

Digital Marketing for Efficiency in Service SMEs: Hybrid Model based on the 4F's

Michel Esparza Márquez¹, Emmanuel Contreras Medina¹, Eyran Roberto Diaz Gurrola², Reimundo Moreno Cepeda³

¹Departamento de Posgrados de la Universidad Autonoma de Coahuila, México

¹Departamento de Posgrados de la Universidad Autonoma de Coahuila, México

²Departamento de Posgrados de la Universidad Autonoma de Coahuila, México

³Departamento de Posgrados de la Universidad Autonoma de Coahuila, México

michel@uadec.edu.mx¹, emmanuelmedina@uadec.edu.mx¹, eyran.roberto@uadec.edu.mx², Reimundo.moreno@uadec.edu.mx³

Correspondence emmanuelmedina@uadec.edu.mx¹

Abstract— Due to changing global market trends and technological advancements, contemporary businesses experience rapid economic and managerial growth. Those that use digital social networks in their marketing show a positive relationship between market orientation and business results. Digital marketing is crucial for companies by driving innovation and competitiveness, taking advantage of opportunities in digital media and creating strategies to increase sales. However, there is a lack of a model that effectively manages this marketing. The objective of this study is to establish a hybrid model to optimize digital marketing management, through the 4Fs marketing mix (Flow, Functionality, Feedback and Loyalty). Using a mixed method, an instrument was designed that allows evaluating the performance of the 4Fs and establishing a correlation with digital marketing management to establish strategies that contribute to improving the areas of opportunity detected.

Keywords- market trends, digital marketing, business development, 4F's model.

I. INTRODUCTION

In Mexico, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) make up over 95 percent of total businesses and are characterized by having up to 100 employees, generating annual sales of approximately 250 million pesos (Mexico SMEs, 2010). Globally, these types of companies account for 60 to 70 percent of employment and are responsible for 50 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (UN, 2019). SMEs play a fundamental role in the economic development of society, whether in countries with a lower development index or highly developed countries (Henkel Mercado et al., 2019). They constitute essential support in the production of large companies, provide a large number of innovations, and promote national economic growth through the creation of jobs, investments, and exports (Tello Cabello, 2014).

In Mexico, there are more than 4 million SMEs, which generate 72% of employment and 52% of the Gross Domestic Product (Inegi, 2018). Some of these businesses are of national capital and operate within a formal sector of the economy; the rest are family businesses, delegated to new generations, and a very small percentage of them consider other aspects for business growth, such as capital opportunity or investment (Inegi, 2018).

Based on information from the Observatory of La Laguna (OL, 2020a), the municipality of Gómez Palacio, Durango, has an annual labor productivity of \$901,767, above the national average. Additionally, it has 12,468 registered economic units, of which 39.82% belong to the commerce sector, 49.99% to services, 8.1% to manufacturing industry, and 2.04% is classified as others. Nine percent of the registered companies are classified as small or medium-sized (Observatory of La Laguna, OL, 2020b).

The purpose of marketing is to create a satisfactory exchange relationship for the parties involved through the development, valuation, distribution, and promotion of a product or service from one party to another (Santesmases Mestre et al., 2014).

Having a good marketing plan does not guarantee the success of the company, but lacking one contributes to failure in a scenario filled with socio-economic structural crises. In this situation, SMEs are unprotected against market competitiveness.

Since 2017, small businesses have considered digital marketing as an opportunity to establish a stronger relationship with customers (Khasawneh, 2017). The integration of this type of marketing has become a complement to the marketing mix, expanding the tools and strategies that SMEs can use to achieve their objectives.

For a better understanding of the topic to be addressed, digital marketing is defined as the simultaneous integration of digital media and the web, through specific processes and methodologies, aiming for clear objectives using different tools, platforms, and social networks (Leefflang et al., 2014).

The importance of using digital marketing for SMEs lies not in a trend or fashion but in the need to adapt to changes made by consumers in their product or service acquisition process (Alcaide et al., 2013)..

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Santesmases Mestre et al. (2014), marketing is a way of imagining and carrying out an "exchange relationship with the aim of being satisfactory for both parties involved, as well as for society, through the development, valuation, distribution, and promotion, by one of the parties, of the goods, services, or ideas that the other party needs." Kotler et al. (2012) refer to marketing as an administrative and social process

through which a group of people or organizations obtains what it needs and wants, creating and exchanging value with others. Münch Galindo (2007) defines marketing as "the set of activities aimed at creating, promoting, distributing, and selling goods and services at the right time and place, and with the required quality to meet customer needs."

These definitions identify marketing as a set of techniques that allow the exchange of goods or services to satisfy a societal need or desire.

Factors in the Evolution of Marketing

The market has changed radically due to the most powerful social forces, sometimes interrelated, causing changes or new behaviors, customs, opportunities, and challenges (Rueda-López, 2007). In this context, the increase in social influence on individuals and businesses, as well as the possibility for both to interact on internet communication platforms, has led to a change in the norms of "traditional marketing." As a result of this situation, brands, instead of interrupting consumers with one-way messages through conventional media, now seek to capture attention and attract consumers to environments where they can engage in a conversation with them (García, 2016). Communication technology is the main element to achieve efficient communication between organizations and consumers. Therefore, the development and level of innovation in communication technology will shape the path of marketing and its efficiency. Due to this, many companies invest more and more in technology for marketing, indicating that two functions that were separated until recently have now become necessary complements to achieve business objectives.

Marketing Process

Kotler et al. (2012) state that the marketing process involves analyzing the opportunities that the market offers to a company, investigating and selecting suitable market niches, as well as designing and formulating strategies. Different authors (Kotler et al., 2012; Kotler and Keller, 2012) establish a basic structure that can be found in almost all organizations and is described in the following phases of the process: Market Research: During this phase, a comprehensive market research is conducted to discover latent needs in the market, evaluate existing perceptions about the brand and competitors, identify trends, unmet desires, among other relevant aspects. It is essential to have a clear objective guiding the research to avoid misallocation of resources or obtaining irrelevant data. Selection of the Target Market: Based on the information gathered in the previous phase, the consumer profile is defined. With a deep understanding of the customer, a product or service can be offered that meets their needs, generating a positive perception of the brand. Market Analysis: In this stage, a SWOT analysis is implemented to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the company, as well as the opportunities and threats present in the market. Formulation of Marketing Strategies: The formulated strategy should cover all elements of the marketing mix (product, place, price, and promotion), aiming to satisfy the consumer optimally. This formulation is done with reference to the information collected in the previous phases. Implementation of Marketing Strategies: In this stage, the execution of strategies may vary, but it is essential to define the necessary activities to carry out these strategies, as well as set specific goals to achieve. Control and Evaluation: Finally, a rigorous control and evaluation of the entire marketing process are carried out. This

analysis provides crucial information to determine the effectiveness of the process and suggests possible adjustments that can be made to improve it.

Digital Marketing

The concept of digital marketing was first used in the 1990s (Sainz de Vicuña, 2021). However, with the advent of new technologies (such as smartphones), digital tools, and social networks, in the 2000s and 2010s, this concept transformed from a technique aimed at advertising to users into a concept of creating an experience and a closer relationship between the organization and the user (Brosan, 2012). Digital marketing is defined as the simultaneous integration of strategies on the web through specific processes and methodologies, aiming for clear objectives using different tools, platforms, and social networks (Leefflang et al., 2014). This definition was established from the introduction and will be used in this research project. It is important to understand that digital marketing is not only found on the internet but also in digital telephony, digital television, and video game consoles (Selman, 2017).

The key objective of digital marketing is to promote brands and reach consumers through various forms of digital media, such as the internet, mobile phones, and social networks (Chauhan, 2016).

Model on the 4 F's Marketing Mix

Kotler and Armstrong define the marketing mix as the set of controllable tactical tools that the company combines to generate a desired response in its target market. This encompasses everything the company can do to influence the demand for its product (Kotler et al., 2012).

The classic model of the marketing mix, McCarthy's 4 P's, comprises the variables of "Product, Price, Promotion, and Place" (Bennett, 1997). This model was fundamental in the early days of marketing when products played a preponderant role in the economy. Various marketing specialists have proposed variants of the 4 P's. Among the most well-known is the 7P model by Booms and Bitner (1981), which advocated expanding the 4 P's to incorporate essential elements in the field of services, such as People, Physical Evidence, and Processes.

Ten years later, with the advent of new technologies and the prominence of digital marketing, Fleming (2000) introduced the 4 F's model, which includes the variables of "Flow, Functionality, Feedback, and Fidelity." This approach focuses on the relationship between the customer, the company, and digital media. The following is a detailed description of these variables.

Flow

Flow refers to the optimal state experienced by a user in which they can be so absorbed and concentrated on an activity that they lose track of time and shyness (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It is also considered as the dynamics presented by the digital media channel, where the consumer is attracted to the interactivity that the channel generates, capturing attention and trying not to abandon it (Fleming, 2000; Selman, 2017). Different indicators are used to measure this flow; in the case of websites, performance is reviewed, reflecting aspects such as visits, users,

page views, or bounce rate. In the case of social networks, it is measured through "shared" rates, growth rate, reach, as well as interaction.

Functionality

The way of navigating should be intuitive and easy for any user; thus, anticipating the abandonment of the use of the website or the internet social network (García de León and Garrido Díaz, 2002; Selman, 2017). The design of a website is not only an aesthetic matter but also optimizes the user experience. The structure must be clear, and it is essential to have a navigation map that facilitates the user finding the right paths to take the desired actions, whether it's finding information about the company, product, business address, making a purchase, or receiving direct attention (García de León and Garrido Díaz, 2002). The number of clicks a user must make to access the content they are looking for should be small. And it should be ensured that the links the customer clicks on work properly (García de León and Garrido Díaz, 2002). In the case of social networks, like Facebook, it already has a space that allows companies or users to offer products and services, in addition to providing them with other work tools. For its operation, it is necessary to be fed with information about the business.

Feedback

There must be interaction between the user and the brand to build a relationship. The received perception and the resulting reputation should aim to create bidirectional trust (Selman, 2017). Digital marketing allows companies to have more efficient integration with their customers, as well as to learn about their expectations and preferences, which is very important for managers when making decisions and generating strategic plans (Bricio Samaniego et al., 2018). One of the great advantages of the Internet is that it provides the opportunity to obtain real-time results, as well as a volume of data that allows better understanding of the customer and more efficient satisfaction of their needs (Muñiz González and Muñiz de la Torre, 2020). For this reason, websites must have spaces where a relationship can be built with users, such as blogs, forms, chats, etc. In the case of social networks, it is very important to take into account the comments and interactions that the publications have, as well as the opinions about the brand.

Fidelity

Once a relationship with the Internet user is established, they should not be let go, creating a captive customer. For this reason, creating commitment and generating topics of interest for them is of utmost importance (Fleming, 2000). When a relationship with the website or social network visitor is established, it should be sought to develop it in the long term to establish loyalty (Selman, 2017). There are different ways to achieve this characteristic; some of these are: generating quality content for the user, discounts, or promotions, and good treatment towards the customer (Kee and Yazdanifard, 2015). The creation of quality content allows building and fostering a trusting relationship between the user and the brand. In some cases, content strategies have been developed that invite users to participate, and this allows generating a stronger presence towards the brand (Kee and Yazdanifard, 2015).

Methodology

This research carries out a mixed, non-experimental study, as none of its variables have manipulation. Based on the stated objectives, it has a descriptive and explanatory scope. It is descriptive because information on digital marketing practices conducted by small and medium-sized service sector businesses in Gómez Palacio, Durango, will be collected, analyzed, and evaluated. It is explanatory because it seeks to generate a linear model in which the value of the dependent variable, "Digital Marketing Management," is determined from a set of independent variables, the "4 F's" (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2018).

The concurrent triangulation design was chosen for this research, as a data collection phase was carried out, where the collection and analysis of data (quantitative and qualitative) were done separately but simultaneously to integrate the results during the interpretation phase of the study.

Subject of Research

For this investigation, the subjects of study are SMEs dedicated to the service sector, registered in the database of the "National Statistical Directory of Economic Units" (DENUE), located in the municipality of Gómez Palacio, Durango. The number of employees in the companies is the characteristic for classification as small and medium-sized enterprises, based on the third article of the "Law for the Development of Competitiveness of Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises." The classification of the type of service provided by the company is based on DENUE (INEGI, 2018). The list includes:

Financial and insurance services.

Real estate and rental of movable and intangible property services.

Professional, scientific, and technical services.

Business support services and waste management and remediation services.

Educational services.

Health and social assistance services.

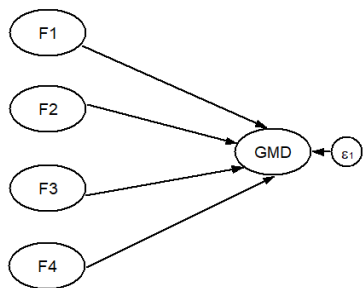
Recreational, cultural, and sports services, and other recreational services.

Temporary accommodation and food and beverage preparation services.

Variables and Their Specific Relationship

In this research, the independent variable is "Digital Marketing Management" (DMM), while "Flow" (F1), "Functionality" (F2), "Feedback" (F3), and "Loyalty" (F4) are the dependent variables, with the formula being as follows:

$$GMD = \beta_0 + \beta_1 F_{1i} + \beta_2 F_{2i} + \beta_3 F_{3i} + \beta_4 F_{4i} + \epsilon_i$$



The graphical representation is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Representation of the graph illustrating the relationship between variables

Where:

GMD = Digital Marketing Management.

F1 = Flow.

F2 = Functionality.

F3 = Feedback.

F4 = Loyalty.

ε = Error

Research Instruments

For data collection, a survey was chosen as it is a technique for gathering information with pre-established responses, which can be analyzed in terms of frequencies for categorical cases.

Survey

The survey consists of two sections. The first section focuses on control variables, which help identify if companies meet all the requirements for the survey and provide more information about them. The first section is described below:

"Company Name": The title the business uses as an identifier, also used for distinguishing itself from the competition.

"Location": Identifies where the surveyed company is located in Gómez Palacio.

"Number of Employees": Since the research subjects are SMEs, only companies with 11 to 50 employees for small businesses and 51 to 100 for medium-sized businesses will be considered.

"Time in Existence": The time the company has been operating in the market.

"Type of Service": According to its economic activity, based on DENU, the service of the company will be classified. The options are:

Financial and insurance services.

Real estate and rental of movable and intangible property services.

Professional, scientific, and technical services.

Business support services and waste management and remediation services.

Educational services.

Health and social assistance services.

Cultural, sports, and recreational services, and other recreational services.

Temporary accommodation and food and beverage preparation services.

"Marketing Department": Identifies if there is a department within the company responsible for managing marketing activities.

"Marketing Objectives": Identifies the objectives the company aims to achieve.

"Digital Marketing Channels": The object of study can select the digital media channels where the business conducts marketing activities. The options are website or social media (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, or LinkedIn).

The second part of the questionnaire consists of statements related to "Digital Marketing Management" and the "4Fs," intending to measure the relationship between these variables using a Likert scale. This scale is used to question the study subject about their level of agreement or disagreement with a statement, rating it from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). This scale was chosen because it offers a graduation of study subject responses, provides more precise measurements, minimizes errors, and allows for the necessary analyses to achieve the objectives of this research. Table 1 presents the operationalization of variables, showing the items used to evaluate the variables in this research.

Variable	Dimensions	Citation	Item	Indica
Digital Marketing Management	Market Research	(Kotler et al., 2012; Kotler and Keller, 2012)	The company has specific objectives for digital marketing	IM1
			Customer needs through digital channels are known	IM2
			Brand perception through digital channels is known	IM3
			Existing competition in the digital (internet) realm is known	IM4
Market Target Selection			Profile (characteristics) of the digital user is known	SM1
			The company's service meets customer needs	SM2
			The service offered fosters a positive perspective towards the brand	SM3
Market Analysis			Strengths of using digital channels are perfectly understood	SM4
			All weaknesses when using digital channels are identified	SM5
			All opportunities in the digital realm are known	SM6

Tabla 1: Operationalization of Variables

Source: own elaboration

Materials, equipment and software used

In order to carry out the research, it will be necessary to have the following resources:

- The National Statistical Directory of Economic Units, which allows identifying and obtaining information on the small and medium-sized enterprises found in the service sector of Gomez Palacio, Durango.

- The survey to collect information on the object of study.

- The Google Forms platform to create the survey digitally and make its application easier.
- The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program to perform a multivariate analysis.
- Meta Business and Google Analytics to obtain the necessary metrics to evaluate the performance of the strategies implemented.
- The Stata program to build a model to illustrate the results obtained.

In addition to requiring a computer equipment where the programs and tools necessary to achieve the objectives of this research can be used.

Procedure Used

Assessing the validity of the Instrument

To gather the essential information required in this study, an exhaustive documentary review was carried out and complemented by field research. In this phase, a questionnaire based on the Likert scale was designed and applied in order to validate our hypotheses and obtain the necessary data.

Prior to the implementation of the questionnaire in the companies under study, an essential pilot test was carried out to ensure adequate reliability and validity of its application. To this end, a representative sample was obtained to allow the necessary calculations to be made.

As for the data analysis, it was decided to evaluate each of the elements of the factors separately, with the aim of obtaining optimal results without affecting the other elements. The methodology selected in this work was principal component analysis, in which linear combinations of the original variables are calculated to explain the greatest possible proportion of the total variance in these variables (La Garza et al., 2013).

To measure the reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used, seeking to reach an acceptable level of 0.7. It is important to bear in mind that reliability may vary depending on the number of items that make up the instrument (La Garza et al., 2013).

Regarding validity, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was applied in search of an acceptable result, with a significance level of 0, indicating the absence of errors in the set of values and, therefore, its acceptability. In addition, the communalities exceeded the threshold of 0.50, which showed that the components were correctly located (La Garza et al., 2013).

Sample Calculation

For this project the probabilistic method of simple random sampling is used, where the relevant variables of the sample have the same probability function and are independent of each other.

Once the final instrument was available, the sample was calculated according to the following formula:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 * p * q * N}{(E^2 * (N - 1)) + Z^2 * p * q}$$

Where:

- n: Sample (outcome).
- N: Total number of the universe.
- Z: Confidence level.
- E: Sampling error.
- p: Is the probability of success.

- q: Is the probability of failure, i.e., it is 1 - p.

Statistical calculations

Once the necessary sample was calculated, we proceeded to contact the companies, where we explained the purpose of our research and requested their consent to administer the questionnaire to the person in charge of digital marketing management in each business. The data collected were subjected to statistical analysis using SPSS software, which included calculations of descriptive statistics, such as mean, median and modes.

Based on the information obtained, we conducted a linear regression analysis with the objective of predicting the behavior of one variable (dependent) as a function of another (independent). To ensure the validity of the linear regression model, we examined the following assumptions:

- Linearity. The regression equation takes a particular form, where the dependent variable is the sum of the origin of the line, a linear combination of independent variables and the residuals.
- Independence. The values of each observation must be independent of the others.
- Homoscedasticity. The variance of the residuals is constant over the entire range of observations.
- Normality. The residuals are normally distributed with zero mean.
- Non-collinearity. There is no exact linear relationship between any of the independent variables. Non-compliance with these assumptions gives rise to collinearity or multicollinearity.

Once the linear regression was obtained, three companies were selected for the establishment of strategies. To do this, information was collected through the model, the KPI's of the moment were seen, and then the necessary strategies were established to improve these indicators.

Results

Table 2 shows a detailed breakdown of the results for each variable obtained through principal component analysis.

Table 2

Summary of statistical analysis of the pilot test

Variable	Initial Items	Final Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin	Cumulative Percentage Explained Variance
Market Research	4	3	0.902	0.743	84.634
Market Selection Target	4	3	0.889	0.744	82.561
Market Analysis	4	4	0.894	0.813	76.051
Strategy Formulation	3	3	0.832	0.714	75.711
Implementation of Marketing Strategies	3	3	0.900	0.723	83.424
Control and Evaluation	4	3	0.865	0.724	79.321
Flow	4	4	0.865	0.788	73.360
Functionality	4	4	0.870	0.821	72.477
Feedback	5	5	0.889	0.851	70.342
Loyalty	4	4	0.883	0.753	74.927

SOURCE: (OWN ELABORATION)

Results of the sample

For the calculation of the sample, Inegi (2018) data on service sector companies located in the municipality of Gomez Palacio,

Durango were reviewed, finding a total record of 396 companies in the service sector with a number of employees from 11 to 100 employees, this being the characteristic to be classified as small and medium enterprises, based on the third article of the "Law for the Development of the Competitiveness of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises".

Below is a breakdown of the number of companies according to sector economic activity (Inegi, 2018):

- Financial and insurance services: 33

- Real estate services and rental of movable and intangible property: 7

- Professional, scientific and technical services: 20

- Business support services and waste management and remediation services: 25

- Educational services: 205

- Health and social work services: 51

- Cultural and sporting entertainment and other recreational services: 7

- Temporary accommodation services and food and beverage preparation services: 48

To calculate the sample, the values of the following formula were substituted:

$$\frac{Z^2 * p * q * N}{(E^2 * (N - 1)) + Z^2 * p * q}$$

Conclusions

Through the implemented methodology, it was possible to identify how the 4Ps relate to the efficient use of digital marketing management in SMEs in the services sector of Gómez Palacio, Durango. The goal was to establish a model that diagnoses the state of digital marketing in businesses and formulates strategies to improve their situation. This confirms the research objective.

The results from the application of the information collection instrument lead to the following conclusions:

Approximately half of the companies have a lifespan of more than 7 years, with 29.1% having between 1 and 3 years, 12.7% falling within the 4 to 6 years range, and a low percentage of 9.1% corresponding to companies with less than 1 year of existence. These data suggest a certain stability in the lifespan of the companies, with a significant proportion surpassing 7 years.

Most of the surveyed companies offer professional, scientific, and/or technical services.

Half of the surveyed companies have a marketing department.

There is a preference for social media for marketing purposes.

The results show a moderately positive correlation between the variables of the 4Fs and digital marketing management. However, areas of opportunity were identified, such as feedback - digital marketing management (.643); flow - digital marketing management (.719), and loyalty - digital marketing management (.764), as these were the three lowest correlations compared to the others.

Based on the identified information, the foundation is laid for establishing a hybrid model to optimize digital marketing management based on the 4Fs model in service-oriented SMEs.

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