

Implementation of a digital intermediation model as a competitive advantage of a personalized service in a hostess travel agency

Implementación de un modelo de intermediación digital como ventaja competitiva de un servicio personalizado en una agencia de viajes hostess

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SECIHTI Classification:

Area: Social Sciences

Field: Economic and Administrative Sciences

Discipline: Administration

Subdiscipline: Digital Marketing

doi <https://doi.org/10.35429/EJRP.2025.11.19.7.1.16>

History of the article:

Received: October 11, 2025

Accepted: December 27, 2025

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Abstract

This article analyzes digital intermediation in online travel agencies as a key strategy for brand strengthening and customer loyalty in the tourism sector. The objective is to identify the factors that influence the acceptance and effectiveness of digital intermediation models, highlighting their strategic relevance for the competitiveness and sustainability of tourism organizations in the context of digital transformation. The methodology adopted follows a mixed-methods approach, with a predominance of quantitative analysis, based on the application of structured surveys to users with experience or interest in contracting tourism services online, as well as descriptive analysis of the collected data. Additionally, a qualitative analysis of digital interaction and users' perceptions regarding personalized attention and support throughout the purchasing process was incorporated. The results show that the combination of personalized service, multichannel communication, strategic use of social media, and content marketing strengthens user experience and trust in online travel agencies. However, barriers related to perceived risk and the lack of process standardization were identified, particularly in micro and small agencies, although these limitations can be mitigated through digital support strategies and direct communication. The main contribution of this study lies in providing an empirical reference for the design of user-centered digital intermediation models, supporting managerial decision-making and the development of digital marketing strategies in the tourism sector.

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la intermediación digital en las agencias de viajes en línea como una estrategia clave para el fortalecimiento de la marca y la fidelización de los clientes en el sector turístico. El objetivo es identificar los factores que influyen en la aceptación y la eficacia de los modelos de intermediación digital, destacando su relevancia estratégica para la competitividad y la sostenibilidad de las organizaciones turísticas en el contexto de la transformación digital. La metodología adoptada sigue un enfoque de métodos mixtos, con predominio del análisis cuantitativo, basado en la aplicación de encuestas estructuradas a usuarios con experiencia o interés en contratar servicios turísticos en línea, así como en el análisis descriptivo de los datos recopilados. Además, se incorporó un análisis cualitativo de la interacción digital y las percepciones de los usuarios con respecto a la atención personalizada y el apoyo a lo largo del proceso de compra. Los resultados muestran que la combinación de un servicio personalizado, la comunicación multicanal, el uso estratégico de las redes sociales y el marketing de contenidos refuerza la experiencia del usuario y la confianza en las agencias de viajes online. Sin embargo, se identificaron barreras relacionadas con la percepción del riesgo y la falta de estandarización de los procesos, especialmente en las microempresas y las pequeñas agencias, aunque estas limitaciones pueden mitigarse mediante estrategias de apoyo digital y comunicación directa. La principal contribución de este estudio radica en proporcionar una referencia empírica para el diseño de modelos de intermediación digital centrados en el usuario, lo que respalda la toma de decisiones gerenciales y el desarrollo de estrategias de marketing digital en el sector turístico.

Implementation of a Digital Intermediation Model as a Competitive Advantage for Personalized Service in a Hostess Travel Agency		
Goals	Methodology	Contributions
<p>Analyze the factors influencing the effectiveness of digital intermediation in online travel agencies.</p>	<p>Applied research with a mixed-methods approach, with a predominance of quantitative analysis.</p>	<p>Identification of personalized service, multichannel strategies, and digital marketing as core elements of effective digital intermediation.</p>
<p>Identify successful digital practices that strengthen user experience, trust, and customer loyalty.</p>	<p>Application of structured surveys to 110 users with experience or interest in online tourism services.</p>	<p>Evidence that human support within digital environments increases trust and purchase intention.</p>
<p>Propose an analytical reference framework to support strategic decision-making in digital tourism intermediation models policies in this sector of the industry.</p>	<p>Descriptive analysis of variables related to personalized service, multichannel communication, social media use, and customer satisfaction.</p>	<p>Proposal of a practical framework to enhance customer loyalty and competitiveness in online travel agencies.</p>

Digital intermediation; online travel agencies; digital marketing.

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Intermediación digital; agencias de viajes online; marketing digital

Area: Development of strategic leading-edge technologies and open innovation for social transformation

Citation: Delgado-Torres, Claudia Lizethe, Ríos-Castillo, Maricela, Villarreal-Benavides, Clara Maria and Madrigal-Enríquez, Jessica Berenice. [2025]. Implementation of a digital intermediation model as a competitive advantage of a personalized service in a hostess travel agency. ECORFAN Journal Republic of Peru. 11[19]1-16: e71119116.



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Introduction

Digital intermediation of tourism services has become one of the most significant challenges for the competitiveness, sustainability, and differentiation of travel agencies in the context of digital transformation. This challenge has gained particular relevance due to changes in consumer habits, the expansion of e-commerce, and the growing preference of users for digital channels in the planning and booking of tourism experiences. In this scenario, the transition from traditional face-to-face service processes to online models entails risks associated with the loss of consumer trust, service standardization, experience quality, and customer loyalty.

Despite the economic importance of the tourism sector in Mexico and the sustained growth of e-commerce, the adoption of structured digital intermediation models remains uneven, particularly among micro and small travel agencies. Although the use of digital platforms and social media has become widespread, many organizations lack formal strategies to integrate personalized service, multichannel approaches, and digital marketing as articulated elements of their business model. Several authors point out that the lack of systematization in digital processes limits value creation and the consolidation of competitive advantages in highly dynamic environments (Ricart, 2009).

Recent studies have shown that the digitalization of services, when accompanied by strategic customer experience management, contributes to improving purchase intention, trust, and loyalty toward tourism brands. In particular, service personalization and the strategic use of digital channels positively influence perceived value and decision-making in the online booking of tourism services, especially among young and digitally active consumers (Bricio Samaniego et al., 2018). In this context, the present study aims to analyze current digital intermediation practices in online travel agencies, with the objective of identifying the factors that influence model acceptance, user experience, and customer loyalty. Using an applied and descriptive approach, quantitative and qualitative data obtained from users with experience or interest in contracting digital tourism services are examined, making it possible to identify behavioral patterns, barriers, and strategic opportunities.

The added value of this research is based on four lines of analysis:

- Digital intermediation models and personalized service in online travel agencies.
- Strategic use of digital platforms and social media as communication and sales channels.
- Multichannel approaches and continuous support as differentiating elements of the customer experience.
- Satisfaction, trust, and loyalty indicators associated with digital intermediation.

Each of these dimensions is analyzed based on empirical evidence and recent academic literature, generating a relevant contribution for researchers, digital tourism professionals, and decision-makers interested in strengthening the competitiveness of the tourism sector in the digital economy.

2. Theoretical framework: Conceptual foundations for digital intermediation and marketing in online travel agencies

The present theoretical framework supports the analysis of digital intermediation and digital marketing applied to online travel agencies through a critical review of concepts, models, and theoretical contributions related to tourism, electronic business models, service intermediation, and digital consumer behavior. It also integrates contemporary approaches to content marketing and customer loyalty in digital environments, with the aim of understanding how service personalization and multichannel strategies influence value creation and competitive advantage. This conceptual foundation supports the design of the proposed model and contextualizes the research findings within the current dynamics of the tourism sector and the digital transformation of services.

2.1 Tourism and Its Economic Relevance in the Digital Environment

Tourism is a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon that involves the movement of people outside their usual environment for personal, professional, or business purposes for a period of less than one year (World Tourism Organization) [OMT], 2008).

This sector represents a strategic source of income for national and local economies, as tourism expenditure includes the acquisition of goods and services before and during travel, generating a significant economic spillover.

In the Mexican context, tourism is positioned as one of the sectors with the greatest growth potential, acting as a catalyst for regional development and job creation. This dynamism has driven the transformation of traditional tourism intermediation models, encouraging the adoption of digital schemes that expand service reach and enhance the user experience. Travel agencies play a key role in this ecosystem by providing information, guidance, and integrated access to tourism products, concentrating the management of multiple services within a single point of contact. The evolution of the sector requires these organizations to incorporate digital tools that respond to the new demands of consumers.

2.2 Traditional Travel Agencies and Their Role as Intermediaries

A travel agency is defined as a professional entity dedicated to the organization and commercialization of package tours, either through its own packages or those developed by wholesale travel agencies (Guerra, C. 2009). These agencies are primarily classified as wholesalers and retailers, with the latter acting as intermediaries between the end customer and tourism service providers.

Three essential functions of travel agencies are identified: customer guidance, intermediation in reservation management, and the creation of integrated tourism products. In Mexico, the General Tourism Law recognizes travel agencies as tourism service providers, regardless of whether they operate in a physical or virtual modality. However, traditional travel agencies are characterized by having a physical location and face-to-face interaction with customers, which may limit their geographic reach and their capacity to adapt to the rapid changes of the digital environment.

2.3 Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) and the Transformation of the Service Model

Online travel agencies, known as OTAs (Online Travel Agencies), perform the same functions as traditional agencies but operate exclusively through digital platforms.

This model eliminates the need for physical infrastructure and enables services to be offered in a continuous, flexible, and global manner.

The growth of OTAs intensified after the COVID-19 pandemic due to changes in consumer behavior and increased trust in digital transactions. Among the factors explaining their rapid expansion are ease of access to detailed information, real-time price comparison, and reduced operating costs.

Nevertheless, this model also faces challenges related to risk perception, user trust, and the absence of personalized support, which creates opportunities for hybrid digital intermediation models with an emphasis on human-centered service.

2.4 Electronic Business Models and Digital Commerce

The business model defines the way an organization creates, delivers, and captures value by integrating strategic and operational decisions (Ricart, 2009). With the incorporation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), the concept of the electronic business model, or e-business, emerges, focusing on operations and transactions carried out in digital environments.

Electronic business models are classified according to the type of relationship between the actors involved, highlighting schemes such as Business to Customer (B2C), Business to Business (B2B), and Customer to Customer (C2C) (Brzozowska & Bubel, 2015). In the tourism sector, the B2C model is predominant, as it facilitates a direct relationship between agencies and the end consumer, supported by digital marketing strategies, search engine positioning, and electronic payment platforms.

These models allow companies to expand their market reach, reduce costs, and offer personalized experiences—key elements for competitiveness in highly dynamic digital environments.

2.5 Digital Intermediation Model in Tourism Services

The digital intermediation model is based on the efficient connection between supply and demand through technological platforms, where the agency acts as a facilitator of the purchasing process and customer support (Bellón, 2024). This approach makes it possible to generate added value through service personalization, multichannel strategies, and user experience management.

Unlike mass booking portals, personalized digital intermediation prioritizes the building of trust-based relationships, continuous follow-up, and direct interaction through channels such as social media and instant messaging applications. According to Garrido (2023), this type of model strengthens customer loyalty and improves the perception of security in online transactions.

2.6 Content Marketing and Digital Consumer Behavior

Digital marketing has evolved from an approach focused solely on advertising to one centered on creating value-driven experiences for users (Bricio Samaniego et al., 2018). Content marketing has positioned itself as a key strategy for attracting, informing, and retaining customers through relevant, visual, and emotionally meaningful information.

Various studies indicate that high-quality content—particularly in visual and narrative formats—increases engagement and strengthens the brand–customer relationship (Toledo, 2022). Likewise, the strategic use of social media makes it possible to humanize the brand and generate digital communities based on trust and bidirectional interaction (Guerra, 2009).

Digital consumer behavior is characterized by a strong preference for immediacy, personalization, and direct communication. In Mexico, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp concentrate a large share of interaction between companies and consumers, consolidating their role as strategic channels for tourism marketing management (Briceño, 2023).

3. Methodology

The research was conducted using a mixed-methods approach of an applied and descriptive nature, aimed at analyzing a digital intermediation model as a strategy for strengthening brand positioning and customer loyalty in an online travel agency. The mixed-methods approach enabled the integration of quantitative and qualitative data, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study and enhancing the validity of the findings (Hernández-Sampieri, Fernández-Collado & Baptista, 2014).

From a quantitative perspective, 110 structured surveys were administered to users with experience or interest in contracting digital tourism services, with the aim of identifying consumption habits, communication channel preferences, levels of trust, and factors influencing purchase decisions.

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, an appropriate technique for exploratory and descriptive studies in social and organizational contexts.

Complementarily, the qualitative approach was supported by the analysis of digital interactions and user-generated content on social media, as well as by the interpretation of perceptions associated with personalized support and user experience. This type of analysis is particularly relevant for understanding intangible dimensions such as trust, closeness, and loyalty in digital environments. The study population consisted of users who use or consider using online travel agencies. Sample selection was based on accessibility and voluntary participation criteria, using digital media for instrument administration. The questionnaires were specifically designed for this study and administered through electronic platforms, which made it possible to optimize the data collection process and ensure data consistency.

Finally, the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings supported the design of strategic recommendations aimed at implementing a digital intermediation model focused on service personalization, multichannel strategies, and strengthening the agency–customer relationship, contributing to the analysis of digital marketing in the tourism sector.

4. Results

This section presents the findings derived from the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data obtained through the application of digital instruments to users with experience or interest in contracting online tourism services. The results make it possible to identify consumer behavior patterns, perceptions of digital intermediation, and key factors associated with trust, service personalization, and the strategic use of digital marketing in travel agencies.

These findings directly address the research objectives, particularly the understanding of how digital intermediation and multichannel strategies influence purchase intention, user experience, and customer loyalty within the tourism sector.

4.1 Profile of the Digital Tourism Consumer

The analysis of the respondents' sociodemographic profile shows a clear concentration of users in the 20 to 30 age range (Figure 1), followed by the 31 to 40 age group. This result confirms that young adults constitute the segment with the greatest affinity for digital tourism services, characterized by a high level of familiarity with the use of technological platforms and social media.

Box 1

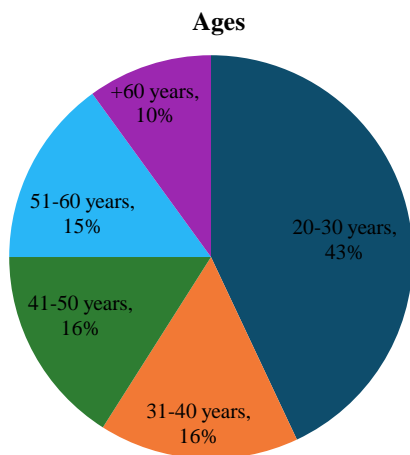


Figure 1
Age of the respondents
Source: Own Elaboration (2025)

Regarding travel habits, the results indicate that a significant proportion of participants take at least one trip per year (Figure 2), with leisure tourism being the main reason for travel (Figure 3).

Box 2

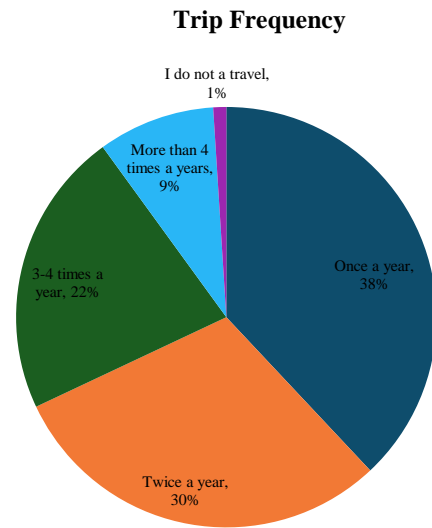


Figure 2
Travel frequency per year
Source: Own Elaboration (2025).

Box 3

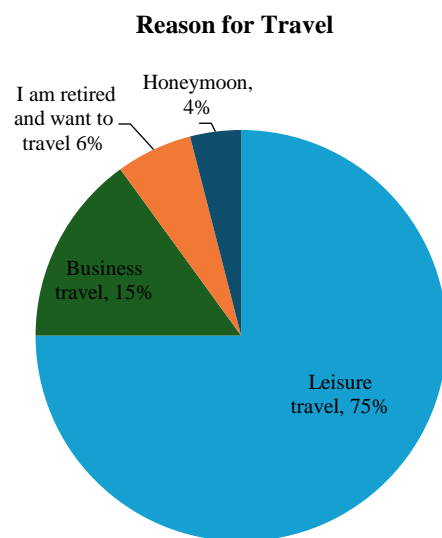
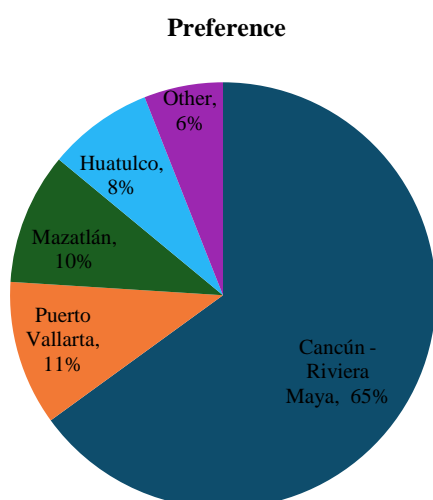


Figure 3
Purpose of travel
Source: Own Elaboration (2025)

Likewise, a predominant preference for beach destinations within the national territory is observed (Figure 4), which indicates a demand concentrated on accessible and recurring tourism experiences that are well suited to being addressed through personalized travel packages.

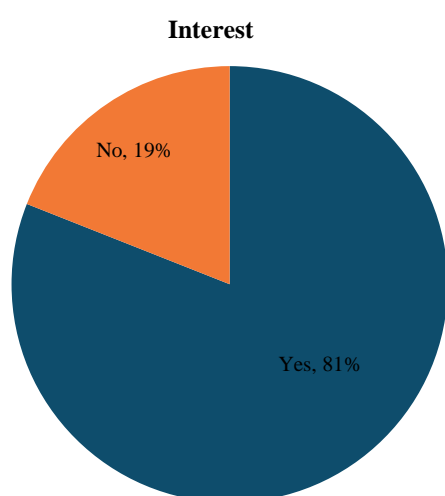
Box 4**Figure 4**

Preferences for Mexican beach destinations

Source: Own Elaboration (2025)

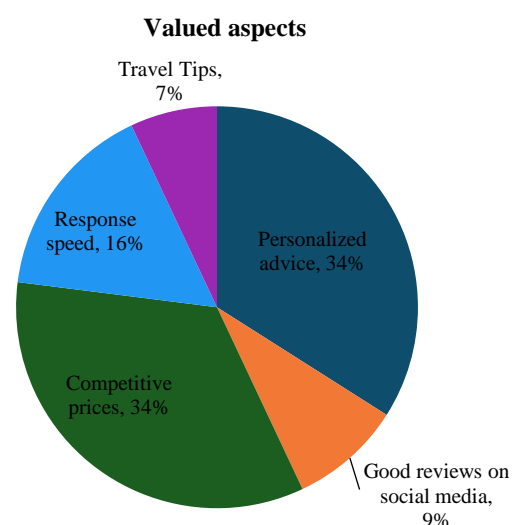
4.2 Willingness to Use Online Travel Agencies

Results related to the contracting of digital tourism services show a high willingness among users to use online travel agencies (Figure 5), as well as a sustained interest in continuing to purchase this type of service (Figure 6). This finding confirms the general acceptance of the digital model as a viable alternative to traditional travel agencies.

Box 5**Figure 5**

Interest in hiring an online travel agency

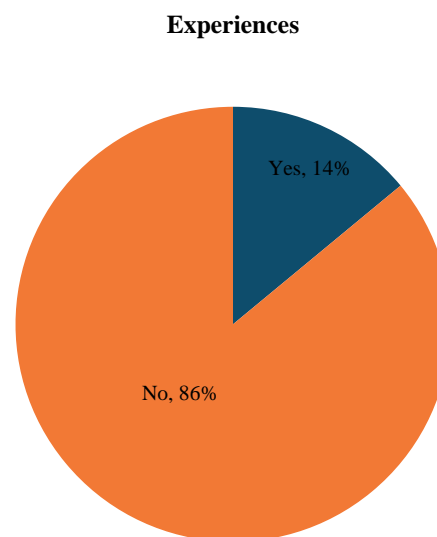
Source: Own Elaboration (2025)

Box 6**Figure 6**

Most important aspects when choosing a travel agency

Source: Own Elaboration (2025)

Nevertheless, the analysis also reveals the presence of previous negative experiences with travel agencies (Figure 7) and an underlying fear of being scammed in online purchases (Figure 8).

Box 7**Figure 7**

Most important aspects when choosing a travel agency

Source: Own Elaboration (2025)

Box 8

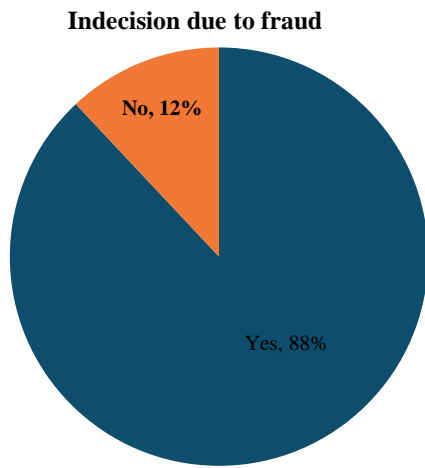


Figure 8
Fear of being scammed in online purchases
Source: Own Elaboration (2025)

These results indicate that although digital channels are widely used, trust remains a critical factor in decision-making, reinforcing the need for digital intermediation models that prioritize transparency, security, and continuous customer support.

4.3 Service Experience and Communication Channels

Regarding service experience, users express a clear preference for personalized attention and support throughout the planning and management of their trips. Figure 9 shows a high level of trust in online support, validating the feasibility of a digital intermediation model centered on close customer interaction.

Box 9

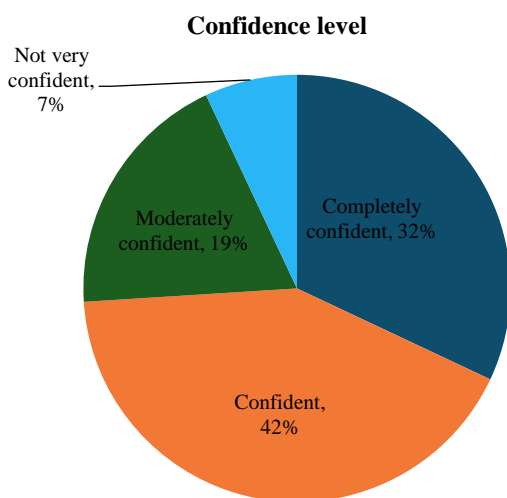


Figure 9
Level of trust in online support
Source: Own Elaboration (2025)

Regarding communication channels, the results indicate that WhatsApp is the preferred medium for interacting with an online travel agency (Figure 10), surpassing other digital channels.

Box 10

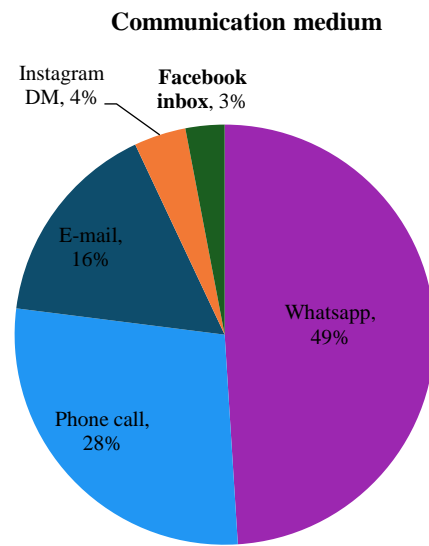
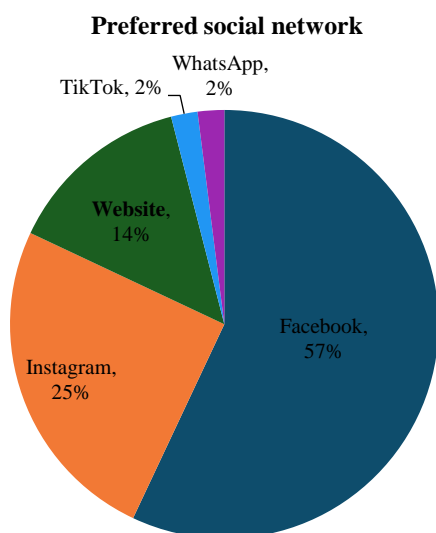


Figure 10
Preferred communication channels
Source: Own Elaboration (2025)

This finding highlights the importance of direct, immediate, and bidirectional communication as a differentiating element of the user experience and as a key factor in strengthening the agency–customer relationship.

4.4 Role of Digital Marketing and Social Media Content

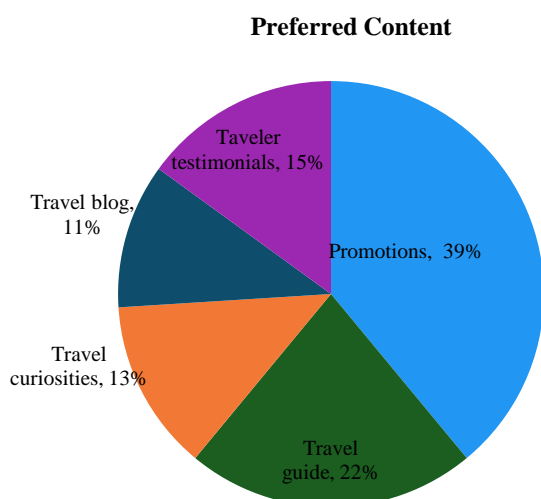
The analysis of results related to digital marketing shows that social media platforms constitute the main point of contact between travel agencies and potential customers. Facebook and Instagram are positioned as the preferred platforms for contacting an online travel agency (Figure 11), consolidating their role as strategic channels for the promotion of tourism services.

Box 11**Figure 11**

Preferred social media platforms for contacting an online travel agency

Source: Own Elaboration (2025).

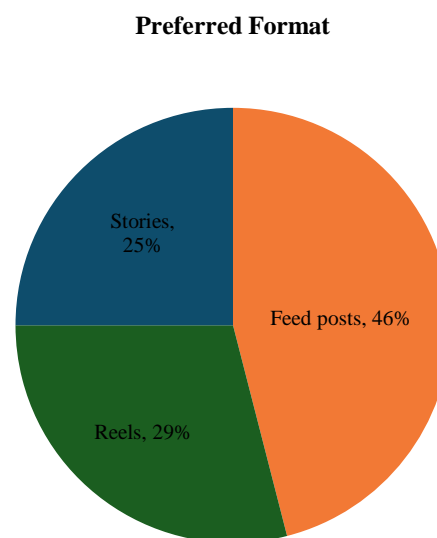
Likewise, users express a strong preference for visual, testimonial, and dynamic content—such as images, videos, and experiences shared by other travelers (Figure 12).

Box 12**Figure 12**

Facebook content preferences

Source: Own Elaboration (2025)

The preference for content formats that are easy to consume and share (Figure 13) reinforces the relevance of content marketing as a tool for generating engagement, conveying trust, and strengthening brand positioning.

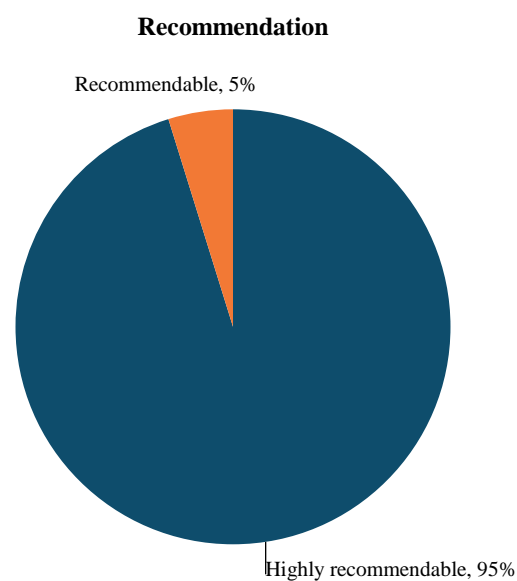
Box 13**Figure 13**

Preferred social media content formats

Source: Own Elaboration (2025)

4.5 Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty

The results obtained from the second instrument, applied to users who have already contracted services from online travel agencies, show a high likelihood of recommending the service (Figure 14, Instrument 2), reflecting favorable levels of customer satisfaction.

Box 14**Figure 14**

Likelihood of recommendation

Source: Own Elaboration (2025)

This indicator suggests that a positive user experience directly influences customer loyalty and the promotion of the service through word-of-mouth recommendations.

Likewise, the preference for real-time assistance and for clear, personalized content (Figure 15, Instrument 2) confirms that the customer experience is strengthened when continuous, timely, and needs-based digital support is provided.

Box 15

Likelihood of recommendation

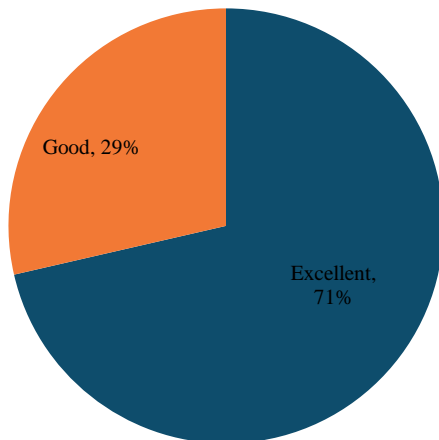


Figure 15

Likelihood of recommendation

Source: Own Elaboration (2025)

Overall, the results show that the implementation of a digital intermediation model based on service personalization, multichannel strategies, and the strategic use of content marketing significantly improves service perception, increases purchase intention, and strengthens customer loyalty in the tourism sector. These findings provide solid empirical evidence to support the proposed model and serve as a foundation for the discussion and conclusions of the study.

5. Discussion

The results obtained in the present research confirm that digital intermediation in the tourism sector not only constitutes an operational alternative to traditional models, but also represents an effective strategy for value creation, brand strengthening, and customer loyalty when integrated with a personalization- and multichannel-oriented approach. These findings are consistent with the perspectives proposed by the World Tourism Organization (OMT, 2008) which highlights the structural transformation of tourism driven by digitalization and changing consumer expectations.

The identified consumer profile—predominantly young and highly familiar with technology—aligns with previous studies indicating that young adults are the main users of digital platforms for contracting tourism services. This segment not only shows a greater willingness to use online travel agencies, but also demands personalized experiences, immediacy in service, and direct communication channels, reinforcing the need to rethink intermediation models from a user-centered perspective.

The high willingness to use online travel agencies observed in the results supports the arguments put forward by Ricart (2009) and Brzowska y Bubel (2015) with regard to the viability of electronic business models as mechanisms for expanding market reach and optimizing the value proposition. However, the persistence of fear of fraud and previous negative experiences indicates that trust remains a critical factor, as pointed out by Garrido (2023) and Bellón (2024). In this regard, the results suggest that competitive differentiation lies not solely in the use of digital platforms, but in agencies' ability to provide human support, transparency, and security throughout the purchasing process.

Likewise, the strong preference for direct communication channels, particularly WhatsApp, confirms the relevance of multichannel strategies as a strategic element of digital intermediation. This finding is consistent with the arguments proposed by Guerra (2009) and Bricio Samaniego et al. (2018), those who emphasize that social media platforms and messaging applications should not be conceived solely as promotional showcases, but rather as spaces for interaction and the construction of long-term relationships with customers.

With regard to digital marketing, the results reinforce the importance of content marketing as a strategy for generating engagement and strengthening brand trust perception. The preference for visual, testimonial, and experiential content is consistent with the trends identified by Toledo (2022), who points out that narrative and visual content constitutes one of the main drivers of interaction in digital environments. In this context, the strategic use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram is consolidated as a key component for the positioning of online travel agencies.

On the other hand, the high levels of satisfaction and the strong likelihood of service recommendation observed among customers who have already used online travel agencies confirm that a positive user experience is a determining factor in customer loyalty. This finding is linked to the arguments put forward by [Núñez Cudriz y Miranda Corrales \(2020\)](#), who emphasize that the creation of superior value and the development of long-term relationships are central elements of contemporary marketing.

In summary, the discussion of the results makes it possible to affirm that digital intermediation in travel agencies becomes more effective when it is grounded in the integration of technology, personalized service, and user-centered digital marketing strategies. These elements not only respond to current trends in the tourism sector, but also contribute to the consolidation of sustainable competitive advantages, reinforcing the relevance of the model proposed in the present research.

6. Conclusions

The results obtained in this study indicate that the present research made it possible to analyze digital intermediation as a viable and effective strategy for brand growth and customer loyalty in the online travel agency sector. Through the integration of theoretical approaches from tourism studies, electronic business models, and digital marketing, the quantitative analysis showed that the digitalization of tourism services—when accompanied by personalized attention—generates measurable positive impacts on user experience and on the agency–customer relationship, as reflected in the levels of acceptance and trust reported by respondents.

The findings confirm a high willingness among consumers to contract tourism services online, with 92% of participants indicating their willingness to use digital travel agencies. This behavior is particularly significant among the young adult segment, which represents the largest proportion of users and shows a clear preference for immediacy, direct communication, and the use of social media as primary interaction channels. In this context, multichannel strategies and continuous support emerge as determining factors for model acceptance, as they respond to the expectations of the digital customer.

Likewise, the research shows that despite the widespread acceptance of digital channels, trust remains a critical element in purchase decisions.

Although 95% of respondents reported trusting digital support during the contracting process, a significant proportion also expressed fear of fraud and previous negative experiences, reinforcing the need to incorporate mechanisms of transparency, security, and personalized follow-up. These quantitative results confirm that digital intermediation based on proximity and human-centered service constitutes a competitive advantage over mass booking platforms that lack personalized support.

Regarding digital marketing, the study concludes that content marketing plays a strategic role in generating engagement and strengthening brand positioning. The data show that more than 70% of users prefer visual and testimonial content, while 55% value incentives such as discounts or gifts as factors influencing their purchase decisions.

These percentages confirm that strategies focused on creating informational and emotional value directly contribute to increasing trust and purchase intention in tourism services.

Finally, the high levels of satisfaction and the strong likelihood of recommendation identified among users who have already utilized online travel agencies allow us to conclude that a positive customer experience is a key factor in loyalty and sustained business growth. The preference for real-time assistance and direct communication channels—such as WhatsApp, used by 78% of respondents—reinforces the relevance of digital intermediation models centered on service personalization.

Overall, the quantitative findings and their analysis provide solid empirical evidence supporting the implementation of digital intermediation models oriented toward multichannel strategies, personalized service, and the strategic use of digital marketing, offering a consistent foundation for future research and informed decision-making in the tourism sector.

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative results obtained, as well as the critical conditions identified in the digital intermediation of tourism services, structured recommendations are proposed across four strategic levels aimed at strengthening digital intermediation models, enhancing user experience, and consolidating sustainable competitive advantages in online travel agencies.

a. Organizational Level (Travel Agencies)

- Standardize digital service and support processes by documenting service workflows, response protocols, and post-sale follow-up procedures in order to ensure consistent and reliable customer experiences. For example, systematizing customer service via WhatsApp and social media helps guarantee consistent response times and reduces perceived risk during the purchasing process.
- Strengthen personalized service as the core of the digital intermediation model by integrating real-time human support during critical stages such as quotation, booking, and incident resolution, given that 95% of users reported trust in digital support.
- Promote a customer-centered organizational culture focused on the digital consumer by encouraging continuous staff training in digital communication skills, empathy, experience management, and problem-solving, aligned with the expectations of today's tourism consumers.

b. Interinstitutional Level (Associations, Chambers, and the Education Sector)

- Promote partnerships between travel agencies, tourism chambers, and universities aimed at developing digital competencies applied to tourism, such as digital marketing, online platform management, and consumer behavior analysis. An example of this type of collaboration is the linkage between educational institutions and tourism companies to offer professional internships focused on social media management and digital customer service.

- Establish training and certification programs in digital tourism marketing to professionalize online intermediation and increase consumer trust in digital travel agencies.
- Encourage spaces for the exchange of best practices among travel agencies, facilitated by sector chambers and associations, with the aim of sharing successful experiences in service personalization, customer loyalty, and the use of digital technologies.

c. Technological Level

- Prioritize the use of accessible, customer-oriented technologies, such as instant messaging platforms, visual content management systems, and digital customer tracking tools, considering that 78% of users prefer WhatsApp as their primary communication channel.
- Develop digital repositories of tourism content, integrating testimonials, audiovisual materials, travel experiences, and frequently asked questions, to facilitate user decision-making and reinforce perceptions of trust.
- Integrate digital analytics tools to monitor key indicators such as social media engagement, satisfaction levels, repurchase intention, and likelihood of recommendation, thereby strengthening data-driven decision-making.

d. Public Policy Level

- Strengthen support programs for the digitalization of the tourism sector, specifically targeting micro and small travel agencies, with an emphasis on the adoption of digital marketing tools, e-commerce solutions, and multichannel customer service.
- Promote guidelines and certifications of best practices in digital tourism intermediation, coordinated among tourism organizations, business chambers, and regulatory authorities, to reduce perceptions of fraud and increase consumer trust.

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- Promote a national strategy for tourism digital transformation, articulated among the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Economy, and the education sector, incorporating training, support, and financing for user-centered digital intermediation models.
- Ensure the continuity of support programs, avoiding exclusively short-term schemes, in order to consolidate sustainable digitalization and professionalization processes within the tourism sector.

e. Business Level

- Strengthen personalized service and digital support schemes, given that the high willingness to contract online services (92%) and the elevated level of trust in digital support (95%) indicate that users place significant value on closeness and continuous follow-up throughout the purchasing process. In this regard, travel agencies should prioritize service models that integrate real-time human assistance, especially during critical stages such as quotation, booking, and post-sale support.
- Consolidate multichannel strategies by strategically incorporating users' preferred communication channels. Considering that 78% of respondents use WhatsApp as their primary contact medium, it is advisable to integrate this platform as a formal customer service channel, complemented by social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, in order to ensure a fluid, immediate, and consistent communication experience.
- Reinforce digital trust and security mechanisms, addressing users' fear of fraud and previously reported negative experiences. The implementation of clear privacy policies, security certifications, verifiable testimonials, and secure payment processes can help reduce perceived risk and differentiate online travel agencies from mass booking platforms that lack personalized support.

- Prioritize the development of content marketing strategies focused on creating informational and emotional value. Given that more than 70% of users prefer visual and testimonial content, and that 55% value incentives such as discounts or gifts, travel agencies should design campaigns that integrate real traveler experiences, engaging audiovisual content, and strategic promotions that reinforce trust and purchase intention.
- Establish continuous measurement and feedback systems to monitor key indicators such as customer satisfaction, trust levels, frequency of interaction, and likelihood of recommendation. The systematic use of these indicators will facilitate data-driven decision-making and continuous improvement of the digital intermediation model.

6.2 Future Lines of Research

The analysis developed in this research shows that digital intermediation in the online travel agency sector not only represents a growing trend, but also constitutes a feasible and strategically relevant field of study for the generation of sustainable competitive advantages. The results indicate that when a customer-oriented organizational structure, a digital service culture, and the appropriate use of communication and marketing technologies are in place, digital intermediation can generate measurable impacts on user experience, customer loyalty, and brand positioning.

In general terms, the central premise of the study is validated: the articulation of service personalization, multichannel strategies, digital platforms, and content marketing approaches is a determining factor in the acceptance and effectiveness of digital intermediation models within the tourism sector. This integration makes it possible to respond more efficiently to the expectations of the digital consumer and to strengthen the agency–customer relationship.

Likewise, several critical factors that favor digital intermediation were identified, such as the intensive use of social media, instant messaging applications, visual and testimonial content, and human support throughout the purchasing process.

These elements are more clearly present among younger user segments and in agencies that have adopted structured digital strategies, suggesting a higher level of digital maturity in certain organizational profiles.

Conversely, small travel agencies and digital tourism ventures continue to face barriers related to consumer trust, process standardization, and limited adoption of analytical tools. However, the results indicate that these limitations can be overcome through personalization strategies, external partnerships, and the use of accessible digital platforms, reinforcing the need to promote inclusive intermediation models adapted to different levels of organizational development.

Based on these findings, the following lines for future research are proposed:

- Conduct longitudinal studies to evaluate the impact of digital intermediation on customer loyalty, repeat purchase behavior, and brand equity in the medium and long term.
- Analyze the effects of emerging technologies, such as generative artificial intelligence, advanced chatbots, and recommendation systems, on service personalization in tourism.
- Extend the analysis to other tourism segments, such as business tourism, medical tourism, or rural tourism, which present differentiated digital dynamics.
- Assess the role of microenterprises and digital tourism startups in informal service intermediation and in building consumer trust.
- Develop standardized performance indicators for digital intermediation, capable of being integrated into quality, marketing, or innovation models within the tourism sector.

Overall, this study contributes to both the theoretical and practical understanding of digital intermediation in real tourism contexts and opens new research agendas that recognize the technological, organizational, and relational dimensions of tourism services in the digital economy.

6.3 Final Considerations

The comprehensive analysis of digital intermediation in the online travel agency sector confirms that digital transformation does not depend exclusively on the adoption of technological tools, but rather on organizations' ability to manage the customer experience as a strategic asset. The empirical evidence obtained shows that the digitalization of tourism services is more effective when it is articulated with personalized service processes, direct communication, and user-centered marketing strategies.

The study's results reveal that the integration of digital platforms, staff competencies, a service-oriented organizational culture, and the strategic use of social media constitutes the determining factor for the success of digital intermediation models. Agencies that integrate these elements are able to strengthen consumer trust, improve the purchasing experience, and consolidate long-term relationships with their customers.

In addition, the findings confirm that multichannel strategies and continuous support are necessary conditions for developing sustainable digital intermediation models, particularly in a context where perceptions of risk associated with online transactions persist. Nevertheless, relevant challenges are also identified, such as heterogeneity in agencies' levels of digital maturity, limited process standardization, and the need to professionalize digital competencies in micro and small enterprises within the tourism sector.

The evidence presented allows us to affirm that a comprehensive digital intermediation strategy in tourism must be flexible, customer-centered, and technologically scalable, taking into account the particularities of different market segments. Such a strategy should recognize the value of human support in digital environments, strengthen staff operational capabilities, and foster organizational cultures that are open to learning and continuous improvement.

Finally, this study contributes an empirical and methodological foundation for decision-making in the field of digital tourism, providing clear elements for the design of business strategies and sectoral policies aimed at the professionalization of digital intermediation. In this sense, it outlines concrete pathways for online travel agencies to strengthen their competitiveness through the structured management of customer experience in the digital economy.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have 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.

Declaration of Originality and Non-Plagiarism

This document is an original and unpublished work. It has not been previously published nor is it currently under review by another scientific journal. The authors ensure that all external sources have been fully cited in accordance with the guidelines of the APA 7 standard, properly acknowledging third-party intellectual authorship and avoiding any form of academic plagiarism.

Authors' Contributions

Delgado Torres, Claudia Lizethe (First Author): Primarily responsible for the design and conceptualization of the research. Led the literature review, the development of the methodology, and the writing of the introduction and conclusions. Additionally, coordinated the data collection process and supervised all phases of the research to ensure coherence and alignment with the study objectives.

Ríos Castillo, Maricela (First Co-author): Responsible for the statistical analysis of the data. Organized the database and applied descriptive statistical techniques to interpret the findings clearly and accurately. Also collaborated in the methodological review and in the preparation of the figures presented in the study.

Villarreal Benavides, Clara Maria (Second Co-author) Responsible for the design and implementation of data collection instruments, such as the administered questionnaires. Also collaborated in the analysis of the collected data and in the interpretation of the results.

Madrigal Enríquez, Jessica Berenice (Third Co-author): Responsible for the theoretical review and support in drafting the theoretical framework. Also contributed to the final editing of the manuscript and to the verification of citations and references.

Data Availability and Materials

All data used in this research come from public and verifiable sources. PDF documents and functional links are included in the References section. Any additional requests may be addressed to the corresponding author.

Funding

This research was conducted without financial support from public or private institutions. The work was carried out using the authors' own resources.

Acknowledgments

The research was conducted without any external funding, relying solely on the researchers' own resources.

Abbreviations

ID	Intermediación Digital
OTA	Online Travel Agencies (Agencias de Viajes Online)
MD	Marketing Digital
RRSS	Redes Sociales
CX	Customer Experience (Experiencia del Cliente)

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