

Research article

# The role of digital technologies in promoting social innovation in tourism Brazilian companies

## El papel de las tecnologías digitales en la promoción de la innovación social en las empresas turísticas brasileñas

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Promoting social innovation and social entrepreneurship is key to building sustainable tourism destinations. In this way, entrepreneurship, through social innovation, aims to generate social impact to the detriment of financial benefits. Digital technologies can be important tools to support social innovation, as they enable new forms of cooperation, expanding social and innovative activities. In this sense, the aim of the study is to analyze entrepreneurship in the tourism sector, with an emphasis on good social innovation practices,

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and to explore the relevance of digital technologies in the creation and promotion innovation. **Methodology:** The empirical study used case study analysis and semi-structured interviews with five companies' Brazilian tourism. **Results and Discussions:** The results show that these companies are committed to sustainable development, concerned with involving communities. About the use of digital technologies to foster social innovation, they play an important role. However, technical and financial obstacles are highlighted, as well as the effectiveness of the tools already in use. **Conclusions:** The digital technologies are crucial for social innovation, transcending communication boundaries and broadening the scope to promote sustainable development.

**Keywords:** social innovation; entrepreneurship; social entrepreneurship; digital technologies; sustainable development; technological impact; social impact; tourism.

## Resumen

**Introducción:** Promover la innovación social y el emprendimiento social es clave para construir destinos turísticos sostenibles. De este modo, el emprendimiento, a través de la innovación social, pretende generar impacto social en detrimento de los beneficios financieros. Las tecnologías digitales pueden ser herramientas importantes para apoyar la innovación social, ya que permiten nuevas formas de cooperación, ampliando las actividades innovadoras. En este sentido, el objetivo del estudio es analizar el emprendimiento en el sector turístico, con énfasis en las buenas prácticas de innovación social, y explorar la relevancia de las tecnologías digitales en la creación y promoción de la innovación social. **Metodología:** El estudio empírico utilizó el análisis de casos y entrevistas semiestructuradas con cinco empresas turísticas brasileñas. **Resultados e Discusión:** Los resultados muestran que estas empresas están comprometidas con el desarrollo sostenible, preocupadas por implicar a las comunidades. En cuanto al uso de las tecnologías digitales para fomentar la innovación social, desempeñan un papel importante. Sin embargo, se destacan los obstáculos técnicos y financieros, así como la eficacia de las herramientas ya utilizadas. **Conclusiones:** Las tecnologías digitales son cruciales para la innovación social, pues trascienden los límites de la comunicación y amplían las posibilidades de promover el desarrollo sostenible.

**Palabras clave:** innovación social; espíritu empresarial; emprendimiento social; tecnologías digitales; desarrollo sostenible; impacto tecnológico; impacto social; turismo.

## 1. Introduction

Tourism provides social, economic and cultural opportunities and has a significant impact on the global economy (OECD, 2016). However, its rapid expansion has created social and environmental problems that require innovative and sustainable solutions. Sustainable tourism requires new sustainable investment solutions, rather than traditional ones, that promote and support growth and productivity. This has intensified following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (UNWTO, 2021).

Entrepreneurship and social innovation are drivers for solving social problems. Through social innovation, businesses can not only benefit financially but also generate positive social impact. Tourism fosters the creation of new businesses and thus opportunities for sustainable development. Digital technologies are an important tool for transforming entrepreneurship (Bi et al., 2017; Giones & Brem, 2017) and can support existing social innovations or contribute to the creation of new ones (Millard & Carpenter, 2014).

Mulgan (2006) states that social innovation refers to creative action driven by a social need. In this context, entrepreneurship develops economically sustainable solutions to social problems by individuals who support and generate resources for commercial ventures or those supported by governments or philanthropic actions (Tracey & Phillips, 2007).

The process of social innovation emphasizes the dimension of transparency, governance and empowerment of social movements and initiatives (Moulaert et al., 2005). Social entrepreneurs consider social missions that alleviate specific social problems to be more important than their own financial benefits (Prieto & Phipps, 2014).

According to Charalabidis et al. (2014), few studies have managed to address the role and impact of information and communication technologies (ICT) on social innovation. In this sense, there is a need for more studies that link these topics and empirical research that can contribute to studies related to sustainable development in tourism. The study aims to analyze tourism entrepreneurship, focusing on social innovation practices, and explore digital technology's relevance in creating and promoting social innovation in this context.

Initially, a literature review was conducted, which “consists of identifying, locating, and analyzing documents that contain information related to the topic of a specific investigation” (Coutinho, 2011, p. 55). The literature review was divided into three blocks, namely:

- (i) concepts and dimensions of social innovation, entrepreneurship, and social entrepreneurship;
- (ii) social innovation and social entrepreneurship in tourism; and
- (iii) the impact of digital technologies on the creation and promotion of social innovation. Based on the literature review, a data collection instrument was developed for the study in question, namely a semi-structured interview.

We hope that the conclusions will be stimulating and contribute to studies on social innovation and entrepreneurship in tourism, promoting broader discussions among the various actors in the sector on the topic in future research.

## **2. Conceptual framework**

### ***2.1. Concepts and dimensions of social innovation, entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship***

Much has been said recently about innovation, but the term "innovate" is defined in different ways within typologies of innovation. Schumpeter (1934) classified innovation as the rupture or discontinuity of something and associated this classification with the term "creative destruction", i.e. something completely new. Over time, other authors have developed different approaches to the subject, distinguishing innovation from invention, although the two are related (Negas et. al. 2020).

Five types of innovation are defined by Schumpeter (1934):

- (i) creation or improvement of a product;
- (ii) introduction of a new approach to production;

- (iii) development of a new line of business;
- (iv) new source of raw materials or semi-finished products; and
- (v) new way of organizing the industry.

In turn, the Oslo Manual (2018) has defined four classifications:

- (i) product innovation,
- (ii) process innovation,
- (iii) marketing innovation, and
- (iv) organizational innovation.

It's important to note that these typologies can be characterized as incremental (an existing idea) or radical (a new idea).

The concept of social innovation differs from other forms of traditional innovation in that it is not profit-driven. New concepts that help achieve social goals are called social innovation (Mulgan & Sanders, 2007). More broadly, social innovation can be defined as new activities and services that are motivated by social needs and are developed and distributed primarily by organizations whose main objectives are social (Mulgan & Sanders, 2007). In this sense, the application of knowledge to social needs, with the participation of all actors involved, creates innovative and sustainable solutions for social groups, communities, or society in general, this is known as social innovation (Bignetti, 2011). Table 1 shows some of the definitions of social innovation according to Bignetti's research (2011).

**Table 1.**

*Definitions of social innovation, according to different authors*

<b>AUTHOR</b>	<b>DEFINITION</b>
<b>Taylor (1970)</b>	New social inventions, improved methods of action and execution.
<b>Dagnino and Gomes (2000, in Dagnino et al, 2004)</b>	Knowledge that can be intangible or embodied in people or equipment, tacit or programmed, and aims to improve processes, services and products related to satisfying social needs.
<b>Cloutier (2003)</b>	A new response to a social situation that is considered unsatisfactory and aimed at the well-being of people and/or communities, with a lasting effect defined in the action.
<b>Standford Social Innovation Review (2003)</b>	The process of creating, supporting, and implementing new solutions to social issues and needs.
<b>Novy e Leubolt (2005)</b>	The satisfaction of basic human needs, increased political participation by marginalized groups, improved socio-political capacity and access to the resources needed to defend the rights that lead to participation, and the satisfaction of human needs are the main factors that lead to social innovation.
<b>Rodrigues (2006)</b>	Resulting from approaches, practices and interventions, changes in the way a person perceives their world and the reciprocal expectations between people.
<b>Moulaert et al. (2007)</b>	The tool for a different perspective on urban development is the satisfaction and empowerment of human needs through the transformation of neighborhood and community relations.

<b>Mulgan et al. (2007)</b>	New concepts that help achieve social objectives; new activities and services motivated to meet social needs are mainly developed and distributed by organizations whose main objectives are social.
<b>Phills et al. (2008)</b>	Instead of focusing only on individuals, the aim is to find a more effective, lasting, or simple solution to a social problem that affects society as a whole.
<b>Pol e Ville (2009)</b>	New concept that can increase the quality or length of life.
<b>Murray et al. (2010)</b>	New concepts, such as products, services and models, that meet society's needs and create connections or collaborations. These innovations are positive for society and improve its ability to act.

**Source:** Based on Bignetti (2011).

Social innovation is not a new concept, but rather an emerging paradigm that proposes structural and systemic solutions to social challenges. This concept has the potential to promote significant changes in the way nations structure their resources, regulations, and social institutions, aiming to address contemporary challenges and foster dynamic research environments (Sharma & Bhat, 2023).

There is no single definition that conceptualizes social innovation, despite the numerous definitions and similarities between them. Social innovation can be defined in several ways, each highlighting a specific aspect while showing the broad scope of interdisciplinarity (Max, 2021). Social innovation is not, however, a new phenomenon; its consolidation as a research discipline and its conceptualization is, in a way, relatively new (Elias & Barbero, 2021).

According to Bignetti (2011), the focus of research on social innovation is social entrepreneurship, organizations and social movements. It is important to emphasize that entrepreneurship can generate profit while at the same time seeking to have a positive impact on society.

In this sense, we have the example of bifocal innovation (social innovation + business innovation), which can generate profit and social welfare. Innovations generally go beyond the limits of the domain for which they were proposed, as the impact spreads to other domains (Juliani et al., 2014). In fact, a growing number of entrepreneurs are involved in social innovation to find innovative solutions to social problems in their community (Bacq & Janssen, 2011).

Kerlin (2006) states that social entrepreneurship can be defined as an enterprise that combines social objectives with the aim of making a profit, or an enterprise that is not for profit but engages in commercial activities for social reasons. The focus of a social enterprise should be on meeting social needs and creating value, not just generating profit for stakeholders (Nicholls, 2006).

However, social entrepreneurship is often rooted in ethical motives and moral responsibility, but it can also be driven by individual aspirations, such as the search for personal fulfilment. Profit-driven entrepreneurship can also have social aspects and intentions (Mair & Martí, 2006). The literature on social entrepreneurship argues that many ventures have defined social objectives. However, as these ventures depend on profit for their sustainability, it is crucial to balance financial interests with social goals (Mair & Martí, 2006).

## 2.2. Social innovation and social entrepreneurship in tourism

Innovation is a crucial component of social entrepreneurship, and thus the two are linked (Mosedale & Voll, 2017). Innovation is fundamental for social entrepreneurs who seek business solutions to social problems (Alegre & Berbegal-Mirabent, 2016). Social innovation can significantly improve the distribution of resources, policies, and social institutions to solve the major problems of modernity (Sharma & Bhat, 2023). When discussing social entrepreneurship in tourism, it is important to consider the process and benefits of collaborative innovation for the sustainability of societies (Mosedale & Voll, 2017).

As such, social innovation in tourism has been discussed as a tool for organizational change within tourism businesses (Alkier et al., 2017). Furthermore, it is an approach that considers local communities in the planning and decision-making of tourism destinations. It is also based on social capital formed by networks to create opportunities and alternatives, breaking down barriers between different stakeholders: the public sector, the private sector, social entrepreneurs, and the community (Mosedale & Voll, 2017). For Gómez et al. (2015), actors need to work together at the micro level (the internal environment of the community) and the macro level (the community and tourism stakeholders). In this sense, it is important to understand the main foundations of social innovation (Moulaert & MacCallum, 2019):

- Collective empowerment of people, with a particular focus on the marginalized.
- Meeting needs that are neglected or exacerbated by the state/market system.
- Developing new forms of eco-social/institutional relations and policies.

Sheldon et al (2017) defines social entrepreneurship in tourism as a process of using innovation to develop responses to the social, environmental, and economic challenges facing destinations. This involves empowering individuals and stimulating the generation of ideas aimed at sustainable social change. The tourism sector is a promising area for social entrepreneurship in today's capitalist society (Aquino et al., 2018).

Social entrepreneurship in tourism is a promotion and development tool for the positive transformation of destinations (Sheldon et al., 2017) and has the potential to integrate into local communities and mobilize the resources needed to achieve development and well-being outcomes (Farmer et al., 2016). A study by Lew et al. (2017) listed the stages and changes that occurred in a community following a social entrepreneurship intervention in tourism, and these changes were classified as:

- (i) slow: regardless of the intervention procedures and methods, the results of the change occur in the later stage of the development of social entrepreneurship;
- (ii) (i)gradual: the results of the change occur gradually, depending on the way the intervention allows them to occur and the capacity of the community system to respond; and
- (iii) sudden: the changes begin to manifest soon after the introduction of the intervention processes and mechanisms. In other words, the proposed model had three dimensions.



However, only looking at the scale of change does not provide a complete understanding of the magnitude and scope of impact, but social entrepreneurship in tourism is seen as a tool for systemic change for destinations (Lew et al., 2017).

Furthermore, a social entrepreneur in tourism is someone who inspires and encourages local communities to participate in businesses related to the sector (Reindrawati, 2018). Suriyankietkaew et al. (2022), in turn, discuss sustainable leadership practices and competencies for sustainability and resilience in the context of community-based social enterprises. Actions aimed at solving social problems focus on meeting the needs of society and have the power to transform the reality of these communities (Bignetti, 2011; Gentil, 2019). In this sense of transformation, it is important to focus on issues that generate social inclusion, equity and sustainability (Gentil, 2019).

Companies are expected to adapt their business practices and make organizational and cultural changes to meet the needs and aspirations of sustainable development (Birkin et al., 2009). Thus, by transforming and challenging traditional power structures and unsustainable conditions related to tourism, social innovations can respond to traditional needs and initiatives in local development and decision-making, particularly in the context of tourism (Partanen et al., 2023).

### *2.3. The impact of digital technologies on the creation and promotion of social innovation*

Digital technologies have transformed society in recent years, redefining the way we live, work and interact. In this context, tourism entrepreneurship is a driving force that takes advantage of the opportunities created by the digital revolution. Producers, suppliers, sellers, customers and almost any other participant in the economic cycle can now exchange information, services, goods and money in a common virtual space, thanks to information technologies and, above all, the Internet.

The movement of societies towards entrepreneurship has been accelerated and facilitated by information and communication technologies (Mivehchi, 2019) process that has been growing through digitization in the tourism sector, promoting new business models, personalization, and sustainability (Gretzel et al., 2015; Bekele & Raj, 2024).

Technological innovation is complementary to social innovation, as it works with social innovation and social innovation generates technological innovation (Lévesque, 2002). However, little information is available on which digital tools are being used to meet social needs (Smith & McKeen, 2011), although recent research in the social field mentions positive advances in the relationship between ICTs and digital platforms (Zenarolla, 2024). According to Maiolini et al. (2016), digitalization expands social and innovative activities and generates completely new and innovative commercial, social and governance value chain models. Information technology helps to identify new social needs, create innovative content and develop new technologies.

Bignetti (2011) mentions the counterpoint between technological innovation and social innovation, where one focuses on the economic side and the other on social issues. It is important to stress that this opposition does not imply an incompatibility between technological and social innovation, as there is a clear link between them. Buck et al. (2025) corroborates this perception, emphasizing that hybrid projects seek both social value creation and economic value appropriation.

In any case, social progress focuses on the creation of value (Santos, 2010), while technological progress focuses on the appropriation of value (Mizik & Jacobson, 2003). In terms of strategy, it can be inferred that while one group seeks to gain competitive advantage, the other group seeks to collaborate to solve social problems (Santos, 2010).

Analyzing the value chain of online tools and platforms can help to understand the role of digital technology in social innovation. This value chain covers everything from the creation of content to the identification of unmet social needs and possible solutions (Millard & Carpenter, 2014). In this analysis, Millard and Carpenter (2014) conclude that technology is better at performing codifiable and rule-oriented tasks related to data execution and analysis, enabling rapid speed and global reach, cost reduction and process efficiency. On the other hand, humans are better at caring, teaching, advising, decision-making, policymaking, creating, innovating, empathizing and socializing.

The authors also point out that new technologies increase connectivity and simplify processes, improving the user experience and enabling new forms of social innovation. This is possible through a variety of platforms, devices, networks and communities, while changing the norms and roles of participants within these communities (Millard & Carpenter, 2014). In his research, Zenarolla (2024) shows that digital technologies are more effective in codifiable and scalable tasks, while humans are central to creativity, decision-making, and innovation.

Social innovation can be amplified by online tools. This can shift processes from an individual model perspective to a networked collaborative model (Cammack & Byrne, 2012). The experiences that people have in online environments are valuable for creating new businesses; therefore, community leaders have the ability to influence the development of new products and services that can influence the behavior of end consumers (Hajli, 2014). Value ideas that incorporate social, economic and environmental aspects can be developed using the resources of new technologies. In addition, digital tools enable collaborative work, broader stakeholder involvement and community development strategies through different combinations of value-adding elements (Gregori & Holzmann, 2020).

In fact, few studies have examined the impact of communication and information technologies on social innovation. On the other hand, in several countries, including developing countries, information and communication technologies (ICTs), especially the Internet, mobile devices and social networks, are essential for the creation and implementation of social innovations (Charalabidis et al., 2014). As noted by Misuraca and Pasi (2019), there is an increasing number of innovative ICT-based solutions that have a positive impact on the potential for social innovation. According to Vrontis et al. (2021), the exploitation of the social, economic, and environmental effects of ICT ecosystems is influenced by the use of these technologies by their various stakeholders. It is essential to create a digital ecosystem that provides opportunities through social innovation and social entrepreneurship (Chi et al. 2020).

### **3. Methodology**

This chapter details the methodological approach of the empirical study, analyzing tourism entrepreneurship with a focus on social innovation practices and digital technology's role. It describes data collection and analysis methods, employing qualitative and inductive approaches. The interaction between the researcher and the phenomenon under investigation allows for an inductive and systematic process of theory building, which begins in the field and continues until the empirical data emerges (Creswell, 1994).



### **3.1. Data collection**

To collect empirical data, we used semi-structured interviews, which give the researcher flexibility in data collection, with a script with steps and a series of pre-established questions to facilitate the interview process. This does not prevent the researcher from asking the interviewee other questions to complement what is being investigated, if they feel the need. In this way, the interviewee feels comfortable expressing their ideas, perceptions, and accounts in a comprehensive manner. For Shaw (1999), the researcher's purpose is not to generalize but to particularize, to study the data based on concrete situations.

The interview script was structured as follows: an initial introduction of the researcher and the study was followed by 14 questions pertaining to the company, the entrepreneur, social innovation, and the digital technology tools utilized.

The sample was selected in two stages. Initially, companies from different segments of the Brazilian tourism sector were identified based on three criteria:

- (i) operating in the tourism sector;
- (ii) engagement with the local community; and
- (iii) incorporation of social innovation initiatives in their projects.

Based on these criteria, the companies were invited to participate in the study. Only one company chose to respond via a questionnaire, while the others participated in semi-structured interviews conducted through videoconference. Additionally, further contacts were obtained through a professional network in the sector, resulting in a total of five companies in the sample. Most interviewees held leadership positions within their organizations. Four interviews were conducted via the Zoom platform, with an average duration of 30 minutes between 13 and 28 March 2024. One interview was conducted via Google Form. All companies received a consent form before the interviews began.

### **3.2. Data analysis**

This study used semi-structured interviews and case studies, analyzed with WebQDA software for content and data coding. WebQDA facilitates analysis, interpretation, and visualization of coded data, ensuring easier process and reliable, valid conclusions.

The case studies were initially analyzed according to the following dimensions: organizational scale, geographical dimension, temporal dimension, conceptual dimension, and services and promotion. Following transcription of the interviews, a systematic approach to analysis was adopted, commencing with the creation of categories and subcategories within the respective dimensions analyzed (Table 2).

**Table 2.***Categories e subcategories of analysis*

Dimensions	Categories	Subcategories
<b>Social innovation</b>	Best practice	Local community, environmental sustainability.
	Actors involved	Local community, public sector, private sector, NGOS.
	Beneficiaries	Company, community, tourists.
	Impact produced	Social, economic, environmental.
	Measuring impact	Measured, not measured, beginning.
	Related SDG	From SDG 1 to SDG 17.
	Sustainable development	It is a key component of sustainable development. It is not a key component of sustainable development.
	Social values	Support and encouragement for minorities (women; blacks; indigenous people). Fair labor, cultural preservation, community preservation and cooperation.
<b>Technologies</b>	Purpose	Promotion, project management, company administration and communication.
	Digital tools	Online meetings (e.g. Zoom); Cloud storage; Online diaries. Online forms; E-mail marketing; Company website. Project management (e.g. Trello). Communication (e.g. WhatsApp). Content manager (e.g. WordPress). Online design and visual communication platform (e.g. Canva). Promotional management (e.g. Google ADS). Digital spreadsheets (e.g. Excel). Customer information storage platform (CRM).
	Social networks	Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube.
	Effectiveness	Effective, not effective and could be better.
	Barriers to use	Financial, expertise and time.

**Source:** Own elaboration.

## 4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the main results obtained by analyzing the selected cases and interviewing their representatives.

### 4.1. Characterization of the case studies

The sample includes Brazilian companies, mainly founded or run by women. In three companies, women hold most professional and leadership positions. This highlights gender equality promotion, and the positive social impact aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) in the communities in which they operate. Most of the companies analyzed have been operating in the sector for less than 10 years, while some have more than 15 years of experience in the market.

Although most are under a decade old, they're well-established and growing annually. They're mostly small, based on Brazilian company size classifications.

The companies' concepts are relatively similar (Table 3). They include:

- (i) encouragement of responsible tourism;
- (ii) support, encouragement and respect for local communities;

- (iii) development of projects aimed at boosting sustainable development;
- (iv) concern for positive social impact; and
- (v) sustainable approaches. In terms of service, the majority develop customized itineraries and experiences for Brazilian destinations, including the Amazon, Pantanal, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, Bahia and others.

The experiences offered by these companies focus on regions of nature, biodiversity and culture. Some of the companies also offer consultancy and training services to other companies, with the aim of stimulating knowledge through the preservation of natural resources, the promotion of multiculturalism, respect for local communities, co-creation and the creation of social value.

**Table 3.**

*Company concept and services*

<b>E1</b>	<b>Concept e services:</b> A woman-led company specializing in destination management. Personalized experiences and cultural and adventure itineraries.
<b>E2</b>	<b>Concept e services:</b> Social impact company with social diversity. Consulting and educational experiences.
<b>E3</b>	<b>Concept e services:</b> Sustainable community-based tourism. Itineraries and accommodation in local communities.
<b>E4</b>	<b>Concept e services:</b> Social enterprise dedicated to projects that aim to boost territorial development. Consultancy in socio-environmental projects.
<b>E5</b>	<b>Concept e services:</b> A social enterprise that promotes responsible tourism and female empowerment. Sustainable tourism itineraries and experiences.

**Source:** Own elaboration

#### **4.2. Social innovation dynamics and the use of digital tools**

The social innovation activities highlighted by the companies are associated with environmental and social responsibility, community development, valuing local traditions, co-creation, creating sustainable experiences, conservation and raising awareness (Table 4). The companies were concerned about issues related to the communities where they operate and how tourists can be involved in these activities in a sustainable way.

It is crucial to emphasize the role of the various “actors” involved in this innovation process, namely the public and private sectors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the local community. These “actors” are a fundamental part of the process of developing social innovation in destinations.

The social development goals (SDGs) linked to the companies included in this study are as follows: gender equality (SDG 5), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), reducing inequalities (SDG 10), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), sustainable production and consumption (SDG 12), among others.

**Table 4.***Dynamics of social innovation of the analyzed companies*

<b>Observed practices across companies</b>	
<b>Social innovation activities</b>	Companies promote responsible tourism, community development, and sustainable economic growth, often including cultural immersion, volunteering, and collaborative projects.
<b>Involved actors</b>	Mainly local communities, with involvement from public and private sectors in some cases.
<b>Beneficiaries</b>	Primarily local community members and tourists; some initiatives target vulnerable groups or women.
<b>SDG</b>	Most companies contribute to SDGs 5, 8, 10, 12, and 16.

**Source:** Own elaboration

Companies utilize various technological tools, including research, meeting, management, and promotional platforms (Table 5). These tools are vital and readily accessible. All companies maintain active, visually appealing websites for promotion. Additionally, they use email, WhatsApp for communication, and social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram for promotional activities.

**Table 5.***Digital tools used by the analyzed companies.*

<b>Technological tools</b>	All companies use digital platforms for meetings, research, and task management.
<b>Promotion / Communication</b>	Most companies maintain digital channels such as websites and email to communicate with clients and partners.
<b>Social networks</b>	All companies use social media; Instagram and Facebook are the most common, with some also using LinkedIn, Twitter, or other platforms.

**Source:** Own elaboration

As shown in Table 5, several digital tools were mentioned by the companies. However, the analysis is not limited to their identification; the participants reported the purpose of using these tools, as we will see in the following excerpts. One of the participants described:

So, everything is in the cloud now, everything is online for us, even to allow the whole team to work together, because we work in a hybrid model. We also use social media, especially Instagram and LinkedIn, and we do targeted communication via email marketing. (E1).

Another participant also reported some other tools, and again the use of social media platforms.

We have been using Google Ads. We use it a lot daily: emails, WordPress to develop our websites. We use LinkedIn, Instagram, and WhatsApp a lot too. So, we run campaigns via Facebook. (E2).

Another company reported the importance of online contact through meetings: Access to video calls allowed us to stay in closer contact by holding online meetings. We also use social media, because partners can promote their business and attract their own customers directly" (E3).

Company 4 highlighted some important digital tools for remote work and how these tools assist in the company's internal and external tasks.

We work remotely, so the team needs to use online task management, cloud storage, virtual meetings, shared calendar, among other tools. For beneficiaries, we provide video lessons, monitor satisfaction, and share knowledge online synchronously. (E4).

Finally, the last participant emphasized the importance of several of the digital tools previously mentioned by other companies, such as: “social media, websites, things like that, videos, I usually record videos talking about things I think are important. Today we have WhatsApp groups where these people are, and I share a lot of things there” (E5).

#### ***4.3. Good practices in social innovation***

It can be concluded that all the companies interviewed are concerned about and center their work on sustainable development objectives. Based on the case studies, it can be concluded that social innovation is the basis for developing ideas and processes that contribute to the development of the communities in which they operate. The critical success factors include partnerships, sustainable action in communities and destinations, minority inclusion, and a multi-stakeholder approach.

The companies analyzed show a strong focus on social and environmental impact, promoting initiatives that benefit local communities and respect local culture and customs. All offer authentic experiences for travelers, integrating cultural, educational, and conservation aspects.

There is also a focus on training and developing local partners, creating economic opportunities and strengthening community traditions and knowledge. Some companies adopt flexible, people-centered methodologies, adapting projects to the needs of communities and promoting collaborative development.

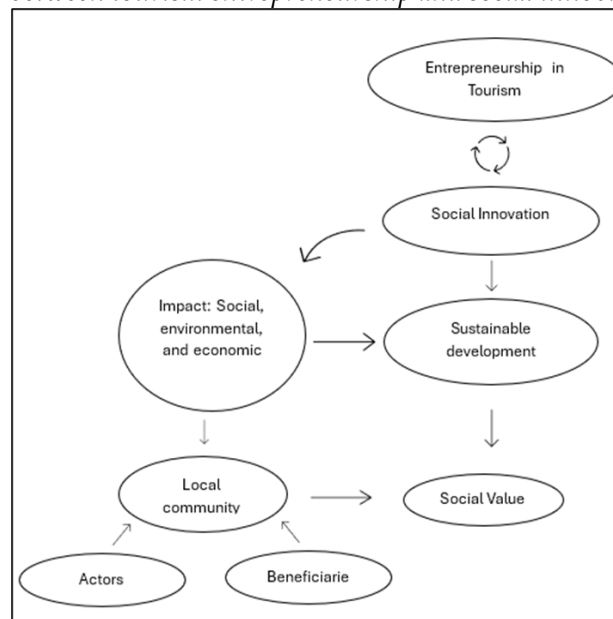
In addition, the results indicate a focus on sustainability, inclusion, female empowerment, and community leadership, showing that practices go beyond tourism and contribute to social and economic transformation in the regions where they operate.

The model presented in Figure 1 elucidates the interrelationship between entrepreneurship and social innovation, underscoring its impact on local communities through the promotion of sustainable development and value creation. Tourism can be perceived by disadvantaged communities as an opportunity to enhance their economy and reinforce their community, thereby establishing a nexus between tourism, social entrepreneurship, and community development (Mahato et al., 2021).

The model demonstrates how entrepreneurship in the tourism sector can facilitate social innovation, leading to sustainable development and tangible benefits for the communities involved. These communities not only become agents of social innovation, but also benefit from it. Companies highlight social innovation as crucial for sustainable development, emphasizing its role in generating social value, including fair labor practices, and preserving culture and community.

**Figure 1.**

*Model of the relationship between tourism entrepreneurship and social innovation, and its consequences*



**Source:** Own elaboration

Other actors that contribute to social innovation within companies and that generate a collaborative network are the private sector, public authorities, and non-profit organizations. According to, the environment is seen as a network of actors, where interaction between organizations drives the development of integrated tourism. This requires cooperation between different sectors and levels of government, as well as between public and private organizations. This implies the distribution of roles in different contexts, with the participation of individuals from diverse cultures and identities, all working in favor of a common and public interest (Tardif & Harrisson, 2005).

Most companies identified social and economic impact as the primary outcomes of social innovation. Further analysis of the portfolios revealed that some companies are also undertaking significant work through social innovation, with positive impacts on the environment. Innovation is a process that aims to facilitate transformations in society, with the intention of promoting the progress of communities at local, regional, or global levels. This process encompasses diverse areas, including social, cultural, economic, and environmental aspects (Dandolini et al., 2020). Finally, it can be concluded that the effective social innovation practices of these companies are highly dependent on the involvement and decision-making of the communities involved.

#### ***4.4. The role of digital technologies in fostering social innovation***

The analysis reveals that digital technologies play a pivotal role in the companies under consideration, particularly in the domains of promotion, management, communication, and administration. Information and communication technologies are indispensable for communication, information management, teamwork, the generation of solutions, and the adaptation to complex social issues (Charalabidis et al., 2014).



The promotion of services and projects is a key focus for all these companies, with the use of social media platforms, such as Instagram and LinkedIn, being a common strategy. WhatsApp is also a tool that is widely used by these companies to communicate with their employees, partners and clients. Charalabidis et al. (2014) cite a "paradigm shift in communication", which eliminates barriers and facilitates communication between people at a low cost.

In the context of technology, it is evident that most companies utilize it to manage and administer their services. The most employed platform is Google's suite of services, which encompasses email, diary, cloud, ADS, and so forth. Other platforms that have been mentioned include Trello (project management), Canva (creation), Slack (a cloud-based team communication platform), Sana (data and communication management), and CRM (customer relationship management).

Furthermore, we inquired as to whether these tools were adequate for the demands of the company, with the objective of facilitating projects related to social innovation. Most respondents indicated that they could be more effective. Only one individual asserted that they were effective yet expressed reservations about the high costs associated with certain technological tools in optimizing the company's work. The effects of information technologies and digital technologies on entrepreneurship and innovation are highly variable. Information and communication technologies can facilitate, mediate, or even be the result of global operations and business models (Steininger, 2018).

The study highlights companies' need for digital technology tools, especially for improving management, administration, and promotion processes. However, none of the companies mentioned utilizing advanced technologies like robotics, biometrics, facial recognition, blockchain, augmented reality (AR), or virtual reality (VR). Small businesses primarily focus on communication, data, cloud, and social networks. Challenges include financial constraints and technical issues, with some companies citing difficulty integrating these technologies into their communities. Nevertheless, digital technologies are crucial for fostering social innovation and can facilitate sustainable development by transcending communication barriers.

## 5. Conclusions

The case studies demonstrate a clear link between social innovation and commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The cases illustrate an effort to maintain sustainability, which encompasses sustainable practices and integration into the community, with a focus on social and environmental development, rather than merely profit generation.

Upon closer examination of the strategies employed by these companies to promote and create social innovation, it becomes evident that there is a notable absence of more advanced digital technologies. Despite the acknowledgment of digital technologies as instrumental in the operationalization of social innovation objectives, the utilization of such technologies remains limited. The prevailing technologies in this context are those related to promotion, data management, and communication.

This finding emphasizes the importance of thoroughly exploring the potential of digital technologies to drive social innovation and broaden the impact of sustainable development projects, overcoming financial and technical challenges to ensure a more comprehensive and effective participation of the communities involved. As Millard and Carpenter (2014) state, digital technologies are tools that can support social innovation.

Nevertheless, it is essential to examine how digital technologies can be leveraged in diverse cultural, economic, and political settings (Ughetto et al., 2019). The participants themselves suggest that the use of digital technologies goes beyond the mere operationalization of tasks; they enable greater reach in communication, engagement with communities, collaborative creation, and other solutions.

Furthermore, it is acknowledged that the involvement and active participation of the various actors is of paramount importance when examining the relationships that exist between companies and the communities in which they operate. Cooperation between non-profit organizations, public authorities and the private sector is essential for the promotion of sustainable development and social innovation. A favorable environment for multidisciplinary and multisectoral collaboration creates an environment conducive to the collaborative creation of solutions that comprehensively address the socio-environmental challenges facing communities.

Community-based tourism has demonstrated positive developments in terms of development, incorporating social elements and emphasizing participation and empowerment, as well as the importance of community participation in sustainable development (Sofield, 2003). However, for effective collaboration, it is necessary to distribute roles, promote diversity and guarantee the representativeness of local actors.

It is hoped that future studies will be able to expand the number of cases analyzed, as this small sample size is a significant limitation. With only five companies, the results reflect a restricted and specific context, making it impossible to generalize the broad impact of digital technologies on social innovation. In addition, it is essential to discuss other issues related to these areas of study to provide insights into how companies in the tourism sector that operate through social innovation can make the best use of available digital technologies in sustainable projects.

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