

LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS OF WEBSITES OF SKI AND MOUNTAIN RESORTS IN SPAIN, ANDORRA AND PYRÉNÉES OF FRANCE. SEASONS: FROM 2009-10 TO 2013-14

Oscar García Lastra

Gregorio Escalera Izquierdo

Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia. Madrid
osgsarlas@gmail.com, gescalera@cee.uned.es

1. INTRODUCTION

Spain remains a tourist destination of the first order at the global level, both by number of visitors and revenue. The Spanish tourist sector has been characterized for being one of the most powerful economic engines (Esteve and Fuentes, 2000); this importance has been increased to be protagonist in the cohesion of the territories, still occasionally monoculture, with an economic and social dimension. But this certainly idyllic landscape is still hiding some clouds as:

- A concentrated and seasonal selection with a high dependence on tourism of sun and beach (OPTI, 2005).
- And a technological gap with respect to the neighbouring countries; the level of Internet access in Spanish households is 9% below the European average in the year 2013 (INE, 2014).

In this context, this paper as well as conduct a longitudinal assessment of Websites, has specific objectives:

- 1) To snow and mountain tourism value with a high impact on the geographical areas of influence.
- 2) Highlight the Website as a channeler instrument of information and interactivity with the user.
- 3) Review the methodologies used to evaluate Websites; and establish a model simple and useful tool for all those involved in this tourism segment.

2. SNOW TOURISM

Among the activities declared by tourists received in Spain, include cultural activities carried out by more than 50%, the activities of fun (20%) and sports (13%) (TURESPAÑA, 2015). In the sports segment, are the activities that take place outdoors, in the mountain environment, water sports or golf. In snow and mountain tourism, the main motivation that causes the displacement is related to snow and mountain sports, or attend competitions or tests of professional or amateur (Garcia and Escalera, 2008). The development of products such as snow tourism opens up new possibilities both activity and seasonality for the classic holiday destinations (TURESPAÑA, 2007). Its economic and social impact on the environment is huge, stimulates and promotes the development of zones of influence, well as main activity, as well as complementary activity to others.

In Spain, there are 31 ski and mountain resorts, associated under ATUDEM created in 1974. In the season of 2013-14, despite an adverse economic situation, were 5.11 million visitors, 4.2% more than in the previous season. It can be pointed out some data that show the weight of the sector, in the 2011-12 season, the contribution of the Spanish ski resorts to mountain regions was 800 million euros, and nearly 100,000 jobs, adding direct and indirect (ATUDEM, 2015).

3. WEB ANALYTICS METHODOLOGIES

The development of ICTs has come to revolutionize the way tourists plan, organize, and make their journeys. The use of the Internet is the majority among the tourists arrived in Spain, a 65.6% of them have resorted to this medium in their trips in the year 2013 (TURESPAÑA, 2015). It is widely accepted that the Internet can serve as a tool of effective marketing in the tourism (Buhalis and Law, 2008). A tourist destination is a geographic area where touristic resources are located and where tourists move (Hall, 2000). In this line a ski resort constitutes by itself a tourist destination and planning must take into account the synergies of the resources at its disposal.

In the field of tourism there is not a universally accepted definition of what is and what should be the evaluation of Websites (Law *et al.*, 2010), an essential tool in the effort to design websites informative, effective and quality (Pallas and Economides, 2008). History tour of the Web as an academic practice evaluation can be classified generally into two streams: first qualitative and then quantitative, although now many researchers are integrating both approaches (Law *et al.*, 2010). However, it is difficult to unite all instruments to form a single standard for the evaluation of a Website (Morrison *et al.*, 2004). There are several classifications that categorized the evaluation of Websites, from (Law *et al.*, 2010) there are two main categories:

- Models that adopted and/or modified existing assessment tools.
- Innovative methods, which developed new models of assessment.

4. MODEL EMICA

Burgess and Cooper (1999) developed the model called MICA (*Model of Internet Commerce Adoption*), which consists in positioning the development of a Website based on three stages: Promotion, first phase that collects information about the company; the second stage is a Provision that indicates the level of interactivity; and the third is Processing that shows the level of online transactions. They later expanded the features contained in each stage and renamed the model as *eMICA (extended MICA)* (Burgess and Cooper, 2000).

The basis of the model for the present study is the adaptation made by Garcia and Escalera (2008) examining the use of the Internet that made the ski and mountain resorts in Spain and Andorra in 2007. This work is another step in this research line, longitudinally evaluating the advancement of ski and mountain resorts Websites, expanding the sample stations located in the Pyrenees in France. Reduces the number of variables of 38 to 28 in order to make a set and operating model, and included some recent use as e.g. social networks.

In this research has been selected the methodology of *counting* by being consistent with the objectives of the work and be widely used in the previous literature. The method of accounting of elements is used to assess the performance of a Website or their wealth (Law *et al.*, 2010).

78 Websites are analyzed: 34 of Spain, Andorra 2 and 42 of France; that it corresponds to the total of the ski and mountain resorts associated in ATUDEM; Andorra ski, integrated in SKI ANDORRA, and the ski resorts of the Pyrenees in France, grouped in the Pyrenean Confederation of tourism, LES PYRÉNÉES. They are ski resorts located in the same area of influence, mainly the Pyrenees. The evolution is analyzed from the season 2009-10 to 2013-14.

5. THE RESULTS

The analyzed Websites, 34 from Spain, Andorra 2 and 42 of France, 78 in total between the seasons 2009-10 and 2013-14, more than 90% of the sites reaches any of the levels, with an increase of 3.85%, between two seasons. According to the model adapted *eMICA*, functional maturity level has varied between seasons 2009-10 and 2013-14, especially in level 2 Provision with a 6.41% reduction and the level 3 Process with an increase of 7.69% of the total number of analyzed Websites. At level 1 Promotion, the most basic step of a Website, virtually no changes.

In the individual analysis by variables, the balance is more positive, especially in those related to interactivity and the purchasing process; highlights the growth experienced by the *Customer Zone* variable that happened to be present in 71 websites, 30 more than in the 2009-10 season. On the negative side the little progress of the utility *Language*, one place more on the 2009-10 season; the communication is effective if it is produced in the language of the user.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The methodology used and adapted has been *eMICA* (Burgess and Cooper, 2000), collecting the three stages that gradually a Website goes to get the functional maturity:

information, provision and process. The 28 selected and evaluated variables were distributed at these three levels, giving the instrument a remarkable degree of manageability and simplicity. The results belong to the seasons 2009-10 and 2013-14; and although there is a small evolution positive between both seasons, Websites continue to show a low degree of functional maturity, located mainly in the first two levels of the model. 35 sites reach level 1 (information), level 2 (Provision) strengthen 19; There are three sites that do not attach level.

We understand that the results of this study reveal the need for the ski resorts and mountain reinforce the resources used on the network and not over-dimension inherent to ICTs opportunities. The potential of the Web environment remains untapped to showing that the effective use of Internet in the continuous promotion as a challenge for tourism organizations (Zach *et al.*, 2007).

The continuity of this work can achieve a more extensive sample, which includes more regions of European and non-European countries; expanding the focus of analysis and validating the proposed model, linking the development of Websites with the size of ski resorts, for example en line with other studies that have found that the use of Internet and the Web in particular, is related to, among other factors, the size of firms (Burke, 2005).