



Research Article

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Design, Adaptation, and Validation of a Digital Marketing Instrument in SMEs

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Abstract

Measuring digital marketing will help evaluate the impact of strategies, increased sales, customer acquisition, and customer retention. This research aims to design, adapt, and validate a scale measuring Digital Marketing in Small and Medium Enterprises. Results were structured as follows: To start, a thorough literature review was carried out. Subsequently, a panel of 6 marketing experts was made, who evaluated the content. Additionally, data collection was carried out with 711 collaborators from the strategic area of SMEs. As well as, exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis was carried out, obtaining a KMO of 0.95, with a variance of 85.80% in three factors, with factor weights greater than 0.5. The values of the goodness-of-fit index are as follows: residual root mean square (RMS) = 0.047; goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = 0.876; adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) = 0.825; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.956; Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) = 0.945; normalized fit index (NFI) = 0.945; incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.950 and root mean square residual (RMSEA) = 0.072. These values imply an acceptable fit for which the model is adequate, and the scale is valid.

Keywords: scale, digital marketing, SMEs

1. Introduction

The Internet and Digital Social Networks (DSN) has transformed the behavior of buyers and how Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) must sell their services since consumers currently navigate in a digital scenario, so they must focus their marketing strategies on creative, innovative resources in a

digital scenario, which is why one option is to turn your gaze to Digital Marketing (DM). For Gentili (2016), the need for companies to insert themselves into the digital world has become a priority; the revolutionary beginning of the digital era in the 90s changed human complacency into a necessity.

To deepen this study, research has been found such as, for example; in Mexico, Reyes-Mercado and Barajas-Portas (2020) by combining the technology readiness (TR) model and the unified theory of technology acceptance and use, analyzed the intensity of use of digital advertising platforms among SMEs firms. Additionally, a study on DM in SMEs in Mexico was carried out by Moctezuma (2017). Similarly, in Indonesia, Daud et al. (2022) analyzed the impact of digital economy, marketing, and digital payment variables on financial performance, while Giantari et al. (2022) explain the role of DM adoption in mediating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of competitive intensity on firm performance, in SMEs in the culinary sector in Bali. Moreover, Adhitya et al. (2021) analyzed the role of DSN in improving customer satisfaction in DM and its impact on repeat purchase intentions of SMEs in Bekasi, Indonesia. Similarly, the impact of DSN on the competitiveness of Indonesian SMEs in the food and beverage industry was investigated by Nurliza and Oktoriana (2021)

On the other hand, in Italy, Caputo et al. (2022) studied the positive relationships between (a) the SMEs investments in information and communication technologies (ICT), b) Number of languages available for SMEs websites and c) Number of languages available for SMEs social pages and the sales performance (ROS) of SMEs in foreign countries. Likewise, in Ghana, Amoah and Jibril (2021) evaluated using DSN as an advertising tool to develop SMEs. Similarly, Pradhan et al. (2020) assessed the drivers of SMEs adoption of DM in India. In the United Arab Emirates, Eid et al. (2019) contributed to the literature on DM of B2B (business-to-business) identifying mechanisms through which SMEs can benefit from the use of DSN in export activities.

In Germany, Härting et al. (2020) explored the impacts of the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) on SME business; similarly, in Thailand, Pruekruedee & Suriya (2015) by introducing a digital database and applying data analysis in SMEs enterprises, they investigated the strength of the relationship between Internet broadband usage habits and creative product production goals and the organizational relevance of production promotion. Furthermore, by continuing to explore the study variable, research has been identified that establishes that training in digital marketing allows giving the client security and ease in their transactions, so the skill of entrepreneurs is an important asset to achieve success. In digital environments (Riaño-Solano et al., 2024), the latter being a factor that significantly influences the business management of SMEs (Ariste-León et al., 2023).

As shown in the previous paragraphs, SMEs constitute an important focus of study worldwide, even more so after having gone through a challenging scenario in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic where these micro and small businesses were exposed to significant difficulties. In this way, it is crucial to evaluate the technological advances (digital marketing) in these companies in order to have an accurate diagnosis that allows them to prosper in a demanding business landscape, even more so taking into account that DM is a vital tool for the growth and consolidation of SMEs, for obtaining new consumers and, in this way, expanding their market and positioning themselves in different niches; that is, through DSN, the brands have the possibility of maintaining a direct and constant relationship with their consumers, in addition to two-way communication, in which opinions, comments, and recommendations are transmitted and received, thus generating a positive impact for the campaigns and with the current changes that live the world (Bermeo Giraldo et al., 2022).

It should be noted that that the study of SMEs is very broad and has been done from many perspectives. However, it is possible to point out that since the COVID-19 pandemic began, companies are trying to survive and cope with the new norm to improve performance in the new socio-economic environment. Even before the pandemic, economic and development competitiveness issues were one of the biggest concerns (Vázquez Torres et al., 2018). The pandemic created a much more complicated scenario for SMEs. For this reason, this work sought to design, adapt, and validate a DM instrument in SMEs that supports its measurement.

2. Literature Review

Marketing is a comprehensive concept, which includes digital and telecommunication tools to achieve marketing objectives (Cruz Herradón, 2009). The development of the Internet and the introduction of interconnected digital technologies have completely changed the way marketers communicate and interact with consumers (Krishen et al., 2021). The new Internet and other digital technologies have not only changed the practice of marketing, but also changed the way we think about marketing. Technology has caused huge changes in its environment as consumers have gained power and complete market information (Saeed et al., 2020).

Along these lines, Selman (2017) defined digital marketing as the marketing strategies that occur online and seek some conversion by the user. It has among its advantages precise and continuous measurement of the results. Likewise, it uses the Internet, mobile devices, social networks, and search engines, among other channels, to reach users. This is why digital marketing is an important strategy that enables a person or organization to reach different customers through innovative practices (Mena Mera et al., 2019).

For Goyal et al. (2021), DM is a useful tool that helps increase the quantity and quality of sales opportunities for the desired products or services. Piñeiro Otero and Martínez Rolán (2016) explain it as a set of strategies based on using digital channels for the customer to access products and services from companies. To do this, companies implement one or more innovative approaches supported by an Internet strategy.

DSN has changed the way traditional marketing works and created MD. MD can take the form of website marketing, email marketing and DSN marketing (Indrawati et al., 2023).

DM efforts should not be limited to moving advertising from traditional media to the Internet, promoting products through new technology-enabled ways or gaining customer trust, but should be designed holistically to provide a seamless and unified experience, improve efficiency and marketing connectivity. Consumers are working together to build customer loyalty (Fernández Cueria et al., 2022).

DM is leading the way by offering new ways to reach, inform, engage, deliver and sell products and services to customers and is expected to continue to be at the forefront of the technological revolution (Kim et al., 2021) and the widespread customer adoption of digital innovations is changing the nature of customer/business interactions (Horakova et al., 2022). In this way, companies increase investment in digital services and DM activities, creating and delivering customer value through these efforts (Dolega et al., 2021).

3. Impact of Digital Marketing on SMEs

MD plays a leading role in large companies worldwide, as most of them adopt digital strategies to improve profitability, competitiveness, and position in national and international markets through various networks (Calle Calderón et al., 2020). Although emerging companies do not see the need to adapt to recent changes, since they are created within the environment and are part of it, they have a more reciprocal relationship between placing themselves in the competitive field and proposing new paradigms (Brito Carillo et al., 2018).

According to Kotler (2000), marketing strategies have changed much in recent years regarding their context and application. For example, factors such as competitiveness, customer service, changing international markets, consumer culture and ethnography have a significant impact on marketing. Therefore, marketing management faces more significant challenges related to the overall results that the company hopes to achieve or achieve.

SMEs have several challenges ranging from customer attraction, retention, loyalty, and market positioning, among others, which is why Mazzarol (2015), assertive communication with customers must be ensured through various interaction channels so that the user recognizes the company and its digital content with greater confidence to encourage the greatest number of transactions to

acquire such products or services.

Along these lines, the analysis of experts, institutional reports, and databases related to DM and strategic support indicate that both go hand in hand, constituting a binomial that produces favorable results for the company at all levels, in all dimensions or areas of the organization, and at all scales, whether regional, national or international (Nuñez Cudriz & Miranda Corrales, 2020). Therefore, Gkarane et al. (2019) maintain that different marketing strategies must be combined simultaneously to ensure better consumer receptivity to sending information about the company, building relationships with the customer, and then selling products or services effectively.

Derived from the above, a competitor analysis is required to implement DM plan. Goyal et al. (2021) indicates that competitor analysis is very important for DM analysis where your organization can see the company's top online and offline competitors. By researching your top competitors, you'll be able to evaluate your overall plan and compare it to your competitors, find opportunities that fit your online marketing strategy, and discover your competitors' target audiences.

The Internet is a great asset for businesses because it provides a window to the world, facilitating greater interaction with customers and helping them understand the specifics, news, and trends of the markets in which they operate (Gutiérrez & Nava, 2016). Likewise, this allows SMEs to position themselves in the market on equal terms with larger companies, deliver products and services more efficiently and facilitate access to previously inaccessible markets (Cepeda Palacio et al., 2017).

Without a doubt, business processes developed with the support of the Internet ensure more product sales and better interaction with customers and suppliers using specialized tools, thereby optimizing business services, and ensuring greater accessibility and ease of use. Information flow (Sainz de Vicuña Ancín, 2015).

In addition, another benefit derived from the inclusion of DM in business strategy is innovation, as its main contribution is the acquisition and generation of knowledge obtained from various information sources (Bernal Torres & Frost González, 2015). From the point of view of Gumilang (2019), the digital affects the support of people's businesses, especially in promotion and marketing, from Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) to large-scale companies. So, MSMEs can focus on improving their DM capabilities by providing product information on digital platforms, providing online services based on customer needs, building relationships, and communicating with consumers, etc. (Zahoor et al., 2023). Therefore, SMEs business development is supported by applying digital strategies that provide price differentiation, promotions, and offers to attract customers (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2014).

4. Digital Marketing Scales

New marketing strategies have become essential tools to maintain customer loyalty, understand and update the issues of buying and selling goods and services in DSN, achieving a new form of dissemination and interaction with the consumer (Calle Calderón et al., 2020); therefore, indicators and mechanisms for their measurement must be defined.

In this sense, progress has been made in the design of plans, scales, and models to evaluate digital marketing. For example, Zahoor et al. (2023) developed a model to investigate the relationship between managers' digital competencies and digital transformation through the mediating mechanism of digital technology use. On the other hand, a model is proposed to investigate the impact of DM capabilities on SMEs performance following dimensions and environmental dynamics as moderators of this relationship: environmental dynamism, digital advertising, and performance of MSEs by Purwanti et al. (2022).

Similarly, Nekomahmud et al. (2022) present a model whose main objective is to assess consumers' purchase intentions for green products and to observe how DSN marketing actively influences consumers' purchase of green products. Also, Uribe Saavedra et al. (2013) proposed a model for the use of DSN as a marketing tool in business performance, with the following

dimensions: market coordination, entrepreneurial orientation, and business performance,

For their part, Pizzinato and Silva (2009) proposed a marketing planning model suitable for SMEs, which consists of five phases: diagnosis of the current situation, determination of objectives, appropriate set of strategies, development of action plans and accurate systematic control strategies. The authors note that while not all small businesses will have the necessary information or resources to go through these steps thoroughly, at least the basic components of a marketing plan are needed, such as setting objectives, a set of marketing plan strategies, and operational development plan.

Similarly, Saltos Cruz et al. (2023) “proposed a model of nine elements: Email / CRM, Website, Social media, Social, Inbound Marketing, Adaptive SEO, Mobile, and Paid Search Advertising” (p. 4). Additionally, the DM plan proposed by Calle Calderón et al. (2020) considers business situational analysis, goal setting, DM strategies, dissemination and monitoring, and analysis, which serves as a guide to study the environment, the current situation of the company as well as the objectives to be achieved through the application of digital strategies that help improve the profitability of an organization.

5. Methodology

The scale was designed to be applied in SMEs. The research design is cross-sectional, non-experimental, and field. Its design is non-experimental since no control will be carried out on the variables, their causes, or consequences, nor will it seek to influence or condition them. Its temporality and place design are transversal and field-based since the information will be collected on a single occasion, seeking to describe and analyze the variables at a given time (Briones, 1996; Hernández et al., 2014).

This research was based on questionnaires applied to people in the strategic area of SMEs in Mexico, with voluntary participation and confidential management of the information. For the procedural treatment of the data, the multivariate statistical technique of structural equation models was used to measure latent variables and test and estimate the existence of cause-effect relationships based on the statistical data found (Hair Jr et al., 2014).

The structure for the research development was as follows: generation of the items, data collection, and confirmation of the latent structure (Hair Jr et al., 2014; Leguina, 2015). The research is the result of the project called “Digital Marketing, Business Performance, Culture of Innovation and its Effect on the Sustainable Competitive Advantage of SMEs, supported by a Structural Equations Model,” approved and funded by the National Council of Humanities, Sciences, and Technologies (CONAHCYT), Mexico, for financing the project named, based at the Autonomous University of Baja California.

5.1 Items' Generation

A systematized literature review was carried out to generate the items in scientific databases, which were Scopus, Science Direct, and EBSCO Host, using the terms Models, Scales, and Digital Marketing. Based on the instrument Mahmutović (2021) designed, its scale consists of 15 items with three dimensions: a strategic emphasis, generation of digital intelligence, and resource planning and provisioning, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.933. It is worth mentioning that the base scale was subjected to a double translation process by a certified expert in the field. Subsequently, the items were adapted to the Mexican context, and the expert validation format was designed and sent via e-mail.

Hence, the items were evaluated through a judgment of 5 experts who analyzed the items' sufficiency, clarity, coherence, and relevance on the Digital Marketing scale. The panel was made up of two Mexicans, two Colombians, and one Peruvian, who are characterized by being experts in Marketing and research professors and have an average of 20 years of experience. The criteria used to select the panel of experts was that they had a doctorate degree, related to marketing, professional

experience in marketing and research.

On the other hand, the measurement scale was grouped into three dimensions: Strategic emphasis, generation of digital intelligence, planning, and resource provisioning. The questions were designed on a seven-point Likert scale, in which (1) completely disagree and (7) completely agree, considered the most effective in identifying variation (Su & Reynolds, 2019).

5.2 Data collection

The research instrument was organized in two parts: The first describes a sociodemographic profile of the respondents, and the second presents the items that make up the constructs of the scale.

The study population will consist of 4,469,247 SMEs in Mexico according to the National Statistical Directory of Economic Units (DENUE) of the Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática, 2021) as of July 2021. In order to determine the sample, the sooper calculator for structural models was used, considering 4 latent variables and 32 observable variables, which determined a minimum sample of 700 SMEs. Thus then, the sampling technique will be probabilistic, simple random, which guarantees that all individuals that compose the target population have the same opportunity to be included in the sample (Otzen & Manterola, 2017).

The sample comprised 751 collaborators from the strategic area of SMEs in Mexico, from 5 states of the Mexican Republic (Baja California, Hidalgo, Puebla, Quintana Roo, and Veracruz). The instruments were physically applied from February 1 to May 1, 2023.

5.3 Latent structure confirmation

This stage consists of two phases. In the first, four criteria were used for content validation to evaluate the items: 1 = Does not meet the criteria, 2 = low level, 3 = moderate level, and 4 = high level. Likewise, Aiken's V coefficient (Table 1) quantifies the degree of sufficiency, coherence, relevance, and clarity. In the second stage, the reliability and validity of the scale were confirmed, for which the free access R program in version 4.2.0 was used, specifically, the RStudio environment in version 02.3. In addition, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) (Table 2) was carried out with the component analysis method (Papadimitriou et al., 2019) to know the factor structure of the construct. Subsequently, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed to determine the overall fit of the scale (Figure 1, Table 1 and 2).

6. Data analysis

Data analysis was carried out with the open access R program in version 4.2.0, specifically, the RStudio environment in version 02.3. In this case, the libraries used were "psych" for the calculation of response rates and reliability analysis, "lavaan" for the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and "semPaths" to make the final figure. Due to the ordinal nature of the observed variables, the items were preliminarily examined at the beginning through the response rate of each choice alternative. Then, the scale's internal structure was analyzed through CFA, using a Robust Maximum Likelihood (RML) estimation method, which has proven adequate for ordinal variables. The goodness-of-fit measures were chi-square (χ^2), Comparative Fit Index (CFI > 0.90), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI > 0.90), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA < 0.08), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR < 0.06). Finally, reliability was calculated using the Alpha (α) coefficient.

7. Results

Table 1 shows the results of the evaluation of 5 experts who analyzed the sufficiency, clarity, coherence, and relevance of the items of the Digital Marketing scale. It can be seen that the items

received a favorable evaluation ($V > 0.70$). Regarding relevance, it is evident that items 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 are more important than the others ($V = 1.00$; 95% CI: 0.80-1.00). Items 7 and 11,12,13,14 are the ones that have the most clarity ($V = 1.00$; 95% CI: 0.80-1.00), and items 2 to 9 and 11 to 15 are the more coherent ($V = 1.00$; 95% CI: 0.80-1.00) and, finally, items 3 to 9 and 11 to 15, are the ones that have the most significant relevance. Likewise, it can be seen that all the values of the lower limit (Li) of the 95% CI are appropriate, and all the values of the V coefficient were statistically significant. Table 1

7.1 Criteria evaluated by experts.

Items	Sufficiency (n=5)				Clarity (n=5)				Coherence (n=5)				Relevance (n=5)			
	M	SD	V	CI 95%	M	SD	V	CI 95%	M	SD	V	CI 95%	M	SD	V	CI 95%
1	3.60	0.55	0.87	0.62 - 0.96	3.80	0.45	0.93	0.7 - 0.99	3.60	0.89	0.87	0.62 - 0.96	3.60	0.89	0.87	0.62 - 0.96
2	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	3.60	0.55	0.87	0.62 - 0.96	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	3.80	0.45	0.93	0.7 - 0.99
3	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	3.80	0.45	0.93	0.7 - 0.99	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1
4	3.80	0.45	0.93	0.7 - 0.99	3.80	0.45	0.93	0.7 - 0.99	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1
5	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	3.60	0.55	0.87	0.62 - 0.96	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1
6	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	3.80	0.45	0.93	0.7 - 0.99	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1
7	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1
8	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	3.80	0.45	0.93	0.7 - 0.99	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1
9	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	3.80	0.45	0.93	0.7 - 0.99	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1
10	3.80	0.45	0.93	0.7 - 0.99	3.40	0.89	0.80	0.55 - 0.93	3.60	0.89	0.87	0.62 - 0.96	3.60	0.89	0.87	0.62 - 0.96
11	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1
12	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1
13	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1
14	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1
15	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	3.80	0.45	0.93	0.7 - 0.99	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1	4.00	0.00	1.00	0.8 - 1
16	3.80	0.45	0.93	0.7 - 0.99	3.40	0.55	0.80	0.55 - 0.93	3.60	0.89	0.87	0.62 - 0.96	3.60	0.89	0.87	0.62 - 0.96

M: Mean, SD: Standard deviation, V: Aiken's V, 95% CI: Confidence interval at 95% confidence

After having validated expert judgment, the Exploratory Factor Analysis was continued, where the result of the KMO was 0.95, with a variance of 85.80% in three factors, with factor weights greater than 0.5. Likewise, when applying Confirmatory Factor Analysis to analyze the internal structure of the scale, where the goodness-of-fit indices were adjusted, in a second instance, satisfactory goodness-of-fit indices were obtained as shown in Table 3 CFI=0.956, TLI=0.945, RMSEA=0.072, RMS=0.047, implying that the model with 15 items distributed in three factors is satisfactory. (Figure 1). Finally, regarding reliability, an excellent value was obtained for the total factor ($\alpha = 0.95$).

Table 2. Factors of the digital MKT Model, with 3 dimensions

	Factor		
	1	2	3
MKD13	0.865		
MKD12	0.863		
MKD15	0.807		
MKD14	0.798		
MKD11	0.731		
MKD6	0.565		
MKD1		0.871	
MKD2		0.817	
MKD4		0.803	
MKD3		0.799	
MKD5		0.749	
MKD8			0.783
MKD9			0.767
MKD7			0.719
MKD10			0.680

	Factor		
	1	2	3
% of variance	72.235	9.287	4.273
Cronbach's alpha (α)	0.965	0.944	0.955

Factor 1=Strategic Emphasis, Factor 2= Generation of digital intelligence, Factor 3=Planning and provision of resources.

7.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Below, the goodness of fit index of the digital marketing instrument in MSEs are presented, considering three constructs: Strategic Emphasis, Generation of digital intelligence, and Planning and provision of resources.

Goodness-of-fit index

Goodness of fit index	Value	Goodness of fit index	Value
RMS	0.047	TLI	0.945
GFI	0.876	NFI	0.945
AGFI	0.825	IFI	0.950
CFI	0.956	RMSEA	0.072

The values of the goodness-of-fit index are as follows: residual root mean square (RMS) =0.047; goodness-of-fit index (GFI) = 0.876; adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGPI) =0.825; comparative fit index (CFI) =0.956; Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) =0.945; normalized fit index (NFI) = 0.945; incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.950 and root mean square residual (RMSEA) =0.072. These values imply an acceptable fit for which the model is adequate, and the scale is valid.

Table 4. Validation

Dimensions	Items	M	SD	V	CR	AVE	F ₁	F ₂	F ₃
F ₁	6	22.65	11.91	0.96	0.90	0.61	0.78		
F ₂	5	23.24	9.53		0.90	0.65	0.72	0.81	
F ₃	4	15.74	8.01		0.83	0.55	0.86	0.75	0.74

F₁= Strategic Emphasis, F₂= Generation of digital intelligence, F₃= Planning and provisioning of resources.
Note: M = mean, SD = standard deviation, V = coefficient V of Aiken, CR = Composite reliability, AVE = Average variance Extracted.

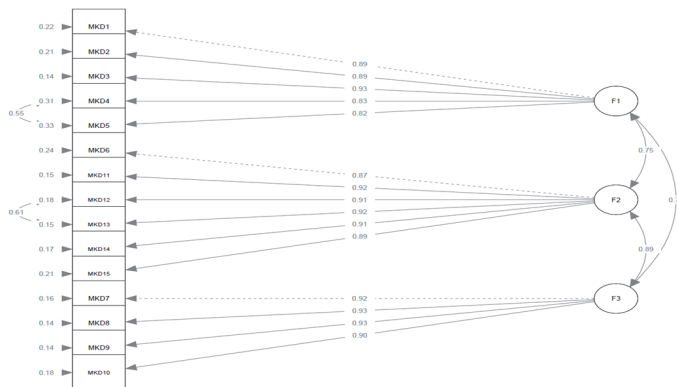


Figure 1. Adjusted Digital Marketing Model.

Note: F₁= Strategic Emphasis, F₂= Generation of digital intelligence.

8. Discussion

Many results indicate that DM is a vital component for companies worldwide in this 21st century, allowing effective tools from strategic management to apply marketing strategies in the digital universe. Many companies worldwide already understand the importance of analyzing DM as an element of strategic support for the traditional marketing of organizations (Nuñez Cudriz & Miranda Corrales, 2020).

One of the most current definitions of marketing comes from Monroy (2014), who says that the purpose of marketing is to understand the market and all the needs and wants that may exist so that these needs can be met, not just by developing a logical sequence. plans and strategies, and can deliver value beyond expectations, create profitable relationships that lead to long-term sales, profits, and customer value.

Lovett (2012) perfectly complements this definition by explaining that these desires are determined by the society we live in and the environment in which we develop and operate, they are shaped by consumer culture. If these wants are within our financial means, we can say that they become needs and eventually become an essential part of any company's revenue forecast, as it will generate its profits.

For Nuseir and Refae (2022), the main reason for adopting these tools is the possibility of increasing the number of customers and reaching consumers directly and effectively. In addition, Saeed et al. (2020) argues that when DM is used to deliver creative content across brands, content effectiveness can be guaranteed.

In this sense, DSN are also a hybrid. They arise from mixed origins of technology and media that allow instant communication, multimedia formats, and numerous delivery platforms with global reach capabilities (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

DM research has grown in recent decades, while university research in the field has continued to strengthen. Based on the criterion that DM is a new field of knowledge, the published content about DM is in the context of the information field (Fernández Cueria et al., 2022). Currently, the DM represents an advantage for companies to make their products and services known because the world of digitalization has been constantly evolving, providing an approach to the customer's needs with the characteristics of the product or service that is offered (Londoño Arredondo et al., 2018).

In the competitive global market, DM is becoming increasingly important. In this sense, today's buyers have special characteristics because of the introduction of new technologies, leading them to make decisions with greater information analysis (Hernandez Palma et al., 2021). To this end, Chaffey, Edmundson-Bird & Hemphill (2019) point out that, when doing DM, several processes are important to support the strategy and improve business performance, even these processes have the most significant effect on the success of DM, so the owners business must know and apply the processes.

Hernandez Palma et al. (2021) also talk about the impact of DM on Colombian companies and conclude that competitive environments in the globalized world have seen it necessary for companies to innovate their strategy in order to achieve efficient and effective results, this being a tool that brings the company closer to its customers, allowing it to process accurate information about their behavior, favoring the development of improvements in its products or services. Similarly, Barreda et al. (2020) found that digital marketing positively impacts the company's brand image.

For their part, Zahoor et al. (2023) found that the relationship between managers' digital skills and use of digital technologies was moderated by managerial characteristics such as gender, education, and age. This suggests that SMEs should consider the characteristics of their managers when undertaking digital transformation.

Similar results in Zahoor et al. (2023) stated that DM capabilities described through customer awareness, needs, relationships, and communication have been identified as resources for small and micro enterprises to improve their business performance. The better a small business can use DM, the better its results will be.

As well as the results of Nekmahmud et al. (2022) validated that consumers are more willing to buy ecological products if the ecological thinking, therefore use marketing on DSN positively influence them. Therefore, this area has been little explored in DM and is suggested for future research.

On the other hand, Uribe Saavedra et al. (2013) suggest that companies should intensively use DSN as marketing tools, and only when companies actively engage in these new technology platforms can they develop DSN marketing strategies to strengthen the link between market orientation and business performance. In this sense, Yazdanifard and Li (2014) specify that it is essential to guarantee security in financial transactions between clients and suppliers, combat fraud and unwanted emails, constitute essential elements in electronic businesses, and positively influence business marketing.

The validated digital MKT in SMEs, as a research tool, has great potential to improve the practice of MKT in SMEs, both in research and practice, as these scales provide greater rigor and reliability in research, better understanding of consumer behavior, optimization of digital marketing strategies, democratization of access to valuable information. The proven scale provides a powerful measurement and analytics framework that can help SMEs better understand their customers, optimize marketing strategies and make smarter decisions to achieve greater success in the digital environment.

9. Conclusions

Measuring digital marketing will help evaluate the impact of strategies, increased sales, customer acquisition, customer retention, and the company's profitability.

It is important to highlight that consumer habits have changed, and with it, the design of the strategies implemented by companies to attract customers; therefore, digital marketing has been evolving with them, challenging the pace of the market. Thus, the DM approach has accelerated in the present 21st century (Nuñez Cudriz & Miranda Corrales, 2020). Chiquillo Rodelo et al. (2018) agree with this, considering that business marketing processes have undergone important changes due to new trends, which lean towards DSN as a fundamental pillar.

Among the elements highlighted by the authors as benefits of DM are innovation, accessibility, and fluid communication with the client. The advantage of DM is that it makes the brand accessible to the audience, as there is a chance that existing customers will write a review for a good experience and support their friends. Therefore, digital marketing provides a platform where customers can have their opinion (Goyal et al., 2021). For Striedinger Meléndez (2018), innovation and feedback are determining aspects in this new way of marketing, with the help of information and communication technologies, which has undoubtedly contributed to companies knowing more about their customers or users.

The trend is toward digital and cultural patterns; fashion and innovations demonstrate it (Striedinger Meléndez, 2018). Nowadays, social media influencers are widely used by enterprises and marketers to attract potential buyers (Martínez López et al., 2020).

Digital marketing faces several challenges: the proliferation of platforms, devices and digital pipelines makes it difficult to collect data and measure the impact of marketing across the entire customer journey. Moreover, determining the individual impact of each touchpoint in the customer journey and optimizing marketing campaigns accordingly remains a complex challenge, which demonstrates the importance of digital marketing return on investment (ROI) and therefore measurement.

Finally, the items and constructs proposed to measure MD in MSEM in the Mexican context yield an acceptable fit and scale, which can be applied in a local, state, national and even regional context.

The limitations of the study were the lack of interest of micro, small and medium entrepreneurs to participate in the surveys, as well as the logistics to take a homogeneous sample in states of the republic that represented the north, center, south and southeast of Mexico.

For future research, it is recommended to design digital marketing instruments that evaluate the use of artificial intelligence as an analysis tool for decision-making in MSMEs. Also, investigate methods to isolate the impact of digital marketing from other external factors and quantify its value in financial terms. Similarly, guiding research to demonstrate that the return on investment (ROI) of digital marketing remains a challenge for many marketers, as the causality between marketing actions and business results can be difficult to establish.

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