SEO Optimization of Hotel Websites: A Comparative Analysis in Ecuador

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Abstract– ***The growing importance of digital channels has made search engine optimization (SEO) a strategic component of competitiveness in the hotel industry. In this context, this study comparatively analysed the on-page and technical SEO readiness of the official websites of ten Ecuadorian hotel establishments. A quantitative, descriptive-comparative, cross-sectional study was conducted through a structured SEOquake audit, from which a fourteen-criterion SEO Compliance Index (ICSEO) was developed. The findings revealed widespread implementation of technical infrastructure components, although shortcomings persisted in meta descriptions, H1 headings, image ALT attributes, and textual content. Differences were also identified in the semantic configuration of the hotels' value propositions. As its main contribution, the study introduces the concept of the digital articulation gap in the hotel value proposition, defined as the misalignment between the technical implementation of a website and the semantic representation of its distinctive attributes. The findings broaden the understanding of SEO as a strategic digital marketing capability and provide a useful tool for benchmarking in the hotel industry.***

Keywords-- search engine optimization (SEO); hotel websites; digital presence; digital marketing; technical SEO.

I. Introduction

International tourism continues to grow in a context characterized by increasing economic and geopolitical uncertainty. During the first quarter of 2026, approximately 307 million tourists travelled internationally, six million more than in the same period of 2025, representing year-on-year growth of 2%. However, this trend showed relevant regional differences: while international arrivals in the Americas increased by 2%, South America recorded a 1% decline [1]. This pattern creates a particularly challenging environment for South American tourism businesses, which must capture the attention of travelers exposed to multiple alternatives during the search and evaluation stages of tourism services [2].

In Ecuador, the recent dynamism of tourism confirms the sector's economic relevance. During the first quarter of 2026, hotel occupancy reached 37.40%, while tourism expenditure grew by 17.62% to USD 44.85 million [3]. These results reveal opportunities for the Ecuadorian hotel industry and, at the same time, reinforce the importance of digital presence in a market where travelers use online environments to search for information, compare establishments, and evaluate alternatives before making travel-related decisions [4].

At the same time, digitalization has reshaped the creation, distribution, and consumption of tourism services. Digital technologies have not only expanded commercialization channels but have also transformed the way travelers search for information, compare alternatives, and form decisions before making a reservation [5]. Projections reported in [6] show an increasing share of online channels in global travel and tourism sales through 2030. Although the technological transformation of tourism is a long-term process, the interaction among information technologies, consumers, and organizations has structurally changed tourism activity [7]. Within this ecosystem, the ability of hotel establishments to structure and present their offerings in digital environments has acquired strategic relevance.

In this context, the official website is a particularly relevant digital asset for hotel establishments. Unlike intermediary platforms, it is a space managed directly by the organization to communicate information about rooms, services, gastronomy, experiences, location, and booking mechanisms [8]. The evaluation of tourism websites is a multidimensional field in which content, functionality, design, and technical characteristics converge [9]. Consequently, a hotel's digital presence depends not only on having a visually attractive website, but also on how its architecture, content, and technical components facilitate the identification, crawling, and interpretation of information by search systems [10].

This issue is particularly relevant given the role of search engines as intermediaries in access to digital information. In a study involving 2,012 Internet users, [11] found that only 8.9% were familiar with the term search engine optimization and only 14.5% could correctly mention an SEO tactic; nevertheless, 59.2% believed that optimization could exert a strong or very strong influence on search rankings. These results reveal a relevant paradox: users access information organized through systems whose ranking mechanisms they understand only to a limited extent, while organizations develop actions aimed at increasing the visibility of their content [12]. Consequently, preparing web assets for search engines is important in the process through which users gain digital access to hotel offerings.

However, the implementation of SEO practices should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of superior content quality. [13] found that certain non-optimized pages received higher experience ratings than optimized pages and were perceived as more competent and reputable. This finding demonstrates that optimization and perceived quality are conceptually distinct dimensions. therefore, is should therefore

examine observable characteristics of web readiness without inferring solely from them the overall quality of a website, its actual position in search results, or its ability to generate commercial outcomes [14].

This distinction is particularly relevant in the hotel industry, where official websites integrate photographs, booking engines, room pages, experiences, restaurants, and destination-related content [15]. However, a sophisticated visual proposition may coexist with deficiencies in metadata, heading hierarchy, image alternative attributes, structured data, or crawling and indexing mechanisms [16]. Although tourism research has extensively examined digital technologies, booking platforms, online reviews, and traveler behavior, less is known about differences in the joint implementation of on-page and technical SEO components across hotel websites [17]. This gap is particularly relevant in Latin American contexts, where comparative evidence on the SEO readiness of official hotel websites remains limited.

Ecuador provides a relevant context for addressing this gap because of the heterogeneity of its hotel offering, which includes international chains, national urban hotels, boutique establishments, and accommodation oriented towards nature and wellness experiences [18]. This diversity makes it possible to examine whether establishments within the same industry exhibit similar levels of SEO readiness or, conversely, whether cumulative differences exist in the implementation of their digital components. Accordingly, the objective of this study is to comparatively analyze the level of on-page and technical SEO optimization of the official websites of hotel establishments in Ecuador through a structured audit of their digital components. To this end, ten websites are examined and an SEO Compliance Index (ICSEO) is constructed based on 14 observable criteria related to metadata, structure, content, structured data, social SEO, mobile compatibility, crawling, and web infrastructure.

This study makes three contributions. First, it extends the analysis of hotel digital presence towards the comparative assessment of SEO readiness in a scarcely examined Latin American context. Second, it operationalizes a set of on-page and technical characteristics through a descriptive index that facilitates benchmarking among hotel websites. Third, it identifies compliance patterns and cumulative gaps in digital architecture, showing that SEO readiness does not depend on the isolated presence of a single component, but on the joint implementation of technical and semantic elements that shape how websites are structured for interaction with search systems.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Digitalization and the Strategic Role of the Hotel Website

Digital transformation has changed the way organizations create value, interact with consumers, and structure their commercial channels. This process is not limited to technology adoption; it also entails changes in organizational capabilities and in the relationship between firms and markets [19]. In tourism, this evolution is particularly relevant because travel decisions are highly information-intensive, with consumers using multiple digital touchpoints to search for information, compare alternatives, and select accommodation [20]. Consequently, digital infrastructure is a component of competitive strategy rather than merely an operational or communication resource [21].

In the hotel sector, websites, digital platforms, and booking systems form an interconnected ecosystem that contributes to the traveler's experience. Within this environment, the official website retains a strategic role by concentrating on information about rooms, services, location, experiences, and booking mechanisms [22]. Its value therefore lies not only in visually presenting the establishment, but also in structuring information that is accessible to consumers and digital systems [23]. This issue is especially relevant because a hotel may have a differentiated value proposition while simultaneously facing limitations in being discovered digitally [24]. The existence of a website does not guarantee visibility; its content and architecture must facilitate information retrieval and interpretation.

B. Organic Visibility and On-Page SEO Optimization

Search engine optimization (SEO) comprises a set of practices aimed at improving the readiness of content for search environments [25]. Unlike paid advertising activities, SEO integrates cumulative decisions concerning content, keywords, and page configuration [26]. The selection of terms should be understood from a strategic, long-term perspective because optimization decisions may influence the ability of content to respond to specific queries [27]. SEO is therefore not an isolated intervention, but rather a coordination of content, architecture, and digital meaning [28].

Nevertheless, SEO readiness should be distinguished from actual organic ranking. A page may implement titles, meta descriptions, headings, or structured data without necessarily occupying the top positions for a query, because multiple signals and competitive conditions influence search systems [29]. [11] demonstrated users' limited knowledge of how SEO works. This distinction is fundamental for academic research because a technical audit can examine observable optimization components but cannot reproduce Google's algorithm or directly establish a page's ranking.

Within on-page optimization, the title, meta description, and headings help describe and thematically organize content [30]. On hotel websites, these elements should articulate the brand, location, and attributes of the experience offered. ALT attributes likewise make it possible to describe visual content, an especially relevant aspect in an industry that relies heavily on photographs of rooms, gastronomy, wellness, and destinations [31]. However, optimization should not be reduced to the mechanical inclusion of tags. [13] warn that the presence of SEO measures does not necessarily imply higher information quality. Evaluation should therefore consider both component implementation and the semantic coherence of the content.

C. Technical SEO and Digital Architecture

Technical architecture shapes the way search systems discover, organize, and interpret pages. Components such as the canonical URL, robots.txt, and XML sitemap are involved in crawling and indexing processes, while structured data through Schema.org make it possible to describe entities and content using vocabularies interpretable by automated systems [32]. In the hotel context, this architecture can help represent establishments, services, location, and other attributes of the offering. In addition, mobile compatibility is an essential component given the use of different devices when searching for tourism information [27].

These elements should be understood as indicators of technical readiness rather than as isolated factors capable of explaining a specific position in search results. This conceptual distinction is particularly important in automated audits, where the presence of a component can be observably verified, whereas its effect on traffic or ranking requires additional information [34]. Consequently, hotel SEO readiness can be analysed by integrating on-page and technical elements, while recognizing that organic visibility is a broader phenomenon conditioned by multiple factors [35].

D. SEO Auditing, Benchmarking, and the Research Gap

An SEO audit is a systematic procedure for identifying the presence, absence, or configuration of components associated with web optimization. Its comparative application enables digital benchmarking among organizations within the same sector [36]. However, automated tools observe technical signals and content accessible during crawling but do not fully reproduce search-engine algorithms. Accordingly, the concepts of SEO compliance and observable SEO readiness are more appropriate than claiming that a website is better positioned solely because it exhibits greater technical implementation [37].

Despite the development of research on digital transformation, tourism platforms, and online behavior, studies specifically focused on hotel SEO remain limited. For example, [38] analysed hotel websites through the segmentation and assessment of SEO variables, highlighting the relevance of these components for understanding and improving online visibility. However, the comparative evidence identified is concentrated mainly in contexts outside Latin America, and research on the joint implementation of on-page and technical SEO components on official hotel websites in the region therefore remains limited. This limitation is particularly relevant in Ecuador, where international chains, urban hotels, boutique establishments, eco-lodges, and resorts compete in a shared digital environment through different value propositions [39]. In response to this gap, the present study develops a comparative audit of Ecuadorian hotel websites and proposes an SEO Compliance Index (ICSEO) to synthesize the observable implementation of previously defined criteria [40], [41]. The study thus seeks to identify differences in SEO readiness and examine how establishments technically and semantically articulate their digital presence.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a quantitative approach, with a descriptive-comparative scope and a cross-sectional observational design. The unit of analysis was the homepage of each hotel establishment's official website. Each website was treated as a digital unit suitable for systematic auditing using homogeneous on-page and technical optimization criteria. This approach makes it possible to examine observable components of web architecture without equating their implementation with perceived content quality or actual search-engine ranking [13], [11].

The sample was selected through criterion-based purposive sampling. Establishments operating in Ecuador, with their own official website and a publicly accessible homepage available for auditing, were included. Competitive relevance was also considered by incorporating internationally recognized hotels and establishments notable for their business importance within the Ecuadorian hotel sector [42], [43]. The sample comprised ten establishments: Oro Verde Guayaquil, Wyndham Guayaquil Puerto Santa Ana, Hilton Colón Guayaquil, Sheraton Quito Hotel, Casa Gangotena, Swissôtel Quito, Samari Spa Resort, Sangay Spa Hotel, Termas de Papallacta, and Mashpi Lodge. The heterogeneity of the cases enabled comparison among urban hotels, boutique hotels, resorts, and accommodation associated with wellness and nature.

Data was collected during June 2026 through a structured audit using SEOquake. In the first stage, descriptive indicators were recorded: number of words, internal and external links, images without ALT attributes, and text-to-HTML ratio. In the second stage, components related to metadata, headings, images, crawling, structured data, social metadata, and technical configuration were evaluated. The joint assessment of content and architecture is relevant given the multidimensional nature of search engine optimization [38]. In addition, word and phrase density was examined, distinguishing terms associated with the brand, location, and hotel proposition from expressions generated by cookies or functional components.

In the third stage, the SEO Compliance Index (ICSEO) was constructed as a synthetic measure of observable SEO readiness. The construction of composite indicators facilitates the integration of multiple observable variables into a common comparative measure [39]. The ICSEO incorporated 14 criteria selected from the indicators assessed through SEOquake: SEO title, meta description, H1, ALT attributes, text-to-HTML ratio, canonical URL, Schema.org, meta viewport, robots.txt, XML sitemap, Open Graph, Twitter Card, Google Analytics, and favicon. The selected criteria were subjected to content validation through the judgement of two experts, who assessed their relevance and correspondence with the purpose of the SEO audit. Based on this review, the final version of the criteria used to construct the index was established. Each criterion was coded dichotomously (1 = compliance; 0 = absence or deficiency), and the index was

calculated as ICSEO=(∑x_i/n) ×100, where n=14. The criteria were equally weighted because of the descriptive-comparative nature of the index, whose purpose is to synthesize observable compliance to facilitate benchmarking among websites rather than to estimate the relative importance of each component for organic ranking. Consequently, no differential weights that had not been empirically estimated for the analysed context were assigned. Three operational levels were established: high (≥80%), medium (60 – 79.99%), and low (<60%).

Finally, the data were organized in an establishment – indicator matrix and analysed through descriptive digital benchmarking. First, individual criterion compliance was compared; subsequently, the ICSEO was examined for each establishment; and, finally, the semantic configurations of the content were interpreted. Because of the purposive sampling and the number of units analysed, no inferential procedures were applied, and no statistical generalizations were made to the Ecuadorian hotel sector as a whole.

IV. RESULTS

The comparative audit of the ten hotel websites revealed substantial differences in the implementation of on-page and technical SEO factors. In aggregate terms, the SEO Compliance Index (ICSEO) reached a mean of 74.29%, corresponding to a medium level of observable SEO readiness according to the operational classification established in this study. Nevertheless, variation across establishments shows a heterogeneous digital configuration. While some websites consistently integrated metadata, heading structure, image alternative attributes, structured data, and crawling mechanisms, others accumulated simultaneous deficiencies across several of these components. The initial results therefore show that the SEO readiness of the establishments analysed does not follow a uniform pattern, even among organizations belonging to the same tourism sector.

A. Characterization of Hotel Websites

Table 1 presents the main descriptive indicators obtained through the SEOquake audit. Word count showed high variability, ranging from 269 words for Swissôtel Quito to 6,037 for Wyndham Guayaquil Puerto Santa Ana. The number of internal links ranged from 22 to 145, while external links varied between 10 and 34. These results reveal important differences in the observable length and architecture of the homepages analysed.

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE INDICATORS OF THE WEBSITES ANALYSED

Hotel establishment	Words	Internal links	External links	Images without ALT	Text/ HTML
Oro Verde Guayaquil	707	45	14	0	8,53 %
Wyndham Guayaquil Puerto Santa Ana	6.037	145	18	103	33,06 %
Hilton Colón Guayaquil	1.004	51	32	52	2,03 %
Sheraton Quito Hotel	4.635	127	34	0	24,71 %
Casa Gangotena	4.615	57	21	0	6,87 %
Swissôtel Quito	269	22	17	0	0,84 %
Samari Spa Resort	761	27	16	32	8,97 %
Sangay Spa Hotel	525	72	10	41	6,04 %
Termas de Papallacta	1.133	49	17	26	11,54 %
Mashpi Lodge	4.807	67	22	0	7,16 %

Note. Data corresponds to the audit of the homepages of the official websites conducted using SEOquake in June 2026. Source: Authors own elaboration based on data obtained through SEOquake.

Wyndham Guayaquil Puerto Santa Ana and Sheraton Quito Hotel were the only websites that exceeded the operational threshold of 15% for the text-to-HTML ratio, with 33.06% and 24.71%, respectively. In contrast, Swissôtel Quito and Hilton Colón Guayaquil recorded the lowest values, at 0.84% and 2.03%. The difference between the two extremes exceeds 30 percentage points, reflecting considerably different configurations in the proportion of detected textual content relative to HTML code. These values do not, by themselves, represent a measure of overall website quality, because hotel pages may incorporate booking engines, scripts, and dynamic components; however, they make it possible to identify observable differences in the technical composition of the audited pages.

Image optimization also displayed substantial heterogeneity. Oro Verde Guayaquil, Sheraton Quito Hotel, Casa Gangotena, Swissôtel Quito, and Mashpi Lodge recorded no images without ALT attributes. By contrast, Wyndham Guayaquil Puerto Santa Ana had 103 images without alternative text, followed by Hilton Colón Guayaquil with 52, Sangay Spa Hotel with 41, Samari Spa Resort with 32, and Termas de Papallacta with 26. This result highlights a particularly relevant gap in websites whose digital communication relies heavily on photographs of rooms, gastronomy, facilities, nature, and tourism experiences.

B. Compliance with SEO Criteria

The disaggregated analysis of the 14 criteria showed that components associated with basic technical infrastructure exhibited higher levels of compliance than certain elements related to the structuring and semantic description of content. As shown in Table 2, all websites implemented meta viewport and robots.txt. Likewise, 90% met the established criteria for SEO title, functional canonical, Schema.org, XML sitemap, and favicon.

TABLE 2
FREQUENCY OF COMPLIANCE WITH SEO CRITERIA

SEO criterion	Compliant websites	Compliance
Meta viewport	10	100 %
Robots.txt	10	100 %
Optimal SEO title	9	90 %
Functional	9	90 %

canonical		
Schema.org	9	90 %
Sitemap XML	9	90 %
Favicon	9	90 %
Twitter Card	8	80 %
Google Analytics detected	8	80 %
Open Graph	7	70 %
H1 present	6	60 %
Images with ALT	5	50 %
Optimal meta description	3	30 %
Text/HTML ratio ≥15 %	2	20 %

Note. Compliance calculated for ten hotel websites (n = 10) audited using SEOquake in June 2026.

The results show that the main deficiencies were concentrated in on-page components. Only three of the ten websites (30%) presented a meta description within the established operational range, while only two pages (20%) achieved a text-to-HTML ratio equal to or greater than 15%. Similarly, four establishments lacked an H1 heading and half of the websites recorded at least one image without an ALT attribute.

In contrast, components related to crawling, mobile compatibility, and web infrastructure showed more widespread implementation. Meta viewport and robots.txt achieved universal compliance, while canonical, Schema.org, and XML sitemap were present on nine of the ten websites. Comparatively, this configuration reveals a gap between basic technical readiness and semantic content optimization. The hotels appear to have progressed more consistently in elements that support the website's general infrastructure, while maintaining uneven levels in the way they digitally describe, hierarchies, and contextualize their hotel offering.

C. SEO Compliance Index

The integration of the 14 criteria made it possible to calculate the ICSEO for each establishment. As shown in Table 3, Casa Gangotena achieved the highest level of compliance, at 92.86%, followed by Swissôtel Quito at 85.71%. At the lower end were Samari Spa Resort, at 57.14%, and Termas de Papallacta, at 50.00%.

TABLE 3.

SEO COMPLIANCE INDEX OF HOTEL WEBSITES

Position	Hotel establishment	Criteria met	ICSEO	Level
1	Casa Gangotena	13/14	92,86 %	High
2	Swissôtel Quito	12/14	85,71 %	High
3	Oro Verde Guayaquil	11/14	78,57 %	Medium
3	Wyndham Guayaquil Puerto Santa Ana	11/14	78,57 %	Medium
3	Sheraton Quito Hotel	11/14	78,57 %	Medium
3	Mashpi Lodge	11/14	78,57 %	Medium
7	Hilton Colón Guayaquil	10/14	71,43 %	Medium
7	Sangay Spa Hotel	10/14	71,43 %	Medium
9	Samari Spa Resort	8/14	57,14 %	Low
10	Termas de Papallacta	7/14	50,00 %	Low

Note. High: ≥80%; medium: 60–79.99%; low: <60%. The ranges are operational and were defined for this study. The ICSEO represents observable SEO compliance and not actual position in Google search results.

The distribution of the index shows that two establishments reached a high level, six were classified at a medium level, and two presented a low level. However, equality in the aggregate score did not imply equivalent SEO configurations. Oro Verde Guayaquil, Wyndham Guayaquil Puerto Santa Ana, Sheraton Quito Hotel, and Mashpi Lodge achieved an ICSEO of 78.57%, although the deficiencies underlying their scores differed.

Oro Verde Guayaquil implemented structured data, ALT attributes, and social metadata, but lacked an H1 and showed a text-to-HTML ratio below the established threshold. Wyndham Guayaquil Puerto Santa Ana stood out for its content volume and text-to-HTML ratio; however, it recorded 103 images without ALT attributes and deficiencies in social metadata. Sheraton Quito Hotel showed a high text-to-HTML ratio and no images without ALT attributes, although issues were identified with canonical and XML sitemap. Mashpi Lodge combined a hierarchical heading structure, image optimization, and experiential content, although Google Analytics was not detected during the audit.

A similar pattern was identified for Hilton Colón Guayaquil and Sangay Spa Hotel, both with an ICSEO of 71.43%. Hilton presented H1, structured data, and basic crawling resources, but recorded 52 images without ALT attributes and a text-to-HTML ratio of 2.03%. Sangay Spa Hotel incorporated an XML sitemap, Google Analytics, and social metadata, although it lacked an H1 and had 41 images without ALT attributes. Consequently, the ICSEO enabled comparison of the aggregate level of implementation, while the criterion-level analysis revealed differentiated internal configurations among establishments.

D. Semantic Configurations of Hotel Content

The lexical density analysis identified two predominant semantic configurations. The first focused on the brand–location relationship, through expressions such as "Wyndham Guayaquil", "Hilton Colón Guayaquil", and "Sheraton Quito". The second organized content around experiential attributes of the offering: Casa Gangotena incorporated terms associated with heritage and the historic centre; Mashpi Lodge with nature, reserve, and sustainability; and Samari Spa Resort and Termas de Papallacta with wellness, spa, and relaxation. These patterns reveal differences in the way establishments translate their value proposition into website content.

Overall, although compliance with technical crawling and web-infrastructure components predominated, the main gaps

were concentrated in meta descriptions, headings, ALT attributes, and textual content. The results therefore suggest a digital articulation gap in the hotel value proposition, because the website's technical readiness is not always accompanied by a semantic configuration capable of consistently integrating the brand, destination, and experiential attributes of the offering. Fig. 1 conceptually synthesizes this gap, showing the misalignment between technical SEO readiness and the semantic articulation of the hotel value proposition, as well as the integration of both components to achieve a coherent digital representation of that proposition.

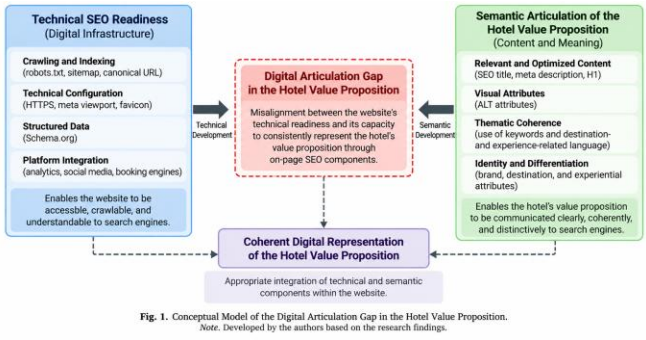


Fig. 1. Conceptual Model of the Digital Articulation Gap in the Hotel Value Proposition.
Note. Developed by the authors based on the research findings.

Fig. 1 Conceptual model of the digital articulation gap in the hotel value proposition.
Note. Authors' owns elaboration based on the research results

V. DISCUSSION

The results show that the SEO readiness of the hotel websites analysed has a heterogeneous configuration and, most importantly, a gap between technical infrastructure and the semantic articulation of content. The mean ICSEO of 74.29% indicates that the establishments have incorporated a relevant proportion of components associated with web optimization; however, the concentration of compliance in meta viewport, robots.txt, canonical, Schema.org, and XML sitemap contrasts with the deficiencies identified in meta descriptions, H1 headings, ALT attributes, and text-to-HTML ratio. This result supports the need to understand digital transformation as an organizational capability that goes beyond the isolated adoption of technologies [19]. In the hotel context, having digital infrastructure does not necessarily imply that the value proposition is coherently structured for interpretation in search environments.

This finding extends the discussion on the strategic role of the hotel website. Previous studies have indicated that these channels integrate content, functionality, design, and technical characteristics [9], while web architecture contributes to the identification and retrieval of digital information [10]. The results obtained suggest that these dimensions may evolve unevenly. Indeed, nine of the ten websites implemented Schema.org and an XML sitemap, while only three met the established criterion for the meta description and five achieved complete image optimization through ALT attributes. Observable technical maturity therefore does not necessarily translate into equivalent structuring of content communicating rooms, experiences, wellness, nature, or destination attributes.

Likewise, differences among establishments with identical ICSEO values confirm that SEO readiness should not be interpreted exclusively through an aggregate score. Oro Verde, Wyndham, Sheraton, and Mashpi Lodge reached 78.57%, although their gaps were located in different components. This result is consistent with the perspective of [13], who warn that applying SEO measures does not automatically imply superior information quality. In this regard, the ICSEO is useful as a benchmarking tool, but the disaggregated analysis makes it possible to identify different configurations of digital readiness. The contribution of the index therefore lies in facilitating systematic comparison without seeking to reproduce search-engine algorithms or directly attribute organic-ranking outcomes.

The lexical analysis deepens this interpretation by revealing two predominant semantic configurations. Websites associated with brand – location expressions structured their content around the identification of the hotel and destination, whereas establishments linked to heritage, nature, and wellness incorporated semantic fields related to experiential attributes. This result is particularly significant considering that tourism decisions develop through multiple touchpoints and processes of searching for and comparing alternatives [20]. From this perspective, the semantic architecture of the website not only organizes information but also constitutes the mechanism through which the hotel value proposition is translated into the digital environment.

Based on these results, the concept of the digital articulation gap in the hotel value proposition is proposed, understood as the observable misalignment between the technical infrastructure implemented by an establishment and its capacity to consistently represent, through on-page components and semantic content, the differentiating attributes of its offering. This gap constitutes the study's main theoretical contribution. A hotel may have crawling mechanisms, mobile compatibility, and structured data while simultaneously facing limitations in integrating brand, destination, and experience within its content architecture. Consequently, hotel SEO readiness should be conceptualized as an integrated digital marketing capability in which technical infrastructure, semantic organization, and digital articulation of the value proposition converge. This approach broadens the instrumental view of SEO and places it within the establishment's capacity to digitally structure what it offers to the market.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study comparatively analysed the on-page and technical SEO readiness of the official websites of ten Ecuadorian hotel establishments through a standardised audit procedure. In this regard, the evidence confirms that SEO readiness in the hotel industry does not depend exclusively on

the incorporation of technical components, but on the capacity to coherently integrate digital infrastructure, content organisation, and the semantic structure of information. Although most establishments adequately implement elements related to crawling and indexing, important differences persist in the way the hotel value proposition is communicated and structured within official websites.

The study's main contribution is the proposal of the concept of the digital articulation gap in the hotel value proposition, understood as the misalignment between the website's technical implementation and its capacity to coherently represent, through on-page SEO components, the establishment's distinctive attributes. From this perspective, SEO readiness goes beyond an exclusively technological view and becomes a strategic digital marketing capability that integrates infrastructure, content, and meaning to facilitate interaction among hotels, search engines, and potential travellers.

From a managerial perspective, the results suggest that SEO audits should evolve from an approach focused solely on technical aspects towards comprehensive assessments that incorporate semantic coherence among the brand, destination, tourism experience, and content architecture. This approach may help strengthen establishments' digital presence and facilitate communication of their value proposition in an increasingly competitive tourism environment.

The study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the cross-sectional nature of the audit provides a representation of observable SEO readiness during the period analysed; therefore, the results may vary following subsequent modifications to the websites. Second, purposive sampling and the number of establishments analysed limit the statistical generalisation of the findings to the Ecuadorian hotel sector as a whole. Likewise, the ICSEO is a synthetic measure of observable compliance with the selected criteria and does not represent a direct measure of organic ranking, web traffic, or the establishments' commercial performance.

Finally, this study opens new opportunities for further research on SEO readiness in the tourism sector. Future studies could analyse the relationship between the ICSEO and variables such as organic visibility, web traffic, direct bookings, or commercial performance, as well as extend the comparison to other Latin American tourism destinations and conduct longitudinal studies to evaluate the evolution of SEO maturity among hotel organisations.

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