Content marketing in five- star hotels: An analysis of strategies and their relationship with the digital audience in Ecuador

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Abstract

This research analyzes the use of content marketing on Instagram by five-star hotels in Ecuador through 2025. It addresses the need to understand how these institutions manage their digital channels to strengthen their image, attract audiences, and position themselves in a highly competitive tourism environment. The objective was to identify the content strategies employed and examine their relationship with the number of followers. Using a quantitative, descriptive-correlational approach, the last ten posts of 45 active hotels on Instagram were analyzed using an observation tool based on eight key dimensions of content marketing. The results show that corporate content and brand presence dominate the posts, especially through calls to action and the constant appearance of the institutional logo. In contrast, dimensions oriented towards social and emotional interaction, such as testimonials, mentions, or recreational content, have a marginal presence. Furthermore, a significant correlation was found between the number of followers and the number of years on Instagram, while no relationship was found between the observed content strategies and audience growth. We conclude that there is a predominance of unidirectional approaches in these hotels' digital communications, which could limit their organic reach, user engagement, and opportunities for differentiation in an increasingly relational environment.

Keywords: Communications strategy, Content marketing, Digital content, Luxury hotels, Social media.

1. Introduction

Digitalization has significantly transformed consumer behavior, consumption patterns, and market dynamics, modifying the ways in which products and services are marketed, thus giving rise to the so-called digital economy [1]. This

phenomenon has significantly impacted multiple productive sectors, including tourism and hospitality [2]. In particular, luxury hotels, such as five-star hotels, have been forced to adapt to the new demands that the presence of the digital consumer suggests, in terms of personalized experiences, impactful content, digital accessibility, and higher levels of servitization.

These changes have posed significant challenges for commercial companies across a variety of production sectors. Many of these organizations have been forced to adopt new internal work practices and have faced significant pressure to offer their products through digital channels, seeking to adapt and ensure their sustainability [3, 4]. All of this has been driven by the rapid development of next-generation information technologies, which has led to iterative innovations in business models and transformed the consumer ecosystem [5-7].

In this digitalized and technological business context, authors Ziyadin et al. [8] argue that social media has become widely recognized as an effective means of communication and a mechanism for promoting business marketing objectives and strategies by generating content that attracts and retains current and potential customers. This approach is especially used to generate a greater number of interactions and higher levels of engagement with consumers [9].

Contemporary society is immersed in a constantly evolving digital environment, characterized by the strong role of technology. In this emerging context, both individuals and companies face a continuous torrent of information, where capturing consumers' attention has become an urgent priority. The competition to achieve this is increasingly intense, forcing brands to stand out in a saturated market. In this sense, digital content management by companies has established itself as a preeminent strategy. Beyond being a promotional tool, the proper management of digital content has become a means to educate, entertain, and establish sustained connections with consumers, making a difference in the competitive digital economy [10, 11].

At this point, it can be added that by offering valuable and relevant content, commercial companies manage to position themselves as leaders in their sector. To do this, they must generate personalized messages and adapt the content to the needs of digital users [12]. This approach allows for the creation of different and valued experiences for consumers. According to Shakya et al. [13] this personalization increases engagement, fosters loyalty, and promotes recommendations among customers. In short, content is consolidated as a foundation for building strong and recognized brands in today's digital environment.

Commercial organizations have faced the emergence of digital marketing, a surge driven by technological advances and changes in consumer behavior. This scenario has also motivated the incorporation of behavioral economics principles, which allow us to understand how user decisions are influenced by cognitive biases, emotions, and specific contexts [14, 15]. However, this does not mean that traditional marketing is no longer valid; rather, an ecosystem has been created where traditional and online marketing strategies can and should adequately coexist. The merger of physical and digital channels, in this approach, poses significant challenges; among these, the growing concern about information privacy and security in the digital environment stands out [16, 17]. In addition, it is also indisputable to remember that managing multiple digital platforms truly demands modern analytical skills and constant adaptation to emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality, which initially require investments in resources and training [18, 19].

However, the challenges of online marketing provide a variety of benefits. Commercial organizations employ these strategies, incorporating the use of AI, becoming more effective, and at the same time, these strategies are economical compared to traditional marketing methods, reaching a wider audience with less investment, unlike conventional advertising techniques [20], in addition, Li and Lee [21] argue that new technologies enable personalized experiences for consumers, leading to increased loyalty; meanwhile, digital platforms reinforce trust by facilitating the formation of brand-centered communities.

1.1. Content Marketing

In this context, content marketing emerges. From the point of view of Rubio [22], it is the art of communicating with consumers without generating a direct sale. Its main objective is to generate interest in users and seek to build trust to retain potential consumers and create commercial negotiation opportunities, all through the presentation of strategic content published on digital platforms. Later, Poradová [23] describes it as a strategy oriented towards the creation and distribution of digital material, but its main objective is to foster interaction between consumers and brands. From a broader point of view, Cueva Estrada et al. [24] define it as a strategic management aimed at recognizing, anticipating, and meeting customer needs in the digital environment with information of interest to them, which resolves doubts and nurtures trust in the brand, all of the above without forgetting the search for profitability for commercial companies. Also, Dilys et al. [25] Recognize it as the process of sharing digital information with a purpose clearly directed and planned by commercial companies in the digital space and the public Figure 1 shows the basic elements for generating a content marketing strategy.
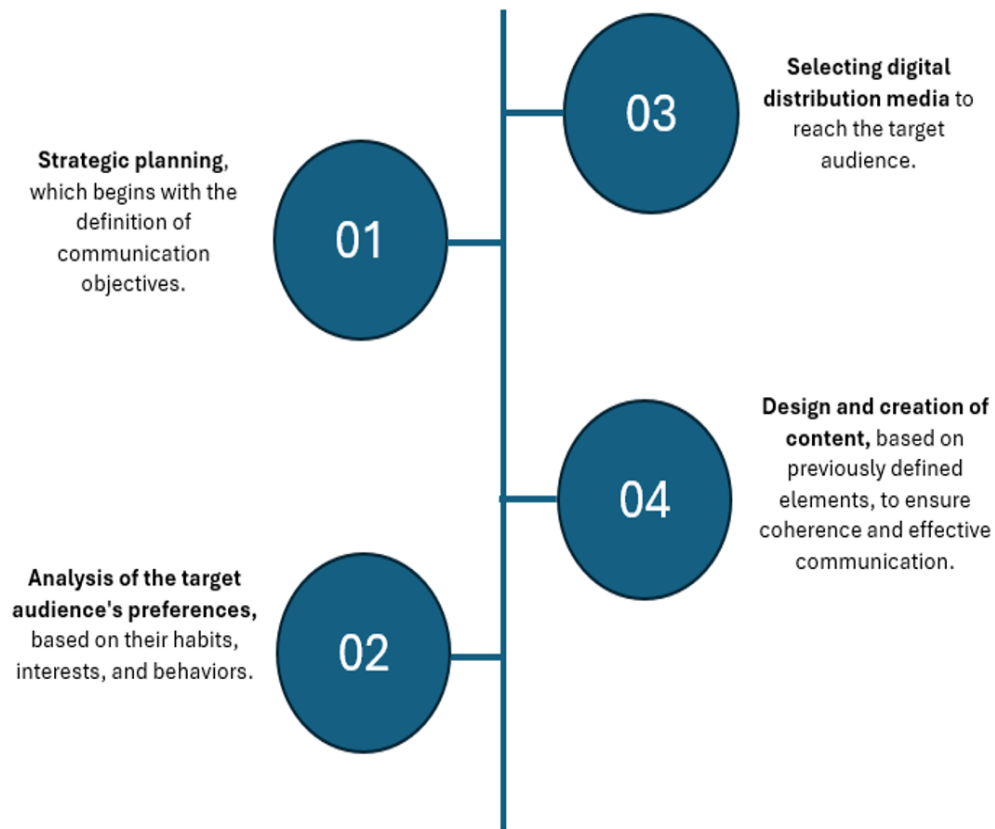
Figure 1.
Content generation.
Source: Own elaboration, based on Yaghtin et al. [26].

In this sense, it is pertinent to address the definition of digital content; for Villegas García and Castañeda Marulanda [27] it is a multimodal structure made up of iconographic, linguistic, and sound components, distributed through digital platforms for communication purposes. For Zhang et al. [28] digital content is digitized information and digital creative products, which include texts, images, audios, and videos, and require telecommunications infrastructures, such as the internet and mobile wireless internet access, for their distribution. Subsequently, Bulantseva [29] defines content as virtual information presented in various digital formats, hosted on digital sites or channels. Its purpose is to meet informational needs, encourage data exchange between commercial brands and consumers, and contribute to building a positive image of the company. Table 1 below presents the characteristics of digital content.

Table 1.
Content features.

Key Feature	Description
Quality	Content must be valuable, consistent, and appropriate, ensuring its relevance and connection with the audience.
Relevance	Content should be useful, informative, creative, entertaining, fun, and tailored to the needs of the target audience.
Interactivity	Content needs to encourage user participation, co-creation of content, and interaction.
Multichannel Distribution	The content is disseminated through social networks, blogs, websites, apps, podcasts, and other digital platforms.
Non-Intrusive Approach	Digital content, unlike traditional marketing, doesn't seek to pressure the sale; rather, it invites the consumer to decide.
Diversity of Formats	Use text, images, videos, audio, infographics, and other digital formats.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Dilys et al. [25] and Cueva Estrada et al. [24].

The implementation of content marketing strategies is of great importance due to its adaptability and the benefits it offers to commercial companies, allowing them to address the specific needs of each commercial sector. In the hotel industry, content marketing is a necessary component for efficient management, driving success and strengthening commercial competitiveness. The benefits it offers to the hotel industry have transformed the way hotels connect with their customers, promote their services, and optimize their revenue [30]. All of this is achieved through the proposal of valuable content to attract the attention of potential customers.

Belias et al. [31] mention that content marketing through informative blogs, service videos, and property articles, local attractions, and travel tips facilitates the positioning of hotels as a reliable resource, encouraging potential guests to make a reservation. Furthermore, it allows for the analysis of customer preferences, booking patterns, and market trends, thus

optimizing commercial strategies. From this perspective, Dieguez et al. [32] further argue that social media interaction allows hotels to communicate directly with customers, strengthening their image, establishing interconnections, and fostering long-term brand loyalty.

Halkiopoulos et al. [33] confirm that in the hotel industry, content marketing strategies are generally more cost-effective than conventional advertising methods, allowing hotels to effectively promote their services, reach a wider audience, and transcend geographical limitations. This is especially relevant in a world where travelers can plan their trips online from anywhere. In addition, it facilitates target audience segmentation, reduces campaign losses, and maximizes return on investment.

1.2. Hotel Sector in Ecuador

After defining and reviewing terms relevant to the study, we now examine the hotel sector in Ecuador and its importance to the economy. This industry is a key element for tourism and the country's development. In recent years, there has been steady growth in the arrival of international tourists, which has boosted demand for tourism services. In 2023, 1.48 million visits from foreigners were reported, reflecting a significant increase compared to the 1.21 million recorded in 2022. Tourists from the United States accounted for 30% of the total, followed by tourists from Colombia at 25% [34]. The upward trend reflects the expansion of tourism in the country, which strengthens the hotel industry and its economic impact.

Below is data showing the economic contribution of accommodation and food service activities, with figures updated by the National Financial Corporation (CFN BP) from 2019 to 2023. These figures show that the tourism sector contributed 2.06% to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In this context, Table 2 shows data on tourism's share of GDP, highlighting its economic impact on the country.

Table 2.
Gross added value of the accommodation and food services sector.

Year	Tourism (USD millions)	Participation in GDP
2019	1,365.40	1.90%
2020	1,077.68	1.63%
2021	1,265.71	1.83%
2022	1,419.57	2.00%
2023	1,487.49	2.06%

Source: Sub-management of Product and Services Analysis [34].

According to data from the Ministry of Tourism, in 2025, the Registry of Tourist Services recorded a total of 5,320 accommodation establishments nationwide. Of these, 46 were categorized as five-star hotels [35] which are the subject of this research. Table 3 presents the geographic distribution of these hotels by canton and province, which shows their territorial concentration within the country.

Table 3.
Distribution of five-star hotels in Ecuador by province and canton (2025).

Province	Canton	Record
Azuay	Cuenca	8
Orellana	Francisco de Orellana	1
Guayas	Guayaquil	8
Sucumbíos	Lago Agrio	1
Loja	Loja	2
El Oro	Machala	1
Manabí	Manta	3
Imbabura	Otavalo	2
Pichincha	Quito	13
Santa Elena	Salinas	1
Guayas	Samborondón	1
Galápagos	San Cristóbal	2
Galápagos	Santa Cruz	1
Sucumbíos	Shushufindi	1
Manabí	Sucre	1
Total		46

Source: Ministerio de Turismo del Ecuador [35].

To understand the categorization of hotels in Ecuador, the country establishes an analysis based on the services they offer. Hotel classification is based on specific standards that consider aspects such as infrastructure, quality, available services, and the experience offered to guests. Under the General Regulations on Activities of Ecuador [36], five-star hotels must offer a series of specialized services to ensure a high-quality experience for their guests. These include: reception and

concierge staff trained in at least two languages, including English; housekeeping and room maintenance services led by a housekeeper with adequate maids according to the hotel's capacity; personalized in-room service managed by a bilingual butler; dining room service with a maître d' and sufficient staff to maintain a standard of quality in service and menu variety; a telephone switchboard with adequate capacity and bilingual staff; efficient laundry and ironing services; and ongoing medical care with a doctor and nurse available, especially in high-altitude areas such as the Andean region. These services are important to meet customer expectations and also to maintain and improve competitiveness and excellence in the hotel sector.

During 2024, Ecuador invested heavily in the sector and actively participated in international events to promote its tourism offerings. In January, the country participated in FITUR 2024, the world's most important tourism fair, where its offerings were highlighted and collaboration agreements were forged with travel agency representatives [37]. Subsequently, in March, the country successfully participated in ITB Berlin 2024, the largest tourism event in Germany, hosting numerous business meetings and demonstrating Ecuadorian cuisine and culture [38].

In addition, Ecuador received international recognition, such as the Gold Award given to the Galápagos Islands in the category of Most Desirable Region to Visit and Do Tourism by Wanderlust magazine, one of the most widely read travel publications in the United Kingdom, with more than 168,000 subscribers worldwide [39]. In addition, the towns of Mindo, El Tambo, and San Rafael de la Laguna were declared Best Tourism Villages (The Best Tourist Villages) by the World Tourism Organization, in recognition of their sustainable development and tourist appeal [40]. Finally, in June 2024, Ecuador launched its new country brand under the concept of "Expanding Our Light" with the aim of strengthening its cultural identity and promoting tourism and investment in the country [41].

This study is relevant by contributing to the strengthening of the hotel and tourism sector in Ecuador, which, as demonstrated, positively contributes to the country's economy. The hotel industry generates jobs, stimulates multiple economic sectors, and also fosters the development of various localities, in addition to reinforcing the country's international projection. In this regard, social media is widely used by the sector as a means of international visibility. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the content published on social media by five-star hotels in Ecuador in 2025, in order to classify the content marketing strategies employed. These results will contribute to a better understanding of the industry's content marketing activities, which will allow for an assessment of its impact and effectiveness in tourism promotion.

It is also noted that, when reviewing the specialized scientific literature, there are few studies focused on Latin America that analyze content marketing in the hotel sector. Most research addressing this topic comes from European or Asian contexts, highlighting a lack of scientific information in the region. This observation underscores the importance of this study, as it helps fill a knowledge gap and will provide guidelines for better business decision-making in the field of hospitality and tourism.

The specific objectives of this study are to analyze the relationship between the length of operation of five-star hotels and their digital presence, specifically on Instagram. First, it seeks to determine whether there is a positive association between the hotel's years of operation and its number of followers on this social network. Second, it aims to assess whether the hotel's active Instagram usage time is significantly related to its number of followers. Finally, it examines the relationship between the intensity of content marketing implemented by the hotel and its impact on its number of followers, considering that a solid content strategy can directly influence the growth of its digital community.

2. Methodology

An empirical study was conducted with a descriptive and correlational scope. The objective of the study was to analyze the content marketing strategies implemented by 5-star hotels on the social network Instagram. In this sense, Horng et al. [42] explored sustainable hotel marketing on said platform in their study. The article confirms the active presence of hotels on social networks and maintains that hotels generate visually attractive content through text, images, and videos, which results in a greater number of interactions with customers.

The methodological design is defined as descriptive and longitudinal, seeking to detail the characteristics of the disseminated content by analyzing the information collected from the last ten publications made during 2025. In Ecuador, there are 46 officially registered 5-star hotels [35]. This figure represents the total number of establishments within this category; however, one hotel does not have an active Instagram account, so it was excluded from the analysis, leaving 45 hotels as the study population.

For each hotel, the 10 most recent Instagram posts were analyzed. It should be noted that the selected posts correspond to content published between April and the preceding months, not later, similar to the method adopted by Cueva Estrada et al. [43] and Sumba Nacipucha et al. [44], who analyzed the management of content on social media by scientific journals. This allowed for the analysis of 450 posts published by the hotels during the period.

For the descriptive study, the primary data collection technique was the observation of posts on the social media platform Instagram. To this end, an observation sheet was designed with the dimensions and analysis elements presented in Table 4. Microsoft Excel was used to tabulate the data, a software that helps present the descriptive results through graphs and tables.

Table 4.
Dimensions and analysis elements for evaluating content on Instagram.

No.	Dimension	Element of Analysis
1	General Information	Hotel Name
		Has Instagram
		Year the hotel opened
2	Instagram Actions	Year the Instagram account was created
		Number of followers
		Year of last publication
		Quarter of the last publication
		Posting frequency
3	Presentation of the Content	NP with only text
		NP with image and text
		NP with image only
		NP with video
4	Publishing Resources	Using reels
		Using carousels
		Using Highlight Stories
		I use hashtags in posts
		Use of links in profile description
5	Corporate Content	NP where a hotel service is described
		NP where the hotel's recognitions or certifications are reflected
		NP where hotel values are mentioned
		NP where other hotel social networks communicate
		NP where calls to action are used in posts
6	Social Connection	NP where customer testimonials and experiences are mentioned
		NP where companies in the tourism sector are mentioned
		NP where hotel collaborators are mentioned or highlighted
		NP where user interaction in comments is encouraged
7	Brand Presence	NP where the hotel logo appears
		NP with social content
8	Recreational content	NP where current topics or trends are mentioned
		NP with humorous content

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Kotler and Armstrong [45] and Armstrong and Kotler [46].
Note: NP - Number of publications

Prior to correlational analysis, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) normality test was applied to the variables described in Table 5 to verify data distribution. Subsequently, based on the results of the normality test, correlational tests were performed between the variables, considering the following hypotheses:

H_1: *There is a positive association between the hotel's years of operation and the number of followers on the social network Instagram.*

H_2: *There is a positive association between the years of the Instagram account and the number of followers on the social network Instagram.*

H_3: *There is a positive association between content marketing and the number of followers on the social network Instagram.*

For the above, the statistical software SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), version 30, with the purpose to measure the degree of association between them.

Table 5.
Definition of study variables.

Variable name	Description
Number of followers (Cant_Seguidores)	Total number of followers on the hotel's official Instagram account
Hotel operating years (Hotel_Years)	Time in years since the official opening of the hotel
Years of the Instagram account (Years_Instagram)	Time in years since the creation of the hotel's Instagram profile
Content Marketing Sum (Suma_Mkt_Cont)	Total sum obtained from the evaluation of items linked to content strategies used in Instagram posts

3. Results

Regarding the general information and Instagram actions corresponding to dimensions 1 and 2 presented in Table 4,

the most relevant data observed in the official accounts of the hotels analyzed are presented in Table 6.

Table 6.
Descriptive statistics of the hotels analyzed in relation to their activity on Instagram.

Variable	Statistics
General characteristics of the hotels	Number of hotels analyzed: 46
	Average length of service: 29 years
Activity on Instagram	Active accounts: 98% (n = 45)
	No account: 2% (n = 1)
	Account age: 9 years on average
	Average followers: 23,495
Frequency of publications	Activity in 2025: the 45 active hotels published during the year
	Daily frequency: 13% (n = 6)
	Weekly frequency: 76% (n = 34)
	Monthly frequency: 11% (n = 5)
	Sporadic frequency: 0%

The results presented in Figure 2 correspond to the presentation of content published by five-star hotels in Ecuador. The data show a marked preference for the use of visual content, combining graphic elements as the main communication strategy.
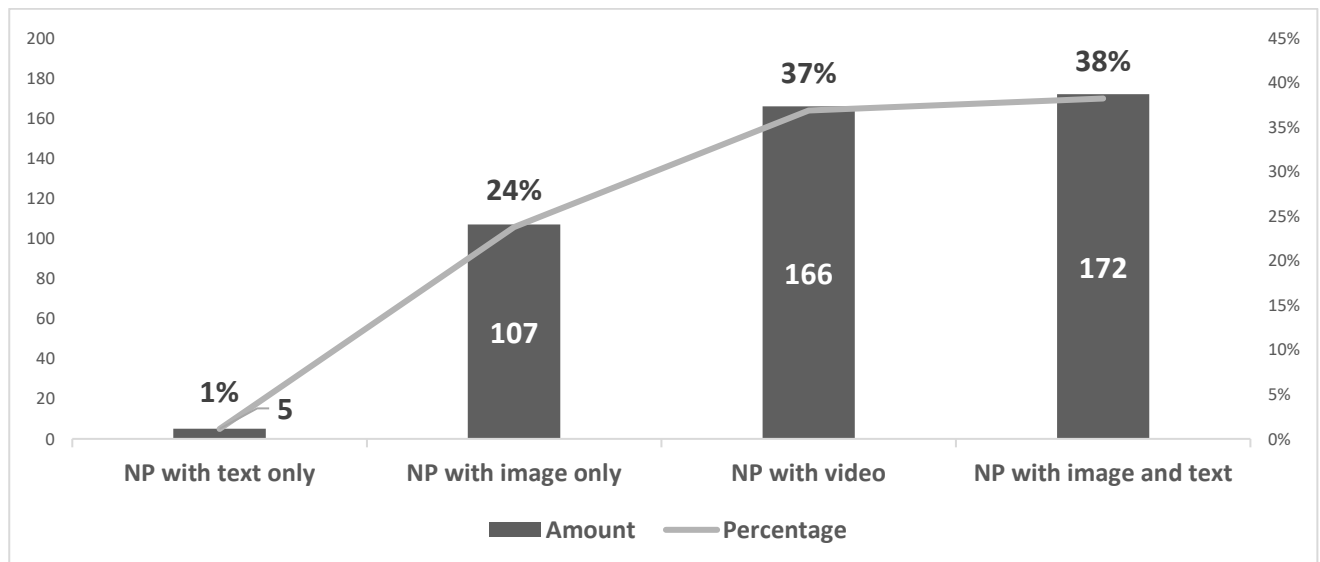

Figure 2.
Presenting Content on Instagram.

Regarding the publishing resources included in dimension 4, it was identified that hotels make use of the various tools offered by Instagram: of the 45 hotels analyzed, 98% employ features such as reels, featured stories, and links in the bio. Similarly, 96% of hotels use carousels and integrate hashtags into their posts. These data reflect a widespread adoption of visual resources that seek to attract customers' attention and maintain interest in their profiles. Based on dimensions 5 through 8, these represent the communicative approach to content, that is, how hotels seek to convey and give meaning to the purpose of the message. For this study, they were classified into four sections: corporate content, social connection, brand presence, and recreational content. During the observation process, the frequency with which these elements appear in the last ten posts of each account was evaluated. It is important to clarify that a single post can include more than one dimension, so the total exceeds 450 records, reaching 514 dimensions in total. Table 7 shows the results.

Table 7.
Distribution of communication dimensions on Instagram.

Dimension	Element of Analysis	NP and %	% of the total dimensions
Corporate Content	NP where calls to action are used in posts	221 (86%)	43%
	NP where a hotel service is described	29 (12%)	6%
	NP where the hotel's recognitions or certifications are reflected	5 (2%)	1%
	NP where hotel values are mentioned	1 (0%)	0%
	NP where other hotel social networks communicate	0 (0%)	0%
	Total posts related to corporate content	**256**	**50%**
Social Connection	NP where hotel collaborators are mentioned or highlighted	17 (41%)	3%
	NP where companies in the tourism sector are mentioned	10 (24%)	2%
	NP where customer testimonials and experiences are mentioned	9 (21%)	2%
	NP where user interaction in comments is encouraged	6 (14%)	1%
	Total posts related to social connection	**42**	**8%**
Brand Presence	NP where the hotel logo appears	199 (97%)	39%
	NP with social content	7 (3%)	1%
	Total posts related to brand presence	**206**	**40%**
Recreational content	NP where current topics or trends are mentioned	8 (80%)	2%
	NP with humorous content	2 (20%)	0%
	Total posts related to recreational content	**10**	**2%**
	total of identified dimensions	**514**	**100%**

The statistics presented indicate a marked focus on corporate content and brand presence as the predominant axes in the content marketing strategies of five-star hotels in Ecuador. Fifty percent of the total posts observed correspond to corporate content, with the use of calls to action (86%) particularly notable. This suggests a functional and promotional approach to content, focused on conversion rather than *engagement* or community building. Similarly, the hotel logo appears in 97% of brand-related posts, highlighting a highly visual strategy oriented toward identity positioning.

In contrast, dimensions such as social connection (8%) and recreational content (2%) show marginal participation, which could be limiting hotels' ability to generate emotional connections with their audiences. The limited presence of customer testimonials, employee mentions, or trend-based content indicates a low level of use of formats that promote interaction, brand humanization, and the social value of content. This disparity reveals a largely unidirectional approach to communication, with little openness to digital dialogue, which represents an opportunity for improvement to increase organic reach and loyalty on social media.

3.1. Correlational Analysis

First, to begin the correlation study, a visual analysis of the variables to be correlated will be performed, based on the hypotheses proposed. Figure 3 shows the set of scatter plots that provide a visual understanding of the relationships.
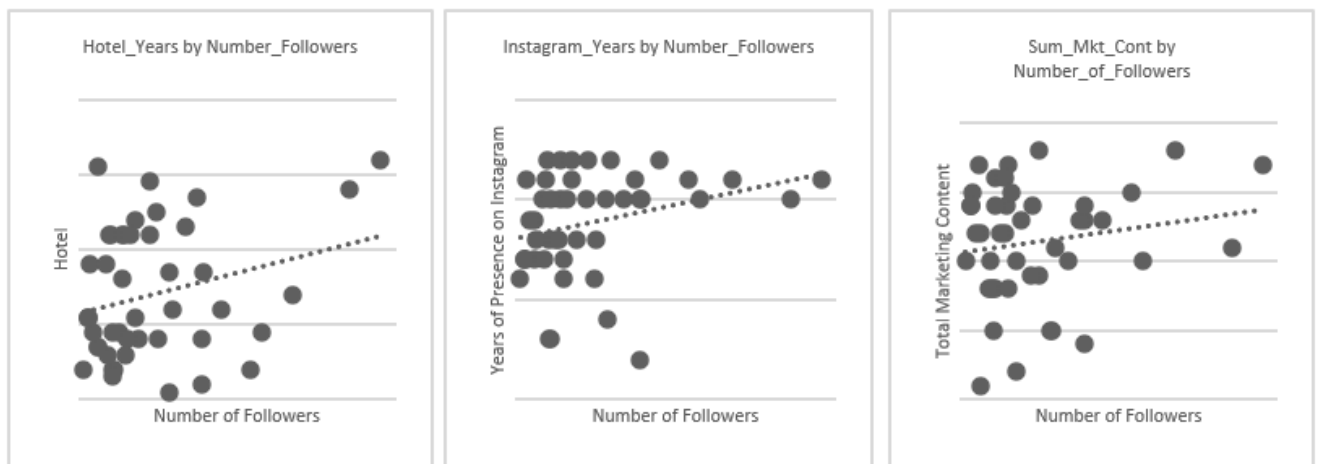
Figure 3.
Scatter plots between the number of followers and the variables of the hotel and content profile.

To quantitatively verify the results obtained visually, the normality of the data in each of the variables was verified using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Considering the results obtained in the KS normality test, it was determined that three of the variables analyzed do not present a normal distribution. For this reason, it was necessary to apply non-parametric statistical techniques. Hernández et al. [47] indicate that Spearman's rho correlation coefficient (CS) is an adequate tool to examine the relationship between variables that do not meet the normality criterion, since it allows establishing the direction and intensity of the link between their ranges. The results of the proposed hypotheses.are shown in Table 8.

Table 8.
Spearman correlations between the number of followers and the study variables.

Variables			Number of Followers	Hotel_Years
Spearman's Rho	Number of Followers	Correlation coefficient	1.000	0.186
		Sig. (bilateral)	.	0.222
		N	45	45
	Hotel_Years	Correlation coefficient	0.186	1.000
		Sig. (bilateral)	0.222	.
		N	45	45
Variables			Number of Followers	Years_Instagram
Spearman's Rho	Number of Followers	Correlation coefficient	1.000	0.368*
		Sig. (bilateral)	.	0.013
		N	45	45
	Years_Instagram	Correlation coefficient	0.368*	1.000
		Sig. (bilateral)	0.013	.
		N	45	45
Variables			**Sum_Mkt_Cont**	**Number of Followers**
Spearman's Rho	Sum_Mkt_Cont	Correlation coefficient	1.000	0.047
		Sig. (bilateral)	.	0.758
		N	45	45
	Number of Followers	Correlation coefficient	0.047	1.000
		Sig. (bilateral)	0.758	.
		N	45	45

Note: *. The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

The results of the Spearman correlation analysis, corresponding to hypothesis 1, show a weak positive correlation between the hotel's age and the number of followers (Rho = 0.186); however, this relationship is not statistically significant (Sig. = 0.222; $p > 0.05$). Therefore, a correlation between these variables cannot be established.

In hypothesis 2, Spearman's correlation analysis shows a moderate positive correlation between years on Instagram and follower count (Rho = 0.368). This relationship is statistically significant (Sig. = 0.013; $p < 0.05$), suggesting that the length of time an account has been active on Instagram is more strongly related to follower growth than the influence exerted by content strategies.

In hypothesis 3, Spearman's correlation analysis reveals a very weak positive correlation between content marketing strategies and follower count (Rho = 0.047). However, this relationship is not statistically significant (Sig. = 0.758; $p > 0.05$), so an association between the two variables cannot be established.

These results highlight a critical disconnect between the content marketing strategies implemented by five-star hotels in Ecuador and their actual impact on the growth of their digital community. Despite the high frequency of corporate posts and the emphasis on brand visibility, the data do not reflect a significant correlation between these strategies and the number of followers. In contrast, the variable most strongly associated with follower growth is time spent on the platform; however, this is not a product of the quality or strategic approach of the content. All of this reinforces the need to rethink current practices and move toward more strategic and relational content management, focused on generating emotional, social, and participatory value.

4. Discussion

The study reveals that 98% of the universe has an active presence on Instagram. This finding is consistent with Dragin-Jensen et al. [48], who highlight social media as a fundamental and expanding tool within the hotel industry's digital strategy. Instagram, in particular, is recognized as one of the most significant platforms today and functions as a relevant instrument for communication and dialogue between hotels and travelers [49].

The results show a clear predominance of the use of visual content formats in Instagram posts. This trend is consistent with what Gómez-Piñeiro and Corbacho-Valencia [50] have pointed out. They highlight video as a key format for virality on social networks. In turn, images have a significant capacity to impact content, with a weight comparable to that of video. On the contrary, the text-only format has minimal use, which coincides with its limited visibility and interaction within the digital environment. The strategy of prioritizing graphic and audiovisual content is created to enhance the levels of engagement of followers. This type of content generates emotional connection and encourages public participation on social networks [51].

Hartono et al. [52] has shown that visual strategies used on Instagram, such as reels, carousels, stories, and interactive links, are important for capturing user attention and encouraging engagement. In particular, the use of carousels allows for the presentation of detailed content, which facilitates consumer decision-making. In turn, the strategic use of hashtags contributes to expanding the reach and improving the visibility of posts [53]. In this sense, the results of the study show a high adoption of these strategies by the hotels analyzed, with an average of 97% of them using these tools offered by Instagram.

The high presence of the logo in publications, representing 39% of the total communication dimensions identified, is supported by Martínez Mora et al. [54] in their neuromarketing study, who demonstrated that the hotel name and logo capture the user's visual attention, thus reinforcing brand recognition and its communication effectiveness.

Within the hotel industry, communication on social media is important for generating interaction and building relationships with customers, and thus creating a social connection between hotels and their community. However, the results do not demonstrate that this social connection is being generated in a cohesive manner, considering that only 8% (42) of the posts analyzed are linked to this dimension. In this sense, the inclusion of customer testimonials and experiences represents 21% (9) of the publications that seek social connection, and in the same line Hartono et al. [52] highlight the value of content generated directly or in collaboration with the user; this content builds trust and enhances the reputation of hotels.

In line with this, Kurniawan et al. [55] in their study highlight posts that aim to foster social connection, including testimonials and experiences, facilitating the collection of customer feedback. The ability to share direct user experiences helps hotels understand opinions, improve services, and strengthen relationships.

Therefore, a strategic reorientation toward the humanization and horizontalization of hotel-generated content is necessary to strengthen their digital positioning and, above all, to generate engaged communities and significant differentiation in a highly competitive environment.

5. Conclusions

The study showed that hotels prioritize posts that aim to communicate corporate content through calls to action and brand awareness, especially the logo. In contrast, posts that promote social connection with customers, such as testimonials or guest reviews, are few and far between. This lack of bidirectional focus may explain the weak correlation between content marketing and follower count. In the Ecuadorian context, the unidirectional approach limits the development of digital communities and reduces organic reach.

In this sense, the analysis of digital content at five-star hotels in Ecuador indicates a strategy predominantly focused on traditional corporate marketing. While these practices are necessary for direct conversion and visual positioning, the imbalance compared to other dimensions, such as social connection and recreational content, suggests limited diversification in the brand narrative. Given this scenario, it is recommended to adopt a more comprehensive and relational content marketing strategy, which includes: a) increasing the presence of social content, highlighting human talent, customer experiences, and alliances with the tourism ecosystem to reinforce the brand's authenticity and relational value; b) incorporating recreational and current content (such as trends, celebrations, or cultural events), which can increase organic engagement and broaden reach among younger, digitally active audiences; c) promoting user-generated content (UGC) through contests, reposts of experiences, or testimonials, which facilitates co-creation and improves the perception of closeness.

Among the study's limitations is the number of posts analyzed per Instagram account. Reviewing the ten most recent posts from 2025 provided a current view, but it does not necessarily represent content marketing behavior for the entire year. For future research, we recommend expanding the number of posts observed, the number of likes and comments per post, and considering a longer period or a larger sample for each hotel, which would allow for identifying the strategies used by hotels over time.

It could be added that, from the perspective of those responsible for content management, the study focused solely on the analysis of content visible on the accounts. The absence of interviews or other qualitative techniques would allow for insight into the criteria or planning behind the posts. Future lines of research could include qualitative tools that complement observation with direct information from the stakeholders involved, to gain a more complete understanding of the use of content marketing in the hotel sector.

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