

## Marketing Digital en la gestión de agencias de viajes. Estudio de Caso República Dominicana

*Digital Marketing in the management of travel agencies.*

*Dominican Republic Case Study*

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**Palabras claves:**

Agencias de viajes, comportamiento, indicadores, marketing digital, República Dominicana.

**Keywords:** Travel agencies, behavior, indicators, digital marketing, Dominican Republic.

**Resumen**

Existen actualmente escasas investigaciones que permitan analizar, desde el punto de vista del uso del marketing digital, la gestión de Cuba en comparación con los destinos turísticos competencia del área. En el presente artículo se analizan las estrategias de marketing digital aplicadas en agencias de viajes de República Dominicana, con el propósito de identificar elementos positivos y negativos de las acciones en este destino, que sirvan de experiencia para Cuba. Se partió de un análisis bibliográfico, identificándose así las metodologías e indicadores más eficientes para evaluar el comportamiento de dichas variables en el destino. El estudio utilizó una metodología descriptiva con un enfoque analítico, tomando como base fuentes de información secundarias, se aplicó además el juicio de expertos adoptándose el método de evaluación individual. Los resultados demostraron aún deficiencias en la implementación de estas estrategias en las agencias dominicanas, lo que se generaliza a toda Latinoamérica, sin embargo, estas han demostrado un avance, ganando en consecuencia un reciente y fortalecido posicionamiento en el mercado. **Área de estudio general:** Marketing turístico. **Área de estudio específica:** Marketing digital en agencias de viajes

**Abstract**

There is currently little research that allows us to analyze, from the point of view of the use of digital marketing, the management of Cuba in comparison with the competing tourist destinations in the area. This article analyzes the digital marketing strategies applied in travel agencies in the Dominican Republic, with the purpose of identifying positive and negative elements of the actions in this destination, which serve as an experience for Cuba. The starting point was a bibliographic analysis, thus identifying the most efficient methodologies and indicators to evaluate the behavior of these variables in the destination. The study used a descriptive methodology with an analytical approach, based on secondary sources of information, expert judgment was also applied, adopting the individual evaluation method. The results still demonstrated deficiencies in the implementation of these strategies in Dominican agencies, which is generalized to all of Latin America; However, they have demonstrated progress, consequently gaining a recent and strengthened positioning in the

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market. General study area: Tourism marketing. Specific study area: Digital marketing in travel agencies

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## Introduction

Today, achieving the much-desired success in the tourism sector is guaranteed exclusively by efficient and effective management of information, starting from understanding the needs of consumers and their purchasing behaviors; in order to create an offer that is sufficiently attractive, with minimal chances of being ignored; and thus determine the safest and most personalized way of getting information to the client about the characteristics and attributes of the product. The best way to achieve this has been simplified with the appearance of one of man's greatest creations: the Internet. We are increasingly connected to technology; most users can see the wonders of tourist sites from a distance and interact with them digitally.

Due to the constant changes in the world, especially in the digital field, new methodologies are being developed when applying marketing strategies, which has modified the negotiation model, thus generating direct ways of relating to customers and, in turn, with employees. "For this reason, studies focused on current marketing trends are carried out more frequently to generate key methodologies when applying them in companies, particularly those with a tourist profile" (Zavala Chalén, 2020; p. 4.).

The Dominican Republic has seen progress in the use of digital marketing. Tourism is one of the sectors that contributes the most to the economy and development of this destination. Tourism Minister David Collado reported that the Caribbean country exceeded all possible expectations with the arrival of tourists in the first quarter of 2023 of 2,076,171 people, breaking even its own records and exceeding the data for 2022 by 21%. Last March was its greatest feat in terms of tourist arrivals and the same happened with the estimate for April (Collado, 2023).

This clearly allows us to infer that the Dominican Republic is experiencing an unprecedented stage in the history of its tourism development, which makes it the focus of this research. They recently signed around 40 cooperation agreements with tour operators, airlines, travel agencies and associations from the United States, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Brazil and Puerto Rico within the framework of the first edition of the DRTrade Show held in Miami. Its presentation to the world has given it greater visibility as a tourist destination.

Based on the current success of the tourism sector in the Dominican Republic, it is essential to study its marketing strategies. Starting from the fact that today's companies,

especially travel agencies, as those responsible for marketing products and creating packages, base their positioning strategy on the management of networks and manage their online campaigns to attract users in order to generate new experiences, identify target markets and provide the desired satisfactions in a more effective and efficient way than competitors; the general objective of this article is to: Evaluate the behavior of digital marketing strategies in travel agencies in the Dominican Republic tourist destination.

### Methodology

In order to analyze good practices, as well as negative elements that serve as experience for the future implementation or improvement of digital marketing strategies applied in Cuban agencies, different diagnostic tools were used. The starting point was an exhaustive bibliographic search on the subject and analysis-synthesis methods were applied to group all the information collected and define methodologies. With the induction-deduction method, certain considerations were reached and with field work related to web and network navigation, the online positioning of the agencies under study was evaluated based on a set of indicators and statistical tools.

The research, in accordance with its specific objectives, was structured into two sections: the first begins by defining everything related to digital marketing from a conceptual point of view and the indicators that can be used to evaluate the performance of these marketing strategies; the second has to do with the evaluation based on indicators of the implementation of these strategies in Dominican travel agencies and the assessment of both positive and negative elements of digital marketing in the destination.

For this research, a sample of all travel agencies operating in the Dominican Republic was taken. The selection criteria was based on those agencies that were better positioned in searches, they were preselected at random (9) after an exhaustive search in the browser, a thorough selection of 4 was made for having a relevant presence in Google Trends, finally studying the agencies: Arbaje Tour, Viajes Alkasa, Emely Tours and Travelwise.

Limitations: It is difficult to carry out an in-depth study due to the impossibility of visiting the destination, applying surveys to travel agencies and accessing information they issue monthly on the operation of their companies (due to privacy rights); therefore, although this study will not be able to fully evaluate all the indicators, it will try to make a general assessment of them, and will also be based on previous studies on the subject.

### **Section 1. Conceptualization and importance of digital marketing in travel agencies Main indicators to evaluate marketing strategies in travel agencies.**

The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines marketing as “an organizational function and set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to

customers, and for managing customer relationships, in ways that benefit the entire organization” (IE Business School [IEBS], 2022; p.1.).

Digital marketing emerged with the creation of web pages to promote products or services, becoming a fundamental tool for any business. As the 21st century began, platforms began to emerge, making the use of digital marketing even more effective. As time went by, with the new turn of the century, new advances emerged, such as social networks, which brought with them a before and after to the way in which the customer-company relationship had been established (Frías María et al., 2018).

### **The role of digital marketing in travel agencies**

Digital platforms are undoubtedly a key connection channel with customers; however, travel agencies often do not give them enough importance. Digital marketing in tourism has evolved rapidly and travel agencies have found it necessary to focus their strategies to better adapt to the various trends in digital marketing.

Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) are key players in this change. Such is their success and reach that, in 2019, according to a report prepared by Statista, OTAs were positioned as the first channel for purchasing trips compared to other possible alternatives such as the company's own website or the online price comparison site, also placing offline travel agencies in fourth position (Statista, 2019). It is important to note that OTAs are understood to be those that manage all or part of their business through the network of networks (Salgado, Morejón & Hernández, 2021).

The bibliometric analysis carried out by Perez Labrada et al., (2022) Regarding publications in Scopus, Scimedirect and Scielo on digital marketing, it was possible to observe a growth in scientific production on the subject of research, which demonstrates the relevance of digital marketing in Latin America, as evidenced in Figure 1. Likewise, the importance of tourism research in Latin America is indicated in terms of emerging destinations in the region. Although a growth in scientific production on the subject is shown for a period of ten years, it is considered insufficient.

**Figure 1***Behavior of the publication index by year*

Source: Pérez Labrada et al., (2022).

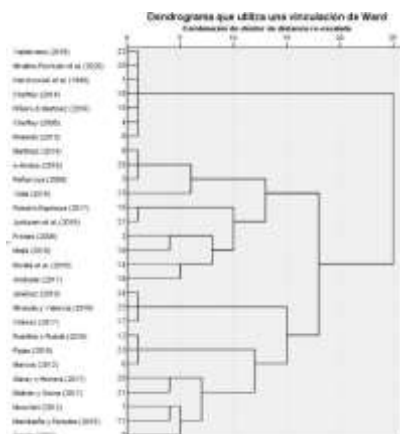
Another study carried out by Alvarado & Peralta (2021) on tourism MSMEs in countries such as Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, the Dominican Republic and Belize reported that 45% of the companies interviewed identify themselves at the adoption level, characterized by the use of technology in basic communication and marketing processes for products or services, and a low level of technological innovation. Technology is also not used to innovate the business model towards an offer with greater digital content, nor is the data generated used to create unique experiences for their customers. Only 37% of companies are taking advantage of the potential of digital tools in their production process, while the majority (63%) use them in basic communication and promotion processes. However, the digital transformation of the sector is expected to accelerate. Companies are motivated to innovate and recognize that these tools attract tourists, provide visibility and are the way in which they sell the most, as well as being vital for interacting with visitors (Alvarado & Peralta, 2021 b).

For the analysis of the bibliographies that address digital marketing management, a cluster study was taken into account through SPSS version 20 as shown in Figure 2, carried out by Fernández Cueria et al., (2022), identifying seven groups of authors whose main contributions and shortcomings were analyzed.



**Figure 2**

*Bibliographic analysis on digital marketing management in tourism organizations. Cluster study*

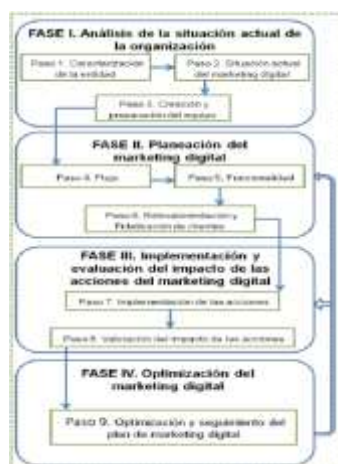


**Fountain:** Fernández Cueria et al., (2022)

The consultation of these methodologies allowed us to identify that they lack a logical sequence for their application in tourism organizations. These tools require incorporating digital marketing principles where customer feedback and loyalty are essential and the goal is not to have advertising with the greatest reach but rather that which manages to maintain constant interaction and conversion. For this reason, Fernández Cueria et al., (2022) propose a new methodology for the management of tourism marketing in tourism organizations as shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3**

*Conceptual map. Methodology for digital marketing management in tourism entities*



**Fountain:** Fernández Cueria et al., (2022)

Given the characteristics and purpose of this research, only Phase I will be worked on, Analysis of the current situation, for which (Positioning, Electronic Commerce, Email Marketing, Social Networks and Corporate Website) will be taken into account. Some aspects of Phase III will also be assessed, which will allow us to evaluate the effectiveness or not of the marketing actions implemented in that destination.

According to García & León (2021), a marketing strategy cannot lack the following actions:

- Have your own website
- Use Email Marketing or Newsletter
- Implement Inbound Marketing and Outbound Marketing
- E-commerce
- Have a Blog
- Apply Video Marketing
- Using Bots
- Using Live Streaming
- Appreciating Mobile Marketing
- Use Web Analytics
- Choosing the social networks to use

One of the most important success factors in establishing digital marketing processes in companies has to do with the acquisition and training of competent human talent in this area, and the appointment of leaders in digital marketing teams who understand its importance.

According to what Selman (2017) expressed in his book Digital Marketing, and ratified by authors such as Paul Fleming (2018) and López Huaman (2021), although traditional marketing is composed of its 4Ps: product, price, promotion and place (distribution); digital marketing also presents its dimensions, the 4 Fs mentioned below: Flow, Functionality, Feedback and Loyalty. The only limitation of the above is that its applicability is focused exclusively on websites or web pages, when digital marketing goes far beyond that.

#### **Definition of possible indicators to take into account:**

Web analytics, as mentioned in the previous section, allows you to optimize your Digital Marketing strategy by studying and monitoring key performance indicators (KPIs) as they are known. These can be divided into three fundamental fields according to concept: traffic, e-commerce and Social Media Marketing. The following table contains some of the most commonly used indicators.



**Table 1**

*Classification of KPIs according to the field being investigated*

Group of indicators (KPIs) by field	Indicators	Breakdown of some indicators
Traffic KPIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New visitors and returning visitors</li> <li>• Bounce rate</li> <li>• Dwell time</li> <li>• Main channels that provide traffic</li> <li>• CTR (Click Through Ratio)</li> </ul>	
E-Commerce KPIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dropout rates</li> <li>• Dropout rate</li> <li>• Product relationships</li> <li>• Average basket</li> <li>• New clients</li> </ul>	
KPIs in Social Media Marketing	Interaction indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engagement</li> <li>- No. of interactions</li> </ul>
	Indicators of influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- number of shares</li> <li>- retweets</li> <li>- no. of times shared</li> </ul>
	Popularity Indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Number of “likes”</li> <li>- No. of followers</li> <li>- Subscribers</li> </ul>
	Quality indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No. of positive and negative comments</li> </ul>

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the proposals made by Soto (2018) and Silva (2021)

## **Section 2. Diagnosis and situational analysis of digital marketing in travel agencies in the Dominican Republic**

Given the value that the application of digital marketing strategies has for travel agencies, the actual marketing behavior in some agencies in the Dominican Republic was evaluated. Regarding phase I, current positioning, use of electronic commerce, implementation or not of email marketing, use of social networks and evaluation of corporate websites were taken into account.

The analysis of the positioning of the destination and the main agencies to be evaluated was carried out through the Google search engine (www.google.com) on April 19 and 20, 2023, where the search criteria listed below were used:

- travel+Caribbean, vacation+Caribbean, tourism+Caribbean
- travel+Dominican Republic, holidays+Dominican Republic, tourism+Dominican Republic, travel agencies+Dominican Republic

After this, it was possible to verify that trips to the Dominican Republic, Mexico and Cuba appear instantly once these criteria were entered and that the best positioned destinations within the Dominican Republic are Punta Cana and Santo Domingo, so a second search was carried out using the following criteria:

- Punta Cana+ travel agency, holidays+ Punta Cana, tourism+ Punta Cana
- Travel + Santo Domingo, travel agencies + Santo Domingo, tourism + Santo Domingo

The best locations in searches were Expedia, Viajes El Corte Inglés and Logitravel, however, the agencies selected for the analysis are based in the Dominican Republic and are also the main ones in charge of promoting trips to the country and outside of it.

When applying research techniques to the different agencies, it was evident that the greatest interaction of the agencies with the clients occurs through social networks; most of these companies consider that digital marketing is only Instagram and Facebook, focusing on promotion through these networks, sometimes ignoring the great impact that they would have by using other virtual platforms to reach their target audience. However, their recent campaigns seem to be more attractive. They have also developed the use of E-commerce as a digital marketing tool facilitating the purchase, they have focused on providing more personalized experiences with a greater inclusive character.

The following table allows us to evaluate and compare the current use of social media in the travel agencies analysed. Each criterion was measured using last March as a reference.

**Table 2**

*Evaluation of the current use of networks in Dominican travel agencies*

<i>Social Network</i>	<i>KPIs / aspects to value</i>	<i>Arbaje Tour &amp; MICE</i>	<i>Alkasa Travels</i>	<i>Emely Tours</i>	<i>Travelwise</i>	
Instagram	Account	arbajetours	travelalkasa	Emelytours	travelwiserd	
	Followers	13.9 thousand	69.3 thousand	84.5 thousand	61.4 thousand	
	Followed	1487	4056	1621	2996	
	Number of publications	1571	3932	1902	1127	
	Engagement		Last month (March)	Last month (March)	There were no publications in February or March	Last month (March)
			8 posts	21 Publications	January's post has 1,472 likes	6 posts
			197 likes	1203 likes	And 72 comments	443 "likes"
		Average of 26 likes per post	Average of 57 likes per post	Note: They usually make 1 to 2 posts per month. They keep active in the stories	Average of 74 "likes" per post	
Facebook	Followers	9.9 thousand	21 thousand	63 thousand	34 thousand	
	Number of "Likes"	9.8 thousand	20 thousand	63 thousand	34 thousand	
	From the page					
	Engagement	Latest Posts	Last month (March)	Last month (March)	Last month (March)	
	October 2022					
	Only 11 interactions or likes for a total of 7 posts	9 posts	34 "I like it"	1 post	3 posts	
				7 "I like it"	23 "I like it"	
					4 times shared	

**Table 2**

*Evaluation of the current use of networks in Dominican travel agencies (continued)*

<i>Social Network</i>	<i>KPIs / aspects to value</i>	<i>Arbaje Tour &amp; MICE</i>	<i>Alkasa Travels</i>	<i>Emely Tours</i>	<i>Travelwise</i>
Twitter	Page rating based on reviews	4.5 (24 reviews)	-	-	4.7 (93 reviews)
	Followers	1016	392	2655	3628
	Followed	512	134	1816	3771
	Number of Tweets	2830	3282	4359	6378
	Engagement	No posts since 2017	No posts since 2019	No posts since 2020	11 publications in the month of March
		Little or no interactions	Very low or no interactions, barely any comments, reactions or retweets	Little or no interactions	Low interactions in terms of “likes” or retweets, however the last publication from March has 156 impressions (or views)
LinkedIn	Contacts	-	-	32	-
	Followers	-	684	39	2671
	Number of employees with a profile on the network	-	44	-	51
	Number of publications	-	No posts	No posts	Last post in February The average is 5 reactions per post.

Source: Own elaboration

Note: (-) Indicates information not found.

An analysis carried out by García Almánzar (2021) allows us to assess certain aspects regarding the use of digital marketing in some of these agencies (Travelwise, Emely

Tours and Viajes Alkasa). Based on this analysis and the study on the current use they give to social networks evaluated in indicators in Table 2, the following assessment of them can be offered.

**Travelwise:** It is about the The only agency in the Dominican Republic that belongs to the Virtuoso agency network, it is one of the most recognized nationwide, it carries out an exhaustive marketing strategy and it is evident that they care about maintaining a competitive position within the market.

It has a very good presence on the digital platforms in which it is found. Currently, on social networks, it is concentrated on Instagram and Facebook, having a robust network of followers, however, they do not have much interaction in the content they generate. Of those analyzed, it is the third with the most followers and the one with the lowest number of publications on Instagram. On Facebook, it remains active with 3 publications in the past month of March, its page has a good rating and among those analyzed, it has the second largest number of followers on this platform. Regarding Twitter, it is the best positioned of the four, with the largest number of followers and tweets, however, compared to said data, the number of interactions is practically null or very low, which denotes that it has not managed to engage and strengthen the public.

Despite this, the content they post on their social networks can be considered quality, using innovative formats such as videos from hotel chains in which their audience can connect with both their brand and the destinations they are interested in visiting. Of the four, it is also the one that is best positioned on LinkedIn, making use of this platform and creating more direct links with its employees, many of whom have profiles on this network.

**Emely Tours:** For its part, it is a travel agency with 44 years of experience in the market offering group plans, corporate events and conferences; hotels around the world, airline tickets, cruises and travel assistance. On its website, it promises to manage the best vacations for its clients. It is a company that, despite not being so well known a few years ago, has implemented the right efforts to position its brand within the market, so much so that it is organically positioned in search engines.

They also started to run a series of contests to attract and convert potential customers into brand ambassadors, and just like Travelwise, they started a mailing strategy with their client portfolio. It can be said that they have a very well-built digital presence, obtaining the expected interaction and response from their users. They have a visually pleasing graphic line and offer valuable content to their online customers. They do not limit themselves to promoting their products, but rather provide content that is of interest to their users and thus connect much more with them as well as attract new travelers by connecting this content with solutions such as the products they offer.

It is a travel agency that made its digital transformation in an effective and assertive way. So much so that, in the analysis of the current use of networks, it is the best positioned of the four on Instagram with the largest number of followers. They maintain a certain interactivity in the stories and, as observed, they usually make publications on a monthly basis, which generates a greater number of reactions, while they are not the ones that publish the most, a sign that the publications are well studied and meet specific objectives.

Currently, one of their strategies is focused on positioning in this network using the hashtag #HayQueViajar. In addition, they recently launched their “EmelyReporter” contest to select a person to travel with them for a whole year. The requirements include: writing and editing skills, being creative, taking good photos and documenting experiences through publications, which have proven to be highly viewed and effective, influencing clients to travel with the agency.

In the case of Facebook, Emely Tour continues to be the best positioned and maintains its activity, although with a low response from users in terms of the number of interactions. On Twitter, they have the largest number of followers of the four, but they have not posted anything since 2020.

**Alkasa Travels:** is a well-positioned travel agency in the Dominican market, operating for 28 years. They are accredited by IATA and have been part of the Signature Travel Network since 2017. They offer a variety of services: airline ticket management, hotel reservations, car rentals, transfers, insurance assistance, cruises, tours and excursions around the world, trains, restaurant reservations, tickets to theaters and concerts both nationally and internationally. Their commitment as an agency is to take care of every detail of the trip, offering excellence in their services and innovation in all aspects of their business.

It is an agency that, due to its history, has a solid position in the Dominican market. They focus on offering unique experiences and developing differentiating factors in order to remain within the competitive framework. They have a very poor digital presence, they are present on platforms such as Instagram and Facebook, however, most of the content they offer to their audience is not very attractive and despite having many followers, they have very low engagement, which is corroborated by the information in Table 2. On Instagram they seem to have more activity, only in the month of March they uploaded 21 publications. Of the four, it is the second with the most followers on this network. On LinkedIn they do not have any publications, even so, they have followers, while on Twitter they have been inactive since 2019.

**Arbajes Tour & MICE:** This is a vacation travel agency with more than 30 years of experience in the sector. Since 2014, it has introduced a new division focused on MICE tourism, a step forward in a tourist environment that requires diversification and is



constantly innovating. Its positioning lies in the fact that it is one of the few Dominican travel agencies specialized in this type of segment. In its Corporate division, it handles Incentive Trips, Meetings, Employee Parties, Professional Congresses, as well as Sales Conventions, which is its specialty.

Assessing the use of their digital marketing strategies in the case of the use of networks, according to Table 2, they remain active mainly on Instagram with 8 publications last March, on Twitter they have not had any publications since 2017 and on Facebook since October 2021. What is interesting is that despite the search, no account of this agency was found on LinkedIn, which seems surprising when dealing with a more formal, serious and professional social network, which allows organizations and companies to make themselves known, giving people the possibility of doing business, promoting their products, finding employment and creating work groups; which would be a vital space in which to interact and promote event and incentive tourism. Despite this, many of its workers have profiles on this social network.

**Rating summary of commercial websites of travel agencies in the Dominican Republic**

The variables listed in Table 3 were taken into account for the evaluation of agency websites, and a score of up to 5 points was given, with a minimum of 2 at the expert's discretion. As was possible to see, from a competitive point of view, the Emely Tours Agency website has more aspects in its favour, above all, in the use of loyalty actions, as well as in the reliability and personalisation of the content it shares.

**Table 3**

*Measuring the variables of Dominican travel agency websites*

<b>Variables</b>	<i>Arbaje Tour &amp; MICE</i>	<i>Alkasa Travels</i>	<i>Emely Tours</i>	<i>Travel wise</i>
<i>Score</i>				
1. Accessibility	5	5	5	5
2. General information provided	4.5	5	5	4.7
3. Ease of use	5	5	5	5
4. Attractiveness	5	5	5	5
5. Design quality	4.5	5	5	5
6. Quality of texts	5	5	5	5
7. Personalization of website content	3	4.5	5	4.8
8. Site interactivity (with users)	3.5	4.7	4.7	5

9. Variety and quality of website services	4	4.3	4.5	4.7
10. Loyalty actions	3	3	5	4.3
11. Reliability of website content	4.5	4.5	5	5
12. Marketing of tourism products and services	2	5	5	5
13. General information about the destination and adequate communication of products and services	4.5	4.7	4.8	4.8
14. Reliability of the content and services of the website	5	5	5	5
15. Possibility of access (links) to different components of the destination	4.7	4.8	4.8	4.5
Total	63.2	70.5	73.8	72.8

Source: Own elaboration.

The Arbaje Tour & MICE Website (<http://www.arbajetours.com/>), is easily accessible, its link appears on each of the agency's networks, the page loads quickly, is very visually attractive and combines the agency's characteristic blue and yellow colors. It has small moving images with symbols of characteristic elements of the main destinations in the world accompanied by the travel prices to these sites.

Regarding interactivity and e-commerce, the data was entered into the search filter to check the availability of accommodation at the destination for a given date, however, it was noted that it is outdated, it does not allow entering check-in and check-out dates, with the options stopped in 2020. On the other hand, the page provides information about the agency and its history supported by an institutional video, showing reliability and professionalism in terms of the content they share. In the vacation section of the menu they offer information related to hotels, travel insurance, cruises, local excursions and other offers and promotions on the market. They have a news section and a contact section in which addresses, telephone numbers and emails are provided that may be useful to the user. They provide personalized service via e-mail ([ecuello@arbajetours.com](mailto:ecuello@arbajetours.com)).

The Alkasa Travel website (<http://www.viajesalkasa.com/>) is simpler and more practical, the loading time is minimal, navigation is easy and they provide images of the destinations as support, their visual characteristics are very attractive and combine the colors of the logo (dark blue and orange). They show information regarding the destination, accommodation prices and other services. Irresistible promotions of interest to users appear on the front page. It has a direct link to the agency's WhatsApp for more

personalized attention, it allows you to enter data and define the preferred tourist products in relation to the availability of dates, accommodation, transportation, etc. From filtering the information and performing the search, once the package is selected, it gives opportunities for direct purchase or to add and continue requesting other services. Therefore, it can be deduced that they use electronic commerce and have a payment platform. Compared to Arbaje Tour, it is much more functional, it is up to date and they offer possibilities of exchange with specialists through chat both on WhatsApp and through their email ([vacations@viajesalkasa.com](mailto:vacations@viajesalkasa.com)).

On the other hand, the website of the Emely Tours agency (<http://www.emelytours.com.do/>) shows ease of use, This is mainly due to the speed of loading of the different elements (photos, texts and videos), which contributes to optimizing the loading time and thus the possibility of the user entering a state of flow. They present their mission in a clear and precise manner. Just like the sites analyzed above, it shows relevant information about the destination, emphasizing local hotels. It has a Travel option in its menu dedicated exclusively to Hotels in the Dominican Republic, as well as excursions, car rentals and airline tickets.

Once a destination or service has been chosen, its availability can be verified. In addition to the images, the portal provides a detailed description of the circuit, the locations, what is included and what is not, the payment methods, the terms and conditions for the tour and the prices. It is worth highlighting the loyalty actions that this agency carries out on its website: they give visibility on their menu to “Cliente Ámbar” (a program for people who want to travel and vacation, open to anyone who wants to join, offering facilities for a whole year), thus promoting their trips and creating closer ties with their clients. They dedicate a space to events and conferences and have a last section called “Viajera 101” dedicated to the publication of travel stories, curiosities related to different destinations and a lot of interesting information that can capture the attention of the traveler, always accompanied by high-quality images. Regarding reliability, the page has information related to travel insurance, which may be of interest or use to the traveler. Of course, just like the other websites, the agency is presented, along with its history, years of experience in the sector and its affiliation with FCM TravelSolutions, recognized as one of the world's leaders in travel agencies and companies in Latin America and the Caribbean. In relation to e-commerce, the site offers immediate purchasing possibilities. It also offers links to further knowledge of certain destinations and links to the agency's social networks. They also provide customer service via email. ([info@emelytours.com.do](mailto:info@emelytours.com.do)).

During the development of this research, the Travelwise agency website was accessed (<http://www.travelwise.com.do/>), it makes an excellent combination and use of the green and blue colors of the logo. The greatest strength of this page lies in the site's Interactivity indicator (with users), as it constantly provides Possibility and ease of two-way

communication (users-site), whether through the sending of suggestions, opinions, comments, questions, requests for information and responses, gives the possibility of exchange with specialists through direct chat, in addition to the ease of filling out forms to request the sending of brochures, magazines, newsletters or reservations via e-mail ([reservations@travelwise.com.do](mailto:reservations@travelwise.com.do)).

It also has an interactive forum, helping users plan the perfect trip by offering them the opportunity to fill out a form. From there, they put you in touch with an advisor, who is in charge of making the best suggestions. The attention that this site provides is much more personalized, allowing you to choose your reason for travel and depending on it, they offer you all the information that may be of interest to you about the destination. Travel advisors or consultants are in charge of helping the client in everything in order to plan an unforgettable trip together.

They dedicate a space on the page to publicly share what their clients think (thus exposing their opinions regarding the service), which is a decisive element for those who plan to choose the agency. Obviously, like the rest of the websites analysed, they present the Agency highlighting its strengths, which provides reliability and security, being a key element for travellers to decide among all of them for it as their preference.

They stand out for being the only agency member of the VIRTUOSO network in the Dominican Republic (specialists in the art of travel), with more than 10 years of experience, being affiliated with BCD Travel for international corporate travel, today with more than 50 thousand travelers. They also position themselves as travel and event coordinators. A key differentiating element in their favor is that they also offer trips to space, being the first agency authorized in the entire Caribbean to sell this type of travel, a goal that has been achieved. This makes it an agency worth studying and evaluating as part of this research, especially because what has guaranteed its success in planning trips and specialized experiences has been having advisors who personally know each destination and are capable of recommending them from their own experience.

### **Definition of Strengths and Weaknesses of Travel Agencies in the Dominican Republic in the Use of Digital Marketing Strategies:**

Finally, a series of positive and negative aspects can be defined in relation to the digital marketing strategies implemented by specialists in the destination. These serve as feedback; and in the case of Cuban experience agencies, especially regarding the use of websites and social networks.

Strengths
✓ Adequate positioning in online search engines compared to other Caribbean agencies.
✓ Use of inbound and outbound marketing.

- ✓ Implementation of e-commerce for the direct purchase of tourist packages.
- ✓ Personalized advice via live chat, e-mail and interactive forum for groups. (Your travel advisors or consultants base their suggestions on their own experiences at the destination).
- ✓ Attractive and interactive websites that provide high-quality images, videos and relevant information about the destination, as well as the services or products they offer.
- ✓ They dedicate sections to show their clients' opinions and others to share curiosities, interesting stories and data that attract the attention of the visitor.
- ✓ Their websites allow information to be segmented, facilitating navigation depending on the reason for travel.
- ✓ Carrying out loyalty actions
- ✓ Linking the website to social networks and strengthening the brand image through advertising campaigns and sales promotions.
- ✓ Use in brand ambassador networks.
- ✓ Implementation of competitions to recruit reporters or clients with networking, writing and photography skills who can document their experiences at destinations through blogs.
- ✓ Start email marketing strategies
- ✓ Use of mobile applications.
- ✓ Strengthening the destination's image through inclusivity, providing website navigation options for people with visual or hearing disabilities.
- ✓ They provide all the tools to make reservations, pay online and for the user to create "tailor-made" packages.

In general, travel agencies in the Dominican Republic value the importance of using digital marketing to promote their destinations and to facilitate the purchase/sale process of their tourism products. They have an adequate online positioning and are strengthened in terms of loyalty actions, also resorting to online raffles and contests. They have promoted the traveler blogs associated with their agencies and have realized that the best way to sell or make travel suggestions is for their advisors or consultants to have previous experience with the product.

#### Weaknesses

- Weak engagement in terms of interactivity with the publications due to the lack of logical order between them or inefficient work with the time between one and the other.
- Disabling of the LinkedIn social network for agencies responsible for organizing and planning events or incentive trips.
- Outdated hotel room availability or other information about the destination.
- In some cases, it is impossible to purchase online.

- Weak use of Pinterest as a social network to motivate travel.
- Not worrying about accounts on networks like Twitter or Facebook.
- The identity elements of the destination are still weakly worked on for its promotion, not using, for example, the characteristic colors of the flag or some images and texts that refer to distinctive and differentiating elements of the Dominican Republic destination.
- They do not usually have links to various components of the destination with additional information to that offered on the site. (The availability of these links could allow the user to access other information that they need to investigate and that is important because it influences their travel decision; these go beyond the necessary comforts, they are associated with particular tastes or life plans).

As for shortcomings, some identity characteristics are still poorly developed, there is still a lack of concern for networks such as Twitter or Facebook, as well as the disuse of LinkedIn for events.

In addition to all this, it is worth highlighting the recently incorporated update: *Threads*, a new social network created by the Instagram team that is positioned as an alternative to Twitter, using the same users as Instagram. It is a kind of microblogging, for publishing short messages and was created by Meta, the company responsible for Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram. Experimenting and making the most of this new trending network represents a new opportunity for travel agencies.

## Conclusions

As part of the study of travel agencies in the Dominican Republic, it was found that:

- Tourist portals are one of the main elements in digital marketing management in travel agencies, supported by work on social networks.
- Despite the limitations, it was possible to evaluate the current behavior of the digital marketing variables of travel agencies in the destination.
- The Dominican Republic's AA.VV. have a good position in the market, although there are still aspects to improve. They must continue to look for elements that differentiate them from the competition, in this case from the large foreign tour operators.
- In order to remain competitive internationally, and especially in the Caribbean region, Cuba needs to redesign, improve and implement a new strategic plan for the digital transformation of the destination, developing the use of electronic commerce, eliminating obstacles, delays and other common inconveniences.



### Conflict of interest

Authors must declare whether or not there is a conflict of interest in relation to the submitted article.

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