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Collaborative tourism communication 2.0: promotion, advertising and interactivity in government tourism websites in Latin America

Miguel Túñez López [CV] [ORCID] [Gmail] Universidad de Santiago de Compostela /
miguel.tunez@usc.es

Verónica Altamirano [CV] [ORCID] [Gmail] Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja /
vpaltamirano@utpl.edu.ec

Karina P. Valarezo [CV] [ORCID] [Gmail] Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja /
kpvalarezo@utpl.edu.ec

Abstract

Introduction. Tourism communication is undergoing a process of transformation. It has evolved from controlled mass communication, focused on the asymmetrical and one-way promotion of popular tourist destinations, to a new era of web-based multimedia information. This research evaluates what we have termed *collaborative tourism communication 2.0* in the government tourism websites of 22 Latin American countries. **Methods.** The study is based on a purpose-created model of analysis that takes into account the website’s tools, accessibility, digital resources, generation of products, interactive spaces (mainly social networks), and creation of virtual communities. **Results and conclusions.** Tourism communication needs to adopt a collaborative approach that involves a two-way and interactive communication model in which both parties have equal opportunities of participation. Websites have become consolidated as an essential platform for tourism promotion and advertising, but these platforms need to be adapted to the changing needs and behaviours of the tourist 2.0, through the use of resources and tools that make the tourism offer more attractive and through the creation spaces of interaction that allow users to participate and obtain direct advice on the web.

Keywords: Tourism communication; collaborative tourism 2.0; digital communication; tourism websites; tourism promotion; interactivity; participation.

Contents

1. Introduction. 2. Methods. 3. Collaborative tourism communication 2.0. 4. Websites for tourism promotion and advertising. 5. Evaluation and analysis of websites. 6. Analysis of results. 6.1. Websites. 6.2. Evaluation of tourism websites. 6.3. Websites' search engine optimisation. 7. Conclusions and recommendations. 8. Note. 9. List of references.

Translation by **CA Martínez-Arcos** (PhD in Communication from the University of London)

1. Introduction

Tourism is an evolving and dynamic activity that adapts easily to social, political and economic changes. It has an evident impact on the development of countries and that is why it has become one of the pillars of the world economy. The constant growth of tourism is due to various factors, including:

- **Internationalisation.** Due to its nature, tourism is bound to internationalisation, but in recent years this feature is most evident due to factors such as the opening of the borders between countries (for example, between the Member States of the European Union and the Andean Community) and the signing of international agreements that eliminate passport visa requirements in order to promote tourism.
- **Corporate globalisation.** Tourism service providers have grown and expanded around the world and this has enabled the consolidation of large hotel, restaurant, aviation and transportation chains.
- **The trend towards sustainable tourism.** Tourism stakeholders are aware of the impact of his activity and, thus, establish policies of environmental, social and cultural responsibility to make sure tourism activities follow quality standards that result in a better use resources and greater economic and social development.
- **Emergence of a new business model.** New ICTs enable tourism companies to market their products without using intermediaries (travel operators and agencies), which consolidates e-commerce. This, combined with the emergence of search engines for low-cost tourism services, changes tourists' purchase and consumption habits and generates a trend towards independent (not professionally guided) travelling and direct purchasing.
- **Changes in trends.** Mass tourism oriented to sun and sea destinations and established products is being abandoned. The trend is towards alternative and specialised tourism that satisfies the specific needs of travellers, who are more active, seek to live experiences and integrate themselves into the culture of the visited place, which has resulted in the emergence of new market segments and tourist destinations.
- **Emergence of a collaborative promotion model.** In this model, through new ICTs, tourists voluntarily promote tourist destinations, share information and experiences, recommend tourist destinations, provide assistance to other travellers, generate information on specialised blogs and rate tourist products and services.

- **Supply exceeds demand.** The emergence of new destinations that try to meet tourists' changing needs and demands increases options, which influence the value and quality of tourist products and services, generating a tendency towards low-cost products.

The impact of these factors and the start of the economic recovery after the global crisis are generating a steady growth in the tourist industry. According to the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) [01], international tourist arrivals worldwide went from 1,087 million in 2013 to 1,133 million in 2014. With 46 million more tourists traveling the world (+4.3%), 2014 marked the fifth consecutive year of growth above the long-term average growth (+3.3% annual), since the financial crisis of 2009. During this period, it is estimated that the tourism sector generated US\$ 1,245 billion (euro 937 billion), which is equivalent to an increase of 3.7%. In addition, according to the UNWTO, tourism represents 9% of the GDP, generates 1 in 11 jobs, and represents 6% of all international trade and 30% of the world's exports of services (UNWTO, 2015, 4-5).

In this context, the new ICTs are a transverse axis for the evolution of tourism and, therefore, become essential tools for the promotion and advertising of tourist destinations, so travellers and tourist organisations come together in a digital environment characterised by two-way and interactive communication in which both parties have equal opportunities of participation.

2. Methods

The following method was used to evaluate the use of websites as platforms of international tourism promotion in Latin America:

The first stage of the research involved the identification of the websites used by the governments of 22 Latin American countries for international tourism promotion and marketing. In May 2014, a search was conducted on the Internet to identify the government agencies responsible for the development, strengthening and promotion of tourism (ministries, departments, offices and institutes) in each country. Once the official government websites were identified, we selected the digital platforms linked to them and used for the promotion of tourism. In May 2015, the websites were monitored and the data were updated.

Based on the literature review, we developed established the different aspects that would be taken into account in the evaluation of the websites: accessibility, mobility, content and information, design and architecture, resources and services for tourists, and interactivity.

Based on quantitative methods, the data collected in 2015 and the literature review, we created a model to evaluate the quality of the tourism websites, from the perspective of communication. The min-max formula was applied to normalise data and create a standard scale capable of keeping the same proportions among variables. This normalisation allows for the rescaling of the values of the attributes and preserving the relations between the original data (Alonso Berrocal, García Figuerola & Zazo Rodríguez, 2006).

The results of the analysis were contrasted with a study of the websites' search engine optimisation (SEO) carried out in 2015 with an automated analysis method: Alexa, one of the most reliable and used platforms to obtain traffic statistics for any website. Alexa provides rankings of the most visited websites according to the average number of visits in the last month, which allows generating statistics based on the number of visits and related links (Sixto García, 2010). SEO was analysed based on such variables as traffic rank, bounce rate, pageviews per user, time on site, sites linking in the government websites, and geographic location of users.

3. Collaborative tourism communication 2.0

It is a fact that “the democratisation of the possibility of becoming the sender of messages to potential masses of receivers and the universalisation of interpersonal connection through the Internet allows users to interact one to one, one to several, in small groups, and with everyone. Message flows have also evolved, from a (discursive) one-way mode to a truly interactive circular mode that takes place, simultaneously, in several platforms. Thus, the narrative is constructed and modified by several actors, by multiple senders, through more than one channel and with the use of different multimedia resources” (Túñez & Altamirano, 2015). In other words, the way in which society communicates has evolved into a two-way, participatory, voluntary and committed model, in which the user is the one who controls the communication process.

In the field of tourism, this user is known as the *tourist 2.0*: a tourist who uses the Internet as a source of information, plans his/her trip using technological tools and the assistance of collaborative communities of travellers that offer comments, suggestions and opinions. The participation of the *tourist 2.0* in these areas is active, voluntary and committed, so he/she is also recognised as a tourism promoter that generates content, shares experiences and recommendations.

Therefore, tourism promotion needs to be adapted to these changes and replace the traditional communication strategy with digital communication 2.0, which involves the creation of communication platforms which give tourists 2.0 access to information and spaces of participation and interaction.

The implementation of new ICTs in the field of tourism allows small and unknown destinations to be positioned in national and international markets, and allows traditional destinations to divide their offer into segments to attract an increasingly demanding audience. ICTs also influence the consumption habits of tourists, who reduce the purchase of trips planned by travel agents and tour operators in order to enjoy independent travelling, in which the Internet is the most used planning tool.

The attitudes, roles and relations that are assumed in the communication between tourism agencies and travellers must be characterised by the ability to initiate a workflow and co-generation of content. In other words, the process must respond to dynamics of collaborative interaction with equal possibilities to send/receive/suggest contents for both parties: institutions and tourists. This is what we refer to as the need to address the management of content from the perspective of *collaborative tourism communication 2.0*.

Traditionally, during the process of decision and purchase of a tourist product, the traveller searched for information and references about the offered product or service. Serra (2013, 122) points out that “the process is initiated with the emergence of the need to travel, for whatever reasons. Consumers will then seek information about the current offers that can adequately meet their needs. The following phase consists of the evaluation of the different alternatives on offer. After evaluating the alternatives, consumers will select the ones that they consider meet their needs in the most convenient way. The last, but not less important, phase starts after the service has been used: the assessment of the degree of satisfaction with the purchase. The entire purchase decision-making process is influenced and conditioned by the internal variables of the individual as well as by the external variables, in addition to the marketing stimuli to which the consumer may be exposed”. In the past, this influence was exercised mainly through the tourism promotion carried out in traditional channels, the recommendations of tourist operators, travel agencies and references from friends and family. Thus, the access to information about other offers or products was limited.

Currently, the Internet offers users the possibility to compare information about new and varied tourist destinations that are increasingly adapted to the specific needs of tourists. This avalanche of offers is influenced by the perceptions and experiences of other travellers, who voluntarily perform a collaborative promotion, whether through blogs, social networks, tourism promotion channels or specialised search engines.

According to Miralbell (2001), *tourists 2.0* emerge in this scenario and:

“want to search for tourism services and integrate them so that, although still far from the destination, they can get an idea of the environment that awaits them. Often, the cold data of a hotel information card fail to meet this expectation, even when it is accompanied by a photograph. It is necessary for the information to be obtained in a more personalised way, in a graphic environment that is accompanied by texts, photos, maps and even videos, capable of complementing the information and making it more appealing and evocative of the attractions and potential of the place. In addition, tourists want to see the utility that a tourist product or service has for them: social value, comfort, tranquillity, environmental balance, ethics in the sustainability of the offer, etc. How can we express these values through information cards?”.

In this sense, there is an essential task for the communication managers of tourist destinations: to make tourist products and services tangible through the use of the multimedia resources that are used permanently by travellers.

It is essential to use digital platforms for the promotion of tourism destinations. Currently, websites, social networks and mobile applications are the most used platforms to promote tourism destinations. However, having presence on the Internet does not ensure the success of a tourism promotion campaign, as new users abandon traditional communication and focus on being part of the conversation, participate actively, generate content, share information, experiences and references about products and services.

Tourist organisations must engage, participate actively in the Internet, interact with tourists, create collaborative spaces that encourage their participation, and deliver quality content in formats appropriate

to the medium used, allowing tourists to live the experience before reaching the destination. “Tourism promotion should give consumers knowledge of the existing attractions and infrastructure, differentiating the destination from the competition, inspiring confidence and credibility as well as influencing the management of the destination and the purchasing process” (Da Cruz, 2008).

In conclusion, *collaborative tourism communication 2.0* has to be promoted by the institutions to interact effectively with the tourist 2.0 and should be directed to the creation and management of virtual communities in which there is voluntarily sharing of contents that can serve as reference for other travellers who are looking for a destination or planning a trip.

4. Websites for tourism promotion and advertising

The definition of the term website is sometimes ambiguous and -from the point of view of users- it is used as a synonym of web page due to their close relation. Juan Carlos García (2001, 6) defines a website as a group of pages on the World Wide Web that are regarded as a single entity and are structured according to a rigorous content organisation system. Websites must be accessible and intuitive to allow easy navigation and the customisation of criteria and requirements.

However, today the technological tools are not the only important aspects in the development of a website. As mentioned by Alfonso Palazón Meseguer (2001): “the best proposal of any website to make users loyal is to offer quality content... that distinguishes it from other websites. This produces in users the need to return to the website on a regular basis. Differentiating content clearly offers a range of mechanisms (forums, announcements board, chat, email, etc.) to establish a relationship with users”.

Marcos & Codina (2005) summarise the essential features of the websites of cities and destinations:

1. Easy to find, either through a search engine or directly.
2. Speed. The website must operate and respond quickly.
3. Usability. The site must be attractive, easy to use, graphically coherent, and keep the interest of the user.
4. Content. The site must provide quality information that is interesting, correct, updated, creative and entertaining for the user.
5. Interactivity. The website must provide users with the ability to find the information they require, facilitate bookings, links, customer support and service.

All these aspects should be considered when creating a tourism promotion website, since these aspects are becoming increasingly important in the field of communication. “The development of new technologies has led to the perception of corporate websites as business cards which communicate by themselves and as powerful tools for access to and for users, so it is convenient and indispensable for the image, information and activities of companies and public bodies to be reflected in their websites. The website is, in short, a communication tool that must be consistent with the institutional objectives, and

must contribute to the transmission of information” (Fernández Poyatos, Aguirregoitia Martínez & Boix Martínez, 2011).

Promotion through websites needs to be complemented with the creation of profiles on the main social networks, to promote interactive communication in which users can become voluntary content generators and promoters of the tourist destinations.

Websites should promote *collaborative tourism communication 2.0* through the generation of quality multimedia content that can be shared and turned viral by tourists 2.0, and through the integration of digital tools that improve the experience of planning and travelling, such as search engines for tourist services, interactive maps, audio guides, traveller applications, etc. They should also include online spaces for advice and communication and collaborative digital platforms in which travellers can share information, references and experiences.

5. Evaluation and analysis of websites

In the field of communication, it is increasingly important and necessary to monitor and evaluate the implemented communication strategies. However, in the field of digital tourist communication there are no established models or parameters to evaluate the communication strategies carried out through websites.

There are numerous reports from the field of technology that allow improving the construction of websites and models that analyse specific cases based on technical functions. There are also measurement systems that allow the evaluation of the return on investment (ROI) and the impact of advertising. There is an increasing number of tools to measure the results of digital communication campaigns. Under the umbrella term “web analytics”, a variety of tools have been developed to measure and analyse data about the behaviour of the online audience and achieve web traffic optimisation and meet the objectives of e-commerce (Lamas, 2010).

However, “it is necessary to work on the development of a method to evaluate the quality and communicative efficacy of tourism websites (Fernández Cavia, et al., 2010; Fernández Poyatos, Aguirregoitia Martínez & Boix Martínez, 2011), since search engine optimization (SEO) is currently the main metrics system for websites. In the context of the World Wide Web, SEO is the process of affecting the visibility of a website in search engine results so that it appears among the first results. Likewise, SEO can be defined as the set of procedures and techniques that are intended to provide a website or a web page with maximum visibility on the Internet (Marcos & Codina, 2005, 84).

6. Analysis of results

6.1. Websites

Government tourism institutions from 22 Latin American countries - ministries, departments, offices and institutes - have implemented strategies of direct communication with tourists through websites and social networks, to inform and promote their main tourist destinations and products as well as to offer

advice and interact with users. This is due to the change that has occurred in the habits and purchasing processes and thanks to the presence of new ICTs.

The growing importance of the Internet and ICTs in the promotion and marketing of tourism products and services has prompted the creation of institutional websites devoted to assist in the process of destination selection.

In Latin America, in 2014, Puerto Rico, Venezuela and Honduras had a corporate website which only included institutional information directed to tourism businessmen, unlike Brazil, Colombia, Paraguay and Uruguay, which had used the institutional website to provide information and assistance to tourists. In contrast, the institutional websites of most innovative countries, such as Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, and Portugal, were used exclusively for the visibility and promotion of their tourism offer.

By 2015, Honduras and Brazil linked their international tourism promotion portals to their institutional websites.

6.2. Evaluation of tourism websites

In order to analyse the data obtained during the period of data monitoring and collection, this study proposes an *evaluation model for tourism websites* that aims to assess these digital platforms from the field of communication, i.e., from the perspective of the tourist 2.0 and the satisfaction of their information and communication needs.

The *Evaluation model* is based on previous studies (Fernández Cavia, et al., 2010; Fernández Poyatos, Aguirregoitia Martínez, & Boix Martínez, 2011; Nacke, Marina, Fernández & Pando, 2012; Fernández-Cavia, Rovira, Díaz-Luque, & Cavaller, 2014) but also incorporates fundamental aspects that should be considered for the promotion of a destination, such as accessibility, content and information for tourists, digital narratives, resources for travellers, mobility, and interactivity, from the field of *collaborative tourism communication 2.0*.

6.2.1. Accessibility

Web accessibility refers to the inclusive practice of creating web pages that can be used by everyone (Mazalu, Cechich & Martin, 2013). A website's accessibility indicates the capacity of access to its content, regardless of the limitations of the user (disability) and limitations related to technology, knowledge or language (Navarro & Fonseca, 2009; Hassan Montero & Martín Fernández, 2014). Thus, accessibility is a key aspect to convince people to visit and stay on a tourism promotion website.

The following table summarises the variables under study:

Table 1: Evaluation of accessibility

Variable		Score	Evaluation scale
Language	Spanish	1	Improvable: 1-4 Acceptable: 5-8 Optimal: 9-12
	English	1	
	Portuguese	1	
	Other languages	2	
Access for people with disabilities	Use of software for people with disabilities	2	
	Page customisation	1	
	Alternative audio for visually impaired people	1	
	Ability to change text size for visually impaired people	1	
	Video or alternative images for people with hearing impairment	1	
	Interactive resources for assistance to persons with disabilities	1	

Source: Túnñez, Altamirano and Valarezo (2015).

Based on the aforementioned evaluation criteria, Spain is the only website that is accessible for people with disabilities. It has a software and mobile applications that provide support to tourists.

Table 2: Results of evaluation of accessibility

Evaluation	Country
Improvable	Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Puerto Rico, Uruguay and Venezuela
Acceptable	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Peru and Portugal
Optimal	Spain

Source: Idem.

6.2.2. Digital narrative

The new digital environment has changed the way information is transmitted and received. Users are the ones who control, dominate, manage and connect the contents in a non-linear way, creating the so-called open works through participation and interaction. This digital storytelling is possible thanks to hypertext, multimedia and hypermedia resources which allow structuring, interconnecting and integrating information. User experience on the web is also marked by the way the different tourist products are sold and the opportunities they have to generate their own navigation experience (Altamirano & Túnuez, 2014).

In this scenario, the digital narrative plays an essential role, since it can be used to make the tourist offer tangible and help travellers to get closer to the tourist experience they are looking for.

Table 3: Evaluation of the use of multimedia resources

Variable		Score	Evaluation
Multimedia resources	Videos	1	Improvable: 1-2 Acceptable: 3-4 Optimal: 5-7
	Photographs	1	
	Audio	1	
	Photo galleries	1	
	Animated / interactive graphics	1	
	Live video	1	
	Other	1	

Source: Idem.

In relation to the use of multimedia resources, the ones most widely used by government agencies for tourism promotion are photographs (22 countries); photo galleries (20 countries) and video (14 countries). However, these websites need to implement more and new resources since only Chile, Costa Rica and Mexico met the criteria to be considered optimal.

Table 4: Results of the evaluation of the use of multimedia resources

Evaluation	Country
Improvable	Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela
Acceptable	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Spain, Nicaragua, Peru, Portugal and Uruguay.
Optimal	Chile, Costa Rica and Mexico.

Source: Idem.

6.2.3. Content and information

The sample of digital platforms under study were created to promote tourist destinations, but it should be emphasised that tourists 2.0 require quality experiences and contents. Therefore, tourism enterprises should offer added value in their websites, to complement their offer with information of interest to tourists. Thus, tourism websites should include contents that complement the information needs of travellers. The following table presents the results of the evaluation of the websites' contents and information directed at travellers:

Table 5: Evaluation of contents and information

	Variable	Score	Evaluation
Tourist offer	Segmented by search criteria: geographic area	1	Improvable: 1-6 Acceptable: 7-12 Optimal: 13-19
	Segmented by search criteria: types of tourism	1	
Country and city information	History	1	
	Political organisation	1	
	Culture and tradition	1	
	Country brand	1	
Information for trip planning	Country entry requirements / visa procedures	1	
	Customs regulations	1	
	Coin / currency converter / exchange rates	1	
	Meteorological information	1	
	What to do?	1	
	How to get there?	1	
	Tourist calendar	1	
Information about complementary services	Accommodation and food	1	
	Mobility and vehicle rental	1	
	Travel agencies / tour guides	1	
	Accessible services	1	
Safety	Contact information of tourist emergency assistance	1	
	Contact information of complaint services	1	
Other	Other	1	

Source: Idem.

The quality of content is essential in tourism promotion and in this regard 12 countries met the criteria to be considered optimal, since they offer tourists the greatest amount of information, distributed in an appropriate manner.

Table 6: Results of evaluation of content and information

Evaluation	Country
Improvable	Brazil, Puerto Rico and Venezuela
Acceptable	Bolivia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico and Paraguay
Optimal	Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Spain, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Portugal and Uruguay

Source: Idem.

6.2.4. Resources for travellers

The satisfaction of tourist depends on the experiences they have during the trip, which starts when they leave their place of origin. Currently, with the presence of the information and communication technologies, this experience extends to the selection, purchase and planning processes. Therefore, the additional resources that a website or a social network offers to tourists to enhance their experience needs to be evaluated as they can influence the purchase decision-making process and increase the level of satisfaction of tourists.

Table 7: Evaluation of resources for travellers

	Variable	Score	Evaluation
Resources for travellers	Maps and tourist brochures	1	Improvable: 1-2 Acceptable: 3-5 Optimal: 6-9
	Guided visits	1	
	Augmented reality	1	
	Travel guides	1	
	Audio guides	1	
	Online games	1	
	Online booking centre	1	
	Trip planning tools	1	
	Other	1	

Source: Idem.

The implementation of resources for tourists is one of the weaknesses of all websites. This evaluation is influenced by the myriad of possibilities offered by new ICTs. Therefore, it is difficult to adapt websites to this trend. The most commonly used resources are maps and brochures (15 countries), trip planning tools (8 countries), travel guides (6 countries) and online booking centres (6 countries).

Table 8: Evaluation of the resources for travellers

Evaluation	Country
Improvable	Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Uruguay and Venezuela
Acceptable	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Dominican Republic, Spain and Mexico
Optimal	

Source: Idem.

6.2.5. Mobility

In this hyper-connected world, not only the Internet and social networks play a transcendental role. Currently, the possibility of permanent connection provided by mobile devices influences changes that occur in the society of information, in the way people develop their daily activities and communicate and in people’s media use and consumption habits.

Santiago Iglesias-Prada (2010) defines mobility as the capacity of the Internet, the terminal and the user to access, connect and maintain a remote session with a corporate information system regardless of location, movement and context.

Table 9: Evaluation of mobility

Variable	Score	Evaluation
Mobility		
Version for mobile device	1	Improvable: 0 Acceptable: 1
Applications	1	Optimal: 2

Source: Idem.

The capacity for permanent connectivity that is afforded by mobile devices surely influenced the fact that 12 websites had an online version and mobile applications, 6 had only a mobile version, 6 had not migrated towards this trend. It is important to emphasise that the analysis only took into account the applications that appeared in the websites.

6.2.6. Interactivity

The main features of the tourists 2.0 are their will and commitment to interact in digital environments. Tourism promotion platforms must provide the necessary conditions for the establishment of a

relationship between users and institutions. This can be done through tourist support tools like e-mail and chat rooms; participation spaces like forums; spaces of news evaluation; and general social networks that allow the creation of interactive communities where tourists 2.0 can not only access information, but also generate it, share it, and get the opinion of other users.

Table 10: Evaluation of interactive spaces

	Variable	Score	Evaluation
Interactivity	Social networks: Facebook Google+ Twitter Flickr Instagram Pinterest YouTube Other	1 for each network Total: 4	Improvable: 1-5 Acceptable: 6-11 Optimal: 12-18
	Online tourist support	1	
	Online communities	1	
	Email	1	
	Surveys	1	
	Forum	1	
	Chat	1	
	Ability to publish content	1	
	Ability to rate content	1	
	Ability to share information	1	
	Subscriptions	1	
	Others	1	

Source: Idem.

Chile and Portugal are at the top the list of the most interactive countries, since their websites include the largest number of tools to provide personalised attention to users. The websites of other countries should improve, since interactivity is currently a fundamental aspect for the management of communication.

Table 11: Results of the study of interactivity

Evaluation	Country
Improvable	Brazil, Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela
Acceptable	Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic,

	Ecuador, El Salvador, Spain, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru and Uruguay
Optimal	Chile and Portugal

Source: Idem.

6.2.7. Results of the evaluation of websites

Based on the application of the Evaluation model, we can conclude that the tourism promotion websites should be updated and improved in various aspects, in order to provide participatory and collaborative spaces in which users can obtain information of interest and share their experiences, opinions, and references. The sum of the values assigned to all the variables under study is 63. However, the website of Spain, which leads the list, only reached 49 points.

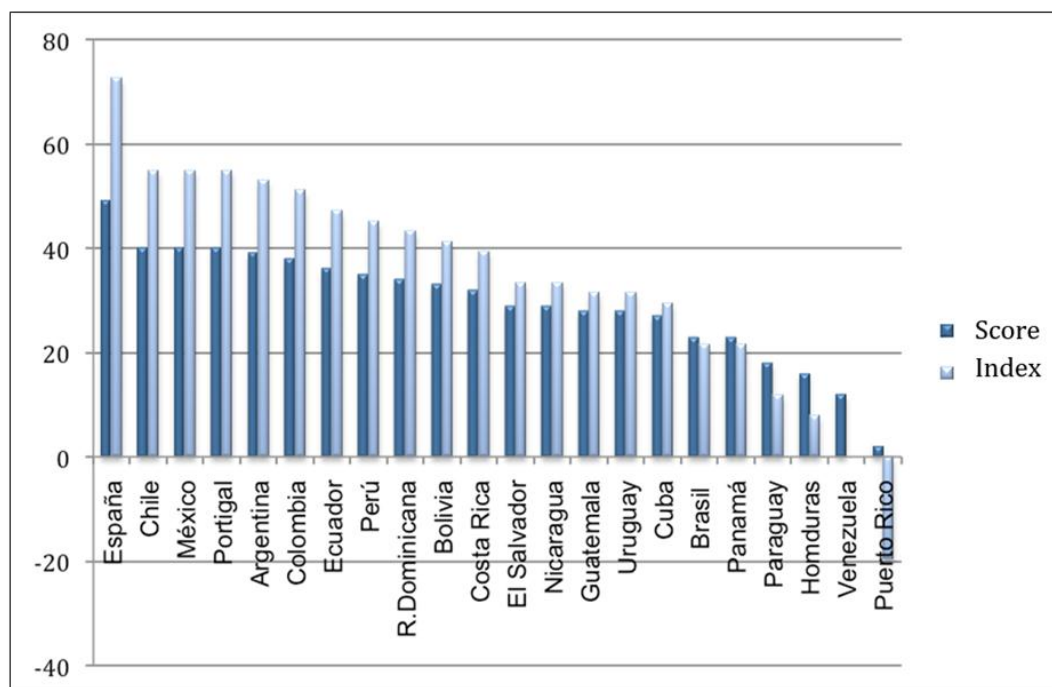
Table 12: Categorisation of websites

Country	Score	Index	Category
Spain	49	73	Optimal
Chile	40	55	Acceptable high
Mexico	40	55	
Portugal	40	55	
Argentina	39	53	
Colombia	38	51	
Ecuador	36	47	Acceptable
Peru	35	45	
Dominican R.	34	43	
Bolivia	33	41	
Costa Rica	32	39	
El Salvador	29	33	
Nicaragua	29	33	
Guatemala	28	31	
Uruguay	28	31	
Cuba	27	29	
Brazil	23	22	Acceptable low
Panama	23	22	
Paraguay	18	12	
Honduras	16	8	Improvable
Venezuela	12	0	
Puerto Rico	2	-20	

Source: Idem.

Based on the previous results, we created a ranking of the tourism websites, which is presented in the following figure.

Figure 1: Index of tourism websites in Latin America



Source: Idem.

6.3. Websites' search engine optimisation

SEO allows improving the visibility of a website, by making it appear among the first options in search engine results, which is essential for the website to reach the largest number of users interested in learning about a tourist destination. One of the aspects analysed in SEO is traffic rank, i.e. the number of visits to a website plus the number of incoming links from other web pages.

Government agencies in Latin America use websites to promote their country internationally and, thus, it is relevant to analyse their SEO. To this end, we used the Alexa web traffic analysis system (www.alexa.com) which calculates a website's traffic rank based on two variables: the number of unique visitors and the number of pageviews. The sites with the highest combination of unique visitors and pageviews are ranked with the highest scores (Marcos & Codina, 2005, 84).

This tool also allows the analysis of other aspects such as:

- Bounce Rate. Refers to the percentage of visitors who only visited the website’s home page and left without completing a particular activity. Depending on the time of permanence, some authors consider that it may be an entry by “mistake” or motivated by advertising on the web.
- Pageviews per visitor. Refers to the estimate number of pages within the site that a user visited per day.
- Daily time on site. Refers to the average time visitors stay on the site.

The web ranking of the Latin American government tourism websites reveals that, despite having presence in the network, these tourism agencies do not have a proper SEO. The countries that occupy the top positions are Spain, Mexico and Portugal, which maintain a direct relationship with their positioning as tourist destinations, since these countries receive the largest number of visitors per year in the region. However, in the web ranking these countries are not among the first 25,000 positions worldwide. Here it is important to bear in mind that, according to the Internet live stats, there were 954 million websites worldwide in the period in which the study was conducted.

Countries such as Nicaragua, Paraguay, Bolivia and Honduras, occupy the last positions, behind a million websites worldwide.

Table 13: Web ranking of government tourism websites in Latin America

Country	World ranking	Linked sites	Bounce rate	Pageviews per visitor	Daily time on site
Spain	30,516	4,532	61.50%	3	3:51
Mexico	38,697	2,576	63.40%	2	2:23
Portugal	90,172	1,695	58.90%	2	2:27
Peru	103,256	826	65.60%	2	2:11
Chile	154,122	643	64.40%	2	2:31
Colombia	168,575	1,071	55.50%	2	2:33
Costa Rica	209,195	1,245	52.50%	3	3:28
Cuba	284,891	177	40.90%	3	7:00
Venezuela	299,356	229	55,00%	2	2:16
Dominican R.	348,314	889	43.80%	2	2:26
Guatemala	372,463	546	32.40%	6	8:08
Panama	381,087	1,075	40.90%	3	3:55
Argentina	390,621	398	55.20%	2	2:12
Ecuador	439,912	658	46.20%	3	2:47
Uruguay	590,882	662	40.80%	2	2:39
El Salvador	615,958	283	33.30%	4	5:22
Brazil	846,923	454	70.80%	1	2:28
Puerto Rico	934,790	129	40,00%	3	2:52
Nicaragua	1,043,620	156	58.30%	2	2:13
Paraguay	1,404,547	329	50,00%	2	1:41

Bolivia	2,937,890	128	NA	3	2:56
Honduras	7,805,966	52	NA	1	NA

Source: Idem, based on data obtained with Alexa

6.3.1. Bounce rate

Another element of evaluation is the bounce rate, which refers to the percentage of visitors of a website that end up abandoning immediately. This abandonment rate reflects user dissatisfaction, with content, design, or the nature of the site. According to Sculley, Malkin, Basu and Bayardo (2009), the period of permanence on a website that is considered to measure the bounce rate ranges from 5 to 60 seconds.

The analysis of the results obtained through Alexa confirms that 14 countries have a bounce rate greater than 50%, i.e. more than half of visitors do not stay on the website. The 8 remaining countries have an average bounce rate of 40%. This indicates that the websites dedicated to the promotion of tourism do not meet the information needs of users.

The countries with the lowest bounce rate are: Guatemala, with 32.4%; El Salvador, with 33.3% (websites dedicated to the promotion of tourism); and Puerto Rico, with 40% (institutional website).

6.3.2. Links to the website

A fundamental aspect to measure SEO is the number of incoming links from other web pages, which also helps to establish the traffic to the site.

The countries whose websites received the largest number of incoming links are: Spain (4,532), Mexico (2,576), Portugal (1,695), Costa Rica (1,071), Panama (1,075) and Colombia (1,245). In contrast, the website of Honduras only received 52 incoming links.

Alexa identifies the incoming links and sorts them out according to their position in the ranking. In this way we selected the first 5 positions of each country to identify the types of organisations linking tourism websites: 45% are media companies, 28% search engines, 14% Wikipedia, 4% virtual communities, 4% tourist search engines, 2% social networks, 2% e-commerce, 0.5% government organisations, and 0.5% non-profit organisations.

6.3.3. Websites that link to the government websites

Alexa also allows for the identification of the websites the user visited before visiting the tourism websites of Latin American countries.

The results indicate that Google is the leading website, as it is used by 71% of users to identify the tourism websites, which highlights the importance of SEO. Before visiting the tourism websites, 12% of

users visited Facebook and 7% visited another government website from the same country. A lower number of users were redirected by Yahoo (2%), YouTube (2%) and tourist blogs (2%).

6.3.4. Number of pageviews per user and time on site

In the government tourism websites of Latin American countries, there is a correlation between the bounce rate, the number of pageviews and the time on site. Thus, the websites with the lowest bounce rate have also the largest number of pageviews and the longest browsing times on site. These results indicate that these websites are better adapted to users' requirements and are more attractive to them.

Guatemala's website's visitors remain an average of 08:08 minutes on site and view approximately 6 pages. El Salvador's website's visitors stay on site an average of 05:00 minutes and view an average of 4 pages. However, satisfaction with the website is not only determined by the number of internal pageviews. Cuba's website's visitors only viewed 3 internal pages but their time on site was 7 minutes, probably due to its online booking system.

Tourists 2.0 visit other websites for about 2:31 minutes and visit an average of 2 and 3 pages (11 and 6 countries, respectively). The visitors of the websites of Brazil (with the highest bounce rate) and Honduras (with no data records) only stay on the homepage.

6.3.5. Geographic location of visitors

Alexa also allows for the identification of the geographic location of visitors and we used this functionality to evaluate the national and international visibility of the websites created by Latin America governments to promote their touristic attractions around the world. This functionality is reliable, but Alexa cannot generate accurate results about certain aspects when data are scarce. Thus, Alexa did not provide information about the geographic location of the users that visited the websites of Bolivia, Cuba, Honduras and Paraguay during the period of analysis.

According to the results obtained, it can be said that the tourism websites do not have international visibility. In 15 websites the highest percentage of visitors were from the same country.

The comparison of the percentages of international and national visits to the tourist websites confirms that their impact is national. The percentage of international visitors is greater than the percentage of national visitors only in 3 of the 15 websites (Peru, Portugal and Dominican Republic).

All of the visitors of the websites of El Salvador, Uruguay and Venezuela are national, which confirms that the government tourism websites have not managed to enter the international market. Brazil is the only country that only registers international visits, although the percentage is minimal: 10% of visitors from United States of America.

The obtained data also specifies the country of origin of the visitors of Latin American tourism: people from the United States visits the websites of 13 tourist destinations; users from Germany, France, India

and Italy search for information about 2 countries; and users from Canada, the United Kingdom and Turkey only visit one website.

Within the region, in addition to searching for information about their same country, Spanish users explore other 5 destinations; users from Argentina and Ecuador explore 2 countries; and users from Colombia and Mexico visit the websites of another country. Of the 22 countries of the region, only 12 register visitors from the same country.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

The research shows that the active management of the communication of the tourism websites influences their position on the web. The location and categorisation resulting from the two studies are proportional: the websites that were best rated in our *Evaluation Model* also occupy the top positions in the Alexa ranking. Spain leads the two rankings, while Mexico, Portugal and Chile are in the top four positions.

Communication models and processes have evolved. However, the tourism promotion platforms used by the Latin American governments still follow a traditional and one-way model of communication and, thus, are not attractive for visitors. It is almost a rule that Internet users are always right, so government agencies must adapt themselves to users' participation and interaction needs and create spaces that satisfy these needs.

On the official websites of Latin American countries offer content and information for tourists. However, these sites do not use multimedia elements nor provided modern digital resources and tools that encourage users to visit them, to remain there for a long time, and to go back until they become loyal. In other words, the tourism websites of Latin American countries do not allow users to virtually experience travelling and only provide access to a wealth of information, which results in a short permanence on site (an average of 2:30 minutes), a high bounce rate (an average of 50%) and a small number of pageviews (an average of 2 pageviews).

The results of the evaluation of the websites and of the implementation of the SEO ranking show that the government platforms used for tourism promotion in Latin America need to be updated. They must create quality, dynamic and interactive content; implement multimedia resources to make the offer tangible, because the use of photographs (almost as the only resource) is not enough; incorporate new and varied digital tools such as games, guided tours, audio guides, etc. However, these websites need to create interactive spaces and communities where users voluntarily promote the tourist destination, thus promoting what we have termed *collaborative tourism communication 2.0*.

8. Note

1.The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) is the United Nations agency responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism. As the leading international organization in the field of tourism, UNWTO promotes tourism as a driver of economic growth, inclusive

development and environmental sustainability and offers leadership and support to the sector in advancing knowledge and tourism policies worldwide.

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