

ORIGINAL

Digital Marketing Strategies in Hospitality: Characterization Applied to Hotel Perla Verde

Estrategias de marketing digital en hotelería: caracterización aplicada al Hotel Perla Verde

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: tourism has established itself as a globally dynamic economic sector, driven by digital transformation and the need for hospitality businesses to adapt to new consumer environments. In this context, digital marketing emerges as a strategic tool to enhance brand visibility and competitiveness.

Objective: to characterize the digital marketing strategies of Hotel Perla Verde in Ecuador.

Method: a cross-sectional descriptive observational study was conducted in March 2022. A total of 200 individuals over 18 years old participated, selected through purposive sampling, including current guests and potential clients identified via social media. Data were collected through a digital survey and analyzed using absolute and relative frequency tables.

Results: 63,5 % of respondents received updates about the hotel through Facebook. 38,5 % preferred content related to special offers and discounts. 36 % visited the website frequently, while 42,5 % had a neutral opinion about it. Only 35,5 % had contacted the hotel via social media, and 27,5 % had participated in promotions. 45,5 % rated customer service as good, and 30,5 % suggested improving the quality of digital content.

Conclusions: Hotel Perla Verde's marketing strategy was characterized by broad user interaction through social media, especially Facebook. Data show regular access to the institution's content by clients, with a tendency toward satisfaction with published material and a generally positive perception of digital customer service quality.

Keywords: Tourism; Hospitality; Digital Marketing; Positioning; Social Media; Strategy; Loyalty.

RESUMEN

Introducción: el turismo ha consolidado su relevancia como sector económico global, impulsado por la transformación digital y la necesidad de adaptación de las empresas hoteleras a nuevos entornos de consumo. En este contexto, el marketing digital se posiciona como herramienta estratégica para fortalecer la visibilidad y competitividad de las marcas.

Objetivo: caracterizar las estrategias de marketing digital del Hotel Perla Verde en Ecuador.

Método: se realizó un estudio observacional descriptivo de corte transversal en marzo de 2022. Participaron 200 individuos mayores de 18 años, seleccionados mediante muestreo intencional, incluyendo huéspedes actuales y potenciales clientes identificados a través de redes sociales. La recolección de datos se efectuó mediante encuesta digital y los resultados se analizaron en tablas de frecuencia absoluta y relativa.

Resultados: el 63,5 % de los encuestados se actualiza sobre el hotel a través de Facebook. El 38,5 % prefiere contenidos sobre ofertas y descuentos. El 36 % visita frecuentemente la página web, aunque el 42,5 % mantiene una opinión neutral sobre ella. Solo el 35,5 % ha contactado al hotel por redes sociales y el 27,5 % ha participado en promociones. El 45,5 % valoró la atención como buena, mientras que el 30,5 % sugirió mejorar la

calidad del contenido digital.

Conclusiones: la estrategia de marketing del Hotel Perla Verde se caracterizó por una marcada interacción con usuarios a través de redes sociales, en especial Facebook, con datos que evidencian acceso regular al contenido de la institución por parte de los clientes, con tendencia a la satisfacción con el contenido publicado y percepción buena de la calidad del servicio de atención digital.

Palabras clave: Turismo; Hotelería; Marketing Digital; Posicionamiento; Redes Sociales; Estrategia; Fidelización.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the grouping of activities carried out by individuals on trips to places other than their place of origin, with the aim of satisfying needs related to culture, leisure, and health, as well as participating in business meetings, conventions, or corporate events.⁽¹⁾ According to the World Tourism Organization, this activity became in 1993, the world's leading economic sector, ahead of energy, was the automotive sector,

among others.⁽²⁾ The hotel industry is a branch of tourism that is currently growing worldwide and undergoing a period of significant change and evolution due to the emergence of new technologies.⁽²⁾

Brands and companies in the tourism sector are forced to adapt and reinvent themselves to meet the demands of an increasingly digitized public that constitutes a new market. Today, *marketing* has emerged as an essential tool for companies, enabling the commercialization and positioning of brands.^(3,4,5) *Marketing* is defined as the science and art of attracting, retaining, and growing the number of profitable customers. In the case of tourism, it is projected to promote companies in the hotel sector, leisure venues, restaurants, transportation companies, and other public bodies.⁽⁶⁾

Digital marketing consists of applying commercial strategies to technological resources and digital media to achieve direct, personal communication that generates a response from consumers.⁽⁷⁾ Digital marketing is a form of "online marketing" used by new digital media and advertising channels such as the internet and mobile phones, which, thanks to technological advances, allow services or products to be introduced in a personalized way, with the ability to measure what is happening at every moment and at every contact, and in turn, develop ideal and unbeatable experiences for customers.⁽⁸⁾

In an environment where consumer preferences are highly influenced by the level of access to digital information, the application of digital marketing has become an indispensable element in the offering of any product or service.⁽⁶⁾

The author agrees with other researchers that digital marketing plays a vital role in a business's commercial dynamics, as customers can learn about offers, promotions, and new products without physically visiting a store or seeking help from sales staff.⁽⁹⁾ Brands that establish meaningful interactions with their customers are considered to experience greater growth and success in the market.⁽³⁾

Digital media such as websites, blogs, and social networks such as Facebook and Instagram has not only had a significant impact on the development of social relationships since its emergence, but they have also had a strong influence at the commercial level, especially in terms of the level of interaction between companies and their customers, as well as in the way

products and services are promoted.⁽⁶⁾

73 % of travelers use online resources to choose their destination, and 86 % use them to choose their accommodation. 10 Studies report that in 2020, investment in virtual advertising increased by 6 %.⁽³⁾

There are three dimensions to digital marketing: content marketing, social media marketing, and email marketing. Content marketing focuses on attracting and retaining consumers by creating and promoting content that is relevant to them. Social media marketing focuses on the interaction between the company and consumers on social media and other digital platforms. Email marketing uses email to communicate with customers through strategies such as transactional, newsletter, and promotional emails.⁽³⁾ These are applied depending on the objectives of each company and the behavior of its target customers.

Market knowledge, customer perceptions, and the identification of specific segments are closely related to a hotel brand's positioning. It is essential to understand how consumers view the brand and adapt to changes in competitors' perceptions and preferences.⁽³⁾

In light of the above, this research aimed to characterize Hotel Perla Verde's digital *marketing* strategies in Ecuador.

METHOD

A descriptive cross-sectional observational study was conducted in March 2022 to characterize Hotel Perla Verde's digital marketing strategies in Babahoyo, Ecuador.

The universe consisted of guests at the time of the research and potential customers identified through the center's digital platforms. A total of 200 participants over the age of 18 who agreed to participate in the study were included through purposive sampling, of which:

Half were hotel customers at the time of data collection.

The other half were users identified as potential customers who interacted with the center's social media or who had stayed at the center at some point.

In this way, a tool was developed to collect the relevant data. It was designed with single-answer questions and had the following structure:

Request for informed consent, brief explanation of the project, and instructions on how to complete the questionnaire.

General information: gender, age, and whether or not staying at the hotel.

About the visibility and positioning of the center: means of information about the institution, preferred type of content, frequency of visits to the website, opinion about the website, activities of interest to do at the hotel, suggestions about the hotel's digital content, assessment of the service received, participation in contests or promotions on the hotel's social networks.

The survey was administered digitally via Google Forms. The link was shared with participants, and their questionnaire responses were automatically stored in Google Drive. The data were downloaded in Microsoft Excel spreadsheet format and grouped into absolute and relative frequency tables, which facilitated the analysis and interpretation of the results.

The survey was conducted anonymously, so it is not possible to identify any of the participants. In addition, permission was requested from the hotel's management to carry out the project.

RESULTS

Male participants predominated (52,5 %), the most common age was 29 to 38 years ($n=61$; 30,5 %), and 69 % of respondents had stayed at the hotel at some point. (table 1)

General data	Subclassification	No.	%
Gender	Male	105	52,5
	Female	95	47,5
Age	18 - 28	40	20
	29 - 38	61	30,5
	39 - 48	29	14,5
	49 - 58	33	16,5
	59 or more	37	18,5
Hotel stay	Yes	138	69
	No	62	31

Table 2 shows that among respondents, Facebook was the most popular medium (63,5 %), the content they preferred to see on the hotel's social media was related to special offers and discounts, 36 % admitted to visiting the institution's website frequently, while 42,5 % remained neutral about its features. The most suggested activity was live shows, with a relative frequency of 45,5 %.

Variable	Subclassification	No.	%
Means of information used to obtain updates on the institution	Facebook	127	63,5
	Instagram	38	19
	Website	22	11
	TikTok	13	6,5
Content you prefer to see on the hotel's social media	Special offers and discounts	77	38,5
	Informative content (travel tips)	63	31,5
	Photos and videos of events	31	15,5
	Instagram and Facebook stories	29	14,5

Frequency of visits to the website	Never	17	8,5
	Almost never	42	21
	Sometimes	51	25,5
	Frequently	72	36
	Always	18	9
Opinion about the Website	Very dissatisfied	13	6,5
	Dissatisfied	34	17
	Neutral	85	42,5
	Satisfied	51	25,5
	Very satisfied	17	8,5
Activities suggested at the hotel	Spa and massage	57	28,5
	Tours and hiking	52	26
	Live shows	91	45,5

It was found that only 35,5 % had contacted the hotel through social media and 27,5 % had participated in hotel contests or promotions on these platforms. The quality of customer service through social media was rated as fair by 21,5 %, while 30,5 % agreed that the quality of digital content needed to be improved. (table 3)

Table 3. Distribution of respondents according to digital interaction with the institution				
Variable	Subclassification	No.	%	
Contact with the institution through social media	Yes	71	35,5	
	No	129	64,5	
Participation in hotel contests or promotions on social media	Yes	55	27,5	
	No	145	72,5	
Assessment of the quality of customer service received	Poor	18	9	
	Fair	43	21,5	
	Good	91	45,5	
	Very good	32	16	
	Excellent	16	8	
Suggestions regarding the hotel's digital content	Implement testimonials on the website	21	10,5	
	Improve content quality	61	30,5	
	Implement attractive and responsive design	36	18	
	Request reviews	39	19,5	
	Improve site speed	43	21,5	

DISCUSSION

Adapting to digital *marketing* is essential to avoid disappearing and, in turn, ensure relevance in a competitive business environment.⁽³⁾ The more a company relies on the use of digital marketing in its business, the more significant its impact on brand promotion and positioning.⁽¹¹⁾

Del Aguila Llaque, in his study, reports a predominance of participants aged 29 to 39, followed by 51 to 61, with various age profiles among current and potential customers. This partially aligns with the findings of the present study. The data reported in the literature vary, but the authors believe this is due to the characteristics of each hotel institution, as each service profile shapes the type of customer it attracts.

Cuellar Molina (1 argues that one of the main problems facing companies today is the failure to implement strategic digital *marketing* plans, stemming from a lack of knowledge about global trends for attracting, retaining, and increasing the number of customers in organizations. The internet is essential for brand visibility, given the considerable amount of time we spend online.⁽³⁾

There is currently a wide variety of digital media that can be used as digital *marketing* tools to promote

different sectors. Among the most effective and widely used, specifically for the tourism sector, are social networks.^(6,12) One study reports that more than half of its participants chose their accommodation based on recommendations from friends and family.⁽¹⁰⁾ Social media is a powerful tool for attracting customers and improving services, functioning not only as a means of dissemination and popularization, but also as a platform for customer feedback. However, its use is not yet widespread in third-world countries.

Unlike traditional *marketing*, social media improves the interaction between companies and their virtual customers, strengthening the relationship with business pages and making it easier for users to access products or services closer to their geographic area through market segmentation.⁽⁹⁾

Some of the barriers to this form of promotion or marketing in underdeveloped countries include a lack of specialized personnel, the creation and proper use of networks, society's adaptation to change, and scarce investment, all of which prevent adequate planning and timely execution of digital marketing processes.⁽¹⁾ The root of the problem, in the authors' opinion, lies in the poor knowledge and investment of governments in the digital revolution, which currently governs all spheres of the economy and services in the world.

Ponce et al.⁽⁹⁾ agree with Caicedo and Galarza, who find that efficient management of the internet and the use of technological tools as a strength for the positioning of tourism companies in a province of Ecuador.

According to MDG Advertising,⁽¹⁰⁾ consumers trust digital channels throughout the entire process of purchasing tourism products: 71 % of North American travelers use them to plan, 79 % to buy, and 83 % to book. Torres Gómez,⁽⁷⁾ found that 43 % of his respondents rated the variety of services offered as "very important," while 68 % rated the quality of customer service similarly.

Today, companies must keep up with their customers and design their digital strategies in a more planned, controlled, and executed manner to achieve their objectives. These objectives can be achieved at low cost, as this *marketing* strategy enables more straightforward campaigns than traditional ones. Paying attention to customer opinions and needs means improving services and attracting a population that could become future guests.

Implementing a strategy that focuses on guest service enhances the value of the hotel, providing unique experiences that differentiate it from other hotels to build customer loyalty.⁽¹³⁾

A digital strategy must undoubtedly encompass all relevant spaces where the target group interacts, aiming to influence opinions and operators, combining design, creativity, profitability, and analysis to deliver a return on investment.⁽⁸⁾ Some assert that the basis of a strategy's success lies in the characteristics of its *marketing* plan, which details the different actions that must be carried out in the marketing area to achieve the objectives set, and also indicates the financial resources and personnel that will be required to carry out these activities.⁽⁷⁾

The use of digital *marketing* in tourism organizations enables a qualitative leap in value chain management, secures competitive advantage, and builds customer loyalty to the brand.⁽²⁾ Brand positioning is essential for any company because it defines how it wants to be seen by the market and by customers. It is about creating an image that sets it apart from the competition. This process requires the brand to be associated with specific characteristics so that people identify it with those characteristics.^(3,14) The use of a logo, creating a typical and characteristic image that encompasses and defines the center, and its implementation on all the institution's digital sites, are ways of standardizing and improving the online projection of a particular service to be offered.

Among the tools used by digital marketing are interactive websites, email *marketing*, blogs, social networks, online advertising, and search engine optimization, among others; these allow for the efficient management of information for the entire target audience, offering advertisements at the right time to the right person, as well as maintaining a direct dialogue with users.⁽⁷⁾ Digital media management only works when clear and specific objectives are defined for each channel used. Therefore, companies need to set their goals in advance so they know which medium is most appropriate for their needs. This is where marketing plays a fundamental role.⁽⁶⁾

A study reports that the most used social network among the people surveyed is Facebook, with 32 %. Sixty-four percent of respondents indicated that the information found on social media is average, 19 % said it is poor, while 15 % said it is good.⁽⁸⁾ Working with social media is essential to give a hotel institution a face, considering that the digitization of the younger generations makes them the primary audience and sometimes the most demanding.

Many companies make the mistake of thinking that incorporating digital *marketing* is as simple as building a website or creating a profile on any social network, without taking into account that, as in traditional marketing, it is essential to consider aspects such as the type of content to be generated according to the tastes and preferences of the selected target market, as well as the image that the company wishes to project. This situation means that in some cases, digital media are not used optimally and adequately.⁽⁶⁾

One alternative worth mentioning is paid positioning strategies, which have so far been developed in the form of advertisements and are known as YouTube Ads, Facebook Ads, Instagram Ads, TikTok Ads, LinkedIn Ads, Twitter/X Ads, and Google Ads, which can adjust the transmission according to the target audience, time, location, and media.⁽¹⁵⁾ However, the authors agree with other researchers that these "less natural" forms of

promotion are sometimes not well received by the public. The success of a marketing program lies in evaluating the target customer and, therefore, adjusting the plan to their characteristics.

Among the main limitations of this research are its descriptive nature, the fact that variables were not correlated, and that no modifications or intervention plans were made based on the results.

CONCLUSIONS

The marketing strategy of the Perla Verde hotel was characterized by marked interaction with users through social networks, especially Facebook, with data showing regular access to the institution's content by customers, a tendency toward satisfaction with the published content, and a good perception of the quality of the digital customer service.

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