

Marketing as a strategic tool for micro and small businesses for business success

La Mercadotecnia como herramienta estratégica en las Micro y Pequeñas Empresas para el éxito empresarial

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Abstract

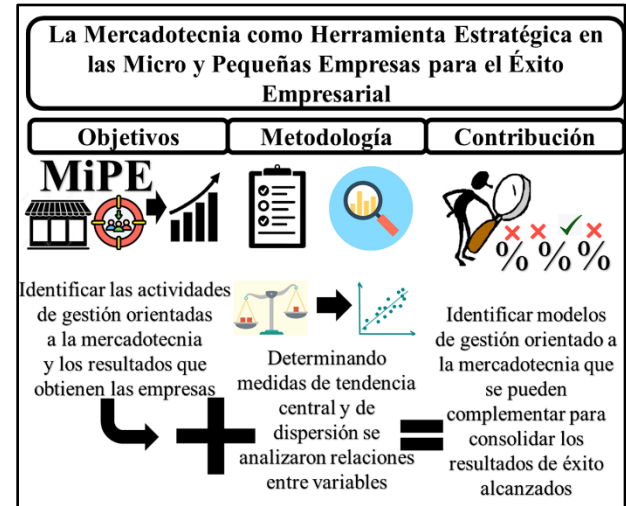
Marketing represents an essential tool for the growth and sustainability of micro and small enterprises [MSEs], especially in contexts of high competition and limited administrative capacity, where the application of marketing strategies has an impact on the success of MSEs. The findings of this study reveal that the structured use of management tools, including the marketing mix, positively correlates with better financial results and business perception.

Resumen

La mercadotecnia representa una herramienta esencial para el crecimiento y sostenibilidad de las micro y pequeñas empresas [MiPE], especialmente en contextos de alta competencia y limitada capacidad administrativa, donde la aplicación de estrategias de mercadotecnia tienen impacto en el éxito de las MiPE. Los hallazgos del presente estudio revelan que el uso estructurado de herramientas de gestión, incluida la mezcla de mercadotecnia, correlaciona positivamente con mejores resultados financieros y de percepción empresarial.



Marketing, Micro and Small Businesses, Business Success



Mercadotecnia, Micro y Pequeñas empresas, éxito empresarial.

Area: Dissemination of and universal access to science

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## Introduction

Micro and small businesses constitute the economic pillar of Mexico, generating more than 52% of formal employment [INEGI, 2023]. However, they face high mortality rates, largely attributable to the poor application of administrative tools and marketing strategies [Patino-Galvan & Hernández, 2023]. This study explores the application of marketing in MSEs as a central element of their management model, highlighting its influence on profitability, competitiveness, and business survival.

## State of the Art

Marketing has evolved from a commercial function focused on sales to a comprehensive strategy for identifying, satisfying, and retaining customers. Kotler and Keller [2016] define marketing as the social and administrative process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and desire through the creation and exchange of products and values.

Since the founding of businesses, formal marketing models have not been applied because the vast majority of entrepreneurs implement them empirically, with the evidently limited use of management tools [Patino-Galvan & Hernández, 2023]. It is common for MSEs to reduce marketing solely to advertising actions, neglecting essential elements for focusing on the customer [Kotler and Keller, 2016].

In MSEs, their limited organizational structure and restricted resources make the formal implementation of marketing strategies difficult [Sanchez et al., 2017]. The limited budget available to these types of companies forces them to make decisions without reliable information, relying primarily on the owner's experience or hunches [Sanchez et al., 2017]. However, entrepreneurs often implement marketing activities without realizing that they are part of a management model [Juárez & Golovina, 2021]. Lacking sufficient skills, MSEs face the challenge of implementing improvised, incomplete, and ineffective management activities [Nouri and Soltani, 2015]. Tools such as SWOT analysis, strategic planning, and the marketing mix [product, price, place, and promotion] can be adapted to their scale, generating significant improvements in performance [Dermawan et al., 2023].

In these companies, decision-making is reactive and unplanned, with little support from performance metrics or in-depth customer knowledge [Rigby, 2015]. However, various studies recognize that marketing training, as part of the business training of entrepreneurs, is an effective way to professionalize and boost organizational performance in MSEs [Filion, 2011].

## Methodology

A literature review was conducted on the application of marketing in micro and small businesses, identifying administrative activities that address this issue.

The research was designed as an applied approach, with a quantitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional approach. A questionnaire was administered to 108 micro and small enterprises in Campeche to identify the use of administrative models, including marketing tools, and their effects on variables such as net profit, sales growth, and perception of success.

Furthermore, complementary theoretical references from key authors such as Kotler, Armstrong, Filion, and Rigby are integrated to contextualize and contrast the empirical findings.

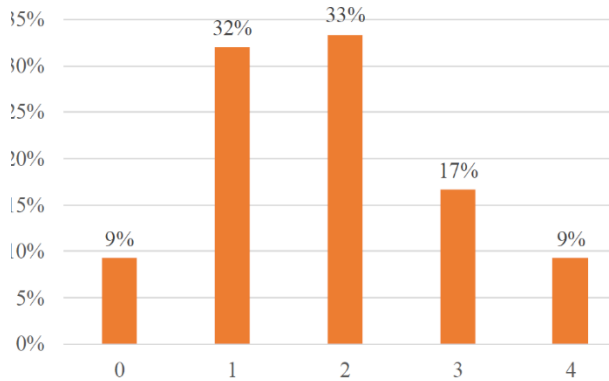
## Results

The research results show that only a fraction of MSEs consistently apply marketing tools.

Those that do, such as the use of social media, customer analytics, and marketing mix, show better success indicators.

As shown in Figure 1, it was observed that more than 90% of companies contact customers using one or more social networks, although during the study it was not identified whether the remaining 9% that do not use modern means of communication omit them due to ignorance, disinterest or because they are not applicable to the business.

**Box 1**



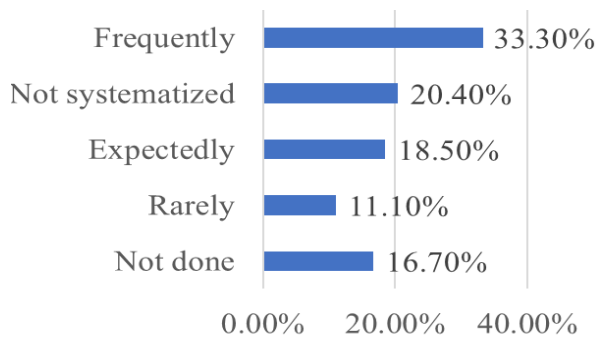
**Figure 1**

Proportion of MSEs by the Number of Social Networks Used

Source: Own Elaboration

Although most businesses report using media to communicate with customers, they don't leverage it to gather customer feedback; as shown in Figure 2, only 33.3% of MSEs do so frequently. Even though only 83.7% of companies know to some extent the opinion of their customers, 92.6% think they know the reasons why the customer chooses them to make their purchases.

**Box 2**



**Figure 2**

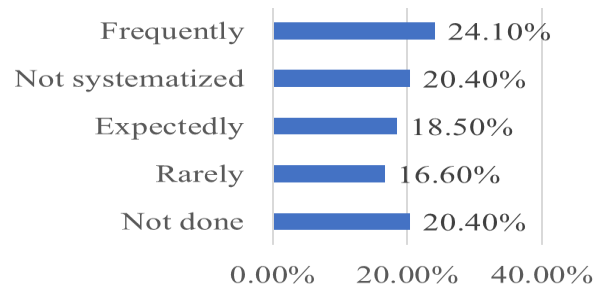
Proportion of MSEs that consult customer opinion

Source: Own Elaboration

A similar proportion is observed regarding the knowledge they have about their competitors, although approximately 83% of businesses know something about them, only 44% monitor them frequently.

The purpose of companies' marketing-related activities is focused on managing their operations and personnel tasks, and they do not necessarily contribute to understanding their customers and improving their market performance. As shown in Figure 3, just over 20% of businesses do not think about the future, and only 24.1% of MSEs do so regularly as part of their management model.

**Box 3**



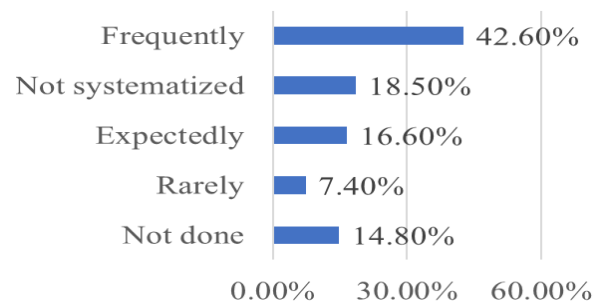
**Figure 3**

Proportion of MSEs that consult customer opinion

Source: Own Elaboration

The decision-making process in these businesses is carried out informally in most cases; less than 43% use supporting information frequently [see figure 4].

**Box 4**



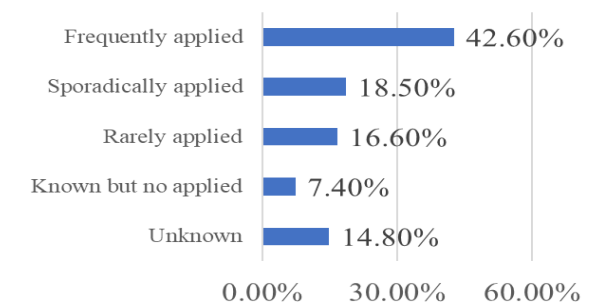
**Figure 4**

Frequency of use of company information for decision-making

Source: Own Elaboration

Approximately a quarter of businesses consciously apply some form of customer-related management model, as shown in Figure 5. 27.8% of MSEs have structured their marketing mix. Eighty-five percent of the subjects studied are unfamiliar with the most modern management models, techniques, and tools.

**Box 5**



**Figure 5**

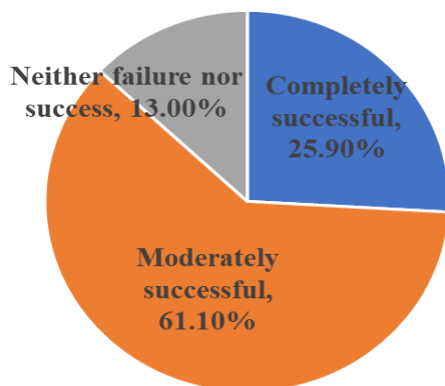
Frequency of application of the Marketing Mix in the MSEs management

Source: Own Elaboration

The low frequency of activities related to customer and market knowledge and research by companies may be due to the fact that they do not conceive of them as structured management systems, since almost 66% of businesses are concerned with the quality of the products or services they offer. Marketing-related activities are not recognized by entrepreneurs as key elements in generating good business results.

As shown in Figure 6, less than 13% of companies consider themselves to be in a successful situation, and the main causes to which they attribute the good results were: planning activities, controlling operations, organizing available resources and employee participation.

### Box 6



**Figure 6**

Frequency of use of company information for decision-making

*Source: Own Elaboration*

The above results show the total number of companies and their weighted behavior according to the different levels of frequency of use of management models. However, the group of companies that frequently use marketing mix activities shows a stronger relationship with a greater perception of business success by owners or entrepreneurs; similarly, 58% of MSEs that implement marketing strategies report positive sales growth.

Companies that use market analysis and customer insight have greater stability at the break-even point. In contrast, those that do not implement these tools have greater difficulty sustaining and adapting to the competitive environment.

### Conclusions

Marketing and its activities are understood as a tool that helps companies focus their operational efforts to reach customers. Proper implementation improves business competitiveness, adaptability, and sustainability.

Barriers such as lack of knowledge and training should be addressed through training programs for entrepreneurs and local support networks that leverage existing actions and guide entrepreneurs to incorporate marketing as part of their daily operations.

The main finding of the study is that frequent use of marketing tools is directly related to improved results and sales growth.

### Consequently, the following is recommended:

Promote the use of marketing and its various models and tools, such as the marketing mix, in a simplified manner adapted to the specific conditions and needs of MSEs.

Strengthen business training in sales management and digital marketing.

Include marketing models in incubation and government funding programs for MSEs.

### Limitations

The study was conducted on MSEs, primarily in the tertiary sector, which provided financial information and management models based on information provided directly by the owners or entrepreneurs, without having official documents available. Recent market changes resulting from the readjustment of business practices following the end of the COVID-19 pandemic and the prevailing macroeconomic conditions due to the increased entry of Asian goods into Mexico in the last year can lay the groundwork for applying this study to companies in the primary and secondary sectors, with the aim of comparing the results obtained here.

The study included an analysis of different management models, which included marketing in general and identified the main administrative activities carried out by companies in isolation. Therefore, these results can be complemented with studies focused specifically on marketing tools.

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## Declarations

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. They have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

## Author contribution

*Alcocer-Martínez, Fidel Ramón:* Contributed to the project idea, research method, data analysis and Conclusions.

*Tejero-Canché, Jessica del Carmen:* Contributed to the research method, technique and state of the art.

*Ramírez-Alcocer, David Enrique:* Contributed to the project idea, state of the art and data analysis.

## Availability of data and materials

The spreadsheet files used for data collection and analysis are available upon request to the author.

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The research was funded by the authors themselves.

## Abbreviations

COVID-19	2019 coronavirus disease
MSEs	Micro and Small-sized enterprises

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