

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Digital Marketing in Manufacturing SMEs: Adoption and Perception in the Ecuadorian Economy<sup>1</sup>

## Marketing digital en PYMES manufactureras: adopción y percepción en la economía ecuatoriana

Georllibeth D. Florencia Olaya,<sup>†</sup> Ercilia M. Franco Cedeño,<sup>‡</sup> Jorge M. Cueva Estrada,<sup>\*¶</sup> y Nicolas A. Sumba Nacipucha<sup>\*§</sup>

<sup>†</sup>Universidad Politécnica Salesiana de Ecuador; ORCID: 0009-0004-1245-5202

<sup>‡</sup>Universidad Politécnica Salesiana de Ecuador; ORCID: 0000-0001-8661-7666

<sup>¶</sup>Universidad Politécnica Salesiana de Ecuador; ORCID: 0000-0002-3055-1060

<sup>§</sup>Universidad Politécnica Salesiana de Ecuador; ORCID: 0000-0001-7163-4252

\*Correspondence to email: [gflorencia@est.ups.edu.ec](mailto:gflorencia@est.ups.edu.ec); [efranco@ups.edu.ec](mailto:efranco@ups.edu.ec); [jcueva@ups.edu.ec](mailto:jcueva@ups.edu.ec); [nsumba@ups.edu.ec](mailto:nsumba@ups.edu.ec)

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### Abstract

The business processes of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have been transformed by digitalization with the aim of strengthening their competitive position. In this study, this analysis focused on the manufacturing sector of Guayaquil. Describing the implementation of digital marketing from the perspective of entrepreneurs and consumers was the main objective. A quantitative approach was applied, with a descriptive, cross-sectional and non-experimental design, through surveys of 50 representatives of SMEs and 100 consumers. A progressive adoption of digital marketing was found, with a predominance of the use of social networks and a favorable business perception regarding its impact on sales and competitiveness. However, internal barriers remain related to technical training, budgeting and planning. From the consumer's point of view, a positive shopping experience was identified, accompanied by a high influence of digital marketing on their decisions, especially weighting the channels used and accessibility to information. It is concluded that digital marketing is perceived as a useful tool, but its institutionalization requires greater technical and strategic support.

**Keywords:** Marketing, Manufacturing SMEs, Digital Economy, Consumer Behavior; Business Transformation.

**JEL-Classification:** M31, L60, O33, D91, M10.

### Resumen

Los procesos comerciales de las pequeñas y medianas empresas (PYMES) han sido transformados por la digitalización con el objetivo de fortalecer su posición competitiva. En el presente estudio, dicho análisis se centró en el sector manufacturero de Guayaquil. Describir la implementación del marketing digital desde la perspectiva de empresarios y consumidores, fue el objetivo principal. Se aplicó un enfoque cuantitativo, con diseño descriptivo, transversal y no experimental, mediante encuestas dirigidas a 50 representantes de PYMES y 100 consumidores. Se encontró una adopción progresiva del marketing digital, con predominancia del uso de redes sociales y una percepción empresarial favorable en cuanto a su impacto en ventas y competitividad. Sin embargo, subsisten barreras internas relacionadas con la formación técnica, el presupuesto y la planificación. Desde la óptica del consumidor, se identificó una experiencia de compra positiva, acompañada de

una alta influencia del marketing digital en sus decisiones, ponderaron especialmente los canales utilizados y la accesibilidad a la información. Se concluye que el marketing digital se percibe como una herramienta útil, pero su institucionalización requiere mayor soporte técnico y estratégico

**Palabras clave:** Marketing, PYMES manufactureras, economía digital, comportamiento del consumidor, transformación empresarial.

**Clasificación JEL:** M31, L60, O33, D91, M10

## 1. Introduction

The liquidity injected to overcome the Great Recession of 2008 (Alonso-Neira et al., 2024), favoured the imposition of the fourth industrial revolution and its massive digitalisation (Sánchez-Bayón, 2025), giving rise to an economic-business paradigmatic shift (Sánchez-Bayón, 2021). In accordance with this change, the incorporation of digital marketing in manufacturing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) has become a strategic component in the context of digital transformation in Ecuador, which requires immediate responses. In this sense, the adoption of digital tools and the incorporation of contemporary marketing approaches are presented as determining elements within business management aimed at economic sustainability and greater well-being (Peñate Santana et al., 2021; Sánchez-Bayón, 2025).

These transformations are associated with a developing digital economy (Cueva-Estrada et al, 2024 and 2025), characterized by the involvement of digital technologies in all commercial and productive sectors. But, despite the global positioning of technologies and digital marketing, there are still organizations focused on the use of traditional communication and promotion channels, which limits their competitive capacity in markets with high levels of adaptability. Therefore, constant innovation in business processes, especially in the field of marketing, thus becomes a component to face the increasingly digitized and globalized business environment (Morales et al., 2024; Cueva Estrada & Sánchez-Bayón, 2024).

Kotler and Keller (2020) state that companies that adopt digital marketing strategies notice a growth in visibility within the market, which promotes their positioning and ability to interact with customers. The limited adoption of digital media by some organizations does not necessarily respond to an internal decision, but is related to cultural models in Latin American contexts, where consumers still show a significant preference for face-to-face purchases. From the business perspective, this inclination can minimize the attractiveness towards the adoption of digital strategies, especially in sectors where direct interaction continues to be highly valued by the market, in this sense and despite the fact that SMEs try to use digital media such as social networks, their use does not respond to a clear and sustained strategy (Peñate Santana et al., 2021).

In the Ecuadorian context, a report published by Branch (2022) shows that 77% of the population actively uses the Internet, while 81% is a user of social networks, which shows an environment conducive to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) accessing their audiences through digital channels. This level of connectivity represents a competitive advantage for those organizations that have incorporated digital resources into their business strategies. In addition to these data, the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC, 2024) reports that 77.2% of the Ecuadorian population aged five and over has used the Internet in the last twelve months, which confirms a progressive digitalization of the social environment. However, the same report reveals that there is still a 5.4% digital illiteracy rate at the national level, mainly concentrated in rural areas and segments with a lower level of education. Although the study does not focus directly on small and medium-sized enterprises, these gaps in access and effective use of technologies can also be reflected in the organizational sphere, limiting the ability of many SMEs to integrate digital strategies into their business processes in a sustained way.

In the city of Guayaquil, small and medium-sized enterprises in the manufacturing sector play an important role as productive units that boost the local economy. However, various studies have

pointed out that many of these organizations have family-oriented management structures, which may influence a more traditional operational vision that is less oriented towards technological innovation (Carvache-Franco et al., 2022). This organization, added to factors such as informality and limited professionalization, may have an impact on a low strategic valuation of digital marketing as a mechanism for sustainability and competitiveness. The incorporation of these strategies requires the acquisition of new knowledge and the implementation of procedures different from the traditional ones, which represents a challenge for companies with entrenched structures that tend to maintain conventional operating schemes.

In the context of an increasingly digitized economy, the incorporation of technologies into organizational processes has become a condition for improving operational efficiency, optimizing communication with audiences, and strengthening competitiveness (Cueva-Estrada & Sánchez-Bayón, 2025). In this scenario, digital marketing has established itself as a strategic resource that allows organizations to adapt to new market dynamics. In contexts such as Ecuador, companies that have incorporated these methodologies coexist with others that maintain traditional schemes, which generates gaps in terms of posicionamiento, alcance y rendimiento commercial.

This study aims to describe the implementation of digital marketing in small and medium-sized companies in the manufacturing sector of Guayaquil, from the perspective of business representatives and consumers. The research seeks to identify the conditions that have facilitated or hindered the implementation of digital strategies in those organizations that have begun their transition to digital environments, as well as the factors that explain resistance to change. The relevance of this study lies in its contribution to the strengthening of SMEs as base agents for local and national economic dynamization, and in its contribution to the state of the art through an empirical update on the incorporation of digital strategies in marketing management in the Ecuadorian context.

## 2. Definition and global context of SMEs

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are an organizational category defined based on criteria such as the number of employees, production volume, annual revenue, and access to operating resources. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2021), the characterization of SMEs depends on the specific conditions of each country, which directly influences their potential for expansion, innovation capacity, and sustainability.

In the Latin American context, SMEs represent more than 95% of all companies and generate approximately 60% of formal employment, which shows their structural relevance in the region's economies (OECD, 2024). However, their contribution to gross domestic product (GDP) remains limited compared to their demographic weight, highlighting persistent problems in terms of productivity, technological integration and access to finance.

In the case of Ecuador, small and medium-sized enterprises represent a significant part of the business fabric. According to data from the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC), in 2020 there were 846,265 companies registered in the country, of which 6.2% were small and 1.4% medium-sized. These companies represent 7.6% of the total registered and generate more than 26% of national sales, with a significant presence in productive sectors (CAF, 2021). According to the current classification, organizations with between 10 and 49 employees are considered small, and medium-sized organizations are those with between 50 and 199 workers, with thresholds differentiated annual income. This categorization, adopted by the Superintendence of Companies, Securities and Insurance in line with the regulations of the Andean Community, allows for the establishment of differentiated regulatory frameworks for the design of public, tax and financing policies aimed at this sector (Superintendence of Companies, Securities and Insurance, 2017).

Zamora Montenegro (2024) adds that small and medium-sized companies recognize the strategic potential of digital marketing, although they face significant restrictions related to financing, training of human talent, and operational planning. These limitations hinder the sustained implementation of digital strategies, which restricts their competitiveness against organizations with a higher degree

of technological maturity (Martínez Martínez, 2023). Consequently, it is necessary to consolidate continuous training programs and technical support mechanisms that strengthen the digital transition of SMEs.

The growing pressure on SMEs to adapt to digital environments promotes the change of their processes and invites the rethinking of the strategies used to interact with their audiences. In this context, marketing acquires a relevant role, offering resources that improve visibility, manage more efficient business relationships, and expand organizational reach (Mero Alava et al., 2025). Marketing management is an important dimension in SMEs, especially in environments such as Ecuador, where the high supply of products and services has reduced quality to a basic standard and no longer represents a differentiating element. Today's consumer behavior is characterized by greater demand, versatility, and dependence on mobile technologies, which imposes different demands in terms of commercial communication (Plaza Quimis et al., 2024) and makes it necessary to use commerce and digital strategies (López Chila & Andrade Ávila, 2020).

However, and considering the current context, there are still SMEs that concentrate their efforts on traditional media, which limits their ability to connect with consumer segments that operate under different logics of search, interaction and purchase decision. This does not imply discarding conventional practices, but rather understanding that markets are being occupied by generations that require other forms of attention (Luque-Ortiz, 2021). This scenario shows the coexistence of two approaches in the sector: one oriented towards innovation and expansion through digital resources, and the other more conservative, with a low level of transformation and dependence on traditional schemes. This duality responds to economic factors (Bermeo Giraldo et al., 2022) and has cultural and organizational elements that condition decision-making around marketing

### 3. Traditional Marketing and Digital Marketing

In the field of business management, marketing is defined as the set of strategies and techniques aimed at identifying and satisfying the needs of the market, promoting the voluntary exchange of goods between organizations and consumers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008), as long as profitable relationships are generated between the parties. Traditionally, these strategies have been implemented through media such as television, radio, and the press, distinguished by one-way communication and massive reach (Suárez-Cousillas, 2018), their operability presents restrictions such as high execution costs, low segmentation capacity, and limited feedback from the target audience, which makes it difficult to accurately evaluate their effectiveness in markets. However, these types of strategies continue to have a significant impact among consumers belonging to older generations or with less familiarity with digital media (Madrigal-Moreno et al., 2024).

With digitalization, a new mode of marketing emerges, which leverages digital platforms to establish two-way and interactive interactions, characterized by real-time consumer engagement and data-driven personalization, components that overcome the one-way limitations of traditional marketing. Chaffey and Smith (2002) and Díaz Landero et al. (2024) describe digital marketing as the planned use of digital technologies to acquire and retain customers in a cost-effective way, integrating strategies guided by customer knowledge and personalized communication, which allows organizations to interact with their audiences in a segmented way.

Kotler and Armstrong (2012) argue that digital marketing comprises all efforts to market products and establish relationships with customers over the Internet, while maintaining the same basic purpose of traditional marketing. However, as consumer dynamics have evolved, digital marketing has ceased to be just a technological extension and has become a new strategic approach. In this sense, new paradigms are emerging, such as Marketing 4.0, where organizations strategically combine technology with a more humanized approach to accompany the customer throughout the digital shopping experience (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2017). Therefore, this should not be limited only to the use of electronic media to promote, but also represents a paradigm shift towards more interactive, measurable, and adaptable strategies, supported by data analysis and the construction of sustainable relationships with

an informed and participatory consumer (Kotler et al., 2021).

For SMEs, this type of strategy should not necessarily be synonymous with high costs, but it should be the possibility of automating actions and access to accurate metrics to evaluate the performance of campaigns (Kotler et al., 2021). However, its implementation requires specific technical and digital skills, strategic planning, and constant updating in the face of changes in trends and platforms (Ramírez Romero et al., 2022). Also taking into account that the saturation of content in digital environments can make it difficult for brands to differentiate themselves, which forces them to design coherent and sustained value propositions for this medium as part of the digital strategy (Cueva Estrada et al., 2023). Although both approaches operate under different logics, the traditional one, focusing on wide dissemination and the digital one, focused on segmentation and personalization, these can coexist in a complementary way within a comprehensive strategy, allowing companies to maximize their reach in a constantly changing market.

#### 4. Materials and methods

The objective of this research was to describe the implementation of digital marketing in small and medium-sized companies in the manufacturing sector of Guayaquil, from the perspective of business representatives and consumers. To this end, a quantitative approach was adopted with a descriptive, cross-sectional, non-experimental and field methodological design (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2014), allowing current marketing practices to be described from a double perspective: business and consumer. Structured surveys were used as the main data collection tool, applied to representatives of SMEs and consumers. The construction of the questions was based on a review of academic literature, which made it possible to guarantee their relevance with respect to the objectives of the study. The instruments were subjected to validation by expert judgment to ensure their coherence, clarity, and adequacy to the Ecuadorian context (Escobar-Pérez & Cuervo-Martínez, 2008).

The first unit of analysis was made up of 50 small and medium-sized companies in the manufacturing sector located in the city of Guayaquil. The sample included organizations from various areas of the city, which allowed us to consider a significant diversity of digital marketing practices. Its size was defined considering the limitations of access and time, as well as the practical impossibility of covering the entire universe of manufacturing SMEs, so a viable selection was chosen that would provide relevant information according to the descriptive objective of the research. The surveys were aimed at those responsible for the marketing or sales areas in each organization, considering their direct knowledge about the commercial practices adopted.

The instrument applied was composed of ten closed questions with categorical options, formulated based on a review of specialized literature on digital marketing in Latin American business contexts. The items allowed collecting information on the type of strategies used, the tools applied, the internal barriers faced, the perception of effectiveness, the impact on sales and competitiveness, as well as the budget allocation and suggestions for improvement. To facilitate the analysis of the results, the questions were grouped into three thematic blocks: (1) marketing strategies implemented, (2) internal barriers and conditions, and (3) perception of the impact of the strategies. This thematic organization allowed a more systematic and coherent reading of the findings obtained in relation to the objectives of the study. Table 1 summarizes the dimensions analyzed according to each block, together with the main indicators considered.

The second unit of analysis was made up of 100 consumers of manufactured products offered by small and medium-sized companies in the city of Guayaquil. For their selection, a non-probabilistic convenience sampling was applied, considering as a criterion the previous interaction with this type of organizations and a minimum age of 18 years. In order to collect information about their shopping experience and digital interaction, a structured questionnaire of ten closed questions was designed, administered through digital platforms. The items were formulated based on recent literature on consumer behavior in digital environments. The questionnaire made it possible to identify aspects such as the frequency of contact with SMEs, the most consumed products, the perception of the

**Table 1.** Grouping of dimensions of the instrument applied to representatives of manufacturing SMEs

Thematic block	Dimension	Indicator or measured content
1. Marketing strategies implemented	Type of strategy used	Predominant use of digital, traditional, mixed marketing or lack of strategy
	Implementation time	Seniority in adopting digital strategies
	Tools used	Use of social media, email marketing, online advertising
	Perception of effectiveness	Level of satisfaction with the results obtained
2. Barriers and internal conditions	Difficulties faced	Training, infrastructure, budget, resistance to change
	Budget allocation	Proportion of the budget allocated to digital marketing
	Suggestions for improvement	Recommendations on investment, innovation, and internal management
3. Perception of impact	Customer perception	Estimated rating by consumers
	Impacto en ventas	Perceived changes in marketing levels
	Impact on competitiveness	Variations in the company's competitive position

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Campos-Dávila et al. (2024); Salgado-García et al. (2024); Obando Caicedo and Docema (2025).

general experience, the level of accessibility of digital information, as well as the preferred channels, the influence on the purchase decision and suggestions to improve marketing strategies. For analytical purposes, the questions were organized into three thematic blocks: (1) level of interaction and type of products purchased, (2) perception of the impact of digital marketing on the customer experience and (3) channels used, perceived accessibility and recommendations for improvement. Table 2 summarizes the dimensions analyzed according to this thematic grouping

**Table 2.** Grouping of dimensions of the questionnaire applied to consumers of manufacturing SMEs

No	Dimension	Indicator or measured content
1. Level of interaction and type of products purchased	Interaction frequency	Degree of contact with SMEs that apply digital marketing
	Type of product purchased	Most frequently purchased product category
2. Perception of the impact of digital marketing on the experience	General experience	Evaluation of the shopping experience with digitized companies
	Influence on the purchase decision	The effect of digital marketing on the decision-making process
	Perception of quality	Comparison between companies that do and do not apply digital marketing
	Improved customer experience	Impact assessment from the consumer's perspective
3. Channels used, accessibility and recommendations for improvement	Preferred channels	Preferred digital channels for interacting with businesses
	Information accessibility	Easy access to digitally provided business information
	Suggestions for improvement	Recommendations on content, promotions, and digital experience
	Perception of improved experience	The degree to which digital marketing has improved the customer experience

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Campos-Dávila et al. (2024); Salgado-García et al. (2024); Obando Caicedo and Docema (2025); Tasayco-Jala et al. (2025)

## 5. Results

In order to organize the information in an analytical way, the results have been classified into four thematic blocks: 1. Strategies implemented, 2. Internal barriers and conditions, 3. Organizational

results. Table 3 summarizes the results of the first section below

**Table 3.** Marketing strategies implemented by manufacturing SMEs in Guayaquil

Dimension	Response options	(%)
Type of marketing strategy most frequently used in the company	<b>Predominantly digital</b>	46,00%
	Primarily traditional	8,00%
	Digital and traditional strategies	32,00%
	They don't apply marketing strategies	14,00%
Experience in implementing digital marketing strategies	<b>More than 3 years</b>	38,00%
	2 to 3 years	28,00%
	Less than 2 years	26,00%
	They do not implement digital strategies	8,00%
Most used digital tools in marketing strategies	<b>Social networks (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)</b>	72,00%
	They do not use digital tools	14,00%
	Email (email marketing)	8,00%
	Digital advertising on websites or platforms	6,00%
Perception of the effectiveness of implemented digital marketing strategies	Very effective	22,00%
	<b>Moderately effective</b>	70,00%
	Not very effective	4,00%
	Not effective	4,00%

Source: Own elaboration with data from the survey, 2025

The results show a significant adoption of digital marketing by the manufacturing SMEs surveyed, this being the most used strategy, with a majority that has been implementing it for two years or more. Social networks stand out as the preferred channel, while the perception of effectiveness, although positive, remains at moderate levels. This trend is evidence of an active transition process towards digital, although still limited by certain structural conditions. In this sense, it is pertinent to examine the main internal obstacles (Table 4) that organizations face when incorporating digital tools into their marketing processes.

**Table 4.** Internal barriers, budget allocation and proposals for improvement in digital marketing management

Dimension	Answer	(%)
Main difficulties in implementing digital marketing strategies	<b>Lack of knowledge and training</b>	38,00%
	Limitations in technological infrastructure	16,00%
	Insufficient financial resources	28,00%
	Resistance to organizational change	18,00%
What percentage of the total marketing budget is allocated to digital marketing?	More than 50% of the total budget	24,00%
	<b>Less than 50% of the total budget</b>	36,00%
	No budget is allocated to digital marketing	16,00%
	Lack of budgetary knowledge	24,00%
Suggestions for strengthening digital marketing in the company	<b>Increase the allocated budget</b>	34,00%
	Incorporate innovative digital tools	30,00%
	Increase investment in staff training	28,00%
	Promote interdepartmental collaboration	8,00%

Source: Own elaboration with data from the survey, 2025

The results indicate that the surveyed SMEs face internal constraints that hinder a more structured integration of digital marketing. The main constraints are associated with financing, technical training and strategic planning, which weakens the effective allocation of resources. Faced with this scenario, companies recognize the need to strengthen capacities, innovate in tools and reorganize internal processes. These conditions configure the environment from which the impact of digital marketing is perceived, both in terms of competitiveness and in the customer experience, elements addressed in the following block of results (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Perception of the impact of digital marketing on manufacturing SMEs in Guayaquil

Dimension	Answer	(%)
Customer perception of the implemented digital marketing strategies.	Very positive	22,00%
	<b>Positive</b>	60,00%
	Neutral	16,00%
	Negative	2,00%
Perception of the impact of digital marketing on sales	<b>Moderate increase</b>	66,00%
	Significant increase	28,00%
	No changes	6,00%
Opinion on the improvement in competitiveness thanks to digital marketing	<b>Moderate improvement</b>	60,00%
	Significant improvement	30,00%
	It has not generated any perceptible changes	10,00%

Source: Own elaboration with data from the survey, 2025.

From the perspective of business representatives, the digital marketing strategies applied are valued as positive in terms of customer perception, impact on sales and strengthening competitiveness. These assessments reflect an optimistic internal reading on the performance of digital stocks, which shows a growing conviction about their usefulness within the commercial dynamics of the manufacturing sector.

Table 6 shows the results for the first block

**Table 6.** Level of interaction and type of products purchased by consumers

Dimension	Answer	(%)
Frequency of interaction with manufacturing SMEs that use digital marketing	Frequent	19,40%
	Occasional	31,60%
	<b>Seldom</b>	33,70%
	Never	15,30%
Category of products most frequently purchased from manufacturing SMEs	<b>Clothing, apparel and footwear</b>	31,60%
	Prepared food	23,50%
	Food products	17,30%
	Technology	10,20%
	Others	17,30%

Source: Own elaboration with data from the survey, 2025

The interaction between consumers and manufacturing SMEs operating in digital environments is evidenced by the recurrent presence of certain consumption patterns linked to specific product categories. This trend suggests a progressive appropriation of digital channels by market segments with differentiated interests. Table 7 below presents the results related to the assessment of the digital experience, the accessibility of information and the way in which these strategies affect the purchasing process.

The results allow us to observe a favorable assessment of digital marketing by consumers, which suggests that these strategies are functional for SMEs, and also recognized by users as part of a more efficient experience. These perceptions support the importance of consolidating digital practices that strengthen the bond with the customer. Next, the most used digital channels, the perceived level of accessibility and the main suggestions proposed by consumers to optimize these interactions are examined (Table 8).

The data collected shows strong consumer engagement in digital environments managed by SME manufacturers, with a positive assessment of both the accessibility of information and the experience generated through these strategies. The responses reflect clear preferences in terms of interaction channels and specific expectations on aspects that must be strengthened, such as customer service and promotional conditions. This allows for a more accurate understanding of consumer behavior in the digital realm and provides relevant inputs to optimize campaign design and brand experience in this type of organization.

**Table 7.** Perception of the impact of digital marketing on the customer experience

Dimension	Answer	(%)
Overall rating of the experience with manufacturing SMEs using digital marketing	Excellent	24,00%
	<b>Good</b>	60,00%
	Regular	13,00%
	Bad	3,00%
Degree of influence of digital marketing on the purchase decision	It has a great influence	34,00%
	<b>It has some influence.</b>	54,00%
	It has very little influence	9,00%
	It doesn't influence	3,00%
Perception of quality differences between SMEs that apply digital marketing and those that do not	<b>Positive difference</b>	49,00%
	He hasn't noticed any differences	35,00%
	Negative difference	11,00%
	Not applicable	5,00%
Perceived impact of digital marketing on customer experience	It has improved significantly	37,00%
	<b>It has improved moderately</b>	51,00%
	It hasn't changed	11,00%
	It has worsened	1,00%

Source: Own elaboration with data from the survey, 2025

**Table 8.** Preferred channels, accessibility level and improvement recommendations according to consumers

Dimension	Answer	(%)
Preferred digital marketing channels for engaging with manufacturing SMEs	<b>Social networks (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)</b>	66,00%
	Email	15,00%
	Corporate websites	10,00%
	Online advertising (banners, search engine ads)	9,00%
Level of accessibility of the information provided through digital marketing	<b>Accessible</b>	58,00%
	Very accessible	35,00%
	Not very accessible	5,00%
	Not accessible	2,00%
Recommendations for improving digital marketing strategies in manufacturing SMEs	<b>Improved customer service</b>	38,00%
	Most frequent promotions and discounts	37,00%
	More interactive content	16,00%
	Improve the user experience on digital platforms	9,00%
Perception of the improvement in customer experience thanks to digital marketing	<b>Yes, moderately</b>	51,00%
	Yes, significantly	37,00%
	It hasn't changed.	11,00%
	It has worsened	1,00%

Source: Own elaboration with data from the survey, 2025.

## 6. Discussions

The results show an important adoption of digital marketing (DM) strategies by manufacturing SMEs in the city of Guayaquil, in line with what was proposed by Benítez Villegas & Pérez-Álvarez (2025), who argue that commercial organizations have found in digital channels an accessible means to expand their commercial reach globally. From a more recent position, Castro Manjarréz et al. (2025) add that artificial intelligence for the development of marketing strategies can make the budget in this area of management more expensive, however, the benefits for the organization grow.

Social networks are positioned as the most used means by SMEs to develop promotion and advertising actions, in this line Silva Ortega et al. (2025), highlight their effectiveness in positioning brands and facilitating interaction with target audiences, allowing feedback to be obtained about the results obtained through the advertising strategies carried out, however, it should be noted that for an effective strategy it is necessary to create content that is relevant and aligned with the interests of the consumer, in order to attract and retain their attention (Sumba Nacipucha et al., 2024). However, the low perception of effectiveness is worrying, this may be due to the lack of planning for the development of digital strategies by companies, which has been observado también por Dwivedi et al. (2021), quienes

señalan que las PYMES implementan estrategias digitales sin una planificación estructurada, lo que disminuye its benefits.

Among the problems encountered are: lack of technical training, low financial resources and resistance to change, these phenomena demonstrate weak management or low support for digital marketing strategies in small companies in the productive sector. However, respondents value the results of their strategies positively, expressing increases in sales and competitiveness. Therefore, it is important to review the budget allocated to this management. The respondents' positive perception of digital marketing suggests that these strategies strengthen the commercial link and improve the shopping experience, as pointed out by Iglesias et al. (2019), who highlight the role of the sensory brand experience in building relationships and strengthening brand value. In this case, the appropriate use of digital media. The direct influence of digital marketing on purchasing decisions sustains its ability to influence consumer behavior, an aspect also identified by Dastane (2020), who researched the impact of digital marketing on online purchase intention and found a positive and significant relationship between the variables.

The recommendations issued by consumers describe a worrying assessment, by putting on the table aspects such as the quality of service, the relevance of the content offered and the conditions associated with the promotions. These factors point to a user experience that still needs to be worked on in detail by SMEs. This makes it necessary to design and implement strategies that improve the overall perception of the service, in coherence with a focus on the user and based on criteria of perceived value and loyalty.

The results made it possible to identify opportunities for improvement for the strengthening of digital capacities in manufacturing SMEs, in training processes, technical advice and strategic content design. Its applicability is aimed at improving regulations and business support programs that recognize the heterogeneity of the sector and promote a more efficient and planned use of digital marketing within the framework of the Ecuadorian digital economy.

## 7. Conclusions

The analysis carried out allowed to describe the current implementation of digital marketing in SMEs in the manufacturing sector of Guayaquil from business and consumer perspectives. The results demonstrate an active transition towards digital environments, promoted by the use of social platforms and a growing appreciation of its organizational benefits. The consolidation of these strategies continues to face management constraints, indicating a still incipient institutionalization of digital marketing in this business segment.

From the consumer's point of view, digital practices are perceived as facilitating the purchasing process, providing improvements in the user experience, accessibility to information and interaction with brands. The partial overlap between business practices and consumer perceptions demonstrates a progressive advance in adjusting business strategies to the dynamics of the local digital environment.

Regarding the contribution to the state of the art, the research supports the idea that digital marketing in the contexts of emerging economies operates under mixed logics: while contemporary tools are adopted, traditional dynamics are maintained that diminish their effectiveness. This raises methodological and strategic factors that must be addressed quickly. The limitations of the study include the application of a non-probabilistic sample and a restricted territorial focus, which minimizes the generalization of the results. As a future line of research, it is proposed to develop comparative studies between different intersectoral realities and at the Ecuadorian level.

## Author Contributions

Georlibeth Denisse Florencia Olaya: [Conceptualization, investigation, methodology, visualization, writing& original draft writing review & editing](#)

Ercilia M. Franco Cedeño: [Formal analysis, project management, writing, review, editing, & supervision](#)

Jorge M. Cueva Estrada: [Data curation, review and editing , supervision](#)

Nicolas A. Sumba Nacipucha: [Data curation, writing, review and editing, supervision](#)

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The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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