

# Determining Factors In The Adoption Of Digital Marketing Technologies And Their Influence On The Competitiveness Of Commercial Smes In Guayaquil

**Factores determinantes en la adopción de tecnologías de marketing digital y su influencia en la competitividad de las PYMES comerciales en Guayaquil**

**Fatores Determinantes na Adoção de Tecnologias de Marketing Digital e a Sua Influência na Competitividade das PME Comerciais em Guayaquil**

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## Abstract

This study addresses the problem related to the factors that limit the adoption of marketing and sales technologies in small and medium-sized commercial enterprises (SMEs) in the optical sector in Guayaquil, and how such adoption influences their competitiveness. The general objective was to propose disruptive or cutting-edge digital marketing strategies to achieve greater visibility and brand recognition in the market for visual aid products and services in the city of Guayaquil. A mixed methodology of an exploratory and descriptive nature was applied, combining surveys of 388 clients with semi-structured interviews of owners of opticians' shops. The results revealed that, although there is a positive perception about the use of digital technologies, there are still barriers such as resistance to change, lack of adequate infrastructure, poor staff training and limited financial resources. It was also identified that social networks are the main information channel for customers, while shopping continues to be centered in the physical store. Finally, both consumers and entrepreneurs value the benefits of digitalization and recognize its impact on improving customer service, loyalty and commercial innovation. The study recommends strengthening digital training, improving access to financing and fostering a business culture oriented to technological transformation.

**Keywords:** Digital Technologies, Marketing, Sales, Smes, Competitiveness.

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### **Resumen**

Este estudio aborda el problema relacionado con los factores que limitan la adopción de tecnologías de marketing y ventas en las pequeñas y medianas empresas comerciales (PYMES) del sector óptico en Guayaquil, y cómo dicha adopción influye en su competitividad. El objetivo general fue proponer estrategias disruptivas o de vanguardia en marketing digital para lograr una mayor visibilidad y reconocimiento de marca en el mercado de productos y servicios de ayuda visual en la ciudad de Guayaquil. Se aplicó una metodología mixta de carácter exploratorio y descriptivo, combinando encuestas a 388 clientes con entrevistas semiestructuradas a dueños de ópticas. Los resultados revelaron que, aunque existe una percepción positiva sobre el uso de tecnologías digitales, aún persisten barreras como la resistencia al cambio, la falta de infraestructura adecuada, la escasa capacitación del personal y los recursos financieros limitados. También se identificó que las redes sociales son el principal canal de información para los clientes, mientras que las compras siguen centrándose en la tienda física. Finalmente, tanto los consumidores como los emprendedores valoran los beneficios de la digitalización y reconocen su impacto en la mejora del servicio al cliente, la fidelización y la innovación comercial. El estudio recomienda fortalecer la capacitación digital, mejorar el acceso a financiamiento y fomentar una cultura empresarial orientada a la transformación tecnológica.

**Palabras clave:** Tecnologías Digitales, Marketing, Ventas, PYMES, Competitividad.

### **Resumo**

Este estudo aborda o problema relacionado aos fatores que limitam a adoção de tecnologias de marketing e vendas nas pequenas e médias empresas comerciais (PMEs) do setor óptico em Guayaquil, e como tal adoção influencia sua competitividade. O objetivo geral foi propor estratégias disruptivas ou de ponta em marketing digital para alcançar maior visibilidade e reconhecimento da marca no mercado de produtos e serviços de auxílio visual na cidade de Guayaquil. Aplicou-se uma metodologia mista de caráter exploratório e descritivo, combinando pesquisas com 388 clientes e entrevistas semiestructuradas com proprietários de óticas. Os resultados revelaram que, embora haja uma percepção positiva sobre o uso de tecnologias digitais, ainda existem barreiras como resistência à mudança, falta de infraestrutura adequada, capacitação

insuficiente da equipe e recursos financeiros limitados. Também foi identificado que as redes sociais são o principal canal de informação para os clientes, enquanto as compras continuam centralizadas na loja física. Por fim, tanto os consumidores quanto os empreendedores valorizam os benefícios da digitalização e reconhecem seu impacto na melhoria do atendimento ao cliente, fidelização e inovação comercial. O estudo recomenda fortalecer a capacitação digital, melhorar o acesso a financiamentos e fomentar uma cultura empresarial orientada para a transformação tecnológica.

**Palavras-chave:** Tecnologias Digitais, Marketing, Vendas, Pmes, Competitividade.

## INTRODUCCIÓN

The digitization of markets is fundamental for economic development and competitiveness in the 21st century. Firms that effectively adopt digital technologies in their operation achieve a significant improvement in efficiency, productivity and innovation, as well as a drive for new opportunities (Galarza, 2023). Technologies applied to e-commerce, customer relationship management systems (CRM) and social networks, among others, allow companies to improve their market reach, personalize the user experience and optimize operational efficiency. The key to digitalization for the future is to be able to effectively use innovative technologies and provide a better service for the new era (OECD, 2021).

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are increasingly necessary for the sector of small and medium-sized commercial enterprises in the city of Guayaquil, which operates in an increasingly digital environment. In a globalized market environment, organizations must adapt quickly to the new needs and preferences of their customers, who require the use of appropriate technologies to continue competing in the commercial market and thus improve their profits (Galarza, 2023).

Despite the obvious benefits of these technologies, many SMEs globally and locally show reluctance or difficulties to adopt new tools due to factors such as insufficient financial resources, skepticism towards innovation and lack of qualified personnel (Ulrich & Frank, 2021). However, digital market trends do not stand still, they are progressive and the implementation of tools that contribute significantly to improve organizational competitiveness, while expanding the reach and visibility to capture the attention of

an audience that is increasingly responsive to online marketing strategies, is inevitable (Loor et al., 2021).

On the other hand, there is currently a growing demand for visual aid products and services, and it is even projected that in approximately two decades, half of the world's population will need to wear glasses (Fairbank, 2023), especially in the new generations, given the excessive exposure to blue light radiated by the screens of modern electronic devices (Bär, 2021).

In this sense, in the sector of visual aid products and services in the city of Guayaquil, more advanced technologies are gradually being implemented, both in marketing, care and diagnosis, as well as in after-sales service. This evolution goes hand in hand with the needs of the supply, which even opens new opportunities for the marketing of lenses online (Guisado Gómez et al., 2021), which poses new challenges, such as the need to apply *branding* and *brand awareness* strategies to enhance online visibility (OPTIPLUS, 2023).

The adoption of these digital strategies implies an orderly process of strategic innovation (Macías & Mero, 2022) , which is an essential element for business consolidation and growth, that must constantly evaluate the need for internal modifications in the company, as well as the growth of intellectual capital, in order to successfully face external elements such as demand and competition in a constantly evolving environment (Jiménez et al., 2020).

### **Problem statement**

The market for visual aid products and services in the city of Guayaquil is very dynamic and responds to a "red ocean market" type of logic; that is, it is saturated, has consolidated leaders and is highly competitive (Marcillo et al., 2024). At present, there are approximately 1,300 establishments on offer, including both independent businesses and large consolidated chains. Large companies represent 65% of the market, operating multiple branches and with strong brand positioning. Medium-sized companies account for 25%, generally managing one or two branches with a personalized approach. Finally, there are 10% of small and micro-enterprises, both domestic and international, that tend to be flexible and offer lower initial investment (S. Ayala, 2022; Galarza, 2023; *Optec*, 2020.), distributed in almost all urban parishes of the city, although an important part is focused downtown. In Guayaquil, demand represents approximately 21.8% of the population (INEGI, 2024), equivalent to about 1.4 million

inhabitants, and shows an annual growth rate of 4% (El Universo, 2024; INEC, 2023). However, most local firms have opted for strategies focused on cost reduction, driven by limited bargaining power *vis-à-vis* their suppliers. This situation has caused their profitability to depend on sales volume, instead of high profit margins (Holguín & Feijó, 2024).

The composition of the supply is mainly given by micro and small businesses, among other factors mainly because the initial investment required is not onerous; optometric equipment and implements are widely available, there is access to bank loans, there are properly trained professionals and technicians, and the necessary operating permits are affordable (Ulrich & Frank, 2021). Given this background, most businesses have adopted a popular approach, and employ low-cost leadership strategies (Porter, 2023). Due to supply saturation, there is little bargaining power of suppliers, constantly pushing prices down and therefore profitability in this market is obtained by high volume sales, not by profit margin per sale (Porter, 2023).

Following the trends of information and communication technologies, these businesses have intensively adopted digital marketing strategies with emphasis on social media marketing, largely due to its high potential, affordable costs and high efficiency, and those who do not use modern technology may fall behind their more agile competitors (González Laguna & Lara Martínez, 2024).

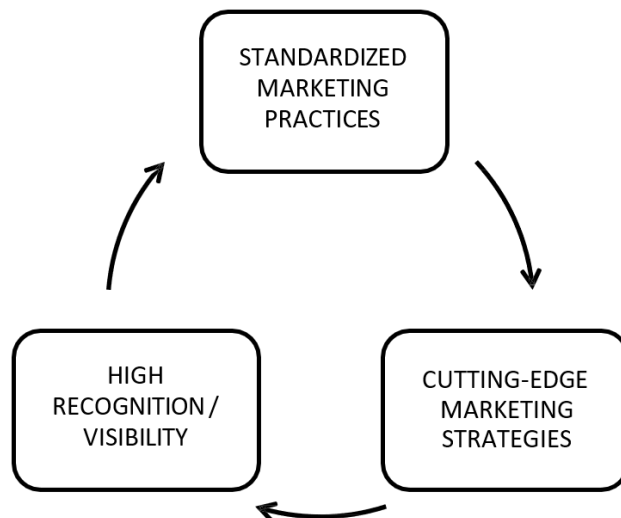
The problem lies in the fact that, by applying similar strategies, with unoriginal patterns and without major innovation, advertising campaigns become homogenized, causing an overload of similar brand publications, which, far from standing out, get confused in the crowd, and instead of transmitting an effective message, produce visual noise. Consequently, it becomes necessary to rethink the digital marketing strategies used in this market, considering necessary the formulation of others which could be disruptive, economical and may produce high impact, taking advantage of technological advances that are already available to consumers in this market. Among the available options that could be adopted by SMEs, the augmented reality technology stands out.

### **Conceptual Model**

Markets usually present standardized digital marketing strategies, that are widely used by most participants. However, when everyone uses similar strategies, they produce visual noise, which, far from standing out, makes those who use them invisible. At this point, it

is advisable to employ new, disruptive or cutting-edge strategies that allow the advertised product or brand to stand out from the competition.

**Figure 1.** *Conceptual model*



If the strategy implemented produces the desired results, the brand will be popular for a while, until other bidders begin to imitate such approaches and a point is reached where these procedures become standard market practice. Again, when most participants adopt similar strategies, these produce a counterproductive effect, requiring disruptive or cutting- edge strategies again, thus continuing a looping process that does not stop (see Figure 1).

**Research objective**

To propose disruptive or cutting-edge digital marketing strategies to achieve greater visibility and brand recognition in the market for visual aid products and services in the city of Guayaquil.

**Literature review**

Digital marketing tools and platforms give SMEs a competitive advantage to attract and retain customers in a digitized environment (Galarza-Sánchez, 2023); their evolution from the first web pages to the development of e-commerce platforms and social media, make a big difference in the way companies interact with customers and manage their marketing and sales operations (OECD, 2021). Today, artificial intelligence and data analytics are progressively being integrated into existing tools, enabling greater personalization and efficiency in marketing and sales strategies (Almuhayfith & Shaiti, 2020).

Technologically diverse companies stand out for their ability to excel in the global marketplace (Hoskins & Carson, 2022) . The use of tools such as, for example, business management applications and social networks, contribute to customer loyalty, while improving the decision-making process based on data and demand trends (Qalati et al., 2021). Thus, the proper implementation of virtual marketing technologies can improve the image and positioning of the brand, which tends to increase its competitiveness and market value.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face multiple obstacles to incorporate marketing and sales technologies. Among the main barriers are lack of financial resources, shortage of trained personnel and a skeptical attitude towards innovation (Ulrich & Frank, 2021). Lack of knowledge about available technologies and their benefits, as well as lack of time for the implementation and management of these tools, are also factors that limit technological adoption, resulting in lack of knowledge to compete in the updated market (Fahmi, 2024).

Currently, the systematic use of updated business management applications and marketing and sales technologies among commercial SMEs in Guayaquil is limited, and an important segment of suppliers lacks online presence, because there is no adequate information to continue capturing more consumers; this gap will be increasingly affected if they do not timely adopt digital skills (Vilgis, et al., 2023). The technological differences between large companies and smaller ones are evident, and are mostly reflected in the fact that the former tend to have more access to financial resources, are more willing to take advantage of the latest generation of technologies and keep a strategic vision for the future (OECD, 2021), while the latter reach a lower efficiency in customer management and capacity of data analysis (Vilgis, et al., 2023).

In an increasingly competitive and information-saturated environment, companies are called to go beyond traditional marketing. Currently, innovation is the key to capture the attention of the public, which does not only seek quality products, but meaningful and personalized experiences. There is also a change in customer expectations with the advent of digital era, with the current capabilities to see the products and buy them online, thus optimizing time and resources (Lozano et al., 2021).

Digital marketing has become a fundamental pillar for the economic growth of enterprises. Its impact is so relevant that it is

already considered one of the most important tools to promote products and services. In particular, the use of social network apps such as TikTok, Facebook and Instagram, among others, has gained great strength, as they allow the audience to show what is offered in a simple and direct way. In addition to facilitating the communication with customers, it allows them to see and purchase the products online, making the process flow smoothly (Alcívar et al., 2022)

In summary, businesses that want to stay relevant must adopt an innovative, flexible and ambitious mentality to realize that the implementation of disruptive strategies is not an option, but a necessity in a market where technological evolution does not give truce to continue the road to success. The challenge lies in integrating these tools into an ethical, strategic and always user-centered fashion, to improve the quality of the service, and therefore the satisfaction of the customers (Lozano et al., 2021).

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This research aims to evaluate the potential impact of the application of disruptive or cutting-edge digital marketing strategies on the competitiveness of SMEs in the market of visual aid products and services in the city of Guayaquil, measured in terms of brand recognition and traffic to the company's website. In order to meet this objective, a mixed methodological approach has been used that integrates qualitative and quantitative techniques, which has allowed a comprehensive understanding of the variables involved.

Qualitative information was obtained through interviews with managers and owners of small businesses in the optical industry, while the survey technique was applied to a sample of 384 clients, both current and potential, through a questionnaire validated by specialists in marketing and digital transformation. The combination of both sources made it possible to identify their technological preferences and facilitated the identification of barriers and opportunities in the digital transformation process. On the other hand, this research has been of an exploratory and descriptive nature, which allowed us to understand phenomena that have not been investigated much in the local context; it also facilitated the identification of behaviors, perceptions and needs of the commercial sector, laying the groundwork for future lines of research.

## **Results and discussion**

This section presents the analysis of the results obtained from the surveys applied to a sample of 384 customers of opticians' shops located in Guayaquil. The objective was to know the consumers' perception of the use of marketing and sales technologies, as well as their influence on the competitiveness of these businesses.

The results indicate that most respondents (44.59%) purchase optical products less than once a year, followed by 40.21% who make annual purchases. This result shows that the purchase of optical products is not frequent, which may be related to the durability of the items and perceived need; only a small percentage (5.15%) purchase frequently. On the other hand, more than half of the respondents (53.35%) are informed through social networks, which positions these platforms as the most influential channel of communication. Personal recommendations (20.62%) and face-to-face visits (20.88%) also play a relevant role, while websites have little use (5.15%).

It should also be considered that 88.40% of customers in the sample prefer the physical store, while digital channels such as social networks, online stores and mobile applications have a very low participation. This reveals that, although customers use digital media to get information, they still value face-to-face experience more at the time of purchase. Thus, 38.40% of respondents agree that opticians have the financial resources to invest in technology, and 31.19% strongly agree. This suggests that customers perceive a favorable economic capacity in these businesses, which represents an opportunity to justify further investment in digital innovation. 44.19% of respondents agree and 25.06% strongly agree that staff are digitally enabled. These results evidence a positive perception of clients regarding the technological skills of human talent. However, there is still room for improvement, as 13.43% disagree. The trends indicate that the perception of the technological infrastructure is mostly positive: 28.68% agree and 24.55% totally agree. However, 19.89% are not convinced of the existence of these tools. A broadly favorable perception is observed here, with 44.85% agreeing and 41.75% strongly agreeing of opticians adopting technologies and adapting to change. These data reflect an image of companies that are innovative and receptive to digital transformation. The low proportion of disagreement (less than 7%) confirms that modernization efforts are visible to consumers and well valued.

Nearly 40% of respondents believe that opticians are responding to competition by adopting digital tools, while 18.30% strongly agree. This indicates that consumers perceive market pressure driving digital transformation. However, about 15% hold a contrary stance, showing that not all opticians have managed to stand out digitally against their competition. Some 46.65% of customers agree that opticians should receive more support to go digital, and 30.41% strongly agree. This reveals a high social awareness of the need for public or private policies to encourage the use of technology in the sector.

It has been established that almost 70% of the respondents favorably perceive the use of data analysis tools by opticians, which includes 39.64% agreeing and 30.57% strongly agreeing. This data reflects a positive assessment towards personalization of service using data. 36.60% of participants agree and 22.42% strongly agree that opticians who adopt marketing and sales technologies offer better services. In contrast, 13.14% hold a negative or critical stance. This suggests that most customers positively relate competitiveness to technological innovation.

In a complementary manner, a qualitative analysis is presented of the results obtained in the semi-structured interviews conducted with the owners of two opticians' shops located at downtown Guayaquil. This analysis was structured around three key categories: resistance to change, organizational culture and perception of value in the use of marketing and sales technologies.

In the first instance, regarding resistance to change, both interviewees agreed that the technological adoption process faced obstacles in its initial stage. In the case of "Óptica del Ahorro", the owner mentioned that older employees were reluctant to leave traditional methods, which generated friction in the implementation of digital tools. Similarly, the owner of " Óptica Vista Ideal" noted that although some employees were enthusiastic, others required more time and training to adapt. These responses reflect that resistance to change is closely linked to the generational profile of the team and the level of familiarity with technology. However, both employers emphasized that, with constant training and support, resistance decreased, suggesting that the adaptation process is possible if it is properly managed.

Likewise, in terms of organizational culture, the interviewees indicated that they have sought to foster a favorable environment for digital innovation. The owner of "Óptica del Ahorro" noted that younger employees are already showing technological initiatives,

while the manager of "Óptica Vista Ideal" emphasized the importance of leadership as a guide for change. Both stated that continuous training has been fundamental to modify attitudes and work habits, thus strengthening a culture more open to the use of digital tools. In addition, a shared interest was identified in integrating technological processes into daily management, such as inventory automation or customer tracking, which shows that the organizational culture has been aligned with the demands of the digital environment.

In addition, on the perception of value in the use of technologies, there was a high valuation of digital tools, especially in relation to social media marketing. Both businesses indicated that their presence on digital platforms has increased brand visibility and attracted new customers. The use of sales systems and databases to improve customer service and loyalty was also highlighted. In addition, both interviewees expressed positive expectations regarding the future implementation of more advanced systems, such as data analysis tools and process automation. This reflects that, despite the limitations, the owners recognize the tangible benefits that technology offers to improve the competitiveness and efficiency of their businesses.

Thus, the interviews reflect an ongoing transformation process. Although barriers such as initial staff resistance and economic constraints persist, opticians are moving towards a more adaptive organizational culture. Owners value the benefits of digitalization and see it as a key tool for growth, consolidating a strategic shift towards modernization of the sector.

## **RESULTS**

Survey results show that most customers access information about optical products through social networks, although they still prefer to make their purchases in physical stores. This preference reveals a gap between digital information interest and the face-to-face shopping experience, which coincides with what was stated by (Galarza-Sánchez, 2023), who argues that SMEs must integrate technologies not only to make their products visible, but also to transform their sales channel. Social networks emerge as a key tool for attracting customers, while the lack of active e-commerce platforms limits the digital closing of sales.

In relation to competitiveness, a high percentage of respondents stated that opticians' shops that use digital technologies offer better service. This perception coincides with the findings of (Ayala et al.,

2024), who state that digital transformation not only improves operational efficiency but also strengthens the relationship with customers. Similarly, the interviews reinforced this perception, as both owners pointed out that the implementation of social networks and digital tracking systems allowed attracting new audiences and building loyalty among existing ones. This result aligns with (Qalati et al., 2021), who highlight the role of CRM systems in personalizing customer experience and strengthening commercial positioning.

On the other hand, it was identified that resistance to change continues to be a barrier, especially among employees with less technological familiarity. This finding was confirmed in both interviews, where the owners reported that the most experienced personnel showed reluctance to use new tools. This situation is consistent with what was pointed out by (Ulrich & Frank, 2021), who warn that the lack of digital skills and a poorly adaptive organizational culture hinder technological adoption in small businesses. However, resistance was partially overcome through training processes, which also supports the statement of (Pareti et al., 2020), on the importance of capacity building as a driver of change.

Therefore, the results show that both customers and business owners positively value the use of data analysis technologies, although their application is still in its infancy. While customers appreciate personalized reminders and promotions, owners' express interest in implementing tools to better manage their users' information. This aspect coincides with (Almuhayfith & Shaiti, 2020; Palacios, 2024), who point out that data analysis in marketing allows for more accurate segmentation and better strategic decisions.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

First, this research identified that the adoption of new disruptive or cutting-edge digital marketing strategies has become an essential component to strengthen the competitiveness of small and medium-sized commercial business in the market of visual aid products and services in the city of Guayaquil. From the mixed approach implemented, it was evidenced that both customers and owners of opticians' shops value positively the use of digital tools, especially those related to social networks, digital sales systems and data analysis. This perception coincides with previous studies that

highlight the influence of digital transformation on customer positioning and loyalty (Ayala et al., 2024; Qalati et al., 2021).

Secondly, the results revealed that, although there is a considerable level of acceptance of the technologies, their implementation still faces significant obstacles. Among the determining factors that hinder adoption were identified the lack of financial resources, limited access to technological infrastructure, and poor staff training, as pointed out by (Ulrich & Frank, 2021), in similar research at the international level. In addition, it was found that resistance to change, especially among employees with less digital familiarity, represents a persistent barrier, although it can be mitigated through continuous training strategies.

It was also concluded that organizational culture plays a decisive role in the technology adoption process. The interviews confirmed that business leadership and openness to innovation are key elements in driving effective transformation. This finding reinforces what was stated by (Pareti et al., 2020), who argue that the development of internal capabilities is a pillar to achieve successful implementation.

On the other hand, from the consumer's perspective, the preference for the physical store as a purchasing channel remains, even though social networks have become the main means of finding out about products and promotions. This suggests that opticians should integrate omnichannel strategies that connect the digital environment with face-to-face experience, optimizing customer service and service personalization.

Finally, to achieve a sustained improvement in the competitiveness of the optical sector, it is essential to design public policies and private strategies that promote the digitization of these companies. This includes facilitating access to financing, training human talent and promoting the use of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and data analysis, as highlighted by (Galarza, 2023; Palacios, 2024) . In this way, SMEs will be better prepared to face the challenges of the digital and globalized market.

Among the limitations encountered, should be pointed out the availability of the participants to answer the surveys, as well as the concentration of the study in a single city, which restricts the possibility of generalizing the findings to other regions of the country. Despite this, the results provided valuable information on the current state of digitalization in marketing strategies in the local visual aid products and services market and offered relevant inputs for future support policies and technological innovation in the

sector. This type of study should be replicated in other important markets from Ecuador, and other countries with similar characteristics, always considering the new predominant technological trends.

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