

**Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tools and sales strategies of micro and small businesses in the city of Chihuahua****Impacto de la pandemia por COVID-19 en el uso de herramientas y estrategias de ventas de las micro y pequeñas empresas en la ciudad de Chihuahua**

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**Abstract**

Goals: Learn about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sales tools and strategies for SMEs (Micro and small enterprises) in the city of Chihuahua, Mexico.

- Identify sales tools and strategies most used before and after the pandemic.
- Learn which strategies are designed and implemented after the pandemic.
- Evaluate if the new sales strategies applied, generate an increase in the Mypes profit.
- Direct sales strategies based on digital marketing tools.

Methodology: Quantitative research is carried out through the survey method whose purpose is to identify the relationship between sales strategies and the continuance in the market of SMEs in the city of Chihuahua, which are applied before, during, and after the pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The purpose of this research is to study a representative sample of companies through a descriptive investigation designed with a questionnaire of 11 closed questions: dichotomous and multiple choice. A sample of 211 companies was obtained, in which only SMEs were considered to carry out the research. Contribution: Digital marketing is necessary for companies if they want to stay in the market and increase their share.

**Pandemic, Strategy, Marketing****Resumen**

Objetivos: Conocer el impacto de la pandemia por COVID-19 en las herramientas y estrategias de ventas para las pymes de la ciudad de Chihuahua, Chihuahua, México.

- Identificar las herramientas y estrategias de ventas más emplean antes y después de la pandemia.
- Conocer que estrategias se diseñan e implementan de forma posterior a la pandemia.
- Evaluar si las nuevas estrategias de ventas que se aplican generan un incremento en la utilidad de las pymes.
- Recomendar a las pymes estrategias de ventas con base en el empleo de herramientas de marketing digital

Metodología: Se realiza una investigación cuantitativa a través del método de encuesta que se pretende identificar la relación de las estrategias de ventas y permanencia en el mercado de las pymes de la ciudad de Chihuahua que se aplican antes, durante y después pandemia ocasionada por el virus SARS-CoV-2. El objetivo de esta investigación es estudiar una muestra representativa de las empresas a través de una investigación descriptiva con el diseño de un cuestionario de 11 preguntas cerradas: dicotómicas y opción múltiple. Se obtuvo una muestra de 211 empresas en las que sólo se consideran empresas mypes a encuestar para llevar a cabo la investigación. Contribución: Es necesario que las empresas apliquen el marketing digital si quieren permanecer en el mercado e incrementar su participación.

**Pandemia, Estrategias, Marketing**

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## Introduction

During the last quarter of 2019, world society faced adverse circumstances generated by a health alert that, weeks later, was declared a "pandemic", because of the high wave of contagions of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, commonly known as COVID-19, which impacted practically the entire world; Mexico was no stranger to this situation in economic, social, environmental and cultural factors. This had an impact, with unfavorable consequences.

On 11 March 2020, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that the Coronavirus 2019 disease was classified as a pandemic; by this date the disease had already claimed the lives of 4,291 people around the world, with 118,000 cases of infection in approximately 114 countries (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020 cited by the Pan American Health Organization [PAHO], 2020).

Therefore, different countries are beginning a process of analysis to decipher which social, health, political, labor and economic strategies, to determine the optimal ones to address health isolation, economic activities have a greater impact for companies in different sectors, sizes and aspects, as is the case of micro and small enterprises that are the subject of this study.

Commercial entities, both formal and informal, have reported having been affected by the sanitary contingency, with a reduction in income being the main factor, as well as a decrease in the demand for their products or services, in addition to a shortage of inputs, as well as permanent and temporary closures of several organizations that marked the direction of the national economy.

This indicates the need to rethink sales techniques to favor the results of SMEs in the city of Chihuahua. When companies take into account the impact of the pandemic caused by COVID-19, they modify their marketing strategies and sales process tools; this is why, in this research, we investigate the behavior of Chihuahua companies in order to identify whether the pandemic forces them to implement adjustments in their sales processes in order to maintain their presence in the market.

The first section is the introduction, which allows us to visualize the background to the problem, followed by the justification, which describes why this research is being carried out. The problem focuses on what sales strategies were used before, during and after the pandemic. The general objective and four specific objectives are mentioned. The second section of this article develops the theoretical framework that supports the concepts included in this research. The third section contains the research methodology; the fourth part presents the results obtained from applying the techniques and procedures. The fifth section includes the conclusions.

**General Objective.** To determine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the use of sales tools and strategies for small and medium-sized enterprises in the city of Chihuahua.

- To identify the sales tools and strategies most used before and after the pandemic.
- To find out which strategies were designed and implemented after the pandemic.
- To evaluate whether the new sales strategies applied generated an increase in the profitability of the SMEs.
- To recommend sales strategies based on digital marketing tools to the SMEs.

The hypothesis aims to verify, through the application of a questionnaire to a sample of 211 small and medium-sized enterprises, whether they use sales strategies such as social networks and other marketing tools such as WhatsApp business, inbound marketing to increase their participation in social networks to remain in the market and continue to grow.

## Justification

SMEs are a determining part of the economic structure of Mexico, due to their high impact on the generation of employment and national production. In the state of Chihuahua, a total of 133 240 establishments are mentioned with 1 279 444 people employed in them in 2019. This highlights the relevance of SMEs in the regional economy.

92.4 % of the enterprises in Chihuahua are micro enterprises and 7.1 % are SMEs, information obtained from the 2019 census of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography [INEGI], (2020). Compared to the 2014 census, a decrease of 0.8 % of these enterprises is observed.

Poor staff training and poor strategic management are the main internal deficiencies that impede the development and growth of SMEs and can even lead to their decline and extinction. This highlights the vulnerability to crisis situations and the importance of implementing tools to face and overcome these challenges. Among the tools are sales strategies (National Institute of Statistics and Geography, 2020).

Prior to the pandemic, companies faced challenges related to the speed of growth, scalability and stagnation in sales, challenges that persist and affect their development; however, it is necessary to conduct research that identifies whether SMEs carry out sales strategies for better positioning, and make effective recommendations to boost their profitability.

This research aims to highlight the challenges and problems they faced before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic and actions for their survival. In addition, reference is made to the sales strategies applied before the pandemic, highlighting sales growth. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic at the local level is presented, noting the effects in terms of decreased revenues, low demand and business closures. This supports the need to address the challenges and problems faced, especially in times of crisis in the economy of Chihuahua and Mexico.

### **Problem**

What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on SMEs with respect to the application of sales tools and strategies in the period 2020-2022 that will allow them to remain in the market in the city of Chihuahua?

### **Objectives**

#### *General objective*

To understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sales tools and strategies for small and medium-sized enterprises in the city of Chihuahua.

#### *Specific objectives*

- To identify the sales tools and strategies most used before and after the pandemic.
- To find out which strategies were designed and implemented after the pandemic.
- To evaluate whether the new sales strategies applied generated an increase in the profitability of the MSEs.
- To recommend sales strategies based on digital marketing tools to the MSMEs.

### **Hypotheses**

- MSMEs were applying sales strategies before the pandemic.
- MSEs applied different sales strategies after the pandemic to maintain their permanence.
- Sales increased with the application of new sales strategies.

### **Methodology**

#### *Type of research*

Quantitative research was carried out using the survey method to identify the relationship between sales strategies and their permanence in the market of SMEs in the city of Chihuahua applied before, during and after the pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The objective of this research is to study a representative sample of companies through descriptive research with the design of a questionnaire of 11 closed multiple-choice and dichotomous questions. The application of the questionnaire is done through the Google form which is sent via email in a simple random way.

The questionnaire is applied to 211 enterprises of which 11 are classified as micro enterprises and 200 as small enterprises. The sample was obtained with a population of 133,240 micro enterprises, with a confidence level of 95% and a sampling error of 5% considering the limitations for the application of the questionnaire. A sample of 211 enterprises was obtained considering only the MSMEs to be surveyed to carry out the research. The survey monkey internet calculator was used (SurveyMonkey. n.d.).

The assessment instrument is developed according to the problem statement regarding the impact of the pandemic on sales during the period 2020-2022.

Questions 1 and 2 identify the line of business and size of the companies, question 3 seeks to know the years of permanence in the market in order to identify sales strategies applied. Questions 3, 4 and 5 seek to determine how their sales were during the period of the pandemic; and questions 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 the implementation of sales strategies; finally, question 11 identifies whether there was an increase in sales with the implementation of new sales strategies.

### Questionnaire design

1. Business activity  
Industry \_\_\_\_\_ commercial \_\_\_\_\_ service \_\_\_\_\_
2. Size of enterprise  
Micro (1-10 employees) \_\_\_\_\_ small \_\_\_\_\_ (11-50 employees)
3. Years in business  
1 to 2 years \_\_\_\_\_ 3 to 4 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 to 6 \_\_\_\_\_
4. How do you consider your sales to be in the years 2020-2021?  
Excellent \_\_\_\_\_ very good \_\_\_\_\_ average \_\_\_\_\_  
poor \_\_\_\_\_ very poor \_\_\_\_\_
5. Was the impact on sales (answer to the previous question) caused by the SARS-COV19 pandemic?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
6. Before the pandemic, were you applying sales strategies?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ (Why?)
7. If yes, which of the following did you use?  
\_\_\_\_ Personal selling  
\_\_\_\_ Rewards or gift program. E.g., On purchase of 5 sodas the 6th is free.  
\_\_\_\_ Point-of-sale distribution.  
\_\_\_\_ Volume discounts.  
\_\_\_\_ Discounts on future purchases  
\_\_\_\_ Days of promotions Example (Tuesday of fruits and vegetables).  
\_\_\_\_ Purchase advances.  
\_\_\_\_ Set-aside (10 days, 15 days, etc.).

\_\_\_\_ Offers, for example, 2x1.

\_\_\_\_ Other (specify)

8. During the pandemic, did you use the same sales strategies?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ (continue at 9) No \_\_\_\_\_ (continue at 10)

9. Please mark with an "X" which one you continued to use

\_\_\_\_ Personal selling

\_\_\_\_ Reward or gift program. E.g., On purchase of 5 sodas the 6th is free.

\_\_\_\_ Point-of-sale distribution.

\_\_\_\_ Volume discounts.

\_\_\_\_ Discounts on future purchases

\_\_\_\_ Days of promotions Example (Tuesday of fruits and vegetables).

\_\_\_\_ Purchase advances.

\_\_\_\_ Set-aside (10 days, 15 days, etc.).

\_\_\_\_ Offers, for example, 2x1.

\_\_\_\_ Other (specify)

10. Which of the following strategies did you implement after the pandemic?

\_\_\_\_ Home delivery service

\_\_\_\_ Mobile application sales

\_\_\_\_ Social media advertising

\_\_\_\_ Website

\_\_\_\_ Internet sales

\_\_\_\_ Other (specify)

11. There was an increase in sales due to the new sales strategies implemented.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_.

### Theoretical methods

According to the Executive Summary Chihuahua Business Survey, published by the Mexican Employers' Confederation (COPARMEX), which mentions that for 2017 the situation in Chihuahua is considered as a thriving economy. It indicates that recent developments in sales, employment, and investment in 2016 and 2017 are generally positive for companies. However, the momentum for the next two years is expected to be even better. There are clear expectations for future investment and economic growth based on the prospects for increased sales and employment.

One of the main findings of this article is a statistical analysis of the factors that determine business success and sustainability in Chihuahua. It was found that, for informal businesses, access to finance and human capital are determinants. While for formal enterprises, in addition to those already mentioned, the development of initiatives for business improvement and the link with foreign trade also contribute to business success. It distinguishes that being a micro or small enterprise is a disadvantage.

In the article Economic impact of COVID-19 on small and medium-sized businesses under voluntary and imposed restrictions, Bejarano, et al. (2021) highlight a worldwide historical fact in 2020, that approximately 37 % of micro and small businesses closed temporarily and reported a 35 % reduction in the number of employees. These results are consistent with the study by Bartik, et al. (2020) for the United States, who find that approximately 43% of such businesses closed due to the pandemic and reduced the number of employees by 39%. The impact of the temporary closure of establishments on sales was significant and accounts for most of the drop in sales.

On the other hand, the use of sales strategies is known to contribute directly to sales growth, and SMEs should be no exception. As Striedinger (2018) points out, strategy is a term that is used in various fields, although in organizations it includes the logic for achieving objectives; in addition, new activities are generated: growth, increasing market share and competitiveness, and the use of information technologies. Since the mid-1990s, digital marketing (or online marketing) has been implemented as an innovation strategy; it is conceived as direct marketing with the support of rapid advances in database technologies and new marketing media, especially the internet (Armstrong and Kotler, 2011, cited by Striedinger, 2018). "It is a trend that understands the changes in consumer behaviour and acts more under pull strategies, where it is the user who pulls the content, which makes it more effective and closer". (Rentería, 2015 cited by Striedinger, 2018).

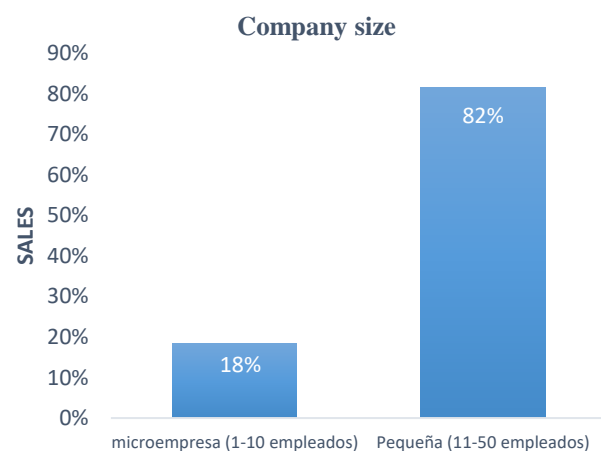
According to the article by Meza and López (2021) La reinversión de las pymes a un año de la pandemia presented by El Economista newspaper, millions of businesses in the country have been damaged by the pandemic. The second edition of the Survey on the Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Companies (ECOVIED-IE), carried out by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), mentions that 1,873,564 companies in the country (86.6%) have been affected by the pandemic.

Furthermore, one year after the start of the pandemic in Mexico, it is estimated that 1 010 857 (20.8 %) businesses have definitively closed down, according to the Business Demographics Study (EDN) 2020 published by INEGI. If one takes into account that of the 4.9 million establishments, 99.8 % are micro, small and medium-sized, the cessation represents an economic crisis for the country. The three sectors with the greatest impact in this area are private non-financial services (24.9 %), commerce (18.9 %) and manufacturing (15 %). Oaxaca, with fewer establishments closed 13.70 %, while Quintana Roo with 31.8 % and Baja California Sur with 28.1 % had the highest number of closures. The final closures generated the loss of 3,000,000 jobs, while the businesses that continued to operate lost 1,150,000 people, making a total of 4,120,000 unemployed.

## Results

Variables are established to determine whether MSMEs in the city of Chihuahua are implementing sales strategies before the pandemic, how their sales were during the period 2020-2021, and the implementation of strategies after the 2022 pandemic.

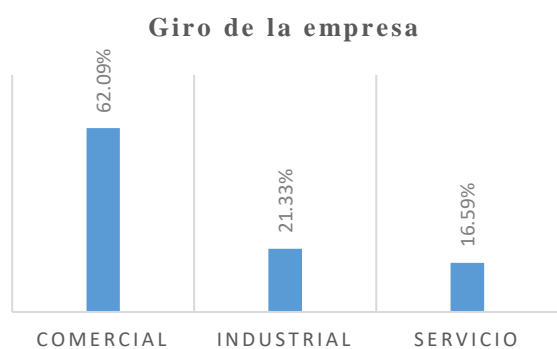
To analyze the responses obtained from the questionnaire, and to easily visualize the results, Excel pivot tables are used to analyze the results.



**Graphic 1** Classification according to the number of employees

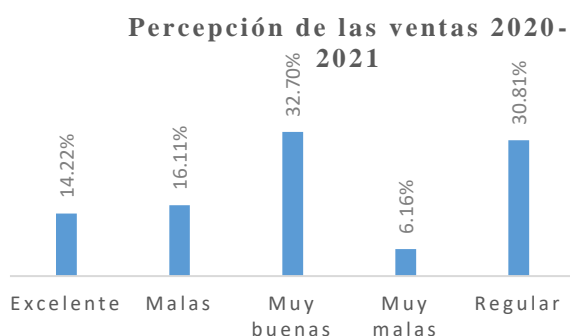
Source: Own elaboration

As can be seen in graph 2, 18 % of the enterprises are micro-enterprises and 82 % are small enterprises.

**Graphic 2**

Source: Own elaboration

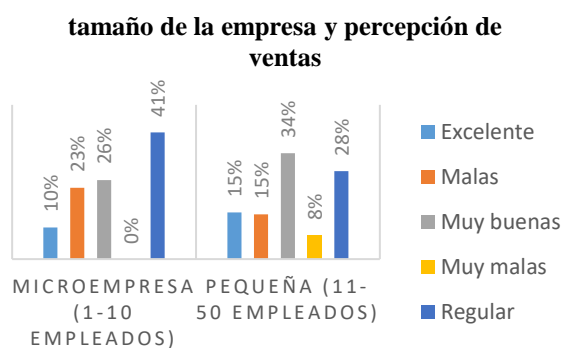
Graph 2 shows that of the 211 SMEs surveyed, 62.09 % are engaged in commercial activities, 21.33 % in industrial activities and 16.59 % in service activities.

**Graphic 3** Perception of sales

Source: Own elaboration

14.22 % of the MSEs consider sales to be excellent in the period 2020-21, while 32.70 % mention that they are very good, 30.81 % fair, 16.11 % bad and, finally, 61.6 % very bad.

To identify the perception of the sales of micro and small enterprises, a cross-check is made between the variables: size of the enterprise and the perception of sales in the period 2020-2021. (graph 4)

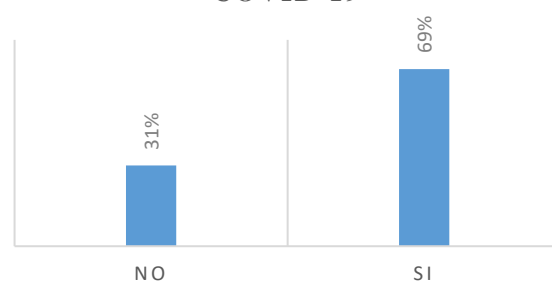
**Graphic 4** Relationship between company size and perception of sales

Source: Own elaboration

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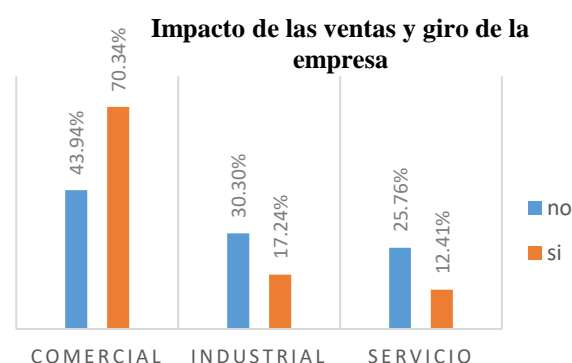
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According to graph 4, 15 % of small enterprises consider that sales were excellent compared to 10 % of micro enterprises in the period indicated. With regard to micro enterprises, 23 % of the micro enterprises consider that sales were bad, compared to 15 % of the small enterprises. 8% of small enterprises consider that sales were very bad.

**Impacto en las ventas por COVID-19****Graphic 5** Impact of COVID-19 on sales

According to Graph 5, 69% of the MSMEs consider that the pandemic caused by COVID-19 had a negative impact on sales, while 31% perceive that there is no impact.

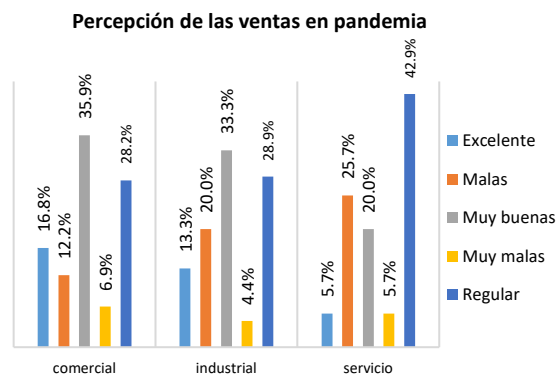
Graph 6 shows a simple correspondence analysis between the variables impact on sales due to COVID-19 and the company's line of business.

**Graphic 6** Impact of sales by COVID-19 with the company's line of business variable

Source: Own elaboration

As can be seen in Graph 6, the impact of the pandemic derived from COVID-19 has a greater impact on sales for commercial SMEs, with 70% of those who responded affirmatively.

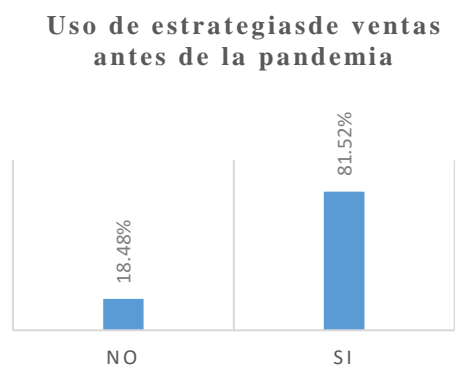
It is analyzed whether there is a relationship between the variables: type of business and the perception of sales during the period of the pandemic.



**Graphic 7** Perception of sales during the pandemics and business line of business

Source: Own elaboration

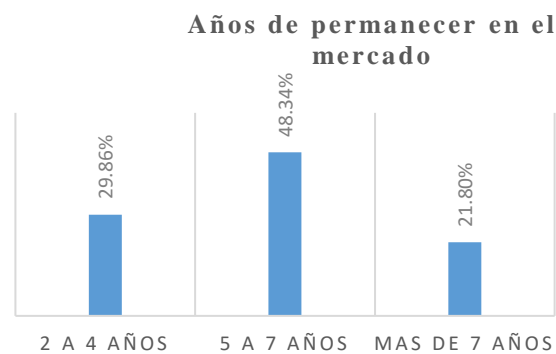
Graphic 7 shows that 16.8% of SMEs in the commercial sector consider that their sales were excellent, while 35% consider that they were very good. Based on these results, it can be determined that 51.8% of the SMEs were not affected by the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus. The rest of the SMEs, 48.2%, consider that their sales were fair, bad and very bad. Therefore, there is a relationship between the following variables.



**Graphic 8** Use of sales strategies before the pandemic

Source: Own elaboration

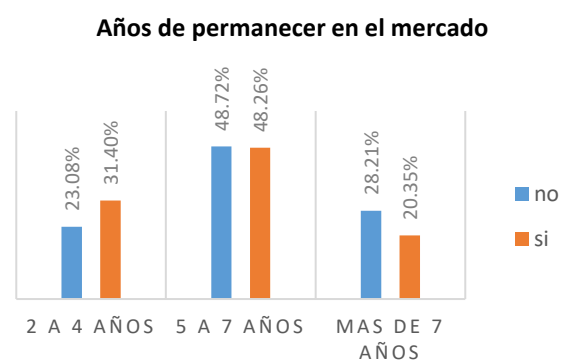
Graphic 8 shows that 81.52% of the SMEs were already using sales strategies before the pandemic, while only 18.48% indicated that they were not using them. Table 1 shows why these companies did not use them.



**Graphic 9** Years in the market

Source: Own elaboration

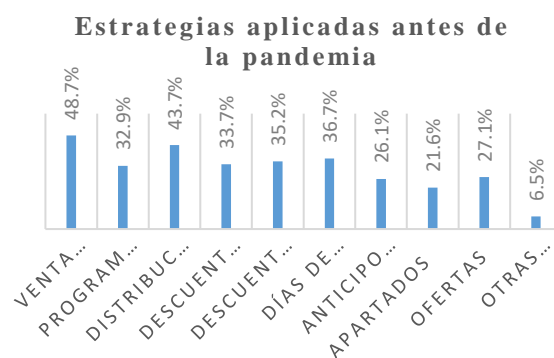
The objective of obtaining this data presented in Graphic 9 is to identify the permanence of MSMEs in the market in the city of Chihuahua, the creation of which is between 5 and 7 years and represents 48.34 % of the total number of MSMEs in the market.



**Graphic 10** Years in the market/sales strategies

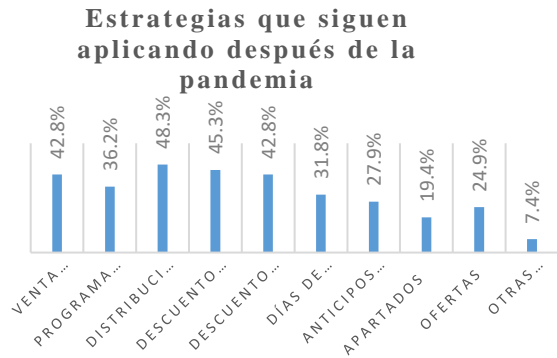
Source: Own elaboration

As can be seen in Graphic 10, 48.26% of the MSEs with the longest time in the market in the city of Chihuahua are those that apply sales strategies.



**Graphic 11** Sales strategies that continue to be applied before the pandemic

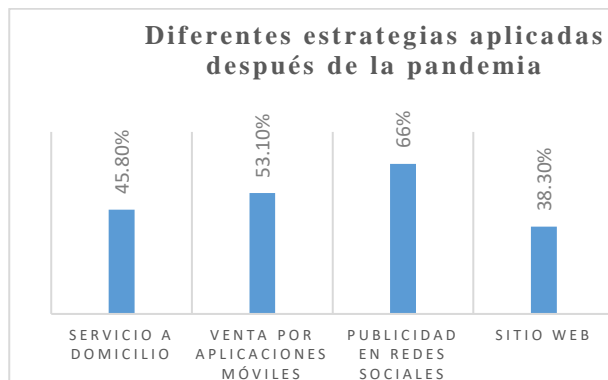
Source: Own elaboration



**Graphic 12** Sales strategies that continue to be applied post-pandemic

Source: Own elaboration

A comparison is made between Graphics 11 and 12 to identify which sales strategies increase and which decrease after the pandemic. Personal sales strategies decrease by 5.9% post-pandemic, rewards and gift programs increased by 3.3%, point-of-sale distribution had an increase of 4.6%, discounts on future purchases show an increase of 4.6%; the sales strategy promotion days, decreases to 4.9%. Offers such as 2-for-1 show a decrease of 2.2%. Therefore, it is determined that there are changes in the strategies used after the pandemic.



**Graphic 13** Different sales strategies applied after the pandemic

Source: Own elaboration

Graphic 13 shows that the SMEs used new strategies for their business after the pandemic (2020-2021) to reach the end customer. With 45.80%, they mentioned that they used door-to-door sales, sales via mobile applications 53.10%, the use of advertising on social networks was 66% and the creation of a website 30%.

If the answer was no to the question "Before the pandemic, did you use sales strategies?" 18.5% (39 small and micro enterprises) of the respondents said that they did not use strategies for the following reasons (not all answers are mentioned as they are repetitive).

It was not necessary because of the influx of people.

I didn't think it was necessary.

I didn't need it.

Because he did not find it necessary.

He does not know about strategies.

He doesn't know about marketing.

Never thought about it because it was going well.

Don't know how to apply them.

Don't know how to use them.

Didn't know about them.

Didn't know about them.

**Table 1** Responses given by SMEs as to why they did not use sales strategies before the pandemic

Increased sales due to new sales strategies implemented	
Yes	100%
Grand total	100%

**Table 2** Increase in sales with the implementation of new sales strategies after the pandemic

Source: Own elaboration

Table 2 shows that 100% of the SMEs show an increase by applying strategies such as door-to-door sales, mobile applications, advertising on social networks and the creation of websites.

## Anexxes

Size of your company	
Microenterprises	18%
Small	82%
Grand total	100%

**Table 3** Size of SMEs

Source: Own elaboration

Business activity	
Comercial	62.09%
Industrial	21.33%
Service	16.59%
Grand total	100%

**Table 4** Business of the SMEs

Source: Own elaboration

How do you see your sales in the 2020-2021 period?	
Excellent	14.22%
Bad	16.11%
Very Good	32.70%
Very bad	6.16%
Regular	30.81%
Grand total	100%

**Table 5** Perception of MSME sales

Source: Own elaboration



	Excellent	Bad	Very Good	Very bad	Regular
Microenterprises	10.26%	23.08%	25.64%	0.00%	41.03%
	15.12%	14.53%	34.30%	7.56%	28.49%
<b>grand total</b>	<b>14.22%</b>	<b>16.11%</b>	<b>32.70%</b>	<b>6.16%</b>	<b>30.81%</b>

**Table 6** Relationship between the size of the MSEs and the perception of sales

Source: Own elaboration

How do you see your sales in the period 2020-2021 and their impact generated by COVID-19			
	Impacted no	Impacted yes	Total
Excellent	7.58%	17.24%	14.22%
Bad	21.21%	13.79%	16.11%
Very Good	22.73%	37.24%	32.70%
Very bad	10.61%	4.14%	6.16%
Regular	37.88%	27.59%	30.81%
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

**Table 7** Impact of sales was by COVID-19

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## Conclusions

According to the responses obtained from the MSME entrepreneurs, it can be identified that 81.52% were already using sales strategies before the pandemic. Those that have been established for between 5 and 7 years are the ones that have applied the most sales strategies (Graphic 10).

After the pandemic, MSMEs had a decrease of 5.9% in the use or application of personal sales strategies and there was also a decrease of 4.9% in the application of promotional days strategies; the application of offers such as 2-for-1 had a decrease of 2.2%; in contrast, the application of rewards and gift programmes increased by 3.3%, as did point-of-sale distribution with an increase of 4.6%. In terms of discounts on future purchases, there was an increase of 4.6 %.

The results show that MSMEs had an increase in sales when they applied different sales strategies to those previously used, such as home delivery, mobile app sales, social media advertising and website (Graphic 13).

It is necessary for companies to apply digital marketing if they want to stay in the market and increase their market share. Recommended sales strategies are inbound marketing, WhatsApp business, increasing their participation in social networks such as Tik tok, Instagram and Facebook.

Information is sent to the SMEs about the internships of the students of the Universidad Tecnológica de Chihuahua. The internship is the period in which the student develops a program of activities with the objective of solving a real problem of the organization or the proposal of continuous improvement within the company. The students of the Business Development degree are the students who have the competence in the area and can collaborate with the interested companies, during the stay period, to create an effective and directed digital marketing project, which allows them to remain and grow in the market.

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