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## Business strategies in the digital age: an analysis of the use of social media in today's Ecuadorian economy

### ABSTRACT

This paper examines how SMEs in Ecuador integrate social media into their business strategies, highlighting the growing significance of these platforms in marketing and communication. Employing a quantitative methodology, online surveys were administered to 850 companies, yielding 289 valid responses. The findings reveal variations in social media adoption based on company size, with greater integration in larger firms, indicating a positive correlation between company size and platform use. A preference for instant messaging and visual content platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram were observed, aligning with global digital marketing trends. Furthermore, a high frequency of image and infographic updates was noted, with a tendency towards less frequent updates for infographics, suggesting unique characteristics of the Ecuadorian market. This study contributes to existing literature by

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emphasizing the need to tailor digital strategies to specific company capabilities and suggests the necessity for further research and public policies to enhance Ecuador's digital economy. These findings are significant for marketing professionals and policymakers interested in supporting the digital transformation of SMEs, promoting a more inclusive and connected economy.

**Keywords:** social media use, Ecuadorian SMEs, digital marketing, digital transformation, digital business strategies

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## **Estrategias empresariales en la era digital: un análisis del uso de las redes sociales en la economía ecuatoriana actual**

### **RESUMEN**

Este artículo examina cómo las PYMES en Ecuador integran las redes sociales en sus estrategias comerciales, destacando la creciente importancia de estas plataformas en el marketing y la comunicación. Empleando una metodología cuantitativa, se administraron encuestas en línea a 850 empresas, arrojando 289 respuestas válidas. Los hallazgos revelan variaciones en la adopción de redes sociales según el tamaño de la empresa, con una mayor integración en las empresas más grandes, lo que indica una correlación positiva entre el tamaño de la empresa y el uso de la plataforma. Se observó preferencia por plataformas de mensajería instantánea y contenido visual como WhatsApp e Instagram, alineándose con las tendencias globales de marketing digital. Además, se observó una alta frecuencia de actualizaciones de imágenes e infografías, con una tendencia hacia actualizaciones menos frecuentes para las infografías, lo que sugiere características únicas del mercado ecuatoriano. Este estudio contribuye a la literatura existente al enfatizar la necesidad de adaptar las estrategias digitales a las capacidades específicas de la empresa y sugiere la necesidad de realizar más investigaciones y políticas públicas para mejorar la economía digital del Ecuador. Estos hallazgos son importantes para los profesionales del marketing y los responsables políticos interesados en apoyar la transformación digital de las pymes, promoviendo una economía más inclusiva y conectada.

**Palabras clave:** uso de redes sociales, Pymes ecuatorianas, marketing digital, transformación digital, estrategias de negocios digitales.

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## **Estratégias empresariais na era digital: uma análise do uso das mídias sociais na economia equatoriana atual**

### **RESUMO**

Este artigo examina como as PMEs no Equador integram as mídias sociais em suas estratégias de negócios, destacando a crescente importância dessas plataformas em marketing e comunicação. Empregando uma metodologia quantitativa, foram realizadas pesquisas on-line em 850 empresas, gerando 289 respostas válidas. Os resultados revelam variações na adoção das redes sociais com base no tamanho da empresa, com maior integração em empresas maiores, indicando uma correlação positiva entre o tamanho da empresa e a utilização da plataforma. Observou-se preferência por plataformas de mensagens instantâneas e conteúdo visual como WhatsApp e Instagram, alinhando-se às tendências globais de marketing digital.

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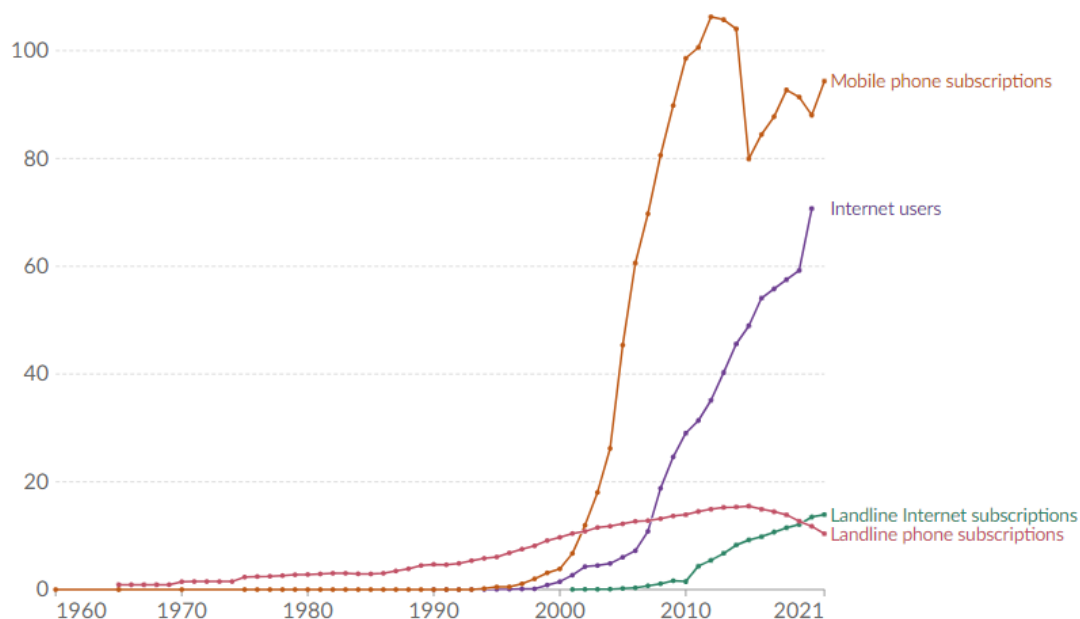
Além disso, notou-se uma alta frequência de atualizações de imagens e infográficos, com tendência a atualizações menos frequentes de infográficos, sugerindo características únicas do mercado equatoriano. Este estudo contribui para a literatura existente ao enfatizar a necessidade de adaptar as estratégias digitais às capacidades específicas da empresa e sugere a necessidade de mais pesquisas e políticas públicas para melhorar a economia digital do Equador. Estas conclusões são significativas para profissionais de marketing e decisores políticos interessados em apoiar a transformação digital das PME, promovendo uma economia mais inclusiva e conectada.

**Palavras-chave:** uso de mídias sociais, PMEs equatorianas, marketing digital, transformação digital, estratégias de negócios digitais

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### INTRODUCTION

In the current environment of the hyperconnected global market, social networks have emerged as fundamental pillars of Web 2.0. These platforms, including giants such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, have triggered a radical transformation in communication and information access, enabling immediate interactions and transcending geographical and temporal barriers (Annoni et al., 2023; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean [ECLAC], 2018). This is clearly reflected in the widespread adoption of communication technologies, as shown in Figure 1 (OurWorldInData.org, 2023).



**Figure 1.** Adoption of communication technologies per 100 people, Ecuador

**Fuente:** OurWorldInData (2023). Adoption of communication technologies per 100 people, Ecuador. <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/ict-adoption-per-100-people?country=~ECU>

Within the corporate sphere, and more specifically in the Ecuadorian context, these networks have thoroughly reformulated marketing and communication strategies, shifting brand narrative control from corporations to consumers and opening an unprecedented range of

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commercial possibilities (Ecuadorian Chamber of Electronic Commerce [ECEC], 2022). This digital era represents not only a window to new opportunities but also a set of challenges that demand innovative and adaptive skills from organizations (INESDI Business TechSchool, 2022; Yang et al., 2023).

In Ecuador, the ubiquity of social networks has motivated companies of all sizes to integrate these tools into their marketing and communication strategies (Suárez & León, 2020; Vásquez, 2021). Interaction with consumers has evolved from a traditional model to a more dynamic and participative one (ECEC, 2022). This shift implies a redefinition of roles and strategies in marketing departments to adapt to an ever-changing digital environment.

Despite their growing importance, many Ecuadorian SMEs still entrust the management of social networks to their existing marketing departments, where executives often take the lead in these efforts (Lasso, 2021). These companies tend to use social networks primarily for promotion and advertising, seeking to attract new customers and strengthen their brand image. However, a shift towards more interactive approaches is observed, using these platforms to enhance competitive intelligence and establish deeper relationships with consumers (Campoverde, 2021; Méndez & Maldonado, 2021).

The adoption of social networks by SMEs in Ecuador is crucial. These tools offer an accessible and economical way to compete with large corporations, thus leveling the business playing field. They allow SMEs to improve their competitiveness and customer service, leveraging technologies applicable to organizations of any size (ECLAC, 2021; World Economic Forum [WEF], 2022).

However, there remains a certain reluctance among SME executives to invest financial resources in social networks. This hesitancy is partly attributed to a commitment to traditional business practices and a desire to maintain personal relationships with clients, characteristic of Ecuadorian SMEs (Dini et al., 2021; INESDI Business Techschool, 2022; Salvador, 2023). This phenomenon points to the need for a cultural and strategic transition to maximize the opportunities that social networks offer in terms of business growth and market consolidation.

### **METHODOLOGY**

In the context of this research, a systematic methodology was adopted to assess the impact of social media on the business strategies of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) in Ecuador. An online survey was designed using Google Forms, aimed at discerning critical aspects in the use of these platforms, including frequency of use, platform preferences, and their influence on business operations.

With a convenience sampling approach, SMEs from various regions of Ecuador were selected to participate in the study. A total of 850 requests were sent to a wide range of companies distributed across several provinces, seeking to obtain a nationally representative sample and to understand the diversity of business practices across the country.

During the data collection period, from August 15 to October 15, 2023, 289 complete and valid responses were obtained, representing a response rate of 34%. This figure is significant, considering the specific nature of the research. The geographical distribution of the responses, including 19% from the Province of Manabí, 18% from El Oro, 16% from Loja, 23% from Guayas, 18% from Los Ríos, and 6% from other regions, ensures a varied and balanced perspective on business practices in different local contexts.

A quantitative approach was used to analyze the data, allowing for an objective and detailed interpretation of the patterns in the use of social media among SMEs. This meticulous

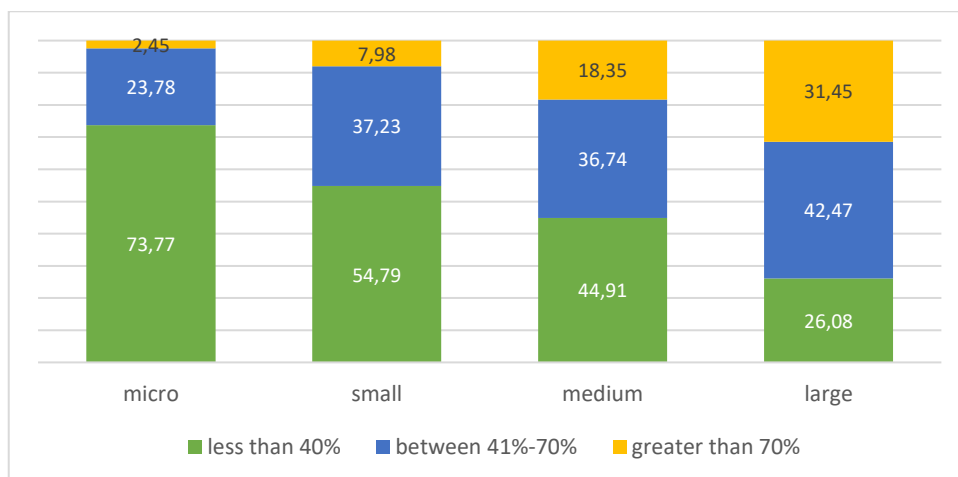
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methodology ensured the collection of relevant and reliable information, establishing a solid foundation for subsequent analyses and significantly contributing to the literature on digital strategies in the context of emerging and developing companies.

### RESULTS

#### Social media use in sales processes

The analysis of social media use in sales processes shows significant variations depending on the size of the company (See Figure 2). In micro-enterprises, 73.77% use social media in less than 40% of their sales process, suggesting an incipient digital strategy. 23.78% integrate these tools between 41% and 70% of their process, while only 2.45% use them in more than 70% of their sales. Small businesses, on the other hand, show greater integration: 54.79% resort to social media in less than 40% for their sales. 37.23% use it between 41% and 70%, and a significant 7.98% include it in more than 70% of their sales, which could indicate a more mature and customer-oriented strategy.



**Figure 2.** Social media use for sales processes (percentages)

Medium-sized businesses exhibit a similar pattern: 44.91% use social media in less than 40% of their sales, and 36.74% between 41% and 70%. It is noteworthy that 18.35% have integrated social media into more than 70% of their sales, indicating a shift towards more advanced digital marketing practices and more intensive interaction with customers through these platforms. At the upper end, large enterprises show the highest adoption of social media, with 26.08% using it in less than 40% of their sales process. A majority, 42.47%, implement it between 41% and 70%, and a significant 31.45% apply it in more than 70% of their sales process, demonstrating a highly integrated digital marketing strategy in line with contemporary practices of engagement through social media.

The relationship between company size and the level of digital adoption is direct and statistically significant, as evidenced by a Spearman correlation coefficient of 0.895 and a p-value of 0.015. This data reinforces the premise that as the size of the company increases, so does the adoption of social media in the sales process. For marketing specialists, the conclusion is clear: establishing a strategic and consolidated presence on social media is

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essential for an effective connection with the consumer and the optimization of the sales process.

**Preferred social media for commercial activities**

The study revealed distinct preferences in the selection of social media for commercial activities among participating companies. WhatsApp stood out as the most prevalent platform, with 73% of companies indicating its use, reflecting its wide acceptance for commercial activity. Instagram also showed a strong preference, being chosen by 67% of the respondents, suggesting its growing relevance as a marketing and sales tool. Facebook, one of the most established social networks, was reported by 38% of the companies, standing out as a still significant channel for commercial operations.

On the other hand, the use of YouTube was reported by only 5.40% of the companies, which could suggest a strategic and focused investment in audiovisual content within their marketing strategies. The adoption of LinkedIn (3.80%), Skype (1.80%), Messenger (7.90%), and Twitter (1.40%) was lower, possibly reflecting the specific objectives and nature of the participating companies. Moreover, these percentages might indicate the reach and particular demographic characteristics of the target audiences.

These findings suggest a trend where instant messaging platforms and visually-focused social networks are preferred by companies to engage consumers and facilitate commercial transactions. The prevalence of WhatsApp and Instagram, in particular, highlights the importance of direct communication and visual presentation in modern commercial activity (See Figure 3).

Option	Percentage	Graphic
WhatsApp	73%	
Youtube	5,4%	
Instagram	67%	
Twitter	1,4%	
Messenger	7,9%	
Skype	1,8%	
Linkedin	3,8%	
Facebook	38%	

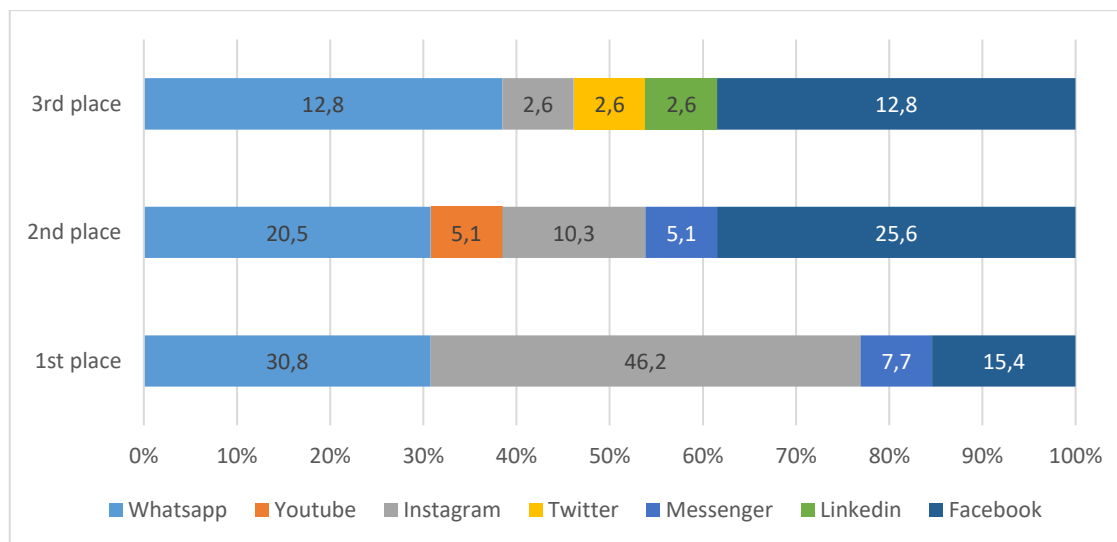
**Figure 3.** Preferred social media for commercial activities

**Hierarchy of social media for commercial activity**

The classification of social networks in commercial activities highlights WhatsApp and Instagram as the most predominant (See Figure 4). WhatsApp leads in 30.77% of cases, followed by 20.51% and 12.82% in the second and third places, respectively, demonstrating its importance in business communication. Instagram stands out with 46.15% in the first place, emphasizing its role in marketing and sales. Facebook also emerges as significant,

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ranking second in 25.64% of cases and third in 12.82%, showing its stable position in the commercial sphere.



**Figure 4.** Hierarchy of social media for commercial activity (percentages)

YouTube, although not as dominant, ranks second in 5.13% of cases, suggesting its specialization in audiovisual marketing strategies. Messenger and Facebook are notable in the top positions, but less so in the third, indicating their specific usage. LinkedIn and Twitter, with 2.56% in the third position, indicate a more focused use. These trends highlight the preference for instant messaging and visual platforms in the contemporary commercial environment.

### Social media uses in commercial activity

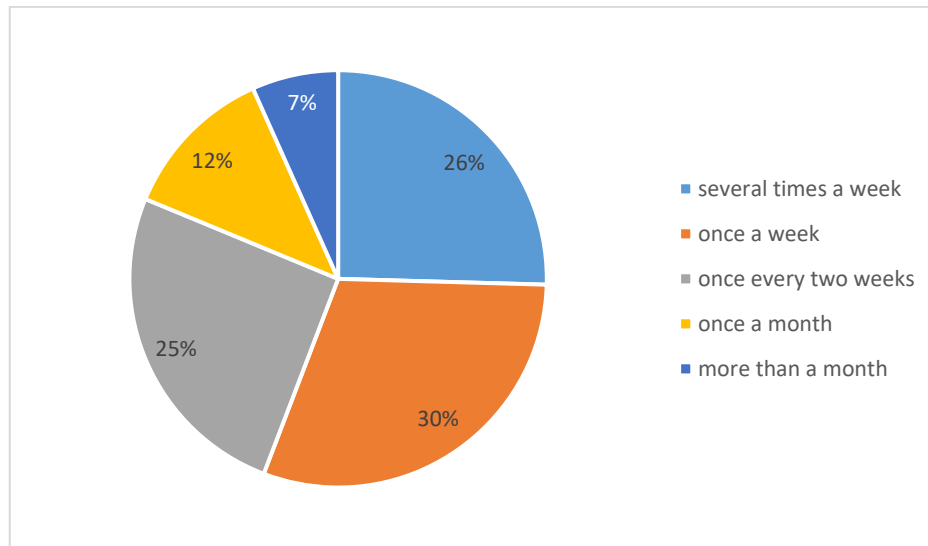
The findings demonstrate that social media serve as a multifaceted tool in companies' commercial activities. Product and service promotion is the most common application, with 86% of businesses utilizing social media for this purpose, closely followed by boosting sales at 88%. Notably, increasing web traffic is another significant use (68%), suggesting that social media are effective channels for directing users to corporate websites.

Creating contacts with potential clients (57%), providing immediate customer service (51%), and enhancing brand positioning (76%) are equally important, indicating that social media are crucial for engagement and brand image building. Additionally, collecting customer feedback (43%) and monitoring competitors (38%) are tactics used to improve market intelligence and competitive strategies. The use of social media for talent acquisition, although less frequent (22%), underscores its emerging role in recruitment. Finally, 32% of responses categorized under 'Other' reflect a variety of diverse secondary uses.

Accompanying these results, a word cloud visually highlights the most frequent uses of social media in businesses, with terms like 'boost sales' and 'promote products/services' being predominant in size, confirming their higher frequency in commercial activity (See Figure 5).



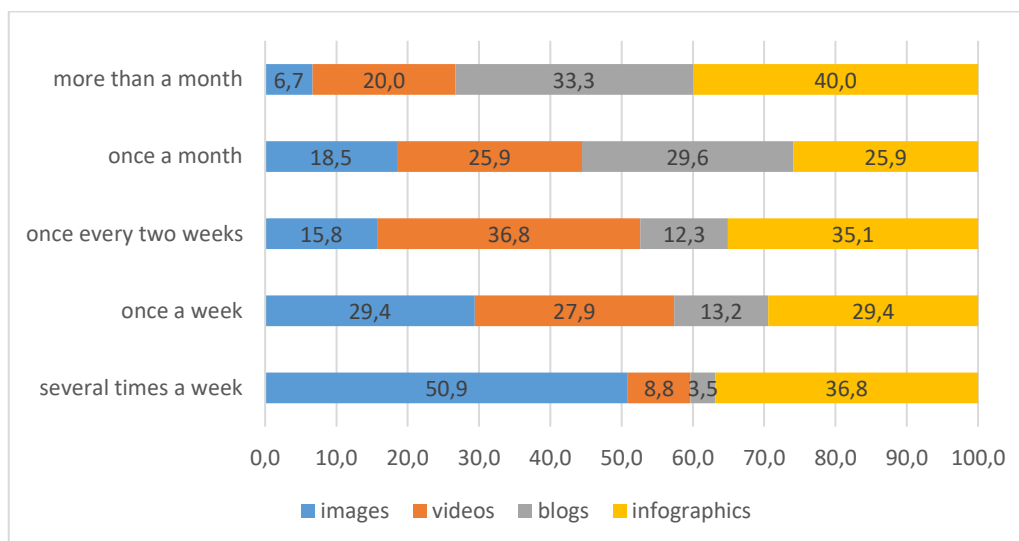
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**Figure 6.** Social media update frequency

### Type of content share on social media

Figure 7 details the frequency of posting different types of content by companies on social networks. It is observed that 50.9% of companies update images several times a week, making it the most frequent content, followed by infographics at 36.8%. As for videos and blogs, frequencies of once every two weeks (36.8%) and monthly (29.6%), respectively, are preferred. It is noteworthy that infographics lead in more spaced updates, exceeding a month in 40% of the cases, possibly due to their detailed elaboration. Videos also show a 20% monthly update rate, reflecting their production complexity.



**Figure 7.** Type of content and update frequency (percentages)

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

The current research on the use of social media in the commercial activity of Ecuadorian companies unveils digital adoption patterns that resonate with previous studies in other geographic and economic contexts. For instance, the observed tendency of microenterprises to use social media to a lesser extent in their sales process aligns with similar findings reported by Tarsakoo & Charoensukmongkol (2020), who noted that limitations in resources and digital knowledge often restrict the implementation of digital marketing strategies in SME.

The direct and statistically significant relationship between the size of the company and the adoption of social media reflected in our analysis is consistent with the findings of Wadhwa et al. (2023), who also identified a positive correlation between these variables. Moreover, our study underscores the importance of a strategic presence on social media for effective communication with consumers, a point emphasized by authors such as Jamil et al. (2022) and Tafesse & Wien (2018), arguing that interactivity and audience engagement are crucial for commercial success in the digital age.

The preference for platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram, identified in our research, mirrors a global trend towards instant messaging and visual content, as described by Costa-Sánchez & Guerrero-Pico (2020) and Dwivedi et al. (2021). These authors suggest that the ability of these platforms to facilitate rapid and personalized communication is highly valued by companies seeking to strengthen relationships with their customers.

Our findings regarding update frequency and shared content type also align with existing literature. Dwivedi et al. (2021) and Mukhtar et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of maintaining a constant flow of communication through social media, which our study confirms with the high frequency of image and infographic postings. Nevertheless, the notable preference for updating infographics on a monthly or longer basis may indicate a peculiarity of the Ecuadorian market, possibly reflecting a strategy focused on targeted informational and educational campaigns.

The negative correlation between the frequency of sharing images and other content types such as blogs and videos suggest a potential saturation of visual content, something not widely reported in the literature and which could be a peculiarity of the Ecuadorian context. This may reflect marketing practices that prioritize immediate visual impact over the creation of more in-depth content, such as articles and videos, requiring more time investment from the audience.

Thus, the discussion of the results of this study fits within the framework of previous research, reaffirming known patterns of social media use in commercial activity while highlighting peculiarities that may be unique to the Ecuadorian context. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by emphasizing the importance of adapting digital strategies to the specific capabilities and needs of companies of different sizes and suggests opportunities for future research and public policies aimed at enhancing the digital economy in Ecuador.

This investigation has explored the use of social media in the commercial activity of Ecuadorian companies, shedding light on digital practices across different business scales. This study provides insights into how the presence on social media is a crucial commercial tool and its use varies significantly according to the size of the company. Microenterprises tend to have a less active social media presence, which may indicate both an opportunity for the development of digital strategies and a need for more resources and training in the digital area.

SME, with a more significant integration into social media, seem to adopt a more strategic and customer-oriented approach, as reflected in their higher frequency of use of these

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platforms. This behavior underscores the importance of a strategic and consolidated social media presence for connecting with consumers and optimizing the sales process. Preferences for platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram indicate a trend towards instant messaging and visual content, in line with the growing demand for quick and visually appealing interactions in the commercial realm. Facebook maintains its relevance as a stable channel, while platforms like YouTube, LinkedIn, Skype, and Twitter have a more specialized use, suggesting the need for targeted and well-defined marketing strategies to leverage their unique features.

Regarding content, images and infographics are the most shared formats, demonstrating their effectiveness in capturing attention and efficiently communicating messages. The negative correlation between the frequency of sharing images and other content highlights a potential preference for visual content over more detailed textual or audiovisual content. Finally, this study contributes to the knowledge base on commercial digitalization in Ecuador, demonstrating the importance of a diversified and adapted social media strategy to the capacities and needs of the companies. The conclusions drawn not only benefit marketing specialists looking to improve their digital presence but also policymakers who could support the digital transformation of microenterprises to foster a more inclusive and connected economy.

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