


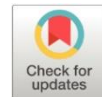


Asistencia virtual en la atención al cliente en las asociaciones de la economía popular y solidaria

Virtual assistance in customer service in the associations of the popular and solidarity economy

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Palabras clave:

Asistencia virtual, cliente, atención, economía popular, servicio, calidad, tecnología, confiabilidad.

Resumen

Introducción: el estudio investigativo se centra en analizar el continuo desarrollo tecnológico que se evidencia en la sociedad actual, teniendo en cuenta las principales necesidades de las organizaciones, siendo los asistentes virtuales uno de los principales factores que se están incorporando a la atención al cliente, mediante el uso de sistemas informáticos, que permiten a los usuarios plantear dudas y resolver preocupaciones sobre productos y servicios. **Objetivo:** analizar el uso de la asistencia virtual en la atención al cliente en las asociaciones de Economía Popular y Solidaria en la actualidad. **Metodología:** la metodología tiene un enfoque cuantitativo es de corte transversal debido a que permite recolectar datos utilizando la técnica de observación y un cuestionario de 20 preguntas cerradas de selección múltiple distribuidas en cuatro dimensiones, como entorno demográfico, conocimiento sobre tecnología, experiencia con la atención al cliente, percepción de la asistencia virtual y atención al cliente con asistencia virtual, el instrumento fue diseñado en base a preguntas en escala Likert, la población estuvo conformada por 8 asociaciones de la Maná, 4 de Salcedo, 2 de Pujilí y 1 de Latacunga dando un total de 15 asociaciones. De tal manera, los resultados serán evaluados mediante análisis, gráficos estadísticos y tablas descriptivas para una adecuada interpretación de los datos. **Resultados:** la encuesta inicio con el 86,7% de personas en estar de acuerdo y el restante 13,3% indico estar totalmente de acuerdo, lo que indica que las personas están conscientes tanto de la existencia de los asistentes virtuales. Sin embargo, se puede evidenciar que existe desacuerdo por parte de las asociaciones que es el 66,7% al momento de ofrecer atención al cliente, por lo mismo el 26,7% muestra que están totalmente de acuerdo que existe demoras en la atención al cliente y el 6,7% de los encuestados recalcan que, si hay retrasos. Respecto a si han tenido dificultades, el 60% de los encuestados presentan inconvenientes para brindar una atención optima a los clientes, el 26,7 % está en desacuerdo porque expresa que si brinda una atención de calidad y 13,3% está totalmente de acuerdo con la atención que oferta. El 86,7% de los participantes creen que la información es útil y precisa, dando esto paso a la aplicación de tecnologías de asistencia virtual. El 80% de los encuestados están totalmente de acuerdo y de acuerdo con la

utilización de estas herramientas tecnológicas, que les permitan brindar una excelente atención al cliente, también que un 20 % están en desacuerdo porque es mejor brindar una atención al cliente de forma presencial que virtual. **Conclusión:** la investigación resalta la importancia del uso de asistentes virtuales en la atención al cliente como una herramienta que permita el desarrollo y crecimiento productivo en las asociaciones de Economía Popular y Solidaria de la Provincia de Cotopaxi. **Área de estudio general:** Ciencias Administrativas. **Área de estudio específica:** Gestión Administrativa, Servicio al Cliente y TIC. **Tipo de estudio:** Artículos Originales.

Keywords:

Virtual assistance,
customer,
attention,
popular economy,
service,
quality,
technology,
reliability.

Abstract

Introduction:the research study focuses on analyzing the continuous technological development that is evident today, considering the main needs of organizations, with virtual assistants being one of the main factors that are being incorporated into customer service, using computer systems, which allow users to raise doubts and resolve concerns about products and services. **Objective:** analyze virtual assistance in customer service in the associations of the popular and solidarity economy of the Province of Cotopaxi today. **Methodology:** the methodology has a quantitative approach that is cross-sectional because it allows data collection using the observation technique and a questionnaire of 20 closed multiple-choice questions distributed in four dimensions, such as demographic environment, knowledge about technology, experience with customer service , perception of virtual assistance and customer service with virtual assistance. the instrument was designed based on questions on the Likert scale, the population was made up of 8 associations from Maná, 4 from Salcedo, 2 from Pujilí and 1 from Latacunga giving a total of 15 associations. In this way, the results will be evaluated through analysis, statistical graphs, and descriptive tables for an adequate interpretation of the data. **Results:** the survey began with 86.7% of people agreeing and the remaining 13.3% indicating they completely agreed, which indicates that people are aware of the existence of virtual assistants. However, there is disagreement on the part of the associations, which is 66.7%, when offering customer service; Therefore, 26.7% show that they totally agree that there

are delays in customer service. customer and 6.7% of those surveyed emphasize that if there are delays. Regarding whether they have had difficulties, 60% of those surveyed have problems providing optimal service to clients, 26.7% disagree because they express that they do provide quality service and 13.3% totally agree. with the attention it offers. 86.7% of the participants believe that the information is useful and accurate, giving way to the application of virtual assistance technologies. 80% of those surveyed totally agree and agree with the use of these technological tools, which allow them to provide excellent customer service, and 20% disagree because it is better to provide customer service in person. How virtual. Conclusion: the research highlights the importance of the use of virtual assistants in customer service as a tool that allows the development and productive growth in the associations of Popular and Solidarity Economy of the Province of Cotopaxi.

Introduction

The popular and solidarity economy operates in small societies that are formed to produce specific goods or services, for example, cooperatives, associations, foundations, which work to meet the needs of the community of which they are part and thus achieve social and environmental objectives and promote solidarity among members. The main characteristics of associations are the production of goods and services which are sold and also used for self-consumption by the workers who make up the associations.

The continuous technological development that is evident in today's society, taking into account the main needs of organizations, virtual assistants being one of the main factors that are being incorporated into customer service, through the use of computer systems, which allow users to raise questions and resolve concerns about products and services. The main objective is efficient management through these virtual assistants, which focus on minimizing time and the use of resources, with the purpose of providing prompt attention to customer requirements.

Virtual assistants have several benefits, among the main ones we can highlight that they do not need a physical space since they work digitally through technological means. The use of these tools increases the communication channels between organizations and users, immediate availability 24/7 to answer questions or concerns of clients, organizations

generate trust and a professional image towards the general public, the use of virtual assistants allows clients to interact from anywhere in the world.

The constant use of technology can be a distracting part when carefully handling customer information, the implementation of virtual assistants requires a technological dependence, therefore if there were technical failures or interruptions in the system, problems in customer service will be evident, the treatment is not personalized because it only solves common doubts or concerns, therefore it may be necessary for them to need human intervention, there are limitations in the response time and finally hiring a virtual assistant can mean a high economic factor.

According to the study “Impact of the popular and solidarity economy in the Ecuadorian cooperative sector” (Delgado et al., 2021), which uses a descriptive quantitative approach to analyze different sources on the subject, it concludes that the popular and solidarity economy has had a positive impact on the cooperative sector in Ecuador. In this sense, it is important to note that a bidirectional role is played by applying a great deal of control and administration by the State with cooperatives, where having higher investment amounts available for members is reflected in the income they generate and the budget they can manage for their development in general.

Quality customer service is essential for all organizations, regardless of their size, structure, or nature of operations. It is essential to demonstrate competence in all areas of the business. Customer service is the first impression given, which is vital to maintaining customer preference. Having good customer service is a guarantee when it comes to keeping an association operational, since the quality of customer service is the first impression received. If this is reduced, the number of customers will decrease and threats to stability in organizations will increase. An example of process optimization can be seen in the article: “Discrete event simulation model for the analysis and improvement of the customer service process” (Heredia et al., 2020), where, through a simulation model for certain events within the customer service process, the necessary suggestions were established for the best operation of an SME.

On the other hand, in the research article entitled: “Customer service, service, product and price as determining variables of customer satisfaction in an SME service approach” (Valenzuela et al., 2019), the objective was to carry out an analysis of the perception of the preferred customers of a service SME regarding their satisfaction with the products they can purchase. In this way, the existing indifference between the comparison standards and the perception of the customers regarding the performance of the product was established, with the condition that the quality shown is superior to the competition, an adequate price is established and with innovation in terms of its offer. By virtue of this, a better economic development and customer service is marked by the associations that use virtual assistance within their service standards.

The Popular and Solidarity Economy (EPS) encompasses economic activities based on solidarity, cooperation and citizen participation. EPS associations are organizations formed by workers in the popular and basic subsistence economy who come together to develop collective economic activities. Virtual assistance strengthens their management, increases their efficiency and improves their impact on the community by improving communications and collaboration, access to information and resources, task automation, capacity building, promotion and marketing. According to the “Studies on the popular and solidarity economy” (Superintendence of Popular and Solidarity Economy[SEPS], 2024a), the objective is to report on academic events organized by SEPS, through links of interest related to scientific research and details of the most important institutional event of the year, from an explanatory quantitative approach.

In the study entitled "Training from SEPS: 10 years strengthening the popular and solidarity economic sector" (SEPS, 2024b), it is indicated that the implementation of training within associations has strengthened and consolidated the principles of the popular and solidarity economy, all this hand in hand with the constant control and supervision of the institutions to guarantee transparent administration and whose purpose is to focus on customer service. Between 2017 and 2022, 83 thousand people were trained in 1,387 events. In addition, in the last three years, 9 out of 10 people trained participated virtually, according to the Superintendency of Popular and Solidarity Economy, 2022.

As indicated, the time savings that occur after using virtual assistants in customer service processes is very large, as is the acceptance they have from customers by simplifying tasks. Virtual assistants provide solutions to the need to have employees who are in charge of direct customer service, therefore, processes are simplified and a better experience is provided to partners, having a very positive influence on the part of institutions in the empathetic field and the trustworthiness that is presented to the general public.

In another study entitled “Logistics management and customer service in a food industry company, Lima 2021” (Zelada, 2021), the aim was to determine the relationship between logistics management and customer service in a food industry company in Lima in 2021. Both studies suggest that virtual assistance provides technological benefits to support customers and needs to be integrated in various ways to make it easy to access, either interactively on web pages or with mobile applications developed for each institution.

According to their study entitled: “Virtual assistant for customer service of the Trevo SAC Company” (Castro & Gonzales, 2022), the question was raised as to how the use of the virtual assistant influences customer service. The study variable on virtual assistance is to seek excellent customer service. An experimental quantitative design was used, which allowed observing a reduction in complaints and a considerable decrease in response time. These results indicate that the implementation of a virtual assistant helped to solve customers' concerns. But this does not mean that virtual assistance tools should

be used 100%, but rather a hybrid model where automation is used with personal attention to customers.

It is important to clarify that not in all situations a virtual assistant can replace direct contact with an advisor, since if the situation is very complex or a high degree of specific information is needed, the client always prefers to deal with a person. For this reason, companies have opted for hybrid solutions between virtual assistance and traditional customer service to optimally please their customers. According to Ramires & Valle (2022), in their studies: “Virtual Assistants based on Artificial Intelligence”, they sought to identify virtual assistants suitable for customer service in virtual intelligence, using a quantitative method. It was verified that virtual assistants effectively reduce the administrative burden in public and private organizations. In addition, in the study “What types of virtual agents can be used in small businesses to improve their advertising”, it was shown that the use of new technologies based on artificial intelligence can benefit small and medium-sized businesses in various aspects. Through a descriptive qualitative study, it was concluded that technology is a constantly evolving field that seeks to continuously improve and offer better solutions to user problems.

On the other hand, from a macro approach, virtual assistance is analyzed in the study of Torres & Cruz (2020). The results showed that good customer service can be an effective competitive strategy, but the study also revealed that low utilization of marketing strategies and lack of partner knowledge have negatively affected business profitability. The use of technologies containing artificial intelligence provides us with virtual assistance services from anywhere in the world, taking into account the needs of customers at the time of their attention. It involves the implementation of intelligent systems and automated platforms to efficiently manage the needs of a large number of customers or users.

According to Arias & Valdivia (2021) in their study: “Customer satisfaction with customer service channels at a financial institution in Arequipa. Study in times of COVID 19”, in Arequipa, the level of customer satisfaction was determined using different service channels during the pandemic. In which it can be observed that most people received the service adequately through digital channels and felt poorly attended to when the process was carried out in person. Therefore, a digital solution should always be considered in the event of possible events that cannot be controlled as an institution.

For this reason, a digital solution must always be considered in the event of possible events that cannot be controlled by an institution.

Silva-Trevino et al. (2021) in Mexico and Villavicencio (2023) in Cotopaxi, point out that virtual assistance at the meso level refers to the application of virtual assistance technologies in more specific or segmented contexts, such as within a particular

organization, industry or community. They underline the importance of designing and implementing solutions that adapt to the specific needs of users and complement human capabilities.

In the master's theses entitled: "The relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty: a case study of a commercial company in Mexico" The objective was to relate service quality with customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Also, in the "Systematization report on the experience of the project "ARCSA for an Entrepreneurial Ecuador 2017 -2022" to promote the growth of the local economy and strengthen the productive sector", the objective was to analyze the systematization of the project experience. The factors identified in terms of technical assistance are key since they have supported product certification, which highlights the importance of both local growth and the strengthening of the productive sector.

These studies highlight the importance of virtual assistance that provides its services specifically to the needs of customers. To ensure quality customer service in companies, it must be complemented with technology, which is not an expense but a good investment that contributes to maintaining profitability and sustainability in productive sectors. Chatbots for websites, for example, are used to answer frequently asked questions, assist in site navigation, and offer product or service recommendations.

Similarly, personal virtual assistants such as Siri, Google Assistant, or Alexa are used to perform tasks and control smart devices at home. This is mentioned by Gallardo (2020) in Peru and Baque et al. (2021) in Ecuador in their studies "Intelligent agent for customer service in the digital channels service in the professional B2B company SAC" and "Digital marketing and its impact on the commercial development of microenterprises in the city of Manta post-COVID 19". The first determined, through an experimental quantitative approach, that an intelligent agent had a positive influence on customer service through digital channels in the B2B company Profesional SAC. The second study, with a qualitative cross-sectional bibliographic design, showed how digital marketing is crucial for commercial development in the current market of the city of Manta.

Furthermore, Martínez (2019) in Spain, in his doctoral thesis "Online trust and reputation in users of collaborative digital platforms with shared access and on demand" describes the impact and elements that shape online trust and reputation in both users and platforms. The need for work is one of the main factors that lead users to use digital platforms. In the same way, one of the fundamental parts of customer service is automation because the customer is not only looking for speed but also personalization, so virtual assistance must be used that is capable of reviewing this data and responding to the needs presented by customers, it may be in the work or personal environment.

Customer service is differentiated depending on the needs of each EPS association. Therefore, it is advisable to assess the particular needs of the association and adapt the functions of the virtual assistant accordingly. Thus, the virtual assistant can perform various functions, such as managing phone calls, providing information, resolving queries and attending to the needs of customers, or managing emails, answering queries, sending relevant information and maintaining effective communication with customers.

Associations promote learning and the use of virtual assistants that allow organizations to evolve and differentiate themselves from others. In this regard, the goal is to find a balance between the use of virtual assistants in the different economic activities that associations carry out, whether they are products or services. Another purpose is to highlight the introduction of virtual assistants that allow customer service to be transformed, creating a friendlier environment and therefore seeking customer loyalty.

Methodology

According to Jiménez et al. (2022), the quantitative study is based on the need to be able to measure and estimate the magnitudes of the phenomena or problems that occur in a type of population, in such a way that it allows the collection of data through a delimited study, as well as a prior review to be able to analyze and establish differences and similarities between EPS associations on how they use virtual assistance.

This research has a quantitative approach because it allows data collection, in such a way that the selection variables are quantifiable and measurable through percentages. It is based on estimating the magnitude of virtual assistance in the associations under study. It is cross-sectional, because it was carried out in a single determined period of time. It is a non-experimental study because the variables will not be manipulated, just as there is no desired intervention to evaluate. The points of interest found in the collection of data on virtual assistance in customer service in associations of the popular and solidarity economy are explained in the discussion.

The population consisted of 134 associations from the province of Cotopaxi distributed as follows: 21 associations in the canton of La Maná, 36 in Latacunga, 31 in Pujilí, and 10 in Salcedo. In selecting the object of study, convenience sampling was used, which was a method that allowed researchers to select organizations using inclusion and exclusion criteria, of which 8 were from La Maná, 4 from Salcedo, 2 from Pujilí, and 1 from Latacunga, giving a total of 15 associations.

The research technique for collecting information was through a structured survey with closed multiple-choice questions, with the option of a single answer. The instrument was designed based on Likert scale reagents, which consists of 20 questions distributed in four

dimensions, such as demographic environment, knowledge about technology, experience with customer service, perception of virtual assistance and customer service with virtual assistance. Thus, the results will be evaluated through analysis, statistical graphs and descriptive tables for an adequate interpretation of the data.

Results

After applying the surveys to the EPS associations of the province of Cotopaxi, information was collected and analyzed to obtain data. Once the procedure for all the questions was carried out, 5 questions were determined that generate greater importance for determining a result, presenting favorable characteristics for the implementation of virtual assistants.

Board1

Population of the Popular and Solidarity Economy Associations of the province of Cotopaxi

No.	Canton	Popular and Solidarity Economy Associations	People who work
1	The Manna	San Agustín Agricultural Producers Association	7
		Association of Independent Producers of Tropical Fruits El Triunfo	4
		Association of Producers and Merchants May 16 Asopcomer	9
		Banana and Related Agricultural Production Association Asoproabanafi	6
		Association of Agricultural Production of Fruits of La Maná Lamanfruts	6
		Asoproafrulam	
		Mother Earth Association of Small Agricultural Producers	7
		New Hope Association	6
2	Latacunga	Asoprothex Association	7
		Livelihood Association	18
3	Pujili	Empretutiv Association	18
		Narcisca de Jesús Association of Organic Agricultural Producers	12
4	Salcedo	Association of Agricultural Producers of the Collection Center of the San Antonio Cumbijin Commune	12
		Association for the Production and Marketing of Virgin of Bethlehem Dairy Products	11
		Sierra Nevada Association	15
		Total	160

Table 2 shows the level of knowledge that partners have about technological tools that can be applied to virtual assistance. All respondents responded positively, with 86.7% of people agreeing and the remaining 13.3% indicating that they fully agree, which indicates

that people are aware of both the existence of virtual assistants and the technological resources that are applied for their implementation.

Table 2

Do you know what technologies can be used in virtual assistance?

	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
1	Totally disagree	0	0.0%
2	Disagree	0	0.0%
3	OK	13	86.7%
4	Totally agree	2	13.3%
	TOTAL	15	100%

Note:Table 2 shows the frequency of knowledge about technologies used in virtual assistance

Similarly, in Table 3, it is possible to see a discomfort on the part of the associations, which is 66.7%, when requesting customer service. Therefore, 26.7% show that they totally agree that there are delays in customer service and 6.7% of those surveyed emphasize that, yes, there are delays in service, but it is a situation that can be improved by using technological tools that allow doubts or concerns to be resolved in order to optimize customer satisfaction.

Table 3

You feel that there are delays in customer service at the association

	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
1	Totally disagree	0	0.0%
2	Disagree	1	6.7%
3	OK	10	66.7%
4	Totally agree	4	26.7%
	TOTAL	15	100%

Note:Table 3 shows whether there are delays in customer service in Cotopaxi associations.

The result of the data collection by the respondents has responded that there are problems in receiving adequate attention, where 60% of the respondents have difficulties in providing optimal attention to clients, 26.7% disagree because quality attention has been provided and 13.3% fully agree taking into account that the current processes are carried out in person at each Association and not by virtual assistants, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Have you had difficulties with customer service at the association?

	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
1	Totally disagree	0	0.0%

Table 4

Have you experienced difficulties with customer service at the association (continued)

	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
2	Disagree	4	26.7%
3	OK	9	60.0%
4	Totally agree	2	13.3%
	TOTAL	15	100%

Note:Table 4 shows whether there are delays in customer service in Cotopaxi associations.

In Table 5, the use of a virtual assistant is given greater value, because when people were surveyed about the veracity, precision and usefulness of the information provided by a virtual assistant, 86.7% of the participants thought that the information was useful and was given accurately, giving way to the application of virtual assistance technologies within EPS associations.

Table 5

Do you think the information provided by virtual assistance is accurate and useful?

	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
1	Totally disagree	0	0.0%
2	Disagree	0	0.0%
3	OK	13	86.7%
4	Totally agree	2	13.3%
	TOTAL	15	100%

Note:Table 5 shows whether the information provided by virtual assistance is useful and accurate.

Finally, in Table 6, it is mentioned that 80% of those surveyed fully agree and support the use of these technological tools, which allow them to provide excellent customer service and therefore improve the levels of productivity that exist in the Popular and Solidarity Economy associations of the province of Cotopaxi, despite the fact that the results also indicate that 20% disagree because it is better to provide customer service in person than virtually, thus presenting a greater dispersion of the data in this question with respect to the others, the members of the association would be willing to train and use virtual assistants to help with customer service processes.

Table 6

Do you think that using virtual assistants will improve the quality of customer service?

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
1 Totally disagree	0	0.0%
2 Disagree	3	20.0%
3 OK	6	40.0%
4 Totally agree	6	40.0%
TOTAL	15	100%

Note: This table shows whether the use of virtual assistants would improve the quality of customer service in EPS associations.

Conclusions

- Partners have a high level of knowledge about technological tools that can be applied in virtual assistance, therefore, the majority of respondents express knowledge about these tools, likewise a small percentage are aware that they are technological resources necessary for customer service.
- Research reveals that most associations report difficulties and delays in customer service; this weakness is seen as an opportunity to implement virtual assistants in customer service.
- The importance of using technological tools allows obtaining accurate and useful information provided by virtual assistants, which improves the efficiency and quality of customer service in associations.
- The use of virtual assistance tools will allow obtaining beneficial results for the customer service process, which will promote sustainable development in associations.
- This research highlights the importance and need for the use of virtual assistants in customer service. In addition, it is necessary for associations to establish mechanisms to incorporate these new technologies into their processes.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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