problems
Customer's lack of knowledge of the tool being used
Customer distrust
Risk of misleading advertising
Possibility of market saturation

Source: Adapted from. (Rodríguez, Camargo, González, & Gorrín, 2015).

The authors Rodríguez et al. (2015) in their research come to develop a SWOT that forcefully determines the clear advantages of applying digital marketing and enhancing its multiple opportunities for a business in the introduction and development stage.

As technology advances, tools appear that, if used properly, provide a strong support to the management of the micro-entrepreneur in all stages of the life cycle of his business. This continuous and global advance allows more people to have access to this knowledge and its scope includes all entrepreneurial activities.

In Ecuador the boom of digital marketing is evident in 2013 in the tourism sector of many SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises), but its use was initially deficient (López, Beltrán, Morales, & Caveró, 2018).. Gradually its use has improved and Ecuadorian companies are using digital marketing, especially social networks to support their distribution strategies and communication of their commercial offerings (Bricio, Calle, & Zambrano, 2018)..

According to the research of Lavanda, Martínez, & Reyes (2021), among the most used tools in this area are listed:

E-mail marketing: This tool was born from traditional marketing, but with the use of the Internet, an e-mail can open the doors to many markets. Every person uses at least one e-mail for their work and/or personal activities, therefore, accessing the e-mail and letting them know the commercial offer of the business is a great opportunity to make a sale. A disadvantage is that the mail arrives to the spam and the target customer does not get to visualize the information that is being provided.

Mobile marketing: Nowadays the design of marketing strategies and specific campaigns are marked by the use of mobile, there is a whole hypercontext of the customer through the analysis of location, price, prediction, promotion and mobile product. (Tong, Luo, & Xu, 2020).. The messenger and Whatsapp are the applications used par excellence, but there are multiple applications on the market that facilitate the microentrepreneur, show their products through photos, videos and additional access to secure payment methods. Social media marketing: In the case of this tool, its strength is its easy access and availability, which has allowed strategies to be more objective and timely, due to the large amount of information that is available to marketing experts (Jacobson, Gruzd, M., and M., 2006). (Jacobson, Gruzd, & Hernández, 2020).. Social media marketing allows interaction linking the customer with the business through experiences, links, posts, etc. which brings the seller closer to potential buyers. The most popular networks are Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Tik Tok and others.

Search engine marketing: Another type of tool is marketing through search engines such as Google, Yahoo, MSN, among others, although many try to position themselves in Google because it is the best known. The organic positioning (SEO) and the purchase of keywords or sponsored links (SEM) are the strategies. Although some of them have a higher cost, they are valid for the business that wants to invest and obtain results quickly by being part of the range of options that a consumer finds, when interested in a product or service.

This concept can be defined as an activity of interrelation, where the microentrepreneur offers a product or service to his client, in place, time and conditions, where the correct use of the product or service is assured. (Montoya & Boyero, 2013).. This interaction generates the differentiating element with the competition, ensuring the positioning of the product or service.

García (2016) compiles several definitions, which in their essence coincide in three main factors for the delivery of customer service, the strategies, the workers and the systems constituted for the delivery of its products or services, the same that act synergistically to meet the desired objectives.

Thus, customer service encompasses elements that ensure that the product or service sold meets the expectations of customers and establishes the reciprocity of the value paid for acquiring what is offered and what is received, in this service is a process of continuous feedback and improvement.

Customer service for all entrepreneurs in general is a key factor that should be part of their philosophy, their internal customers are a reflection of the culture, which will allow a beneficial interaction with external customers (Vera & Collins, 2018).

Then it is relevant to define the term service culture, since in it lies the importance of customer service, in the efforts that are established to create it within the microenterprise and that radiates to each collaborator. For Vera & Collins (2018), it is considered as "a pattern of behaviors, behaviors established as part of an organization, defined in itself as the way of being and aspirations of a company, which influence the behaviors of the members of an organization" (p. 75).

It is also important because the enterprises have a high contact with the customer, the relationship that is consolidated with each sale, ensures future customers, from this and taking into account these appreciations whenever a physical or virtual transaction is achieved there is a customer service component, where a user and a company exchange values for a good or service to satisfaction, which generates feelings of closeness showing the results of an efficient management of the service culture. (Pierrend, 2020).

This process must be efficiently managed and monitored through indicators that show its evolution and consolidation within the microenterprise, since it is through indicators that good responses to client demands are achieved and the objectives of the enterprise are fully met. Recent research analyzes indicators from a quantitative point of view, such as waiting times, % resource utilization, number of lost clients or case attention, or also from a qualitative perspective, such as staff attention, service satisfaction, process satisfaction, etc. (Mendoza & Ramos, 2020). (Mendoza & Ramos, 2020).

An identification of indicators (Salazar et al, 2020) applicable to the microentrepreneur and that denote the hierarchy of its management within the enterprise is listed below:

Customer focus:

- Product Appreciation (measurement by the customer of the appreciation he/she has for the product)
- Service Appreciation (measurement by the customer of their appreciation of the service)

- Experience Appreciation (measurement by the customer of their appreciation of the overall experience of acquiring a product/service)
- Additional benefits (measurement of the differentiating factor)

These indicators allow the detection of deficiencies, helping to correctly define the problems of the microenterprise and thus achieving the redesign of the processes based on the initial results, finally generating a permanent cycle of continuous improvement.

With respect to customer service and its measurements of tangibility and intangibility, these are the keys for the customer to want to repeat the experience with the venture, since its impact on the customer is related to the perception and expectation of the same. (Cevallos et al, 2019), therefore given the importance for the microentrepreneur the implementation of marketing strategies, the present research allows to know through indicators of different dimensions, essential results for decision making, being one of them the dimension customer analysis and its impact on customer service as a marketing strategy.

2. Methodology

This research is quantitative in nature and has been carried out in an orderly manner, from the selection of the topic to the analysis of statistical results, in order to provide a reliable study as indicated by Galindo-Dominguez (2020). It is descriptive and cross-sectional in nature. A survey was used as a research technique, using a combination of questions and Likert scale, this scale provides figures, the result of response options that represent statements associated with respondents' opinions.

According to data obtained from the National Institute of Statistics and Census - INEC (2023), there are a total of 863,681 companies in Ecuador, 94% of which are microenterprises. The city of Guayaquil was selected for this study because it is one of the most populated cities and the main commercial port of Ecuador, which is why it is known as "the economic capital of Ecuador". Guayaquil has a total of 118,115 companies, 89% of which are microenterprises (105,148 microenterprises). The canton of La Libertad, in the province of Santa Elena, is also known for its commercial activity, especially in the development of microenterprises. La Libertad has a total of 3,816 companies, 95% of which are microenterprises (3,610 microenterprises).

The reference population size for this study is composed of the number of microenterprises in Guayaquil and La Libertad, which means that the population would be 108,758 microenterprises. For the calculation of the sample, a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5% are considered, for greater reliability of the data obtained. The minimum sample size, according to the parameters considered, is 384 microenterprises. The sample was selected by convenience and a survey measuring instrument was used with Likert scale questions. The surveys were conducted in person and electronically through Google forms. A total of 579 microenterprises were surveyed (339 in Guayaquil and 240 in La Libertad).

It is important to determine the homogeneity or internal consistency of the instrument. To ensure that the instrument effectively measures a construct, it is necessary to determine the level of certainty of the data and information obtained. Consistent information makes it possible to ensure the validity and reliability of the research. Cronbach's alpha is a coefficient between the values of 0 - 1, which allows measuring the reliability of an instrument. The minimum value for acceptance of the instrument is 0.7; the closer the result of the coefficient is to 1, the higher the level of certainty and consistency of the instrument, and the more effective the measurement of the construct. With a total number of 579 valid cases, the level of reliability of the instrument used is 0.910 (Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient), which confirms the reliability of the research conducted.

The test used to analyze the correlations of the results obtained is the Tau-b Kendall test, with the following considerations for evaluating the correlation coefficient:

Table 3. Definition of Variables

Variable	Dimensions	Indicators	Questions
Marketing Strategies		Consumer profile	Have you been aware of your customers' needs in relation to the products you offer?

	Customer service analysis	Customer Service	How important is quality customer service to you?
	Marketing digital	Marketing Mix Use of digital marketing tools	Has the level of importance of the application of marketing strategies for increasing sales been? How have the marketing strategies applied by your competitors affected the sales of your microenterprise?
		Digital marketing	The development of advertising campaigns through digital marketing has been?
Microenterprise development of the commercial sector in the cities of Guayaquil and La Libertad	Microenterprise	Size of microenterprises	Business time
	Microenterprise development	Growth	Has the profit level of your business in the last 3 years been? Has the level of sales in the market during the last three years been achieved?
		Social responsibility	C23 Has the impact of the implementation of marketing strategies on the profitability of your business been?
			C24 The level of development of your microenterprise through the application of effective marketing strategies would be?

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Through the factor analysis of the quantitative variables obtained, we seek to verify the degree of correlation between the variables and confirm the number of variables defined for the analysis of the results.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and sphericity tests are performed to confirm that the factor analysis is feasible for the results obtained. Based on the criteria for the KMO coefficient value, which, if it is greater than or equal to 0.6, indicates that there is a strong correlation between the variables and therefore the factor analysis is appropriate.

Complementing the sphericity test, which compares the correlation matrix of the variables with the identity matrix, for the factor analysis to be feasible, the correlation matrix must be different from the identity matrix.

The following hypotheses are established for this analysis:

Null Hypothesis (Ho): The correlation matrix is equal to the identity matrix.

Alternate Hypothesis (H1): The correlation matrix is different from the identity matrix.

The criterion for the sphericity test is that if the significance coefficient (p) is less than 0.05 then the null hypothesis is rejected and the correlation matrix is found to be different from the identity matrix.

The results obtained from the test were as follows:

From the results obtained, the KMO coefficient is 0.907, which indicates a high degree of correlation between the variables to be analyzed. The sphericity test indicates a significance result of 0.000, which rejects the null hypothesis, that is to say that the correlation matrix and the identity matrix are different. It is concluded that the factor analysis is feasible for the present investigation.

For the factor analysis, the result obtained from the rotated component matrix is shown.

Table 4. Rotated component matrixa

Rotated component matrixa	Component	
	1	2
How have the marketing strategies applied by your competitors affected the sales of your microenterprise?	803	,093

The development of advertising campaigns through digital marketing has been?	,708	,258
Has the impact of the implementation of marketing strategies on the profitability of your business been?	,707	,208
Has the level of importance of the application of marketing strategies for increasing sales been?	,679	,380
The level of development of your microenterprise through the application of effective marketing strategies would be?	,613	,178
Has the level of sales in the market during the last three years been achieved?	,565	,493
Has the profit level of your business in the last 3 years been?	,525	,443
How important is quality customer service to you?	,046	,841
Have you been aware of your customers' needs in relation to the products you offer?	,212	,839

Extraction method: principal component analysis.
 Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization.
 a. The rotation has converged in 3 iterations.

From the results there are two dimensions or components identified, with the rotated component matrix table, allows us to identify which instrument is mostly related to each dimension. It can be seen in the matrix that there is a component related to Marketing Strategies. On the other hand, the other component is related to microenterprise development.

3. Results

With the objective of showing the importance of digital marketing and customer service for microenterprises and based on the variables previously established, the following results are detailed:

Correlation analysis between the variables Marketing Strategies and Microenterprise Development in the cities of Guayaquil and Libertad.

Hypothesis to be analyzed

Null Hypothesis (Ho): Marketing strategies have no correlation and it is not significant for Microenterprise Development in the cities of Guayaquil and Libertad .

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): Marketing strategies is a dependent variable of Microenterprise Development in the cities of Guayaquil and Libertad and have a significant correlation.

Significance level: for a probability value of 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected. ≤ 0.05 the null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected, so the alternative hypothesis (H1) is accepted.

Level of rejection: for a probability value > 0.05 the null hypothesis (Ho) is accepted, so the alternative hypothesis (H1) is rejected.

In relation to the result obtained in the Somers' d analysis, we have a $p = 0$, which indicates that the variables present a degree of dependence.

In relation to the result obtained in Kendall's Tau-b analysis, the probability value $p = 0$, so the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, that is, that there is a significant correlation between the variable Marketing Strategies and the variable Microenterprise Development in the cities of Guayaquil and Libertad, the degree of correlation between the variables is low. This reality shows that in general terms, the use of digital marketing strategies and customer service to increase sales is of great importance for the entrepreneur.

Correlation analysis between the variables Customer Service Analysis and Microenterprise Development in the cities of Guayaquil and Libertad.

Null Hypothesis (Ho): Customer Service Analysis have no correlation and is not significant for Microenterprise Development in the cities of Guayaquil and Libertad.

Alternate Hypothesis (H1): Customer Service Analysis is a dependent variable of Microenterprise Development in the cities of Guayaquil and Libertad and have a significant correlation.

Significance level: for a probability value of 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected. ≤ 0.05 the null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected, so the alternative hypothesis (H1) is accepted.

Level of rejection: for a probability value > 0.05 the null hypothesis (Ho) is accepted, so the alternative hypothesis (H1) is rejected.

In relation to the result obtained in the Somers' d analysis, we have a $p = 0$, which indicates that the variables present a degree of dependence.

In relation to the result obtained in Kendall's tau-b analysis, the probability value $p = 0$, so the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, i.e., that there is a significant correlation between the variable Customer Service Analysis and the variable Microenterprise Development in the cities of Guayaquil and Libertad, the degree of correlation between the variables is low.

Hypothesis to be analyzed

Null Hypothesis (Ho): Digital Marketing have no correlation and is not significant for Microenterprise Development in the cities of Guayaquil and Libertad.

Alternate Hypothesis (H1): Digital Marketing is a dependent variable of Microenterprise Development in the cities of Guayaquil and Libertad and have a significant correlation.

Significance level: for a probability value of 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected. ≤ 0.05 the null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected, so the alternative hypothesis (H1) is accepted.

Level of rejection: for a probability value > 0.05 the null hypothesis (Ho) is accepted, so the alternative hypothesis (H1) is rejected.

In relation to the result obtained in the Somers' d analysis, we have a $p = 0$, which indicates that the variables present a degree of dependence.

In relation to the result obtained in Kendall's Tau-b analysis, has a probability value $p = 0$, so the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted, i.e., that there is a significant correlation between the Digital Marketing variable and the Microenterprise Development variable in the cities of Guayaquil and Libertad, the degree of correlation between the variables is low.

These results consolidate the reality of the current client, who over 80% consider that the quality of service is key to the permanence of the business in the market and with it the application of strategies that allow the achievement of positive effects in the enterprise.

4. Conclusions

The analyzed topic shows the priority given by microentrepreneurs to the use of digital marketing tools focused on customer service. The areas of application of digital marketing are holistic and stand out for their economy and notable contribution to business results today.

As technology advances, so will the creation of instruments for the application, development, management and control of business processes at all levels, making it a permanent necessity for micro-entrepreneurs to train and use the strengths of all these tools for their competitiveness and growth in the market where they develop their commercial activities.

In Ecuador, although statistics favor the country as the cradle of entrepreneurship and microenterprises, there is also evidence of shortcomings in their management, and many of them do not reach 3 years of economic life, therefore, it is essential to prepare for the challenges posed by microentrepreneurs through cutting-edge tools such as digital marketing and its support applications for microenterprise management such as monitoring indicators. In this sense, future research is necessary to define the most appropriate customer service quality measurement indicators by type of business, to develop an analysis that shows the evolution of these indicators in the sector and verify whether they have been strengthened or weakened by the strategies used by microentrepreneurs, since the tangible benefit generated by the application of indicators is the possibility of detecting shortcomings in the process that help to redefine the processes immediately by including improvements in them.

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