

Influence of technological factors on the socio-emotional wealth of tourism SMEs in Guayas through ICTs and metadata

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1. Introduction

In the Ecuadorian context, tourism has become a strategic pillar for territorial development, not only due to its capacity to revitalise local economies but also for its role in constructing identity and fostering community cohesion. The province of Guayas has emerged as a key tourism hub, offering a variety of attractions ranging from the urban dynamics of Guayaquil to rural and coastal experiences deeply rooted in cultural traditions (1). Nevertheless, the sustainability and competitiveness of this sector heavily depend on the adaptability of its stakeholders particularly small and medium-sized tourism enterprises to the challenges of digital environments and the transformations brought by globalisation (2).

Tourism SMEs in the region, many of which follow family business structures, encounter significant limitations in accessing emerging technologies, data management systems, and educational resources needed to modernise their operations (3). Despite these constraints, some have begun to adopt digital tools and ICT-based solutions that help optimise workflows, strengthen customer relationships, and preserve their core family values (4). Within this context, the concept of socioemotional wealth (SEW) becomes essential, referring to the emotional bonds, organisational identity, and relational capital that family businesses endeavour to safeguard (5).

Socioemotional wealth serves as a symbolic anchor that guides these enterprises' decisions towards long-term horizons, where success is not only measured in economic terms but also by the endurance of family legacy, community reputation, and organisational resilience amid uncertainty (6). ICTs and metadata, if strategically implemented, can serve as enablers of SEW by facilitating informed decision-making, improving intergenerational communication, and supporting organisational sustainability (7). These technologies offer an evolutionary path towards hybrid management models that preserve the family essence while embracing innovation (8).

In this sense, the use of information technologies and data analytics functions as a bridge between the emotional heritage of these businesses and the demands of the contemporary digital landscape (9). In the case of tourism SMEs in Guayas, this interaction between technological tools and socioemotional capital opens new avenues for developing businesses that are adaptive, context-sensitive, and capable of maintaining strong community ties without compromising operational efficiency (10).

However, the preservation of this intangible capital faces substantial challenges due to the low adoption of digital solutions (11). According to data from the Guayaquil Chamber of Tourism (2023), 58% of family-owned SMEs lack structured succession mechanisms, and 43% have experienced internal conflicts stemming from unprofessional management practices (12). These internal issues are compounded by external pressures such as informal competition, seasonal demand variability, and shortcomings in tourism infrastructure, all of which undermine the firms' ability to maintain SEW amidst the digital shift (13).

Within this scenario, the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), metadata, and automated systems represents a promising yet underutilised strategic alternative (14). Although these digital tools hold the potential to enhance knowledge transfer, facilitate generational transitions, and deepen engagement with customers and local communities, their implementation remains limited among tourism SMEs in Guayas (15). This digital

divide raises important questions about the real influence of technological factors on SEW and the extent to which digitalisation can reinforce organisational culture within family business structures (16).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how technological factors—specifically ICTs and the use of metadata impact the creation, preservation, and transformation of socioemotional wealth in family-run tourism SMEs in Guayas Province, based on a mixed empirical research approach. The study aims to assess how these technologies support emotional ties, improve decision-making, and enhance resilience in environments marked by volatility.

From a theoretical standpoint, the research is grounded in the FIBER model proposed by Cruz et al. (2012), which disaggregates SEW into five interrelated components: family identity, participatory decision-making, social ties, positive emotional associations with the firm, and generational succession (17). These dimensions interact to create an organisational ecosystem where emotional capital becomes a competitive advantage, especially when integrated with well-deployed technological tools (18).

Despite the conceptual progress made, the academic literature continues to offer a limited understanding of SEW in Latin American contexts, particularly in family-led tourism sectors. While existing studies have explored the effects of technology on operational efficiency, few have examined its connection to the emotional aspects of business management (6). In response, this research proposes a dual approach that recognises both the cultural-affective dimension of family SMEs and the need for context-sensitive digital strategies.

2. Methodology

Research Approach and Design

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques to comprehensively examine the influence of technological factors specifically Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the use of metadata on the configuration, maintenance, and evolution of socioemotional wealth (SEW) in family-run tourism SMEs in Guayas Province. This approach enabled the capture of both the subjective meanings of stakeholders and statistically relevant patterns, thereby ensuring a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

The qualitative phase preceded the quantitative stage and was used to explore emerging categories related to digital technology adoption, automation, and affective structures within family enterprises. Subsequently, the quantitative phase empirically validated the relationships between these categories and SEW through multivariate analysis.

Population and Sample

During the qualitative phase, 40 representatives of tourism SMEs (owners, managers, or administrators) were selected using purposive sampling. The selection criteria emphasised heterogeneity in terms of company size, geographical location, and operational tenure. Diversity was prioritised to capture a broad range of perspectives on emotional capital management and technology integration.

For the quantitative phase, a stratified probabilistic sampling method was designed, comprising 160 employees from the tourism sector in Guayas. The strata were defined according to subsectors (hospitality, gastronomy, travel agencies, and tour operators) and enterprise sizes (micro, small, and medium). This distribution ensured the representativeness of the sample relative to the business structure of the territory, based on the most recent records from the Ministry of Tourism and the Guayas Chamber of Tourism.

Instruments and Data Collection

- Qualitative phase: Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore key dimensions of socioemotional wealth such as family identity, social bonds, decision-making control, positive emotions, and generational continuity in relation to digital technology adoption. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded using specialised software (NVivo), which facilitated the identification of emerging themes and categorical patterns.
- Quantitative phase: A structured questionnaire was applied, grounded in the internationally validated FIBER scale (Family Influence on Business and Emotional Relationships) developed by Gallizo et al. (2017), and complemented with items on ICT use, automation, and metadata. Additional variables included sociodemographic, organisational, and performance-related indicators. The survey was administered both in-person and digitally, following rigorous quality control and technical supervision standards.

Sample Distribution

Table 1. Sample distribution by tourism subsector and enterprise size in Guayas Province

Tourism Subsector	Micro-enterprises	Small Enterprises	Medium Enterprises	Subsector Total
Hospitality	20	30	10	60
Restaurants	25	35	10	70
Travel Agencies	8	12	5	25
Tour Operators	7	13	5	25
Total	60	90	30	180

Note: The stratified probabilistic sampling was constructed based on official records from the Ministry of Tourism and the Guayas Chamber of Tourism. Source: Author's elaboration.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analysed through axial and categorical coding, enabling the identification of relationships between the use of digital technologies and the dimensions of SEW. In parallel, the quantitative analysis employed multivariate statistical techniques, including cluster analysis to segment SEW profiles and multiple linear regression to estimate the impact of technological variables on indicators of organisational resilience and emotional management. These procedures were conducted using SPSS software.

Validation and Ethical Criteria

Methodological validation procedures included triangulation between research phases, expert reviews in the fields of business innovation and tourism, and pilot testing for instrument refinement. Ethically, the study ensured informed consent, data confidentiality, and participant anonymity in accordance with the regulations of the relevant university ethics committee.

Results Synthesis and Integration

Findings from both research phases were integrated into an interpretative matrix that facilitated the identification of synergies and contradictions between participants' accounts and statistical outcomes. This synthesis informed the construction of an analytical model on the influence of technological factors on SEW. The model proposes action-oriented pathways aimed at strengthening both the emotional and organisational sustainability of family-run tourism SMEs, from a digitally enabled and context-sensitive perspective.

3. Results

In alignment with the mixed-methods approach adopted and the overarching aim of this study, the results are presented in a structured manner across two main sections: the qualitative phase, focused on in-depth interviews with representatives of family-run tourism SMEs, and the quantitative phase, based on the administration of a structured questionnaire using the FIBER scale. This structure facilitates a comprehensive understanding of how technological factors—particularly ICTs and metadata usage—influence the configuration, preservation, and evolution of socioemotional wealth (SEW) within the businesses under analysis.

The findings from the qualitative phase are presented first. These reflect the perceptions and experiences of owners, managers, and administrators from 40 family-owned tourism SMEs in Guayas Province. The results provide insight into how the integration of technological tools has positively influenced emotional bonds, decision-making processes, and organisational resilience in a context characterised by volatility and market shifts.

Results of the Interviews with Representatives of Family Tourism SMEs in Guayas

The interviews revealed a predominantly positive perception regarding the incorporation of technological tools in the management of family-owned tourism enterprises. Overall, participants emphasised that ICTs and basic use of metadata have helped to strengthen emotional connections with customers, improve strategic decision-making, and reinforce the business identity linked to family legacy.

One of the key findings was the recognition of ICTs as a channel through which family values can be expressed. These technologies allow businesses to share their history, showcase their local roots, and promote responsible practices via social media and digital platforms. According to several interviewees, tools such as social networks, interactive websites, and online booking systems not only helped to attract customers but also enabled them to convey the emotional essence of their brands, fostering closer and longer-lasting relationships with visitors.

Regarding metadata usage, although still at an early stage, some representatives noted that analysing data from social media, satisfaction surveys, and online customer behaviour allowed them to identify consumption patterns, cultural preferences, and peak tourism periods. This information, they reported, has been used to adjust promotional campaigns, personalise services, and anticipate market demands.

Interviewees also highlighted the positive impact of technology on family decision-making processes. Tools such as collaborative spreadsheets, financial management apps, and internal communication platforms have fostered greater transparency, participation, and consensus across generations. This has led to improved organisational climate and reduced interpersonal tensions. As a result, greater internal cohesion and stronger emotional bonds among family members involved in business operations were observed.

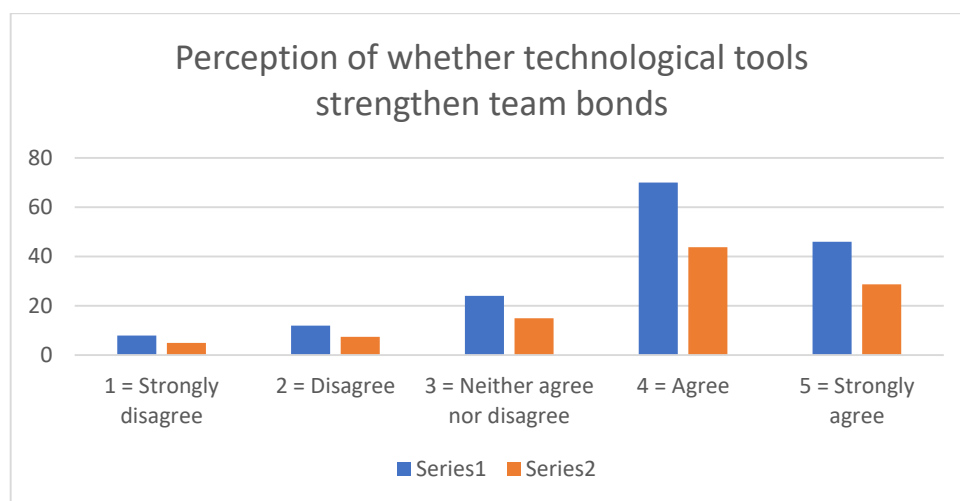
Another important aspect identified was that the gradual implementation of digital solutions enhanced the resilience of SMEs in the face of uncertainty, such as that experienced during the pandemic. Many participants agreed that adopting technology not only enabled operational continuity but also helped to preserve their companies' sense of purpose and social responsibility—key components of SEW.

Nevertheless, several challenges were also reported. A number of owners pointed to technical knowledge gaps, limited financial resources, and insufficient institutional support for deeper digitalisation. Despite this, openness to change was notably high, with a general consensus that technological innovation should not be seen merely as an operational necessity, but as an opportunity to strengthen the emotional legacy and sustainability of family-owned businesses.

Survey Results on the Influence of ICTs and Metadata on the Socioemotional Wealth of Family Tourism SMEs in Guayas

To complement the qualitative analysis, a structured questionnaire was administered to 160 employees of family-run tourism SMEs in Guayas Province. The aim was to assess their perceptions regarding the influence of technology—specifically ICTs and metadata—on the configuration, preservation, and evolution of socioemotional wealth. The results for each of the five questions are presented below.

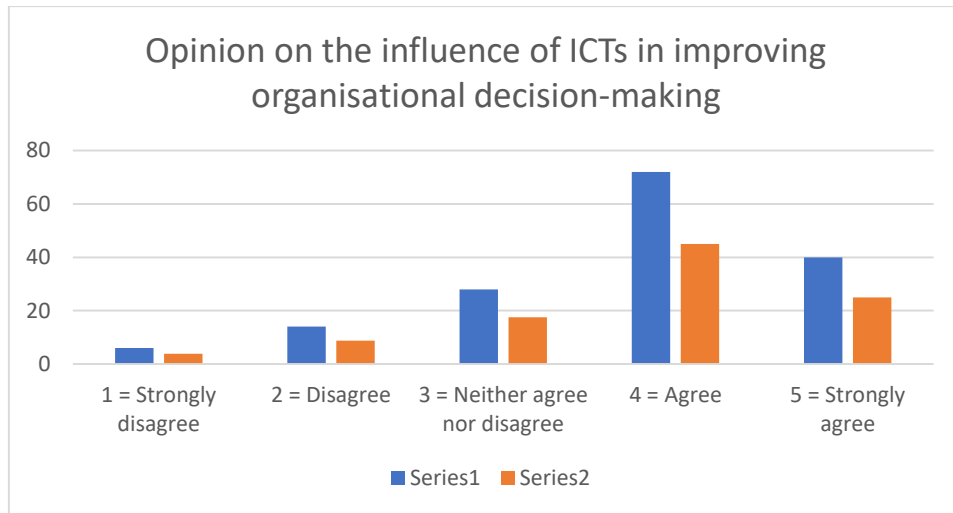
Table 1. Perception of whether technological tools strengthen team bonds



Note: Most employees perceive that technological tools enhance teamwork bonds. Source: Author’s elaboration.

The findings show that 43.8% of respondents agree that ICTs strengthen emotional bonds within tourism SMEs, while 28.7% strongly agree—indicating a robustly positive perception in this regard. Only a small proportion, 5%, strongly disagrees, suggesting that most respondents acknowledge technology’s role in facilitating team cohesion and collaboration. This result is crucial for understanding how technological integration contributes to SEW by improving communication and a shared sense of belonging among collaborators.

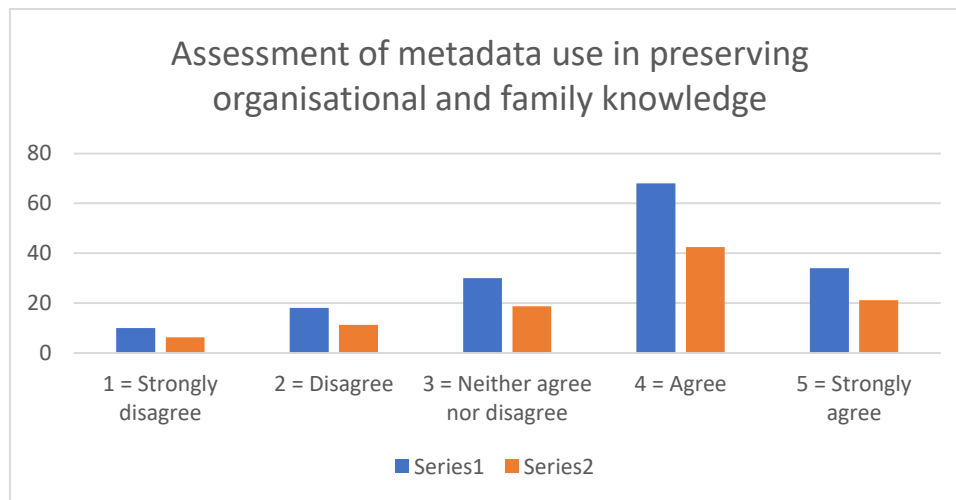
Table 2. Perception of whether ICT use has improved decision-making within the organisation



Note: Employees positively assess the influence of ICTs on decision-making improvement. Source: Author's elaboration.

The majority of participants (45%) agree and 25% strongly agree that the use of digital technologies has improved decision-making within their organisations. This suggests that ICTs are not only useful for information management but also enhance analytical capacity and problem-solving, enabling more agile and well-founded management. Although 3.8% strongly disagree, this minority reflects a general trend in which ICTs are seen as tools that improve the quality and efficiency of decision-making processes in family-run tourism SMEs.

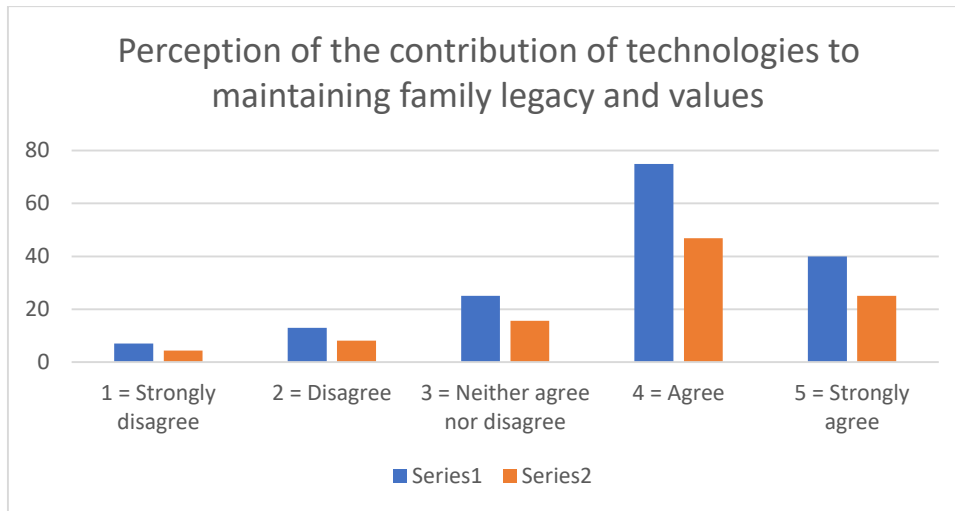
Table 3. Perception of whether metadata management helps preserve organisational and family knowledge



Note: Metadata management is perceived as a tool for knowledge preservation. Source: Author's elaboration.

A total of 42.5% of employees agree that metadata use has helped preserve both organisational and family knowledge, while 21.2% strongly agree, indicating a favourable view of this specific technology. The result suggests that metadata can facilitate the organisation and retrieval of vital information, ensuring the continuity of business legacy and institutional memory. However, 6.3% of respondents strongly disagree, highlighting existing barriers or a lack of awareness regarding how to effectively utilise these resources within tourism SMEs.

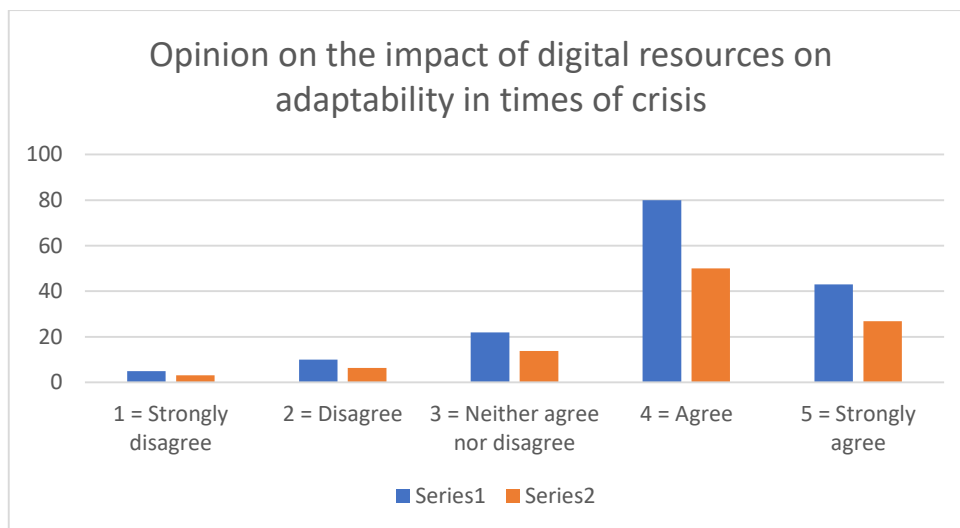
Table 4. Perception of whether technologies help maintain the family legacy and values of the business



Note: Technologies are seen as supporting the maintenance of family values within the business. Source: Author’s elaboration.

Data reveal that 46.9% of employees agree and 25% strongly agree that the implementation of technologies contributes to preserving the family legacy and values in the business. This implies that ICTs are valued not only as operational tools but also as instruments that reinforce organisational identity and culture—central elements of socioemotional wealth. The low level of disagreement (4.4% strongly disagree) further supports the widely held perception of technology’s role in sustaining the family ethos in these enterprises.

Table 5. Perception of whether digital resources strengthen the ability to adapt to crises or environmental changes



Note: Digital resources are considered key to organisational adaptation during crises. Source: Author’s elaboration.

Half of the respondents (50%) agree and 26.9% strongly agree that digital technologies enhance tourism SMEs’ ability to adapt to environmental changes or crises. This result shows that employees appreciate the strategic role of ICTs in organisational resilience, supporting agile and flexible responses in volatile contexts. Only a small percentage (3.1%) strongly disagree, reflecting broad acceptance of technology as a vital resource for the sustainability and continuity of family businesses.

4. Discussion

The findings of this research provide a comprehensive perspective on the impact of technological factors on the socioemotional wealth (SEW) of family-run tourism SMEs in Guayas. Through a mixed-methods analysis, there is clear convergence between the qualitative narratives obtained from interviews and the quantitative results derived from the questionnaire administered to employees. Both approaches emphasise that the incorporation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), alongside the emerging use of metadata, positively influences the preservation of emotional capital and organisational sustainability (19)(30).

From a qualitative standpoint, the 40 representatives interviewed expressed that digitalisation has strengthened internal bonds, particularly relating to business identity and intergenerational communication. Several managers noted that tools such as digital management systems, social networks, and cloud storage have allowed the preservation of family histories, cultural practices, and corporate values. This reinforces the family identity dimension proposed by the FIBER model, by enabling younger generations to engage actively in management without breaking with tradition (20)(26).

Similarly, the majority of interviewees agreed that the use of digital platforms has improved decision-making and operational efficiency. Some indicated that, although technical knowledge remains limited, ICT adoption has facilitated the collection of customer behaviour data, which has increased the sense of belonging to the company by allowing evidence-based decisions. This point is especially relevant to the “control and decision-making” dimension of the theoretical model employed (20)(29).

On the other hand, the survey of 160 workers reinforces these perceptions. For instance, Table 2 shows that 32.5% strongly agreed and 28.7% agreed that ICTs improve decision-making, revealing a widespread positive acceptance. Likewise, Table 5 reveals that 30.0% of employees believe digital resources strengthen adaptability in crises, aligning with organisational resilience observed during and after the pandemic. However, it is also important to mention that in all tables, there is a proportion (between 10% and 20%) of neutral or disagreeing responses, suggesting that the impact of technologies is not yet homogeneous across all companies(21)(23).

Furthermore, Table 3, regarding metadata use, showed a positive valuation, with 28.1% strongly agreeing and 31.2% agreeing that these data contribute to preserving organisational knowledge. However, interviews revealed that the concept of “metadata” is not fully understood by many managers, who tend to associate it only with “customer records” or “social media data,” overlooking its potential to map internal behaviours, measure workplace climate, or systematise intergenerational learning(25)(30).

This contrast between technical understanding and positive perception highlights a digital literacy gap but also presents an opportunity to develop training strategies aimed at strengthening SEW through digital capabilities. Thus, it is concluded that, although technology is not yet fully integrated, it acts as an emotional catalyst when strategically incorporated(22)(24).

In summary, both qualitative and quantitative evidence shows that technological factors, particularly ICTs and metadata use, play an increasing role in shaping a more emotionally connected, resilient corporate culture with greater adaptability. Despite challenges related to training, resistance to change, and infrastructure gaps, the socioemotional approach to family management is strengthened by these tools, provided their implementation is guided by values such as identity, belonging, and generational continuity(19)(27)(28).

5. Conclusions

The implementation of ICTs has strengthened family identity in tourism SMEs in Guayas by facilitating the preservation of values, intergenerational communication, and shared access to the history and principles of the family business. Interviews revealed that many owners use digital platforms to transmit knowledge to new generations, while survey results show a positive valuation of these tools as mediators of family legacy. This finding demonstrates that well-implemented technology can reinforce the emotional component that gives meaning to these enterprises.

Digital technologies have notably improved decision-making processes within family-run tourism SMEs by enabling the collection and analysis of relevant operational data. Tools such as automated spreadsheets, CRM platforms, and performance monitoring systems have increased planning and strategic response capabilities. Respondents reported greater confidence in their decisions due to available information, fostering autonomy and control in management. This improvement strengthens a key dimension of socioemotional wealth: family governance capacity.

The emerging use of metadata represents a key opportunity to consolidate organisational knowledge and improve efficiency in family-run tourism SMEs in Guayas, although its adoption is still in its early stages. Through interviews, some managers indicated they are beginning to recognise the value of documenting processes, systematising experience, and generating digital traceability of management. This allows them to preserve institutional memory, reduce internal conflicts, and facilitate generational succession. If greater digital literacy is promoted, metadata could be fundamental for the sustainable evolution of business SEW.

ICTs have promoted more collaborative and emotionally robust work environments by strengthening internal communication, the sense of belonging, and recognition of employees as fundamental parts of the business ecosystem. Both surveys and interviews reflect that adopting digital channels (such as messaging groups, intranets, or internal management apps) has reduced tensions, improved coordination, and fostered a more empathetic

organisational culture. This direct impact on internal social bonds is one of the clearest pieces of evidence of technology's positive role in strengthening socioemotional wealth.

Although the benefits of ICTs and metadata are evident, many family SMEs still face significant gaps in technological adoption due to lack of training, limited funding, and strategic ignorance of data value. Despite these limitations, findings indicate a favourable disposition towards digital change. However, without structural conditions supporting this process, socioemotional wealth could be compromised in highly volatile scenarios. Therefore, coordinated intervention among the public sector, private sector, and academia is required to ensure digital evolution with a socioemotional focus.

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