

Digital Marketing: the link for hostel arrival in times of pandemic for improving Internet user satisfaction

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the tourism sector, where most hostels require digital marketing strategies for their reactivation. Thus, the objective of this paper is to diagnose the current situation of short-stay hostels regarding digital marketing management during the Covid-19 pandemic in Zone 3, in Ecuador. The methodological framework is based on an exploratory research through a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the information collected through a structured survey to a total of 303 short-stay hostels. The results include three sections that show the situational analysis of tourist hostels, a cluster analysis and an AMOS confirmatory factor analysis; where the most relevant aspects of digital marketing management during the pandemic are detailed.

Keywords: Digital marketing, tourism, hostels, digital media, Covid-19.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemics caused negative impacts on the economy of all countries, especially in Latin America. Since the registration of the first patient with the virus to this day, more than 10 million people were diagnosed with coronavirus and more than 500,000 of them died from complications of the virus (Roser, 2020). For this reason, the authorities established restrictive mobility and biosecurity measures, which generated economic losses in businesses, especially in the hotel industry, which was affected by the virus (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020), and is vulnerable to unexpected threats such as epidemics, natural disasters and terrorist attacks (Chan & Lam, 2013).

In this sense, the global tourism sector has been one of the most affected, since the travel and tourism index decreased by 32.26% in 2020,

due to the fact that its activity model is based on the free movement between countries and due to the restrictions in each of them, this model is unsustainable (Anguera, Aznar, & Vives, 2020). Therefore, it is essential for the tourism sector to develop strategies for its reactivation, not only government support, but also the use of different means to attract local tourists in the first instance and then foreign tourists.

In addition, it requires strategies oriented to the support of governmental entities such as: the gradual repayment of long-term debts, reduction of labor costs, subsidies for personnel training, tax reduction or simplification of payment procedures, and other alliances (Sun, 2020; Wu, 2020). Thus, joint work between the tourism sector and governmental entities is relevant to reactivate each country's own economy.

Enterprise management strategies can minimize potential hazards and accelerate the recovery process (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019) where digital marketing strategies support in vital processes such as: customer service and improving communication between tourist and hostels (Garcia et al. , 2021). But they require trained personnel in areas related to the digital environment (Korstanje, 2021) , defined actions for the efficient provision of all tourism services and technological solutions to provide a service without physical contact (Chango et al., 2019; Duarte et al., 2021).

In this context, digital marketing supports in the redefinition of the hotel business model, where the use of multichannel and multibusiness platforms intervene to potentiate their economic activities (Rivera & Pizam, 2021) . Thus, the use of spaces in hotels and hostels for product demonstration for online shopping, and exhibitions of e-commerce products, as in the Hotel Y Resort Wanda (Chango et al. , 2019). Similarly, food delivery service through e-commerce platforms such as IGH Hotels and Jinling Hotels (Khmiadashvili, 2019) , as well as live broadcasts to motivate and encourage local visits and travel (Acosta, Sandoya, & Gómez, 2020) and updating channels to contact, attract and sell to customers (Amorim et al., 2021).

One of the essential aspects of the analysis of the impact of Covid-19 are cleaning protocols within hostels to minimize the spread of the virus when touching commonly used surfaces (Zemke, Neal, & Kirsch, 2015; Jiang & Wen, 2020). Therefore, the use of ozone purifiers, as well as frequent disinfection of spaces in hostels is essential to ensure the safety of tourists. Relevant studies consider hygiene and cleanliness as a determining factor in the selection of a hotel or hostel for travelers (Lockyer, 2005; Gu & Ryan, 2008; Park et al., 2019).

An example of this aspect is Huazhu's Hanting brand in China, which launched 130 post-epidemic cleaning operations in its hotels and publicly invited customers to monitor the entire cleaning process through its website and social networks, with the aim of reassuring customers

about the safety of the hotel (Hao, Xiao, & Chon, 2020) . This supports the company's branding and fosters a positive perception of a social and health issue.

In addition to this, the importance of socialization of each hotel's own measures, such as distancing, maximum number of people in enclosed spaces and the use of other implements such as masks, as well as health education programs and the support of technological tools for customer service without physical contact is also important (Mariani & Perez, 2020) . An example of this activity was carried out in Korea, where a hotel chain installed new hygiene equipment and offered employees education programs on the proper handling of biosafety implements and protocols to ensure the safety of tourists. Similarly, a massive socialization was carried out through social networks on the measures adopted by the chain (Nguyen, Imamura, & Iuchi, 2017). In this way, the use of digital media becomes an opportunity to generate a closer relationship between the brand and the consumer.

Consequently, Covid-19 leads to a negative impact on the economy, especially in the hotel tourism sector where digital marketing management is essential to survive and achieve an optimal level of competitiveness. Thus, this research aims to diagnose the current situation of short-stay hostels regarding digital marketing management during the Covid-19 pandemic in Zone 3, in Ecuador, to subsequently analyze it and define the necessary components for the implementation of digital marketing strategies in the Ecuadorian context.

2. Methodology

This research is of an exploratory nature to diagnose the management of digital marketing during the Covid-19 pandemics in tourist hostels in the Ecuadorian context. It is mainly based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the information collected through a structured survey with 25 questions, including

10 multiple choice questions and 15 Likert scale questions.

The population of this study focuses on the 603 tourism enterprises that carry out lodging activities for short stays in Zone 3, which comprises the provinces of: Cotopaxi, Chimborazo, Pastaza and Tungurahua, based

on data published by the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC, 2021). In addition, a convenience sampling was applied due to the accessibility of the subjects, selecting 50% of the population and stratified for each province, with a total sample of 303 companies (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Population and Sample*

Economic sectors of Ecuador	National	882,766
Service Companies	National	393,273
	National	5,006
	Zone 3	603
		50%
I5510 Lodging activities for short stays.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cotopaxi • Chimborazo • Pastaza • Tungurahua 	237

Source: INEC (2021)

A pilot test was conducted on 20% of the sample, equivalent to 61 hostels, and a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.81 was obtained, showing that the questionnaire is good, reliable and suitable for application to the entire sample. The data collection period was from May 3 to June 31, 2021 through online surveys with the Google Drive program. The database was then exported to the IBS Statistics SPSS version 23 software for statistical analysis.

In this sense, a cluster analysis was performed to determine the profile of the hostels regarding the management of digital marketing in the Covid-19 pandemic through Ward's method and at a rescaled distance, which allowed establishing the homogeneity of the characteristics among the clusters analyzed. At the same time, a factor analysis with the KMO test or Kaiser-Meyer-Olki Measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity was used to verify the applicability of this analysis.

On the other hand, a confirmatory factor analysis was executed in the AMOS extension of SPSS software to establish the principal components involving the ideal management of digital marketing during the pandemic in short-stay inns. In turn, it used the Varimax rotation method with Kaiser normalization for construct validation.

3. Results

The development of this study included three sections: a) situational analysis of tourist hostels, b) cluster analysis of short-stay hostels and c) AMOS confirmatory factor analysis of tourist hostels in Zone 3-Ecuador; where the most relevant aspects of digital marketing management during the pandemic are detailed.

A. Situation analysis of tourist hostels

Most of the people who manage the hostels are men (65%), between 40 and 49 years of age (42.5%), with higher education (41.5%). Therefore, the profile of the management level is prepared in certain management areas that allow them to adequately manage the establishments.

The highest representation of tourist hostels is found in the province of Tungurahua with 62%, followed far behind by Chimborazo (15%), Cotopaxi (14%) and Pastaza (9%). It is evident that the largest number of hostels are located in cantons that are characterized by tourism, such as Baños (26.5%) for its landscapes and sports activities in nature, and Ambato (14%) for being the center of commercial activities.

Although 89.5% of the hostels know what digital marketing is, during the pandemic 93% were forced to make changes in their strategies

and focus their efforts on digital media, as the survival of their businesses was at risk. Therefore, their strategy was based on social networks as channels for tourism promotion and advertising (97%); however, there are strategies that are not implemented such as influencer marketing (98%) because they are considered high cost and SEO and SEM strategies (94.5%) because not all hostels have websites.

In this sense, it is inferred that budget is a predominant factor when choosing and implementing digital marketing strategies (98%), where social networks are considered an accessible opportunity to promote tourism products and services (72.50%) compared to other traditional media such as radio or press (see Figure 1). However, it also stands out that the hostels do not use web pages because they consider their management to be complicated due to their computer skills and prefer social networks.

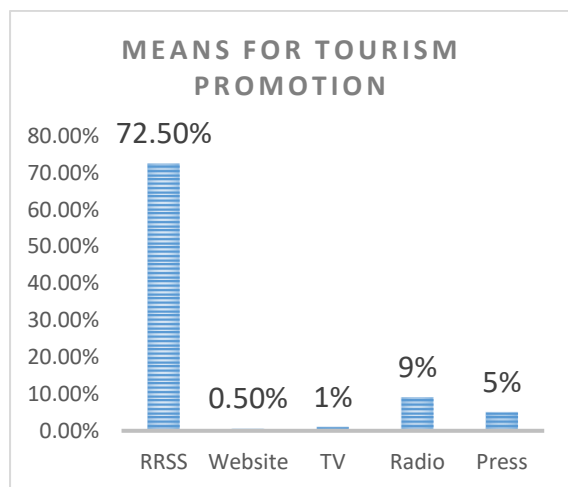


Figure 1. Means for tourism promotion

In this context, Facebook is the social network most used by hostels to promote and advertise tourism products and services with 83.50%, followed by WhatsApp with 43%, as it is used as a channel for serving people (see Figure 2). However, there are social networks that can be used to capture young audiences such as Instagram and Tik Tok; as well as the creation of segments on YouTube that allow the creation of a virtual community.

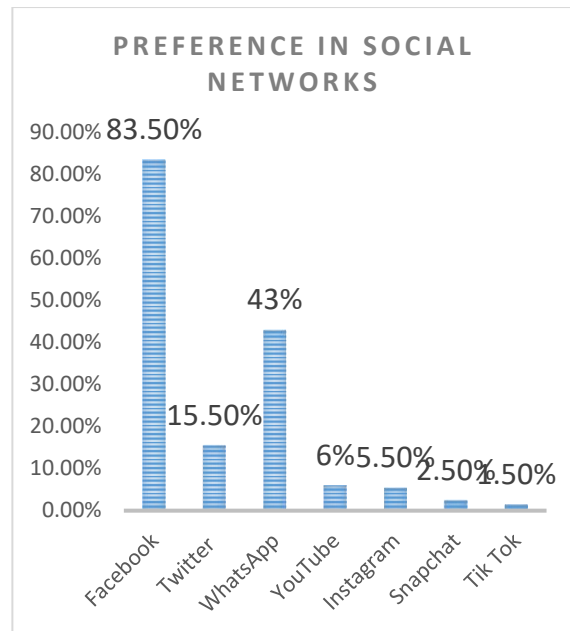


Figure 2. Preference in social networks

On the other hand, the management of this type of strategy leads to a series of benefits or advantages for the hostels, such as: attracting domestic and foreign tourists (55.5%), the opportunity to segment the market and define the profile of the current tourist (49%), the generation of a virtual community (49%) and a results-based management orientation (41.5%). Consequently, the management level recognizes the importance of digital marketing management and constant training on these rapidly evolving topics.

In addition, the responsiveness in digital media of the analyzed hostels is regular (63.5%), since not all hostels follow up on tourist satisfaction with respect to the services offered (54.5%) and do not have an optimal management of complaints or concerns of tourists in digital media (9.5%) since they do not have customer service tools or social network managers. For these reasons, hostels require the implementation of tools or software to support the operation of the establishments, reduce costs and time invested.

An essential aspect for the hostels is staff training in areas related to Marketing or Marketing, as they point out that these academic profiles contribute to directing the appropriate strategies for the establishments. However, most of the people surveyed

indicated that they are in charge of their own execution (49%), or in turn, they delegate it to family members (44%), such as their sons or daughters who are studying similar careers.

It is worth noting that among the measures adopted by hostels to face the pandemic are: dismissal of personnel (52.5%), promotions or discounts (63%) and the implementation of digital marketing strategies (50.5%). On the contrary, they have not opted for paid advertising on social networks (2.5%) since they do not have the budget to do so and have been forced to offer other tourism products (42.5%) and even to change the business activity and orient it to the commercialization of food and aseptic products (11.5%). Thus, it is evident that the impact of Covid-19 on the economic growth of hostels has been seriously affected, and they have opted for activities unrelated to tourism in order to overcome the crisis.

Once the authorities approved the reopening of tourism activities, the hostels adopted biosecurity measures to ensure the safety of tourists; thus, the use of masks and distancing is mandatory in the facilities (95%) and the hostels provide alcohol-gel dispensers and trays or disinfection arches to minimize the entry of the virus (64.5%), although less frequently ozone purifiers for air improvement (10%).

Similarly, social networks were used to socialize these biosecurity measures (62%) and specially to normalize the behavior of tourists within the facilities (52.5%). Thus, social media become tools for disseminating information and promoting tourism services or products.

b. Cluster analysis of short-stay hostels in Zone 3-Ecuador

From a cluster analysis, they were grouped into 9 subgroups and 2 groups were selected at a distance of 7 points, which have greater similarity or homogeneity regarding the management of digital marketing during the pandemic in short-stay hostels in Zone 3 - Ecuador (see Figure 1).

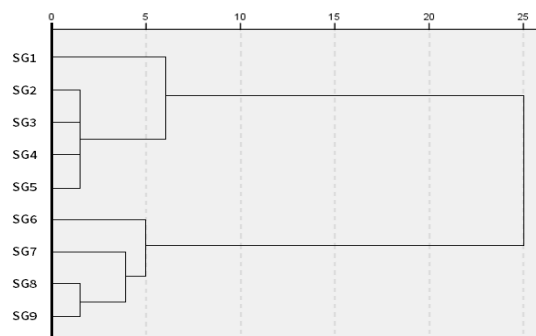


Figure 3. *Tourism clusters according to digital marketing management in the Covid-19 pandemic.*

Source: IBM Statistics SPSS version 23 software

In addition, the comparison of averages shows that group 1 frequently uses technological tools that allow the operation of their companies, as well as the application of digital marketing strategies. Although, most of the people in charge of executing them are the owners, since they have had to take courses, receive training and train themselves.

It should be noted that group 1 prefers digital media to promote their tourism services, while group 2 still prefers traditional media such as radio and press. It is evident that short-stay hostels are still in a process of transition from traditional to digital marketing, where knowledge of these issues is essential for the growth and consolidation of their business in the Ecuadorian market.

Regarding the management of Covid-19, both clusters implement biosecurity measures in the establishments, such as the installation of signage, alcohol-gel dispensers and disinfection trays. They also point out the importance of managing information content in digital media, although many hostels do not do so.

Consequently, in the factor analysis, the KMO test or Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure was performed with a result of 0.767 or its equivalent at 0.8, indicating that the data are valid. And the Barlett's test of sphericity with a significance value at 0.000, thus denoting that digital marketing supports the operation of short-stay hostels during the Covid-19 pandemic (see Table 2).

Table 2. *KMO and Bartlett's Test*

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		,767
Bartlett's test for sphericity	Approx. chi-square gl	836,375
	Sig.	,000

Source: IBM Statistics SPSS version 23 software

In that sense, Figure 4 shows the clusters analyzed, where cluster 1 reflects a lower level of dispersion and possess essential characteristics of digital marketing that they have applied during the Covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, it is evident that short-stay hostels in cluster 2 require special attention in the implementation of strategies aligned to digital media, such as social networks and websites.

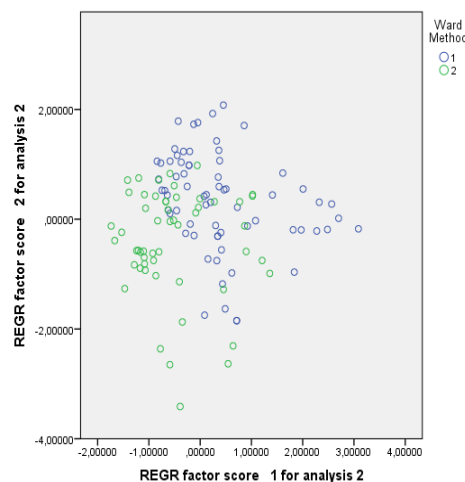


Figure 2. *Tourism clusters according to digital marketing management in the Covid-19 pandemics.*

Source: IBM Statistics SPSS version 23 software

c. Confirmatory factor analysis AMOS of tourist hostels in Zone 3-Ecuador

Based on the exploratory factor analysis, a confirmatory factor analysis was carried out using the principal component extraction method and the Varimax rotation method with Kaiser normalization, where 3 key components are denoted in the proposed model (see Table 3), oriented to Digital Marketing during Covid-19, tourism promotion registered in this period of analysis and Tourist Behavior.

Table 3. *Rotated component matrix*

Items	Component	
	1	
7. Digital marketing knowledge		,736
8. Changes in digital marketing strategy during the pandemic.		,732
9. Use of digital marketing strategies in pandemics		
	,842	
10. Types of digital marketing strategies		,744
11. Importance of implementing digital marketing strategies in pandemics.		,507
12. Frequency of use of media to promote tourism products		,603
		,875
13.1. Frequency of use of digital media to promote tourism products		
13.2. Frequency of use of traditional media to promote tourism products		,617
14. Digital Marketing Actions in the Covid-19 Pandemic		,868
15. Report the company's digital media responsiveness during the pandemic.		,586
16. Follow-up on tourist satisfaction with respect to the services offered		,568

17. Optimal handling of complaints or concerns in digital media.	,595	
18. Use of technological tools	,677	
19. Trained personnel in the Marketing area	,562	
20. Execution of digital marketing strategies		,763
21. Designation of a specialist person to execute the digital marketing strategies.	,531	
22. Support from financial or government entities during the pandemic for business reactivation.	,571	
23. Business Actions to Address the Pandemic	,544	
24. Biosecurity measures to address the pandemic	,792	

Source: IBM Statistics SPSS version 23 software

In this context, both Table 3 and Figure 4 show that the first component highlights the digital marketing actions that tourist hostels require to cope with the pandemic (0.87), such as the use of mailing campaigns, blogs, attractive and creative formats in social networks. It is considered necessary to use strategies that adapt to the current needs of tourists (0.84), to encourage people to visit, whether they are locals or foreigners.

The use of digital media to advertise and promote tourism products and services leads to an approach with people (0.88); especially in social networks of greater interaction in the Ecuadorian environment such as: Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and Instagram, and youth networks such as Tik Tok, which have a potential growth to capture new market segments. For which, one advantage is the use of technological tools that support these processes (0.68), especially social network managers, monitoring and customer service.

On the other hand, biosecurity measures to confront the pandemic play a primordial role in guaranteeing the safety of tourists (0.79), which leads to the frequent use of disinfection arcs, surface cleaning and ozone purifiers, as well as alcohol-gel dispensers.

In the second component, the importance of executing digital marketing strategies (0.76) with a still persistent combination of traditional media such as radio and press (0.62) is denoted. Thus, it is essential that tourist hostels unify efforts in both traditional and digital media to increase the reach of their advertising strategies.

The third component involves the digital marketing knowledge necessary for optimal performance of these digital activities (0.74) and changes in strategy during the pandemic to deal with negative events or situations for hostels (0.73). For example, during the last year the health crisis affected businesses, especially those focused on tourism, therefore, knowledge about the optimal management of digital media supports such businesses to subsist and remain in the market.

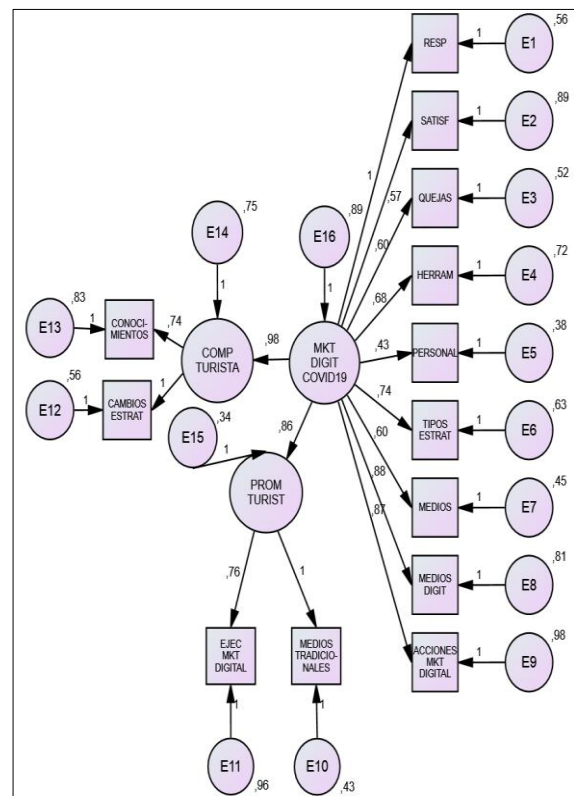


Figure 3. Analysis of the proposed model

Source: IBM Statistics SPSS version 23 software

In this sense, when plotted through structural matrices, the proposed model has a CMIN of 0.006, showing that the correlations are

plausible and the hypothesis of the researchers is accepted since it is greater than 0.05.

H1= Digital marketing affects the permanence in the market of tourist hostels during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition, a CFI greater than 0.9 was obtained, which indicates an adequate model fit and a similar TLI, which expresses the proportion of variance explained by the factorial model. Also, the RMSEA or approximation error is close to 0, showing a good model fit (see Table 4).

Table 4. *Model specifications*

	Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF
CMIN	Default model	28	258.603		0.08	4.105
	Saturated model	91	0	0		
	Independence model		584.51		0	7.494
	Model	NFI	RFI	IFI	TLI	IFC
		Delta1	rho1	Delta2	rho2	
Baseline Comparisons	Default model	0.558	0.452	0.625	0.922	0.914
	Saturated model	1		1		1
	Independence model	0	0	0	0	0
	Model	RMSEA	LO 90	HI 90	PCLOSE	
RMSEA	Default model	0.025	0.109	0.141	0	
	Independence model	0.181	0.167	0.194	0	

Source: IBM Statistics SPSS version 23 software

the spaces in the hostels that were not used due to the pandemic and rely on technological tools to expand their range of products.

4. Discussion

According to Benítez et al. (2020); Gössling et al. (2020); and Chan & Lam (2013), the tourism sector has been seriously affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, since governments in their effort to reduce the levels of contagion, were forced to establish strict mobility and biosecurity measures, which led to closures and stoppages in tourism businesses. For these reasons, this research shows that the hostels implemented digital marketing strategies that allowed them to survive and maintain during the health crisis.

However, several hostels even had to broaden their product offerings and even change their activity completely, focusing on the commercialization of cleaning, grooming and food products. Actions that involve the use of platforms or mobile applications for purchasing and distribution, as mentioned by (Khmiadashvili, 2019) . In this way, they use

On the other hand, the study establishes that micro and small companies have focused on the use of media such as the Internet and radio to advertise their products or services (Chango & Lara, 2020) . However, in this research it was evidenced that digital media such as social networks play a primary role for the promotion of tourism services, especially they use Facebook and WhatsApp. Although a small percentage still uses traditional media such as radio and press to advertise the products or services of the hostels.

From another approach, the pandemic brings with it an opportunity for growth, development and innovation for companies, especially for hotels and hostels, as pointed out by (Garrido et al., 2021); since digital marketing strategies support a balance between survival and profitability of small businesses through digital media and technological tools that contribute to the functioning and operation of the

establishments. (Nozdreva & Churakova, 2021).

That is why, in this study, the pandemics brought with it negative effects, but also from a positive approach, a renewal in the way of communicating with tourists and promoting the services or products they offer. For this, it requires the establishment of strategies and frequent monitoring of the actions carried out in digital media.

In addition, a relevant aspect in hostels is cleanliness and cleanliness in the establishments, since it is an important factor when booking a room (Lockyer, 2005; Gu & Ryan, 2008; Park et al. , 2019). Criterion that coincides with the results obtained in this study, since tourists in the Ecuadorian environment are informed in social networks of the measures of cleanliness, cleanliness and biosecurity that hostels implement to receive tourists and influences the preference for selectivity. Thus, the feeling of security is prevalent when choosing a hostel and visiting its facilities.

5. Conclusions

During the Covid-19 pandemic, digital marketing represents an opportunity for survival for tourist hostels in the Ecuadorian environment; since, despite the negative impact of the virus on the economy, it leads to innovation processes and the use of technological tools that support the operation of the establishments.

The hostels were forced to change their business strategies and use the so-called digital marketing to attract potential tourists and expand their market segments. However, they require the implementation of tools or software that support the operation of the establishments, to reduce costs and time invested, such as: specialized software for digital media attention, monitoring managers and digital tracking.

It is reflected that hostels are in a process of digital transformation, where knowledge related to digital marketing is essential for owners to perform such tasks optimally.

Therefore, the training and courses that, for example, government entities can provide to the tourism sector represent an opportunity to manage their businesses.

The most relevant components for an optimal implementation of digital marketing in short stay hostels in the Ecuadorian environment are focused on a balance between traditional and digital media for the promotion of tourism products or services; as well as a realistic definition of the strategies that can be chosen in each of them. For example: SEO and SEM strategies on their websites, use of influencers as key people of referencing and suggestion, content management and social networks according to the profile of the Ecuadorian media.

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