



Operational management in economy category accommodations as a competitiveness factor in Manta–Manabí

La gestión operativa en alojamientos de categoría económica como factor de competitividad en Manta–Manabí

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to evaluate operational management in economy-category hotels as a competitiveness factor in the Manta-Manabí canton. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques through surveys administered to operational staff and semi-structured interviews conducted with hotel managers. The study was based on five previous investigations and comprised three phases: diagnosing operational processes and competitiveness factors, analyzing the relationship between operational processes and competitiveness elements, and designing a management proposal. To validate the research instruments, the expert judgment method and Kendall's coefficient of concordance were employed, confirming the reliability of the surveys administered in the reception, accommodation, and food and beverage departments. The results showed that the efficiency of operational processes, effective human talent management, and service quality significantly influenced the competitive positioning of the establishments. Based on the findings, an operational management strategy structured around six strategic pillars was proposed. It was concluded that strengthening operational management improved the competitiveness and sustainability of economy-category hotels.

Keywords: service quality; efficiency; operational processes; human talent; tourism

RESUMEN

La presente investigación tuvo como objetivo evaluar la gestión operativa en hoteles de categoría económica como factor de competitividad en el cantón Manta-Manabí. Se adoptó un enfoque mixto, combinando técnicas cuantitativas y cualitativas, mediante la aplicación de encuestas al personal operativo y entrevistas semiestructuradas a gerentes. El estudio se desarrolló a partir de cinco investigaciones previas, y comprendió tres fases: diagnóstico de los procesos operativos y factores de competitividad, análisis de la relación entre los procesos operativos con elementos de competitividad y diseño de una propuesta de gestión. Para la validación de los instrumentos, se empleó el método de expertos y el coeficiente de Kendall, lo que permitió comprobar la fiabilidad de las encuestas aplicadas en las áreas de recepción, alojamiento, alimentos y bebidas. Los resultados evidenciaron que la eficiencia de los procesos operativos, la adecuada gestión del talento humano y la calidad del servicio influyeron significativamente en el posicionamiento competitivo de los establecimientos. Con base en los hallazgos, se propuso una estrategia de gestión operativa estructurada en seis ejes estratégicos. Se concluye que el fortalecer la gestión operativa mejoró la competitividad y sostenibilidad de los alojamientos económicos.

Palabras clave: calidad del servicio; eficiencia; procesos operativos; talento humano; turismo



1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, hotel operational management has become a key strategic tool for enhancing efficiency, sustainability, and competitiveness in the tourism industry. Globally, efficient operations management contributes to maximizing resource utilization, reducing costs, improving service quality, and increasing profitability and competitiveness, all of which translate into stronger hotel positioning, particularly in this segment of the lodging industry where resources are limited. In this regard, appropriate management helps maintain operational continuity, maximize resource utilization, and enhance customer satisfaction (Van Nguyen & Ngloc, 2024).

In Ecuador, operational management constitutes one of the most important sets of processes within hotel organizations for the efficient administration of activities aimed at achieving institutional objectives. Current literature on effective operational management describes it as a system for planning and controlling an organization's activities by managing operational processes to maximize resource-use efficiency, develop human talent, incorporate technologies, and promote continuous improvement, all of which contribute to organizational performance and customer satisfaction (Wilson, 2025).

Several recent studies highlight the influence of operational management on company competitiveness. Bravo Zambrano and Llor Zambrano (2024) consider operational management to be a means of carrying out organizational processes through the resources used to produce goods or services. This type of management is also affected by market influences that shape the design of strategies for production processes. When properly implemented, managerial operations can generate outcomes that positively affect productivity, profitability, and the company's competitive capacity.

In the province of Manabí, specifically in Manta canton, the economy-category hotel sector faces challenges related to process formalization, service quality, and human resource management, all of which influence competitiveness. Suárez et al. (2025) state that operational efficiency is a determining factor in the success of tourism establishments because it ensures proper hotel functioning, optimizes resources, and improves the guest experience.

Against this background, the present study aimed to evaluate the efficiency of operational management in economy-category accommodations in Manta-Manabí in order to analyze its influence on the factors that determine competitiveness in an increasingly demanding tourism environment.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was conducted in Manta canton, Manabí Province, Ecuador, located on the western coast of the country, with central geographic coordinates of approximately 0°57'0" South latitude and 80°43'0" West longitude.

The study employed a non-experimental design combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. It had a descriptive and analytical scope aimed at determining whether operational management in economy-category accommodations in Manta canton constitutes a competitive attribute. The methodology was based on five previous studies relevant to the research problem.

The study provided relevant and sufficient information regarding the problem under evaluation. The total population consisted of five economy-category accommodations: Hotel Stella Blue, Hostal Cabañas Las Velas, Hostal Casa Umiña, Hostal Puerto Manta, and Hostal Playa Murciélagos. A census approach was therefore adopted, meaning that data were collected from all elements comprising the population.

According to Hernández Sampieri, Fernández Collado, and Baptista Lucio (2022), sampling is justified only when studying the entire population is impractical, costly, or impossible. Consequently, when the population is small and accessible, as in this particular case, studying the entire population is

methodologically appropriate. Lohr (2021) and Kothari (2004) state that, in small populations, sampling may result in lower representativeness and unstable results. For this reason, a census was used as the data collection method, ensuring the participation of all workers with the greatest possible accuracy and methodological rigor appropriate to the research problem.

The methodology was divided into three phases. In the first phase, a diagnosis of operational processes and competitiveness factors was conducted through documentary analysis and structured surveys administered to operational staff in the reception, housekeeping, and food and beverage departments of the five economy-category hotels located in Manta canton. The questionnaire was designed based on the operational management and competitiveness variables using a Likert-type scale. Instrument validity was assessed by experts, who evaluated its relevance, objectivity, and consistency (Rodríguez-Chávez et al., 2025; Saldaña-Almazán, 2021).

The expert selection process was conducted by calculating the competence coefficient (K), derived from the knowledge coefficient (Kc) and the argumentation coefficient (Ka). The aforementioned authors state that the expert panel should consist of a minimum of 7 and a maximum of 30 participants. In the present study, an initial group of 13 experts was considered, from which 9 were ultimately selected and evaluated using the competence coefficient.

To assess the level of agreement among the experts, Kendall's coefficient of concordance (W) was applied. This made it possible to determine the degree of agreement among them and thereby provide greater validity, reliability, and consistency to the selected items. A coefficient of 0.91 was obtained; because this value is close to 1, it indicates a high level of consistency in the evaluation instrument.

In the second phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five managers of economy-category accommodations to evaluate the alignment between operational processes and competitiveness elements. The interviews made it possible to collect information on operational management, competitive practices, and the main difficulties faced by the sector.

In addition, hierarchical cluster analysis was performed using a dendrogram and Ward's method (1963), applied to standardized Euclidean distances, in order to identify common operational patterns among the hotels and their differences and thus classify them into homogeneous groups. In the final phase, an operational management proposal was developed to enhance the competitiveness of economy-category accommodations. A process of systematization and strategic analysis guided the formulation of an operational management model for the types of accommodations examined. The proposal included the development of operational planning matrices, the definition of key performance indicators, and specific actions aimed at increasing operational efficiency.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Diagnosis of operational processes and competitiveness factors in economy-category accommodations in Manta canton.

3.1.1. Expert Judgment Method and Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance (W)

The expert judgment method was applied with the participation of nine specialists, who were previously selected by determining their competence coefficient (K), considering their level of knowledge and sources of argumentation. The following equation was used:

Equation 1. Calculation of the competence coefficient:

$$K = \frac{Kc + Ka}{2}$$

Where:

K: Competence coefficient

Kc: Knowledge coefficient

Ka: Argumentation coefficient

The specialists evaluated the questionnaire items according to the criteria of coherence, relevance, and clarity using an established rating scale. The scores assigned by the nine experts, presented in Table 1, were assessed on a scale ranging from 0 to 1.

Table 1. Expert assessment

Expert	Kc (Knowledge)	Ka (Argumentation)	K= (Kc+Ka)/2
E1	0.90	0.85	0.875
E2	0.80	0.90	0.850
E3	0.95	0.80	0.875
E4	0.70	0.75	0.725
E5	0.85	0.85	0.850
E6	0.60	0.70	0.650
E7	0.90	0.95	0.925
E8	0.75	0.80	0.775
E9	0.80	0.85	0.825

To determine whether the group was sufficiently competent, the mean K value for all experts was calculated using the following equation:

Equation 2. Calculation of the group mean competence coefficient:

$$K = \frac{\sum K_i}{n} = \frac{7.359}{9} = 0.8167$$

The sum of K values was:

$$K = 0.875 + 0.850 + 0.875 + 0.725 + 0.850 + 0.650 + 0.925 + 0.775 + 0.825 = 7.359$$

$$K = 7.359 / 9 = 0.8167$$

The result of 0.8167, rounded to 0.82, indicates a high level of expert competence because the value is close to 1.

Subsequently, Kendall's coefficient of concordance was calculated to determine the level of agreement among the experts using the following equation:

Equation 3. Kendall's coefficient of concordance:

$$W = \frac{12S}{m^2 (n^3 - n)}$$

Where:

W: Kendall's coefficient of concordance

S: Sum of the squared deviations between the sum of ranks for each item and the mean of those sums

m: Number of evaluators

n: Number of evaluated items.

The sum of squared deviations was S = 49.026. Substituting the values into the equation yielded:

$$W = \frac{12(49\,026)}{9^2(20^3 - 20)} = \frac{588\,312}{81(7\,980)} = 0.91$$

The analysis yielded a coefficient of $W = 0.91$, indicating a very high degree of agreement among the experts. These results confirm that the questionnaire developed is appropriate and relevant for evaluating operational management in economy-category accommodations as a factor of competitiveness in Manta canton. The findings are consistent with Herrera Masó (2022), who argues that applying Kendall's coefficient strengthens instrument reliability by quantifying the level of agreement among specialists. In this context, the obtained value of $W = 0.91$ supports the consistency of the instrument.

3.1.2. Survey administered to operational staff in the different departments

The survey was administered in five economy-category accommodations in Manta canton: Hotel Stella Blue, Hostal Cabañas Las Velas, Hostal Casa Umiña, Hostal Puerto Manta, and Hostal Playa Murciélago, all located in the urban area of the city. The results obtained for each of the operational departments evaluated are presented below in a structured manner.

Table 2. Survey administered to reception staff

Indicator	Result
Work experience	37.5% have between 3 and 5 years of experience.
Education level	50% have university education.
Training	37.5% receive training only when joining the establishment.
Check-in and check-out processes	62.5% report occasional difficulties.
Reservation channel	87.5% identify the telephone as the main channel.
Management system	75% consider that it partially facilitates their work.
Competitive advantage	87.5% highlight staff friendliness and customer service.
Tourism information	62.5% consider it highly relevant to guest preference.

Table 2 shows that reception staff predominantly have between three and five years of work experience and a university-level education, highlighting an educational foundation with potential for further improvement. Likewise, the telephone remains the main reservation channel, while occasional difficulties persist in the check-in and check-out processes. However, staff friendliness and customer service constitute a competitive advantage, and the results suggest opportunities for improvement through greater use of operational management systems. These findings are consistent with Kalnaovakul and Promsivapallop (2023), who state that efficiency and competitiveness in this department are determined by staff responsiveness and service quality.

Table 3. Survey administered to housekeeping staff

Indicator	Result
Work experience	33.3% have between 3 and 5 years of experience.
Education level	33.3% have completed upper secondary education.
Training	22.2% receive annual training.
Availability of supplies	88.9% have the necessary resources available.
Cleaning time	55.6% clean an occupied room in less than 20 minutes.
Handling of maintenance issues	56.6% rate it as average.
Guest loyalty	66.7% identify deep cleaning as the main factor.

The results in Table 3 show that a large proportion of staff in this department have between three and five years of work experience, with upper secondary education being the predominant educational level. Although most employees have the supplies and equipment necessary to carry out their activities efficiently, training is provided infrequently. In addition, the time allocated to room cleaning is considered adequate; however, the handling of maintenance issues was rated as average, indicating a need to improve

maintenance processes. Finally, deep cleaning was identified as the main factor contributing to guest satisfaction and loyalty.

These results are consistent with Putra et al. (2022), who argue that operational efficiency in the housekeeping department depends on staff members' ability to appropriately respond to guest requests during service delivery, as these actions contribute to customer loyalty.

Table 4. Survey administered to food and beverage staff

Indicator	Result
Work experience	50% have between 3 and 5 years of experience.
Education level	55.6% have completed upper secondary education
Training	37.5% receive annual training.
Quality supervision	50% indicate that it is carried out frequently.
Service times	62.5% consider that they fully meet expectations.
Available resources	62.5% state that they have the necessary resources.
Competitiveness factor	75% identify taste, presentation, and service as the main elements.

Table 4 shows that food and beverage staff generally have between three and five years of work experience, with upper secondary education as the predominant educational level. Training in customer service and hygienic food handling is conducted annually, while product quality control is performed frequently. Staff also consider that preparation and delivery times fully meet customer expectations and that they have the resources necessary to provide the service. Taste, presentation, and staff service were identified as the main factors strengthening the competitiveness of this department.

The findings support Perdomo et al. (2024), who argue that customer satisfaction in the food and beverage department is mainly determined by food quality and the service provided, as both influence customer perceptions and the competitiveness of hotel accommodations.

3.2. Evaluation of the alignment between operational processes and hotel competitiveness elements

3.2.1. Semi-structured interview administered to five managers of economy-category hotels in Manta-Manabí

The semi-structured interview was conducted as part of the second stage of the methodological framework and was aimed at evaluating the alignment between operational processes and the competitiveness elements of the accommodations. Its purpose was to gain deeper insight into managers' perceptions of operational management and to identify implemented strategies, existing difficulties, and opportunities for improvement.

Each question addressed components of the strategic diagnosis, making it possible to complement and contrast the results obtained from the surveys administered to operational staff. A qualitative semi-structured interview consisting of six questions was therefore designed, with its structure presented in Table 5. The profiles of the interviewees are also described.

Table 5. Profiles of interviewees

Interviewee	Hotel name	Position	Hotel type	Years of experience
Manager 1	Playa Murciélagos	General Manager	Economy-category hotel (20 rooms)	8 years
Manager 2	Casa Umiña	Administrator	Economy-category hostel	5 years
Manager 3	Stella	Operations Manager	Economy-category hostel	10 years
Manager 4	Puerto Manta	Owner-Manager	Economy-category hostel	6 years

Manager 5	Cabaña Las Velas	Administrative Manager	Economy-category hotel (15 rooms)	7 years
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The interviewees had between five and ten years of experience in the hotel industry, which enhances the credibility of their responses because their answers are based on knowledge developed through their experience in hotel operational management.

Regarding the first question, the managers agreed that operational management can be defined as the process of planning, coordinating, supervising, and evaluating the establishment's daily activities in order to ensure process efficiency, optimize available resources, control costs, and provide high-quality service. They also considered appropriate operational management to be a fundamental factor in strengthening competitiveness and ensuring the efficient operation of economy-category accommodations.

Regarding the second question, which addressed the main operational processes in an economy-category hotel, the managers agreed that reception, check-in and check-out procedures, reservation control, room cleaning, facility maintenance, and customer service are the most relevant activities. They also highlighted staff management, supply control, and preventive maintenance as essential processes for ensuring operational continuity, service quality, and guest satisfaction.

Regarding the third question, the managers agreed that operational management directly influences the competitiveness of economy-category hotels. They indicated that efficient management makes it possible to optimize resources, reduce costs, and maintain competitive prices without compromising service quality. They also considered that well-organized operations strengthen the establishment's image, increase customer satisfaction and loyalty, and promote differentiation from other hotels, including those in higher categories.

Regarding the fourth question, related to operational strategies used to improve competitiveness, the managers reported implementing actions focused on staff training, daily process control, the use of digital platforms for reservations and promotions, shift optimization, waste reduction, personalized service, and cost control. They also emphasized the importance of continuous monitoring and supervision of activities as mechanisms for strengthening operational efficiency and improving the competitive performance of the establishments.

Regarding the fifth question, which sought to identify the main obstacles to hotel operational management, the managers cited several problems that hinder effective management within their organizations. These included staff turnover, financial constraints on implementing improvements, a lack of specialized training, unregulated competition, changes in tourism demand, low levels of process automation, and insufficient time to train human talent. These barriers highlight the need to strengthen operational planning and develop strategies to increase the efficiency and competitiveness of the establishments. With respect to the final question, the managers agreed that efficient behind-the-scenes management is another key factor in ensuring the sustainability of economy-category hotels. They stated that proper resource management helps reduce costs, improve service quality, increase profitability, and strengthen the long-term presence of the business in the market. Finally, they considered operational management essential for ensuring business continuity and addressing the competitive challenges faced by the sector.

The results are consistent with Bravo Zambrano and Loor Zambrano (2024), who argue that internal resources, particularly human capital and innovation, contribute significantly to the competitiveness of the hotel sector. This reinforces the view that strong operational management should be accompanied by the development of organizational capabilities to improve performance in dynamic markets. In this context, the findings show that operational management is a determining factor in the competitiveness of economy-category accommodations in Manta canton because it directly affects process efficiency, service quality, and the appropriate use of available resources.

However, as Suárez Morán et al. (2025) also point out, the use of technology and staff training are essential for hotels to achieve higher levels of performance. In this regard, the study shows that, despite having experienced and committed staff, economy-category hotels in Manta have weaknesses in specialized training, process standardization, and the use of technological tools. These shortcomings limit the positive contribution of these factors to competitiveness and to the hotels' ability to respond to changes in their environment.

Similarly, Sampaio et al. (2025) note that hotel management has evolved from relying exclusively on financial indicators toward the use of both financial and non-financial indicators, including sustainability, operational efficiency, service quality, and customer perceptions. This provides a multidimensional view of hotel competitiveness that encompasses operational, qualitative, and strategic aspects. These factors are particularly important in the economy-category accommodation sector in Manta–Manabí because day-to-day operational management carries as much weight as strategy itself. Overall, the findings confirm that hotel competitiveness depends not only on appropriate strategic formulation or the possession of resources, but also on the actual implementation of operational practices adapted to each hotel's circumstances. For the economy-category hotels examined, operational management represents a means of remaining competitive in a tourism market characterized by limited resources and intense competitive pressure.

3.2.2. Dendrogram

The dendrogram was used as a statistical analysis tool to identify patterns of operational similarity and differences among the accommodations. Using Ward's method (1963) and standardized Euclidean distances, the hotels were grouped according to operational size, location, level of digitalization, environmental policies, staff training, and customer perception. This technique made it possible to analyze the establishments in homogeneous groups (clusters), thereby relating their operational characteristics to competitiveness. In this regard, Tusell (2023) explains that a dendrogram, generated from cluster analysis, is a graph that visualizes how observations are grouped according to their similarities and allows the classification of typologies and processes sharing common characteristics. This tool enhances the analysis of the phenomenon under study by generating interpretative categories. As shown in Figure 1, the dendrogram based on standardized Euclidean distances reveals two major grouped structures.

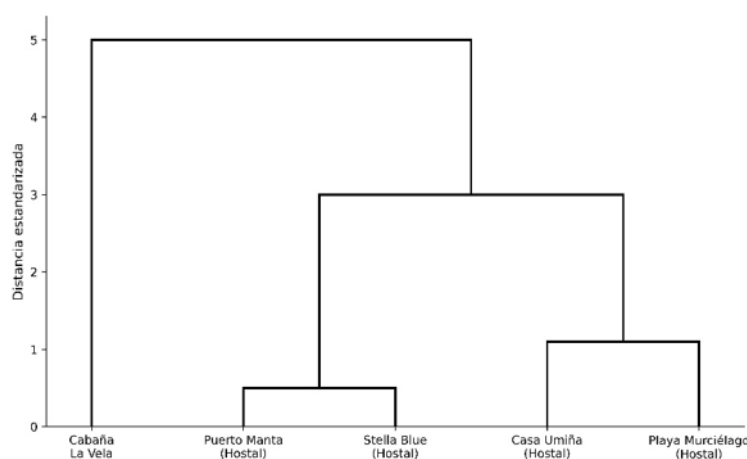


Figure 1. Dendrogram grouped by operational similarity

The clusters represent the multivariate relationships among the companies participating in the study in terms of business size, location, digitalization, environmental policies, staff training, and customer perception. The first group, comprising Casa Umiña, Playa el Murciélago, Puerto Manta Hostal, and Stella Blue, shows a high degree of operational similarity. These establishments share common characteristics,

including central city locations, high levels of digitalization, environmental policies, staff training, and positive customer perceptions. The consistency observed across these variables indicates greater cohesion between competitive elements and operational processes, resulting in more formalized management as well as greater efficiency and service quality.

The second cluster, consisting solely of Cabañas Las Velas, shows atypical or differentiated operational behavior. This establishment has fewer employees (three) and fewer rooms (six), is located outside the city center, and has lower levels of digitalization and process standardization. These characteristics generate a greater operational distance from the other accommodations, highlighting the pressing need to strengthen operational management.

3.3. Design of the operational management proposal to improve competitiveness

The proposal is based on the results obtained from the diagnosis of operational processes and competitiveness factors, which identified efficiency, service quality, human talent management, and innovation as key elements for strengthening the competitiveness of economy-category accommodations. Weaknesses were also identified in training, process standardization, and the use of technological tools. Cluster analysis identified two operational profiles, demonstrating the need for a flexible proposal adapted to different levels of development.

Cazañas Rivero et al. (2011) propose a structured model that integrates the requirements necessary for implementing a Quality Management System in accordance with ISO 9001:2015. Similarly, Millán and Gómez (2018) state that the design of an operational management proposal aimed at improving competitiveness should focus on optimizing internal processes and service conditions as the main drivers of competitiveness. At the microenterprise level, the proposal seeks to increase hotel occupancy, reduce operating costs, and improve the profitability of the establishments.

Likewise, the results are consistent with Santis (2021), who argues that internal resources, particularly human capital and innovation, contribute significantly to the competitiveness of the hotel sector. This reinforces the idea that strong operational management should be accompanied by the development of organizational capabilities to improve performance in dynamic markets. In this context, the findings show that operational management is a determining factor in the competitiveness of economy-category accommodations in Manta canton, as it directly affects process efficiency, service quality, and the appropriate use of available resources.

In addition, Lima Ribeiro (2018) proposes a model focused on situational analysis, evaluation of processes applied in the hotel industry, and determination of the documentation associated with implementation of the management system. The proposal adopts a comprehensive, systemic, and continuous-improvement-oriented approach, considering operational management as a strategic pillar for strengthening competitiveness. It is based on the principles of efficiency, quality, flexibility, and innovation, aligned with customer needs and the capacity to adapt to the competitive environment of the economy-category hotel sector.

3.3.1. Structure of the operational management improvement proposal.

The proposal is organized into six strategic pillars designed on the basis of the diagnostic results. These pillars address the gaps identified in the diagnosis and the competitiveness factors evaluated. As shown in Table 6, each strategic pillar comprises objectives, proposed actions, and monitoring indicators.

Table 6. Proposal for improving operational management

Pillars	Objectives	Proposed actions
Pillar 1. Strategic: Operational	Optimize the operational processes of economy-	- Standardize operational processes in reception, accommodation (housekeeping), and food and

management to strengthen competitiveness	category accommodations in Manta–Manabí canton as a key strategy to improve competitiveness, efficiency, and service quality.	beverage departments through the development of basic procedures. - Gradually incorporate basic technological tools for reservation management and operational control. - Periodically monitor operational and service-quality indicators.
Pillar 2. Standardization and optimization of operational processes	Improve the efficiency and consistency of the hotel's key operational processes.	- Develop basic procedure manuals for reception, accommodation (housekeeping), and food and beverage departments. - Define standard times for check-in, check-out, room cleaning, and food service processes. - Implement operational checklists for the daily monitoring of activities.
Pillar 3. Human talent management and development	Develop the competencies of operational staff as a key competitiveness factor.	- Implement periodic training programs in customer service, operational management, and quality standards. - Establish motivation mechanisms and non-monetary incentives, such as performance recognition.
Pillar 4. Control and optimization of operational resources	Ensure the efficient use of human, material, and financial resources.	- Implement inventory controls for cleaning supplies, food, and beverages. - Record and periodically analyze operating costs by department.
Pillar 5. Incorporation of basic technological tools	Strengthen operational efficiency and commercial competitiveness through the use of accessible technology.	- Use simple digital systems for reservation management and customer records. - Strengthen the establishments' presence on reservation platforms and social media.
Pillar 6. Focus on customer experience and satisfaction	Increase customer loyalty and positive perceptions of hotel service.	- Conduct guest satisfaction surveys. - Provide personalized service and efficiently manage complaints and suggestions.

The implementation plan is presented below in Table 6, establishing four phases with their corresponding activities and estimated duration.

Table 7. Proposal implementation plan

Phase	Main activities	Estimated duration
Diagnosis	Review of current processes and resources	1 month
Design	Development of manuals, indicators, and plans	1 month
Implementation	Training and implementation of actions	3 months
Evaluation	Monitoring through evaluation indicators, which may include: • customer satisfaction level • compliance with standardized processes • reduction in operating costs • staff training level • increase in hotel occupancy	Ongoing

The implementation of the operational management proposal will contribute to improving the competitiveness of economy-category accommodations in Manta–Manabí canton by optimizing internal processes, strengthening human talent, and improving the customer experience. At the same time, it will contribute to the economic sustainability and positioning of these establishments in an increasingly demanding tourism environment.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study determined that operational management is a variable that influences the competitiveness of economy-category accommodations in Manta, Manabí. Validation of the instruments through the expert judgment method and Kendall's coefficient of concordance ($W = 0.91$) demonstrated a high degree of agreement among the experts, while the mean competence coefficient ($K = 0.82$) confirmed the suitability of the selected expert group. The results revealed that operational efficiency, human resource management, and service quality have a direct effect on competitive advantage. However, weaknesses were identified in process standardization, specialized training, and the use of technology, which limited the strengthening of these elements. In response, a plan structured around six strategic pillars was developed, focusing on process improvement, competency development, and customer experience. Its implementation could increase the productivity and sustainability of the accommodations. It is concluded that operational management constitutes a strategic pillar for the competitiveness and continuity of economy-category hotels in the market. Future research could evaluate the effects of the proposal after its implementation.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to the subject matter of this study.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, project administration, supervision, validation, visualization, writing – original draft, and writing – review and editing: Blanco-González, G. and Guerrero-Chávez, L. A.

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