DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES AND ACQUISITION OF NEW CUSTOMERS FOR SMES IN SANTA ELENA PROVINCE

[1]JENIFFER GARCÍA-MENDOZA [2]WILMA GUERRERO-VILLEGAS

[1/2] Universidad Estatal Península de Santa Elena, Ecuador

1[ORCID: 0000-0003-2886-8998],

2[ORCID: 0000-0001-9028-9247],

jeniffer-mendoza@hotmail.com

Abstract: This study analyzes digital marketing strategies in SMEs from the Santa Elena Province, evaluating their impact on attracting and retaining customers, as well as on business growth. Methodology: Using a mixed-methods approach, 239 surveys answered by business owners were examined out of a total of 279 sent forms, along with 8 interviews with owners and marketing managers. Results: The findings indicate the effectiveness of digital channels such as social media, email, and web positioning. Strengthening online presence and the reach of SMEs in the local market significantly influences customer acquisition and satisfaction. Conclusions: Based on the results obtained, it is concluded that SMEs in Santa Elena adopt diverse digital marketing tactics based on size, focused on driving sales and customer service. Despite facing knowledge, competition, and resource constraints, they strive to adapt to the digital environment. This study provides insights into the implementation of digital marketing strategies in SMEs for improving competitiveness and business performance in the Santa Elena Province

Keywords: Digital marketing, SMEs, Customer acquisition, Effective strategies, Online presence

1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence and rapid expansion of the internet, with exponential levels, along with technological advances have modified the business models of companies, their relationship management with customers and the promotion and distribution channels of their products or services (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2016). In this scenario, digital marketing is considered a fundamental tool for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) for their survival and growth, in a business and socio-economic context that becomes increasingly competitive (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Digital marketing includes the use of digital channels and techniques aimed at better communicating the value of an offer to customers and attracting new customers (Ryan, 2016).

There are many studies, in the words of Tiago & Veríssimo, (2014) and Resnick et al., (2016), which have argued that digital marketing contributes to the development of SMEs, as long as a correct alignment of their commercial strategies is developed, with the specific characteristics of each product or service and the real needs of customers.

To some extent, and despite the advances in the study of digital marketing, it is a challenge for many SMEs, the design and implementation of digital marketing strategies, if one takes into account the limitation of resources, competencies and skills in the digital field by entrepreneurs (De Pelsmacker, 2018).

In this sense, this study seeks to analyze the digital marketing strategies used by SMEs in the Province of Santa Elena, an area where research on the subject is still scarce. By identifying successful practices and challenges faced by these companies, this work aims to contribute to knowledge on the subject and provide useful recommendations to improve the competitiveness and business performance of SMEs in the region.

At the Latin American level, therise of new technologies and access to them by increasingly broad segments of the population, together with the adoption of public policies on the democratization of the internet, by local and national authorities, have allowed digital marketing to have higher levels of growth (Moraes & Echeverría, 2016). Valdés, (2018) I consider that as a digital business ecosystem expands, in it the needs of highly effective marketing strategies, SMEs in the region increase.

Oliveira, Cortimiglia and Ghezzi (2017), highlighted the importance of digital marketing in SMEs in the region, this implies that companies must channel their efforts and resources into developing and maintaining a permanent and innovative online presence.   It should be noted that according to Medina and Montes (2015) in Colombia, and Avello and Vásquez-Parraga (2017) in Ecuador, they have shown that an adequate digital marketing plan designed and adapted to the needs of customers, allows to attract new customers, create loyalty programs and as a final result achieve a better positioning in the market.

However, despite the growing importance of digital marketing in Latin America, there is a significant gap in the academic literature on the implementation of digital marketing strategies in Latin American SMEs, especially in regions such as the Santa Elena Province. This research seeks to fill this gap and provide specific knowledge on the practices and challenges of digital marketing in SMEs in the region

State of the art

The beginning of the theme of digital marketing dates back to the 1990s, when the rise of the Internet allowed companies to start exploring new ways to promote their products and services through digital media (Rowley, 2008). Since then, digital marketing has experienced rapid growth and evolution, driven by technological advancement and mass adoption of mobile devices, social media, and e-commerce platforms (Kotler et al., 2016).

For Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, (2019). The state of the art of digital marketing is focused on a series of tools, techniques and channels for adequate corporate communication, as well as a convenite promotion and connection of SMEs with customers, in the digital world.

If trends based on academic production and also on professional practice are analyzed, it will be concluded that these trends point to segmentation and personalization with customers, all this based on communication, according to Kumar & Reinartz, (2018), in the measurement and analysis of results (Pfeiffer & Kumar,   2019), the increasing use of artificial intelligence tools and automation in marketing (Lovelock & Shankar, 2021), and the creation of omnichannel digital experiences for the customer (Melero et al., 2016).

For their part, Resnick et al., (2016),said that the state of the art identifies the levels of change and adaptation of digital marketing strategies to strengthen the high positioning of businesses. Finally, it involves the different challenges faced by SMEs when implementing digital marketing (De Pelsmacker, 2018).

Objectives and scope of the research

The study entitled "Digital marketing strategies and attracting new customers in SMEs in the Province of Santa Elena" has as its main objective to analyze how small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Province of Santa Elena use digital marketing to attract and retain customers. In addition, it seeks to identify the most effective practices and determine how these strategies impact the growth and development of SMEs in the region.

To achieve this objective, the research shall cover the following specific objectives:

a) Identify and characterize the digital marketing strategies adopted by SMEs in the Province of Santa Elena.

b) Analyze the results in the implementation of digital marketing strategies in relation to the attraction of new customers, loyalty and profitability.

c) Identify the key success factors in the implementation of digital marketing strategies in SMEs, including staff knowledge and skills, economic and technological resources, and adaptation to trends and changes in the digital environment.

d) Examine the barriers and challenges faced by SMEs when implementing digital marketing strategies and propose solutions to overcome these difficulties.

e) Propose recommendations to improve digital marketing strategies in SMEs in the Province of Santa Elena, based on the best practices identified and the specific needs of local companies.

The scope of the investigation

The study covers SMEs that have adopted digital marketing strategies in the province of St. Helena.

It is also expected that the conclusions obtained, as derived from the study, will be applicable to SMEs located in other regions and that share similar characteristics.

2. METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGIES OR MATERIALS AND METHODS

To carry out the study on digital marketing strategies and attracting new customers of SMEs in the Province of Santa Elena, the following methodological and material strategies were used:

Mixed methodological approach: The study combined quantitative and qualitative techniques, in order to understand in greater depth the use of digital marketing of SMEs in the province.

Selection of the sample: For the selection of the sample of SMEs s and considered several criteria such as the sector to which it belongs, time spent in the market, business line and level of adoption of digital marketing strategies.

Surveys: An online survey was applied to the owners and managers of digital marketing of the previously selected companies, the bank of questions revolved around digital marketing strategies, with use of channels and networks, their degree of effectiveness budget for digital marketing.

Interviews: 8 semi-structured interviews were conducted with owners and marketing managers, with the purpose of collecting first-line information on current digital marketing practices and understanding their problems and relevant solutions.

Data analysis: Data of quantitative nature were processed based on descriptive statistical techniques, while data of qualitative nature were analyzed according to the content by topic and its context.

Triangulation: For an adequate interpretation and validation of the data, it was necessary a triangulation of the data obtained both quantitative and qualitative, this was done in order to identify countriesand certain trends of digital marketing in SMEs

Sample calculation

Based on information from the Superintendence of Companies ofEcuador in the province of Santa Elena, 678 companies are registered, as of 2020. In the study, this information is referred to as the universe of study.

In order to establish the sample size, from the aforementioned universe of 678 companies, with a margin of 5% error and a confidence level of 95%, the following formula was used:

$$n = (Z^2 * p * (1 - p)) / E^2$$

Where: n = sample size Z = Z-value corresponding to the desired confidence level (1.96 for a 95% confidence level) p = estimated proportion of the population (usually assumed to be 0.5 when no prior information is available) E = margin of error (0.05 for a 5% error)

In the first instance, the sample size was calculated, regardless of the finite size of the universe (678 companies):

$$n = (1.96^2 * 0.5 * (1 - 0.5)) / 0.05^2 \quad n \approx 384.16$$

It is obtained by rounding that the sample size is 385 companies.

As the study universe is finite (678 companies), the sample size was adjusted with the following formula:

$$n\_ajustado = n / (1 + (n - 1) / N)$$

Where: n_ajustado = adjusted sample size n = previously calculated sample size (385) N = size of universe (678 companies)

$$n\_ajustado = 385 / (1 + (385 - 1) / 678) \quad n\_ajustado \approx 278.29$$

Finally, (with rounding), the adjusted sample size of 279 companies was obtained.

Therefore, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, a sample of 279 companies from the universe of 678 companies is required.

Criteria for inclusion in the selection of companies in the sample

In order to make an adequate selection of the companies to be surveyed, some inclusion criteria were taken into account. These criteria allow the sample to be more representative of the target population and therefore obtain more reliable results.

For the selection of companies in the sample of this study on digital marketing strategies and attracting new customers in SMEs in the province of Santa Elena, the following inclusion criteria were considered:

Table 1. Inclusion criteria for sample selection

Inclusion Committee	Description
Economic sector	Companies from specific economic sectors or all sectors present in the Province of Santa Elena.
Company size	Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, or a combination of different sizes of companies.
Geographical location	Companies located and operating within the Province of Santa Elena.
Digital Marketing Implementation	Companies that have implemented some form of digital marketing (social media, online advertising, email marketing, etc.).
Minimum operation time	Companies that have been in operation for a minimum period, such as at least one year or two years.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics

Table N°1 Business Location

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Business Location	C. Freedom	107	44,9%	44,9%	45,0%
	C. Salinas	52	21,8%	21,8%	66,8%
	C. Santa Elena	79	33,2%	33,2%	100,0%
	Total	238	100%	100%	

Source: Survey applied to people responsible for marketing decisions and the implementation of digital marketing strategies in SMEs in the province of Santa Elena.

From the results obtained, it can be established that approximately 5 out of 10 SMEs are located in the La Libertad Canton, 3 out of 10 in the Santa Elena Canton and only 2 out of 10 are located in the Salinas Canton.

Table N°2 Economic sector to which it belongs

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Economic sector	Agriculture	6	2,5%	2,5%	2,5%
	Commerce	112	47,1%	47,1%	49,6%
	Construction	15	6,3%	6,3%	55,9%
	Factory	2	0,8%	0,8%	56,7%
	Other	6	2,5%	2,5%	59,2%
	Services	64	26,9%	26,9%	86,1%
	Technology	22	9,2%	9,2%	95,4%
	Tourism	11	4,6%	4,6%	100,0%
	Total	238	100,0%	100,0%	

Source: Survey applied to people responsible for marketing decisions and the implementation of digital marketing strategies in SMEs in the province of Santa Elena.

In the case of the economic sector, about 5 out of 10 SMEs carry out economic activities aimed at trade. Approximately 3 out of 10 SMEs offer services. Likewise, only 1 in 10 provide technology-

related services. Of the total respondents, only 2.5% of SMEs are engaged in poultry farming; Animation of events and activities related to Health.

Table N°3 Size of the company

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Company size	Medium-sized companies (51-250 employees)	15	6,3%	6,3%	6,3%
	Microenterprise (1-10 employees)	144	60,5%	60,5%	66,8%
	Small Business (11-50 employees)	79	33,2%	33,2%	100,0%
	Total	238	100,0%	100,0%	

Source: Survey applied to people responsible for marketing decisions and the implementation of digital marketing strategies in SMEs in the province of Santa Elena.

Regarding the size of the company, by the number of workers, 6 out of 10 are microenterprises that have between 1 and 10 employees, while 3 out of 10 are small companies with 11 to 50 employees, and less than 1% are medium-sized companies.

Table N°4 Years in the market

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Years in the market	From 1-3 years	72	30,3%	30,3%	30,3%
	From 4-6 years	74	31,1%	31,1%	61,3%
	From 7-10 years	29	12,2%	12,2%	73,5%
	More than 10 years	43	18,1%	18,1%	91,6%
	Less than 1 year	20	8,4%	8,4%	100,0%
	Total	238	100,0%	100,0%	

Source: Survey applied to people responsible for marketing decisions and the implementation of digital marketing strategies in SMEs in the province of Santa Elena.

On the other hand, 3 out of 10 SMEs have 1 to 3 years in the market. Similarly, 3 out of 10 companies are constituted between 4 to 6 years, while only 2 out of 10 SMEs have more than 10 years of permanence in the market.

Table N°5 Responsible for digital marketing

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Responsible	External marketing agency	10	4,2%	4,2%	4,2%
	Internal Marketing Department	43	18,1%	18,1%	22,3%
	The owner of the company	79	33,2%	33,2%	55,5%
	Specific employee	75	31,5%	31,5%	87,0%
	There is no specific person responsible	31	13,0%	13,0%	100,0%
	Total	238	100,0%	100,0%	

Source: Survey applied to people responsible for marketing decisions and the implementation of digital marketing strategies in SMEs in the province of Santa Elena.

On the other hand, 3 out of 10 SMEs are responsible for digital marketing focused on the owner of the company and a specific employee who carries out this function. However, approximately 2 out of 10 microbusinesses have their own internal marketing department to develop productivity strategies.

Table N°6 Annual budget for digital marketing

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Budget	5-10% of total budget	76	31,9%	31,9%	42,4%
	11-20% of total budget	25	10,5%	10,5%	10,5%
	More than 20% of the total budget	9	3,8%	3,8%	46,2%
	Less than 5% of total budget	70	29,4%	29,4%	75,6%
	I don't have a specific budget for digital marketing	58	24,4%	24,4%	100,0%
	Total	238	100,0%	100,0%	

Source: Survey applied to people responsible for marketing decisions and the implementation of digital marketing strategies in SMEs in the province of Santa Elena.

As for the annual budget used for digital marketing, only 3 out of 10 SMEs have 5 to 10% of their total budget allocated for this activity. Approximately 3 out of 10 SMEs have less than 5% of their total budget predestined to the creation of content for E-commerce. At least 2 out of 10 microenterprises do not have defined a specific budget, necessary to develop the promotion, dissemination and advertising of their products or services.

OBJ 1.

Table N°7 Digital marketing strategies implemented by SMEs in the Province of Santa Elena.

		Size of companies								
		Medium-sized companies (51-250 employees)			Microenterprise (1-10 employees)			Small Business (11-50 employees)		
		Business Location								
		C. Freedom	C. Salinas	C. Santa Elena	C. Freedom	C. Salinas	C. Santa Elena	C. Freedom	C. Salinas	C. Santa Elena
		Recount								
Digital marketing strategies you use	Email marketing	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
	%total	0%	0%	0%	0%	0,4%	0%	0%	0,4%	0%
	Email marketing; Online advertising; Content Marketing	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
	%total	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0,4%	0%	0%
	Email marketing; SEO (search engine	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1

optimization); Other									
%total	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0,4%	0%	0,4%
Affiliate Marketing	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
%total	0%	0%	0,5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Content Marketing	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
%total	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0,4%	0%	0%	0%
Other	0	0	0	3	1	2	0	0	2
%total	0%	0%	0%	1,3%	0,4%	0,8%	0%	0%	0,8%
Online Advertising	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	1	0
%total	0%	0%	0%	0%	0,4%	0,4%	0,8%	0,4%	0%
Social Media	2	1	2	34	15	26	11	5	3
%total	0,8%	0,4%	1%	14,9%	6,4%	10,9%	4,7%	2,1%	1,3%
Social media; Email marketing; Online advertising; Other	0	1	1	9	1	3	7	0	2
%total	0%	0,4%	0,5%	3,5%	0,4%	1,3%	2,9%	0%	0,8%
Social media; Content Marketing	0	0	0	1	2	2	2	0	3
%total	0%	0%	0%	0,4%	0,8%	0,8%	0,8%	0%	1,3%
Social media; Other	2	0	0	5	5	2	2	1	6
%total	0,8%	0%	0%	2,1%	2,1%	0,8%	0,8%	0,4%	2,5%
Social media; Online Advertising	2	1	0	9	6	13	12	6	7
%total	0,8%	0,4%	0%	3,8%	2,5%	5,5%	5,1%	2,5%	2,9%
Social media; Online advertising; SEO (search engine optimization); Other	0	2	0	0	1	0	2	0	0
%total	0%	0,8%	0%	0%	0,4%	0%	0,8%	0%	0%
SEO (search engine optimization)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
%total	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0,4%
Total count	6	5	4	61	33	50	40	14	25
% total	2%	2%	2%	26%	14%	21%	17%	6%	10%

Source: Survey applied to people responsible for marketing decisions and the implementation of digital marketing strategies in SMEs in the province of Santa Elena.

Analyzing the results obtained on the use of the different marketing strategies implemented by SMEs in the province of Santa Elena, we observe that 14.9% of microenterprises concentrated in the Canton of La Libertad, use only social networks to disseminate their products and services, while 3.5% use social networks; Email marketing and online advertising. Similarly, 2.1% use social networks and other strategies such as content marketing and affiliate marketing to manage customers, suppliers and advertising.

On the other hand , of the microenterprises located in the Canton of Santa Elena, 10.9% develop digital marketing based only on social networks; 5.5% use both social networks and online advertising and only 1.3% use more than one digital marketing strategy such as social networks; email marketing, online advertising, content marketing and affiliate marketing. Of the companies located in the Salinas Canton, 2.5% handle social networks, 0.8% use social networks and content marketing and only 0.4% resort to online advertising and SEO (search engine optimization).

In the case of small businesses, 5.1% that are located in the Canton of La Libertad report the implementation of social networks and online advertising, as digital marketing strategies, and 4.7% handle only social networks to manage their economic activities. 2.9% of small businesses in the Santa Elena Canton and 2.5% in the Salinas Canton apply social networks and online advertising as the most used digital tools to find effective buying and selling interactions. There are only 0.4% of small businesses that operate with SEO (search engine positioning). It is evident that 0.08% of themedium-sized companies studied belonging to the Canton of La Libertad, use social networks; online advertising and other tools such as content marketing and affiliates.

0.8% of medium-sized companies concentrated in the Salinas Canton use digital marketing tools such as social networks; online advertising and SEO (search engine positioning), finally 1% of medium-sized companies located in Santa Elena apply only social networks to manage their products.

OBJ 2.

Table N°8 What is the main objective of your digital marketing strategies?

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Efficiency of strategies Digital Marketing	Increase brand visibility	5	2,1%	2,1%	2,1%
	Increase brand visibility; Attract new customers	10	4,2%	4,2%	6,3%
	Increase brand visibility; Attract new customers; Build loyalty to existing customers; Increase sales; Improve customer service	74	31,1%	31,1%	37,4%
	Increase brand visibility; Build loyalty to existing customers	1	0,4%	0,4%	37,8%
	Increase brand visibility; Increase sales	5	2,1%	2,1%	39,9%
	Increase brand visibility; Improve customer service	3	1,3%	1,3%	41,2%
	Attract new customers	22	9,2%	9,2%	50,4%
	Attract new customers; Build loyalty to existing customers; Increase sales	25	10,5%	10,5%	60,9%
	Attract new customers; Increase sales; Improve customer service	57	23,9%	23,9%	84,9%
	Build loyalty to existing customers; Increase sales	4	1,7%	1,7%	86,6%

Build loyalty to existing customers; Increase sales; Improve customer service	5	2,1%	2,1%	88,7%
Increase sales	14	5,9%	5,9%	94,5%
Improve customer service	2	0,8%	0,8%	95,4%
Other	11	4,6%	4,6%	100%
Total	238	100%	100%	

Source: *Survey applied to people responsible for marketing decisions and the implementation of digital marketing strategies in SMEs in the province of Santa Elena.*

Table N°9 What is the main objective of yourdigital marketing strategies?

			Size of the company according to number of employees			
			Medium-sized companies (51-250 employees)	Microenterprise (1-10 employees)	Small Business (11-50 employees)	Total
	Increase brand visibility		0	3	2	5
		% total	0,0%	1,3%	0,8%	2,1%
	Increase brand visibility; Attract new customers		0	6	4	10
		% total	0,0%	2,5%	1,7%	4,2%
	Increase brand visibility; Attract new customers; Build loyalty to existing customers; Increase sales; Improve customer service		7	41	26	74
		% total	2,9%	17,2%	10,9%	31,1%
	Increase brand visibility; Build loyalty to existing customers	% total	0	1	0	1
			0,0%	0,4%	0,0%	0,4%
Main objective of digital marketing	Increase brand visibility; Increase sales		0	3	2	5
		% total	0,0%	1,3%	0,8%	2,1%
	Increase brand visibility; Improve customer service		0	2	1	3
		% total	0,0%	0,8%	0,4%	1,3%
	Attract new customers		0	12	10	22
		% total	0,0%	5,0%	4,2%	9,2%
	Attract new customers; Build loyalty to existing customers; Increase sales		1	19	5	25
		% total	0,4%	8,0%	2,1%	10,5%
	Attract new customers; Increase sales; Improve customer service		6	36	15	57
		% total	2,5%	15,1%	6,3%	23,9%

Build loyalty to existing customers; Increase sales		0	1	3	4
	% total	0,0%	0,4%	1,3%	1,7%
Build loyalty to existing customers; Increase sales; Improve customer service		0	4	1	5
	% total	0,0%	1,7%	0,4%	2,1%
Increase sales		0	7	7	14
	% total	0,0%	2,9%	2,9%	5,9%
Improve customer service		0	2	0	2
	% total	0,0%	0,8%	0,0%	0,8%
Other		1	7	3	11
	% total	0,4%	2,9%	1,3%	4,6%
Total		15	144	79	238
	% total	6,3%	60,5%	33,2%	100%

Source: Survey applied to people responsible for marketing decisions and the implementation of digital marketing strategies in SMEs in the province of Santa Elena.

It can be said that respondents pose more than one main objective to achieve, based on the construction of digital marketing strategies. As far as increasing sales and improving customer service are concerned, they are common objectives shared by each of the SMEs under study. In this context,31.1% report that the main objectives are aimed at increasing the visibility of the brand; attracting new customers, retaining existing customers, increasing sales and improving customer service. To do this, 23.9% focus on three aspects such as attracting new consumers; increasing their sales and improving customer service. 10.5% is based on retaining existing customers, obtaining new customers and increasing their sales. However, 9.2% opt for marketing strategies only to reach new customers with their products and services.

Given the case of the size of the companies, it is identified that the microcompanies, with 1 to 10 employees, are the ones that have the greatest results in the application of marketing strategies, which are reflected with 17.2% in the increase of brand visibility; attracting new customers; loyalty to existing ones, increase sales and improve customer service; while small businesses with 10.95% and medium-sized companies with 2.9% identify with the same objectives.

OBJ 3.

Table N°10 What performance indicators (KPIs) do you use to measure the success of your digital marketing strategies?

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Cost per acquisition (CPA); Return on investment (ROI); Number of leads generated; Number of sales generated	3	1,3%	1,3%	1,3%
Number of leads generated	2	0,8%	0,8%	2,1%
Number of followers on social networks	33	13,9%	13,9%	15,97%
Number of followers on social networks; Number of returning visitors; Number of sales generated	49	20,6%	20,2%	36,1%
Number of followers on social networks; Other	20	8,4%	8,4%	44,5%

Performance indicators (KPIs)		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
	Number of sales generated	25	10,5%	10,5%	55,0%
	Other	48	20,2%	20,6%	75,6%
	Return on investment (ROI)	1	0,4%	0,4%	76,1%
	Return on investment (ROI); Number of returning visitors; Number of leads generated; Number of sales generated	1	0,4%	0,4%	76,5%
	Email open rate; Number of returning visitors	1	0,4%	0,4%	76,9%
	Click-through rate (CTR)	10	4,2%	4,2%	81,1%
	Conversion rate; Number of followers on social networks; Average time on page	4	1,7%	1,7%	82,8%
	Conversion rate; Number of sales generated	1	0,4%	0,4%	83,2%
	Conversion rate; Email open rate	1	0,4%	0,4%	83,6%
	Average time on page	3	1,3%	1,3%	84,9%
	Average time on page; Number of returning visitors	2	0,8%	0,8%	85,7%
	Average time on page; Other	2	0,8%	0,8%	86,6%
	Web traffic	4	1,7%	1,7%	88,2%
	Web traffic; Number of followers on social networks; Number of returning visitors; Number of sales generated	5	2,1%	2,1%	90,3%
	Web traffic; Click-through rate (CTR); Number of followers on social networks; Number of returning visitors; Number of sales generated	23	9,7%	9,7%	100,0%
	Total	238	100%	100%	

Source: Survey applied to people responsible for marketing decisions and the implementation of digital marketing strategies in SMEs in the province of Santa Elena.

The marketing strategies applied by each of the companies surveyed, are evaluated by the efficiency indicators, where it allows to demonstrate their direct impact (success) in the actions taken and in turn optimization in the performance and effectiveness of marketing strategies. On the other hand, of the total of 238 SMEs respondents, 20.6% measure their performance by the number of followers they have on social networks; the number of recurring visits and by the number of sales generated. In this way, it is possible to infer that the majority of respondents identify with metrics by level of interaction with the digital medium, the most frequent and recurrent when generating a purchase - sale of products and services. 20.2 per cent indicate that they use "other" unspecified performance indicators; while 13.9% show that the most common indicators to evaluate their marketing strategies are defined by the cost of acquisition; return on investment (ROI); by the number of leads generated and number of sales generated. Finally, 9.7% state that web traffic; click-through rate (CTR); the number of followers on social networks; Number of recurring visitors and the number of sales generated are the most used indicators when measuring the efficiency of each of your business strategies.

Table N°11 How many new customers have you managed to attract through your digital marketing strategies in the last year?

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
1-10 clients	69	29,0%	29,0%	29,0%

New customers	101-200 customers	18	7,6%	7,6%	36,6%
	11-50 clients	75	31,5%	31,5%	68,1%
	201-500 customers	13	5,5%	5,5%	73,5%
	51-100 customers	54	22,7%	22,7%	96,2%
	None	9	3,8%	3,8%	100%
	Total	238	100%	100%	

Source: Survey applied to people responsible for marketing decisions and the implementation of digital marketing strategies in SMEs in the province of Santa Elena.

The benefits offered by digital marketing to SMEs is the fact of increasing the number of new customers, that is, 31.5% of the people surveyed generate from 11 to 50 new customers, which represents that the implementation of commercial strategies in the digital environment, is an opportunity for recruitment and favorable significance when expanding the commercial market of microenterprises. 29.0% gain between 1 and 10 and 22.7% generate between 51 to 100 new customers during the last year, it is evident that the assertive use of digital marketing attracts new consumers and loyalty to existing ones.

Table N°12 What percentage of your total sales do you attribute to your digital marketing strategies?

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Sales percentages	Between 10% and 25%	101	42,4%	42,4%	42,4%
	Between 25% and 50%	41	17,2%	17,2%	59,7%
	Between 50% and 75%	5	2,1%	2,1%	61,8%
	More than 75%	2	0,8%	0,8%	62,6%
	Less than 10%	89	37,4%	37,4%	100%
	Total	238	100%	100%	

Source: Survey applied to people responsible for marketing decisions and the implementation of digital marketing strategies in SMEs in the province of Santa Elena.

To recognize the success of the implementation of digital marketing strategies in SMEs, the percentage of total sales is identified. Thus, 42.4% indicate that 10% to 25% of their sales generated are thanks to an adequate commercial performance of the business. 37.4% responded that they generate less than 10% of their sales by digital marketing, with regard to this result, it can be recognized that it is a relatively high percentage of SMEs that do not develop significant sales based on commercial strategies. However, it alludes to low planning, improvisation and even lack of knowledge in the handling of digital tools.

OBJ 4.

Table N°13 What has been the biggest challenge your company has faced when implementing digital marketing strategies?

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
	Constant changes in algorithms and platforms	28	11,7%	11,7%	11,7%
	Market competition	37	15,5%	15,5%	27,3%
	Difficulties in generating attractive and relevant content	28	11,7%	11,7%	39,0%

Challenges when implementing digital marketing strategies	Difficulties in measuring return on investment (ROI)	6	2,5%	2,5%	41,6%
	Lack of knowledge and skills in digital marketing	98	41,1%	41,1%	82,7%
	Lack of budget	28	11,7%	11,7%	94,5%
	Other	9	3,7%	3,7%	98,3%
	Challenges in customer segmentation and targeting	4	1,6%	1,6%	100%
	Total	238	100%	100%	

Source: Survey applied to people responsible for marketing decisions and the implementation of digital marketing strategies in SMEs in the province of Santa Elena.

In relation to the most relevant challenges that an SME has faced when implementing digital marketing in its productive activities, it is identified that 41.1% of respondents have presented a lack of knowledge and skills in digital marketing. Of the total respondents, 15.7% answer that competition in the market is a difficult situation that can slow down the use of technologies in the commercial process and 11.7% is due to lack of budget and difficulties to generate attractive and relevant content.

Below is a table that summarizes the results of the focus group with 8 executives responsible for digital marketing in the province of Santa Elena:

Question	Result
1. Main objective of digital marketing strategies	Increase brand visibility, attract leads, and improve conversion rate to drive sales and business growth
2. Main digital platforms and channels	Social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn), Google Ads, display advertising, content marketing, SEO, email marketing
3. Evolution of digital marketing strategies	Adoption of emerging technologies, channel diversification, focus on user experience
4. Percentage of total budget allocated to digital marketing	10-18% (varies by company and industry)
5. Main challenges in implementing effective digital marketing strategies	Rapidly evolving digital environment, growing competition, rising advertising costs, difficulty measuring ROI
6. Tools and technologies to measure and analyze performance	Google Analytics, Facebook Insights, CRM software, data analysis tools (Tableau, Microsoft Power BI)
7. Influence on growth and profitability	Positive impact on growth and profitability, especially in terms of reach and acquisition of new customers
8. Greater successes and failures in the field of digital marketing	Successes: Viral campaigns on social networks, improvements in conversion rate, increase in customer acquisition; Failures: Lack of adaptation to new trends and technologies, errors in audience segmentation
9. Stay updated and integrate trends and developments	Attendance at conferences, reading blogs and specialized magazines, continuous training of staff
10. Expectations and future plans	Continuous investment in digital marketing, exploration of new platforms and emerging technologies, focus on personalization and customer experience

4.CONCLUDED ONES

Based on the results of the study, it is concluded that:

(a) In the province of St. Helena, SMEs employ a variety of marketing strategies. Among microenterprises, the use of social networks is predominant, with variations according to the canton. Small businesses combine social media and online advertising, while medium-sized ones incorporate

content marketing, affiliates, and SEO. There is evidence of greater diversification in marketing strategies in larger companies, although social networks remain the main tool in all cases.

b) Respondents set multiple objectives in their digital marketing strategies, being the increase in sales and improvement of customer service common in the SMEs studied. 31.1% seek to increase brand visibility, attract and retain customers, while 23.9% focus on attracting new consumers and improving customer service. Microenterprises have higher results in the application of marketing strategies (17.2%), followed by small (10.95%) and medium-sized enterprises (2.9%).

c) The SMEs surveyed evaluate the effectiveness of their marketing strategies through key indicators, with 20.6% focused on followers on social networks, recurring visits and sales generated. Digital marketing has allowed these companies to increase their new customer base. With regard to total sales, 42.4% attribute between 10% and 25% to digital business strategies, while 37.4% generate less than 10% of their sales from digital marketing, suggesting opportunities for improvement in planning and knowledge in digital tools.

4. The main challenges faced by SMEs when implementing digital marketing include lack of knowledge and skills in this area (41.1%), competition in the market (15.7%) and lack of budget and difficulties in generating attractive and relevant content (11.7%). These barriers can make it difficult to use technologies and adopt business strategies in the digital realm.

St. Helena's small and medium-sized businesses apply a variety of digital marketing strategies depending on their size, with the aim of increasing sales and enhancing customer service. Even facing obstacles such as lack of knowledge, competition and limited resources, these companies seek to adapt to the digital environment.

REFERENCES

[1] Avello, M., & Vásquez-Parraga, A. (2017). Digital marketing: An exploratory study in Ecuadorian SMEs. Managerial Vision, 16(2), 141-155.

[2] Chaffey, D., & Ellis-Chadwick, F. (2019). Digital marketing. Pearson UK.

[3] De Pelsmacker, P. (2018). Marketing communications: A European perspective. Pearson.

[4] Kotler, P., Kartajaya, H., & Setiawan, I. (2016). Marketing 4.0: Moving from traditional to digital. John Wiley & Sons.

[5] Kumar, V., & Reinartz, W. (2018). Customer relationship management: Concept, strategy, and tools. Springer.

[6] Lovelock, C., & Shankar, V. (2021). Services marketing: People, technology, strategy. World Scientific Publishing Company.

[7] Medina, M. A., & Montes, L. M. (2015). Digital marketing and social networks as growth factors in Colombian SMEs. Strategic Sciences Magazine, 23(33), 31-41.

[8] Melero, I., Sese, F. J., & Verhoef, P. C. (2016). Recasting the customer experience in today's omnichannel environment. Universia Business Review, (50), 18-37.

[9] Moraes, G. H. S. M., & Echeverría, R. (2016). Digital marketing as a management tool in SMEs: A study in Latin America. Journal of Social Sciences (RCS), 22(3), 13-24.

[10] Oliveira, B., Cortimiglia, M. N., & Ghezzi, A. (2017). Innovation strategies in Latin American SMEs: Mapping and exploration of heterogeneity in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil. International Journal of Innovation Management, 21(06), 1750045.

[11] Pfeiffer, H. M., & Kumar, V. (2019). Marketing performance measurement: Evolution and future directions. Journal of Business Research, 104, 489-508.

[12] Resnick, S., Cheng, R., Simpson, M., & Lourenço, F. (2016). Marketing in SMEs: A systematic literature review and agenda for future research. International Journal of Management Reviews, 18(4), 379-440.

[13] Rowley, J. (2008). Understanding digital content marketing. Journal of Marketing Management, 24(5-6), 517-540.

[14] Ryan, D. (2016). Understanding digital marketing: Marketing strategies for engaging the digital generation. Kogan Page Publishers.

[15] Tiago, M. T. P. M. B., & Veríssimo, J. M. C. (2014). Digital marketing and social media: Why bother?. Business Horizons, 57(6), 703-708.

[16] Valdés, L. (2018). Digital marketing strategies in Latin American SMEs: Challenges and opportunities. Journal of Business Research, 68(3), 123-130