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## Public relations in the tourism sector. Interactivity and social features of the official tourism websites of Spanish sun and beach destinations

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### Abstract

**Introduction and objectives.** This articles presents the results of a study on the degree of interactivity of the official tourism websites of the main Spanish sun and beach destinations, given their importance in achieving a two-way communication. The study also evaluates key aspects related to social media and the social web, which are also necessary to achieve two-way communication and establish relationships with the public. **Methods.** The study is based on content and functional analysis of a series of indicators that provide descriptive information about the status of the official tourism websites and a score that allows for a comparative analysis among them. **Results and conclusions.** The results show significant shortcomings in the field of interactivity, but also an important development regarding social media and social web tools. The article ends with the proposal of a series of good practices that are necessary to implement to improve the relational aspects of tourism websites, which are essential tools in tourism marketing and communication.

### Keywords

Official tourism website; relational marketing; interactivity; social media; social web; digital communication strategy

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1. Introduction. 2. The relational and collaborative approach to marketing and communication strategies. 3. Social web and interactivity. 4. Hypotheses, objectives and methods. 5. Results. 5.1. Results on interactivity. 5.2. Results on the social web and presence in social media. 6. Discussion and conclusions. 7. References.

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## 1. Introduction

One of the factors that has determined the evolution of tourism is the emergence of new media (Bonilla, 2013). Information and communication technologies [ICT] are increasingly used by people to plan trips and choose destinations due mainly to the large volume of information and opinions that are published on the Internet by other tourists (Prat, 2012: 240).

The Internet has become an indispensable tool in the planning and development of travelling, as well as one of the main channels for the marketing of a destination (Caro, Luque & Zayas, 2015). The Internet and online marketing and communication channels are evolving quickly and appropriately, and are identifying very quickly the needs of the tourist 2.0 and of tourism 2.0 (Domínguez Vila & Araújo Vila, 2014). The tourist 2.0 refers to an informed and participatory traveller who no longer makes his travelling-related decisions based exclusively on the advice given by a travel agency (Suau Jiménez, 2012: 144). Instead, the new tourist takes into account all the information he collects from the Internet. It is precisely the need for information which has made websites a key instrument for the communication of tourism destinations (Fernández Cavia, Díaz-Luque, Huertas, Rovira, Pedraza-Jiménez, Sicily, Gómez & Míguez, 2013; Fernández-Cavia & Huertas-Roig, 2009; Díaz-Luque, 2009). Hallet & Kaplan-Weinger (2010), Lee & Gretzel (2012), Luna-Nevarez & Hyman (2012) and Morrison (2013) consider tourism websites as the main tool in destination selection and trip planning.

In addition, in accordance with the new roles of the consumer as content producer and prescriber of products and services, recommendation systems, and the opinions and experiences of other travellers, etc., websites are, together with information, the determining elements when selecting a tourism destination, planning the trip itself and its components (Caro *et al.*, 2015). Along this line, Huertas Roig (2008) points out that the information that comes from the experience of other travellers exerts a great influence on the decisions of other users.

The current consumer, which has been renamed *adprosumer* (Caro *et al.*, 2015), like the tourist 2.0, requires two-way communication channels to receive information and interact. For this reason, the tourist 2.0 prefers to learn from wikis, forums, blogs, etc. (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). The exchange of information and experience generates a high degree of satisfaction in users. This is the main reason for the use of these spaces (Chung & Buhalis, 2008) and the basis of their success as a promotion and marketing channel. Two-way communication channels enable organisations to establish links with users and to obtain feedback from users, and according to authors like Wright, this is the smartest decision organisations can take (2006: 4).

Along with the success and the massive use of the Internet and more specifically of the social web or Web 2.0, this channel has a lower influence in the selection of the destination and the vacation package in comparison to other tourist products and services such as accommodation and transport (Google Travel Spain, Institute for Tourism Studies, Exceltur, Allianz, the Tourism Department of the Spanish Ministry of Industry, Energy and Tourism & AddedValue, 2013). This reality has inspired this research study, which focuses on the implementation of the features and relational tools by official tourism websites. Their evaluation is based on an analytical model focused on measuring the interactivity and social function of the websites, as well as the presence of tourism destinations on social media. The objective is to determine whether the websites respond to the expectations of the tourist 2.0 and thus effectively fulfil their role as the main promotion and marketing channel.

## 2. The relational and collaborative approach to marketing and communication strategies

In 2004, Philip Kotler argued that transactional marketing had evolved into relational marketing, in which the main purpose is to establish relations with consumers to retain them, and finally into collaborative marketing, which is based on a new individual that, through relations, helps the organisation to create value and to attract new consumers (Serrano Cobos, 2006).

Pérez & Massoni (2009) also allude to the need to reorient the approach to the relations of the organisation with their audiences in his New Strategic Theory (NST). The paradigm of the NST displaces the interest from the economic sphere to the complexity of the public and the individual, focusing on relations and the relational human being.

Technological development has been instrumental in the evolution of the consumer towards a new figure known as *prosumer* (Toffler, 1980) or *adprosumer* (Caro *et al.*, 2015), who uses the Internet and digital channels to interact with mass audiences, apparently, out of the control of the organisation. Organisations also use them to interact with their consumers and that is why relational and collaborative marketing are closely related with marketing 2.0 (Gálvez Clavijo, 2010: 18).

Marketing 2.0 also advocates for a focus on individuals and on the dialogue between organisations and consumers, which requires a change in the traditional orientation of this discipline from the organisation towards consumers, who constitute a market consisting of conversations (Levine, Locke, Sears & Weinberger, 2008), connected spaces where customers become agents and collaborative, participatory and interactive social media (Cortés, 2009). As a result, organisations must provide them with the necessary channels so that they can participate and interact with their brands, products and services, thus promoting personalised relations that generate engagement (Campillo Alhama, Ramos Soler & Castelló Martínez, 2010).

The relational approach implies a new way to conceive and implement marketing and communication strategies. They must answer to an individual who, thanks to the massive implementation of the Internet and mobile devices (Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación, 2015; Google Travel Spain *et al.*, 2013), which can access universal content freely, from anywhere and at any time, and can even generate content. The development of ICT and relation, information and communication technologies [RICT] (Marfil-Carmona, Hergueta Covacho & Villalonga Gómez, 2015), and the consequent expectations of users, derive on the need of developing formats and models that are adapted to the new communication and consumption environments, which includes the object of study: the website. This channel, together with other representatives of the web 2.0, offer organisations many opportunities to interact with their consumers and achieve conversion, loyalty and recommendation thanks to the conversations they can establish (Castelló Martínez, Del Pino & Ramos Soler, 2014: 24).

In the field of tourism websites, in the heyday of the marketing 2.0, new marketing variables begin to be integrated: e-market research, online channels that allow the constant analysis of the audience and their behaviour; e-attention, web pages incorporate links and spaces in which users are served in relation to consultations; e-public relations, both through the web and newsletter that disseminate information that contributes to the creation and maintenance of the image of the tourist destination; and relational e-marketing or social media marketing, in relation to the creation of spaces on the web that promote the interaction of users: online chats, forums, etc., as well as social media, such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, etc. (Martínez González, 2011).

The relational approach to the marketing and communication strategies of destination marketing organisations [DMO] is only possible through the implementation of channels and tools that enable organisations to interact and converse with their audiences, and allow the members of the audience to interact among them. The analytical model therefore focuses on the integration of some of the aforementioned marketing 2.0 variables: e-attention, e-public relations, and e-marketing. All of these variables depend on the interactivity and social functions of the websites and are key to fostering relations with the public.

### 3. Social web and interactivity

The terms *prosumer* (Toffler, 1980) and *adprosumer* (Caro *et al.*, 2015) allude to an individual who not only receives the information generated by the organisation, but also filters and assimilates information and then disseminates it again after he has reinterpreted it based on his own experiences and knowledge (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000).

Interactivity and two-way communication are characteristic features of the social web, a space where information is not only provided, but also shared, complemented with hyperlinks to other websites, with comments from users, etc., generating content in a decentralised way (Caro *et al.*, 2015).

Cho & Cheon (2005) break down the concept of interactivity of the websites into three levels of interaction: user-message, user-manager and user-user. This research focuses on user-manager and user-user interaction, since they are the less developed levels in the official tourism websites (Míguez-González & Fernández-Cavia, 2015; Huertas, Rovira & Fernández-Cavia, 2011). The study also takes into account the third level of interaction (user-user), due to the influence of the opinions of users in the evaluation of products, services and organisations by other users, and on their loyalty (Gruen, Osmonbekov & Czaplewski, 2005). This reality acquires special importance in sectors such as tourism, in which a large number of products and services refer to experiences and emotions (Senecal & Nantal, 2004; Buhalis, 2003). The current tourist wants to buy more of an experience than a product or service and the experiences of other users help him to plan and imagine his own (Camarero Rioja, 2002; Senecal & Nantal, 2004) and influence his final decision by bringing an element of objectivity that is used to contrast commercial information (Ricci & Wietsma, 2006).

The World Tourism Organisation & the European Travel Commission (2008) argue that interactivity is one of the most important aspects when it comes to developing and maintaining a quality tourism website. In this regard, authors such as Díaz-Luque, Guevara & Anton (2006), Huertas Roig & Fernández-Cavia (2006), Huertas Roig (2008), Huertas *et al.* (2011), Luna-Nevarez & Hyman (2012), Fernández-Cavia, Vinyals Mirabent & López Pérez (2013) and Fernández-Cavia *et al.* (2013), include interactivity as an indicator of the quality of the official websites of tourism destinations, concluding that those that encourage it have an increased chance of success.

Interactivity is measurable and gradual (Steuer, 1992) and, therefore, digital channels can be evaluated depending on their level of interactivity, and hence their quality.

Despite their relevance, the studies carried out to date have detected a limited implementation of interactive resources at the user-manager and user-user levels in the official tourism websites. Huertas Roig & Fernández-Cavia (2006) and Díaz-Luque *et al.* (2006) have showed that the interactive resources at both levels were virtually non-existent. Years later, and despite the technological development, Huertas Roig (2008) and Huertas *et al.* (2011) also confirmed the almost total absence of tools for communication between users, and recommended the use of tools such as online chatrooms, contact sections, among others, to enhance users' interaction with website

managers (Huertas *et al.*, 2011). Luna-Nevarez & Hyman (2012), Fernández Cavia, Vinyals Mirabent *et al.* (2013) and Fernández-Cavia *et al.* (2014) conclude that interactivity is one of the areas that requires further development. The last two cited research works also show that the relational aspects of the websites, interactivity, social web and mobile communication, obtained the worst results, with the exception of the social web. This parameter is well valued because websites often provide the necessary mechanisms to users to share content on social networks and similar websites (Fernández Cavia, Vinyals Mirabent *et al.*, 2013). However, and although most of the destinations are present in the major social networks, virtually none of their websites integrates these social networks within their structure as it is advised (Fernández-Cavia *et al.*, 2013; Fernández Cavia, Vinyals Mirabent *et al.* 2013; Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004; Caro *et al.*, 2015).

Míguez-González & Fernández-Cavia (2015) also carried out a research study in the field of interactivity and the social web and their results are not much different from those achieved in previous research.

The limited implementation of resources and tools that facilitate the participation of the user is due to the fact that their results on sales are mid-long term (Domínguez Vila & Araujo Vila, 2014), the fear of comments, as well as the lack of staff to respond properly (Chamorro Martín, 2006). However, the greater the participation of the user, the greater their loyalty and identification with the organisation and the more information that will be available.

In the context of relationship marketing and based on the online reality, the objective of this research, as mentioned, is to analyse the capacity of the main Spanish sun and beach tourism destinations to manage relationships with their public through their official websites and social media. This analysis will be used to determine whether, as Martínez González (2011) points out, DMO have adapted themselves to the requirements of today's users and consumers.

#### **4. Hypotheses, objectives and methods**

The strong dynamism that characterises the online environment requires a constant review of websites through the use of analytical models that are updated based on the new roles of users and technological developments. Based on this reality we have formulated the main research hypothesis of this research study: official tourism websites incorporate tools and spaces that enhance user-manager as well as user-user interaction. The second hypothesis is that tourism destinations include in their official websites the tools and functions that are characteristic of the social web and are present in the main social media.

The testing of both hypotheses will allow us to draw conclusions about the implementation of the relational approach in the public tourism sector, determined by the ability of websites to satisfy the expectations of the tourist 2.0. Based on the previous, we have formulated the following objectives:

- O1. Measure the degree of interactivity of websites at the user-manager and user-user levels.
- O2. Assess the implementation of the tools and functionality of the social web.
- O3. Identify the social media in which the tourist destinations are present.

The research is based on an empirical and analytical method and on the review of literature on the role of the Internet in the tourism sector, on the relational and collaborative trends in public and private organisations, and on web interactivity and the social web. An exploratory analysis is performed based on the case study of the official tourism websites of the Spanish sun and beach



destinations, due to their relevance in the Spanish tourism industry. Data collection is based on observation, the use of websites, and the monitoring of the communications established as user with the websites' managers. The period of analysis covers from 1 January to 29 February, 2016.

The sample is formed of the Spanish sun and beach destinations with the heaviest national and international tourism traffic. Catalonia, Canary Islands, Balearic Islands, Andalusia and Valencia are the autonomous communities that receive the largest volume of international tourism traffic (Instituto de Estudios Turísticos, Instituto de Turismo de España [Turespaña] & Ministerio de Industria, Energía y Turismo, 2014a). Andalusia, Catalonia and Valencia, in that order, lead the ranking of national tourism destinations. Canary Islands and the Balearic Islands are not in the top five destinations but received 4% and 2%, respectively, of the resident tourists (Instituto de Estudios Turísticos, Turespaña & Ministerio de Industria, Energía y Turismo, 2014b).

The final sample includes 20 different regional websites: 5 corresponding to autonomous communities and 15 to provinces and islands, as in the case of the Canary Islands. The latter types of websites have been included in order to work with a representative and convenience sample. The selection was based on the following criteria: they had to be official websites of Spanish sun and beach tourism destinations (autonomous communities and provinces/islands) that target the final tourist and offer full access and navigation (Table 1).

**Table 1: Sample**

Destination marketing organisation or body	Website
Empresa Pública para la Gestión del Turismo y del Deporte de Andalucía, S.A. [And]	<a href="http://www.andalucia.org/es/">http://www.andalucia.org/es/</a>
Servicio Provincial de Turismo Diputación de Almería [AL]	<a href="http://www.turismoalmeria.com/">http://www.turismoalmeria.com/</a>
Patronato Provincial de Turismo. Diputación de Granada [GR]	<a href="http://www.turgranada.es/">http://www.turgranada.es/</a>
Patronato Provincial de Turismo. Diputación de Cádiz [CA]	<a href="http://www.cadizturismo.com/">http://www.cadizturismo.com/</a>
Patronato de Turismo de la Provincia de Málaga Turismo y Planificación Costa del Sol S.L.U [MA]	<a href="http://www.visitacostadelsol.com/">http://www.visitacostadelsol.com/</a>
Patronato Provincial de Turismo de Huelva [H]	<a href="http://www.turismohuelva.org/es/">http://www.turismohuelva.org/es/</a>
Agència Catalana de Turisme [CT]	<a href="http://www.catalunya.com/">www.catalunya.com/</a>
Patronat de Turisme Costa Brava Girona [GE]	<a href="http://ca.costabrava.org/">http://ca.costabrava.org/</a>
Diputació de Barcelona [B]	<a href="http://www.barcelonaesmoltmes.cat/es/">http://www.barcelonaesmoltmes.cat/es/</a>
Patronat de Turisme de la Diputació de Tarragona [T]	<a href="http://www.costadaurada.info/d1/index.php">http://www.costadaurada.info/d1/index.php</a>
Agència Valenciana del Turisme [C.V.]	<a href="http://comunitatvalenciana.com/">http://comunitatvalenciana.com/</a>
Patronat de Turisme de la Diputació de València [V]	<a href="http://www.valenciaturisme.org/">http://www.valenciaturisme.org/</a>
Patronato Provincial de Turismo de la Costa Blanca [A]	<a href="http://www.costablanca.org/Esp/Pag">http://www.costablanca.org/Esp/Pag</a>

	<a href="#">inas/default.aspx</a>
Patronato Provincial de Turismo de Castellón [CS]	<a href="http://www.turismodecastellon.com/">http://www.turismodecastellon.com/</a>
IBATUR (Institut Balear del Turisme) [I.B.]	<a href="http://www.illesbalears.es/index.jsp">http://www.illesbalears.es/index.jsp</a>
Promotur Turismo Canarias S.A. [Can]	<a href="http://www.holaislascanarias.com/">http://www.holaislascanarias.com/</a>
Turismo de Tenerife [TF]	<a href="http://www.webtenerife.com/">http://www.webtenerife.com/</a>
Patronato de Turismo de Fuerteventura [F]	<a href="http://visitfuerteventura.es/">http://visitfuerteventura.es/</a>
Patronato de Turismo de Gran Canaria [G.C.]	<a href="http://www.grancanaria.com/patronato_turismo/">http://www.grancanaria.com/patronato_turismo/</a>
Sociedad de Promoción Exterior de Lanzarote S.A. [LZ]	<a href="http://www.turismolanzarote.com/">http://www.turismolanzarote.com/</a>

Source: Authors' own creation.

The analytical model proposed here (tables 2 and 3) updates the models proposed by Díaz-Luque *et al.* (2006), Huertas Roig (2008), Huertas *et al.* (2011), Fernández-Cavia, Vinyals Mirabent *et al.* (2013), Fernández-Cavia *et al.* (2013), Fernández-Cavia, Rovira, Díaz-Luque and Cavaller (2014), and Míguez-González and Fernández-Cavia (2015) with new indicators and based on the relational approach demanded by the current marketing and communication strategies. This review is required by the constant evolution that characterises the online environment.

The analysis of interactivity brings together a total of 12 indicators, distributed into two levels of interaction: user-manager and user-user (Table 2).

**Table 2: Indicators for the analysis of interactivity**

	Indicator	Evaluation scale
<b>User-manager level</b>		
1	Internal channel for tourism-related consultations from users.	0: No 1: Yes, but it is limited (language, query type, etc.) or external 2: Yes
2	Quick and personalised answers to user's questions.	0: No 1: Yes, but they are not personalised, detailed and delivered quickly. 2: Yes, they are delivered quickly and personalised way.
3	Necessary data so that users can contact the web managers through other online (email) and offline (phone, mail, etc.) channels.	0: No 1: Yes, but they are inoperative or incomplete (links). They provide data of related organisms, but not of the web's managers. 2: Yes
4	Evaluation mechanisms: surveys, forms, voting	0: No

	systems etc.	1: Yes, but they are developed by other platforms, such as TripAdvisor 2: Yes
5	Periodic dissemination of subscription-based customised newsletters.	0: No 1: Yes, but it is not customised to subscribers' language or interests. 2: Yes
6	Online customer services (chat, VoIP technology, etc.)	0: No 1: Yes, but they have limitations (language, time, etc.) 2: Yes
7	Spaces and tools for users to comment on the contents of the website.	0: No 1: Yes, but comments have to be reviewed by web managers before their publication. 2: Yes
<b>User-user level</b>		
1	Built-in users' club or community integrated (users' blog, for example)	0: No 1: Yes, but it is not operational or does not take advantage of the interaction with managers (customisation) or other users. 2: Yes
2	External users' club or community accessible from the website (users' blogs, etc.) and managed by DMO.	0: No 1: Yes, but it is not operational or does not take advantage of the interaction with managers (customisation) or other users. 2: Yes
3	Spaces and tools for user-user interaction with respect to comments on content published by the DMO.	0: No 1: Yes, but comments have to be reviewed by web managers before their publication. 2: Yes
4	Spaces and tools for users to publish their own content.	0: No 1: Yes, but contents have to be reviewed by web managers before their publication. 2: Yes
5	Spaces and tools for user-user interaction with respect to comments on contents published by users on website.	0: No 1: Yes, but comments have to be reviewed by web managers before their publication. 2: Yes

Source: authors' own creation based on Díaz-Luque *et al.* (2006); Fernández-Cavia, Vinyals Mirabent *et al.* (2013); Fernández-Cavia *et al.* (2013); Fernández-Cavia *et al.* (2014); Huertas Roig (2008); Huertas *et al.* (2011); Martínez-Sala (2015) and Míguez-González and Fernández-Cavia (2015).



The websites' use of tools and functions of the social web and their presence in social media is evaluated by means of 9 indicators (Table 3).

**Table 3: Indicators for the analysis of social web features and social media presence**

	Indicator	Evaluation scale
<b>Social media/social web</b>		
1	RSS contents	0: No 1: Yes, but it has limitations (to subscribe, channel, topic etc.) or is not operational. 2: Yes
2	Blog	0: No/Yes, but is not for tourists. 1: Yes, there are sections with blog format / Yes, but it is not operational. 2: Yes
3	Presence in microblogging networks, like Twitter.	0: No 1: Yes, but it is not integrated in the website. 2: Yes
4	Presence in recommendation-based social networks, like Facebook and Google+	0: No 1: Yes, but it is not integrated in the website. 2: Yes
5	Presence in specialised recommendation-based social networks, like TripAdvisor and Minube.	0: No 1: Yes, but it is not integrated in the website. 2: Yes
6	Presence in image-based social networks like Instagram, Flickr, Pinterest.	0: No 1: Yes, but it is not integrated in the website. 2: Yes
7	Presence in video-based social networks like YouTube and Vimeo.	0: No 1: Yes, but it is not integrated in the website. 2: Yes
8	Integration of contents published on social networks and social media.	0: No 1: Yes, but only basic data (number of users or comments, etc.) 2: Yes
9	Tools for sharing the website's contents on social networks/social media.	0: No 1: Yes, but not through the major networks (AIMC, 2015) 2: Yes

Source: authors' own creation based on Fernández-Cavia, Vinyals Mirabent *et al.* (2013); Fernández-Cavia *et al.* (2013); Fernández-Cavia *et al.* (2014) and Míguez-González & Fernández-Cavia (2015).



SOCIAL MEDIA	
Average	1.33 1.33 1.78 0.67 1.78 1.56 1.56 1.44 1.56 1.22 1.33 1.56 1.56 1.33 0.89 1.67 1.56 1.33 1.11 1.44 1.4 1.44 1.28

  

RELATIONAL CAPACITY	
Average	0.7 0.95 1.15 0.5 1.65 0.95 0.85 1.0 1.45 1.0 0.85 1.05 0.85 1.0 0.65 1.25 1.35 1.05 0.8 1.35 1.02 1.14 0.91

Source: Authors' own creation.

### 5.1. Results on interactivity

Despite the importance of interactivity, the results show a limited evolution in relation to previous research studies. Most websites fail in the implementation of the tools and functionality needed to establish a two-way communication channel between the website's managers and users, and among users.

With regards to the level of user-manager interactivity (Table 5) the average (1) is exceeded only in the presentation of data about the managers of the websites and the built-in channel to contact the websites' managers. Some websites even limit the range of issues about which users can make questions. Catalonia, for example, only allows users to request publications and for other types of queries it redirects users to the website of the Catalan Agency for Tourism. Another common practice is the integration in the website of a channel to perform queries. Instead, websites rely on external tools such as *Outlook Express* email service, which limits the interaction abilities of users, who usually opt for platforms like *gmail.com* and *hotmail.com*. This occurs on the websites of the Canary Islands and Alicante. Andalusia only lists tourism information offices as well as other tourist agencies next to a search engine to locate them.

With regards to the analysis and monitoring of the queries, the study confirmed that most websites respond quickly and that the responses are personalised although, in general, the information they provide is partial. For their evaluation, we made a query about locations and conditions for water sports. And although the websites of most destinations answer questions about their locations, few of them provide information about the conditions.

Another type of frequent response is given by the websites of destinations such as Valencia, Alicante and Gran Canaria, which only provide data on specialised companies and ask users to contact these companies to solve their doubts. Finally, Catalonia, Barcelona, Tarragona, Valencia, Almeria and Huelva do not answer users' questions.

The indicators in which the websites obtained the lowest scores, in general terms in the user-manager level, are those relating to the comments on their textual and audiovisual contents, their rating by users, and the dissemination of the newsletter. Finally, none of the websites incorporates an online chat room.

By regional typology, the results are similar between the regional websites, which reached an average rating of 0.74, and the provincial/island websites, which reached an average rating of 0.72. However, there are differences with respect to indicators such as the newsletter and the ability to comment, and rate content, which performed better among the regional websites.

**Table 5. Quantitative results on user-manager interactivity**

User-manager interactivity								
	Contact: internal channel	Contact: reply	Data of DMO	Surveys, forms, voting	Newsletter	Online customer service	Users' comments vs. managers	Average user- manager interactivity (*)
Lanzarote	2	2	2	2	0	0	2	1.43
Valencian C.	2	1	0	2	2	0	2	1.29
Fuerteventura	2	1	2	2	0	0	2	1.29
Gerona	2	1	2	2	0	0	0	1.00
Castellón	2	1	2	0	2	0	0	1.00
Andalusia	0	0	1	2	2	0	2	1.00
Malaga	2	1	2	0	2	0	0	1.00
Tenerife	2	2	1	0	0	0	2	1.00
Gran Canaria	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0.86
Barcelona	1	0	2	0	2	0	0	0.71
Almeria	2	0	0	0	2	0	1	0.71
Granada	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0.71
Balearic Islands	1	1	1	0	2	0	0	0.71
Canary Islands	0	2	0	1	2	0	0	0.71
Tarragona	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0.57
Huelva	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0.57
Valencia	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0.43
Cadiz	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0.43
Alicante	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.14
Catalonia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00

Average for all websites	1.35	0.85	1.35	0.55	0.80	0	0.55	0.78
Average for websites of	0.60	0.80	0.40	1.00	1.60	0	0.80	0.74

autonomous communities.								
Average for websites of provinces/islands	1.47	0.80	1.53	0.40	0.40	0	0.47	0.72

Source: Authors' own creation.

(\*) Data sorted according to average user-manager interactivity

When it comes to user-user interactivity (Table 6), there is a difference between the two types of websites under analysis. The websites of autonomous communities achieved a score of 1.08 while the provincial/island websites reached a rating of 0.32. The high score obtained by the websites of the autonomous communities is primarily due to the fact that the websites of Valencia and Andalusia achieved the maximum score. The rest of the websites reached different results. Canary Islands and Catalonia, with a score of 1 and 0.4, respectively, reached an above-average score in the field of user-manager interactivity, but the website of the Balearic Islands, which does not offer any of the tools considered at this level, affected the average global score for the field of interactivity.

Among the websites of the autonomous communities we can highlight the creation of users' clubs or communities that are made accessible from the website, mainly blogs, and to a lesser extent built in the website. Only the Valencia Community, Andalusia and the Canary Islands have created an authentic user community that, after registration, allows users to publish their own content, and recommend, rate and comment the content posted on the website, by the operator or other users. Other websites that offer the user-registration option allow users to store information through applications such as *Cuaderno de viaje* ("Travel log"), in the case of Alicante; *Mi Granada* ("My Granada"), in the case of Granada, and *Tu itinerario* ("Your itinerary"), in the case of Malaga. However, this information cannot be published or shared, which makes it difficult to consider these websites as genuine communities. The worst scores were obtained with respect to the possibility given to users to comment on the contents published by other users and the contents created by the websites' managers. Only Valencia and Andalusia provide the tools necessary to do so.

None of provincial/island websites exceeds the average score reached in the user-user interactivity indicators (1). The best rated indicators correspond to user clubs and communities accessible from the website, which obtained a score of 0.87 because the websites of Barcelona, Valencia, Alicante, Huelva, Tenerife and Lanzarote include hyperlinks to their respective blogs. In some cases, as in Tenerife, these clubs or communities are built into the website. In other cases, as in Lanzarote, the blog has been created in the free-to-use *WordPress* platform and is not associated with the domain of the website, contrary to the recommendations of Míguez-González and Fernández-Cavia (2015). In the rest of the indicators, the maximum average score is 0.33 and it corresponds to the least-used tools and features, as it occurs in the websites of the autonomous communities: the possibility to comment on the content and the comments of other users. In this area, the case of Almeria stands out as it reserves the right to publish users' comments (a positive comment had not been published even three weeks after it had been posted).



**Table 6. Quantitative results on user-user interactivity**

User-user interactivity						
	Built-in users' clubs or communities	Linked-in users' clubs or communities	User-on-user comments (on contents posted by website)	Stories, experiences, opinions, etc.	Users' comments on users' contents	Average user-user interactivity (*)
Valencian Community	2	2	2	2	2	2.00
Andalusia	2	2	2	2	2	2.00
Tenerife	2	2	2	0	0	1.20
Canary Islands	2	1	0	2	0	1.00
Almeria	1	1	0	2	0	0.80
Huelva	2	2	0	0	0	0.80
Lanzarote	0	2	0	2	0	0.80
Catalonia	0	2	0	0	0	0.40
Barcelona	0	2	0	0	0	0.40
Valencia	0	2	0	0	0	0.40
Alicante	0	2	0	0	0	0.40
Gerona	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Tarragona	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Castellón	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Granada	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Malaga	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Cadiz	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Balearic Islands	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Fuerteventura	0	0	0	0	0	0.00
Gran Canaria	0	0	0	0	0	0.00

Average for all websites	0.55	1.00	0.30	0.50	0.20	0.51
Average for websites of autonomous	1.20	1.40	0.80	1.20	0.80	1.08

communities.						
Average for websites of provinces/islands	0.33	0.87	0.13	0.27	0.00	0.32

Source: authors' own creation.

(\*) Data sorted according to average user-user interactivity

## 5.2. Results on the social web and presence in social media

In general terms, the results can be described as positive in this indicator. The average score (1.40) is higher than that obtained with regards to interactivity despite the latter is a feature that has been required since longer time ago. According to the regionality, the websites of the autonomous communities reached a higher score than the websites of the provinces/islands. The individual analysis indicates that only two websites do not reach the average score (1), precisely one from each category: Tarragona and the Balearic Islands. At the other end, the websites that obtained the highest scores are those of Barcelona and the Valencian Community, both with 1.78 (Table 4).

**Table 7: Indicators of social web and social media presence: summary of results**

	Score	All websites	Websites of autonomous communities	Websites of provinces / islands
RSS contents	0	75.00%	60.00%	80.00%
	1	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	2	25.00%	40.00%	20.00%
Blog	0	55.00%	40.00%	60.00%
	1	10.00%	20.00%	6.67%
	2	35.00%	40.00%	33.33%
Presence in microblogging networks like Twitter.	0	5.00%	0.00%	6.67%
	1	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	2	95.00%	100.00%	93.33%
Presence in recommendation-based social networks like Facebook and Google+.	0	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	1	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	2	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Presence in specialised recommendation-based sites like	0	60.00%	80.00%	53.33%
	1	5.00%	0.00%	6.67%

TripAdvisor.	2	35.00%	20.00%	40.00%
Presence in image-based social networks, like Instagram and Pinterest.	0	5.00%	0.00%	6.67%
	1	5.00%	0.00%	6.67%
	2	90.00%	100.00%	86.67%
Presence in video-based social networks, like YouTube and Vimeo.	0	5.00%	0.00%	6.67%
	1	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
	2	95.00%	100.00%	93.33%
Integration of contents in social networks	0	40.00%	40.00%	40.00%
	1	5.00%	0.00%	6.67%
	2	55.00%	60.00%	53.33%
Dissemination and sharing through social networks	0	10.00%	20.00%	6.67%
	1	5.00%	0.00%	6.67%
	2	85.00%	80.00%	86.67%

Source: authors' own creation.

The least used social media and tools are: RSS contents (25%), the inclusion of links to external recommendation-based social networks specialised in touristic products and services, such as TripAdvisor and Minube (35%), blogs (35%) and the website-integration of the contents generated on social networks (55%). The rest of the indicators obtained the maximum score, in most cases in over 90% of the websites. Recommendation-based social networks like Facebook and Google+ stand out as they are included in 100% of the analysed websites.

By regional typology, the websites of the autonomous communities have largely implemented this type of resource. All of these websites are present in external microblogging, recommendation-based, image-based and video-based social networks. However, some of the provinces are not yet present on essential social networks such as Twitter (Tarragona) and YouTube (Almería). Almería, in particular, includes YouTube videos on its website, but does not have its own account on this platform. The most important social networks are Facebook (100%), Twitter and YouTube (95%), and Instagram (80%). The rest of the social networks are less important in the sample of websites. Pinterest is used by 50% of the websites, Google+ by 45%, and Flickr by 35%, while Vimeo is only used by Castellón.

Some destinations have yet to implement the option to share the contents of the website through social networks, as in the case of Tarragona and the Balearic Islands. There are also cases in which the resource is used partially: for example, the website of Lanzarote just allows users to share specific contents such as photographs.

Finally, with regards to the website's integration of content generated on social networks, the situation is similar between the websites of the provinces/islands and the autonomous communities. Only 40% of the websites do not show the comments users post on their social network profiles.

Catalonia, for example, does not integrate this type of content in its website (only on its blog) while Castellón's website only shows the number of users and comments.

## 6. Discussion and conclusions

The low degree of interactivity detected with the analysis coincides with the results of previous research works, such as the one carried out by Huertas *et al.* (2011), which points out that while websites do encourage user-message interactivity, they do not encourage the other two interaction levels identified by Cho & Cheon (2005), despite these levels are a decisive factor in the visibility of the website and in achievement of the marketing and communication objectives of the tourism destinations. Despite the advantages offered by two-way communication (Chung & Buhalis, 2008) and the incorporation of the opinions and experiences of other users (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004), the analysed websites have not improved their resources to enable users to interact with other users and the site managers. Broadly speaking, the analysed websites are not characterised by a high degree of interactivity in any of the analysed levels, which refutes the main hypothesis, except for the websites of Valencia and Andalusia, which do not achieve the maximum score but obtained 1.42 and 1.58 points, respectively.

Míguez-González and Fernández-Cavia (2015) also confirmed the limited interactivity at the user-user and user-manager levels. In the first level the authors allude to the need to generate spaces for users to publish their opinions, recommendations, etc., but also raise the possibility of replacing them with external social media to avoid unnecessary human and economic costs. The results confirm this trend, but we should also note the convenience of giving visibility to the contents published on these social media on the tourism websites. This is done by Girona, Barcelona, The Valencian Community, Valencia, Alicante, Castellón, Andalusia, Granada, Malaga, Cadiz, Canary Islands and Lanzarote in specific sections known as "Social Room", "Social Wall", "Social Media Room", or in the Home page. The integration of this type of content, which is updated with frequency, improves the credibility and acceptance of the website (Fernández-Cavia *et al.*, 2013; Fernández Cavia, Vinyals Mirabent *et al.*, 2013) due to the great value that users grant to the opinions and comments of other users (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004; Caro *et al.*, 2015).

On the second level, user-manager, the results are also consistent with those obtained by Míguez-González & Fernández-Cavia (2015), who allude to the deficient use of tools that enhance the interaction of users with the site managers and recommend the implementation of systems that allow users to vote, rate, etc. In this regard, the results show that the situation has improved slightly in the case of the websites of the autonomous communities, but in the case of the websites of the provinces/islands, and that tools such as online chats are still not implemented in any of the analysed websites. It is therefore concluded that the analysed websites, in general terms, do not meet the expectations of the tourist 2.0 with regards to information, the ability to share experiences and establish relations with other users (Suau Jiménez, 2012; Caro *et al.*, 2015).

Among the indicators evaluated in relation to interactivity, it is advisable to recommend the tourism websites to enable spaces that allow users to publish their own contents, experiences, photos and videos, as well as to make comments on the textual and audiovisual contents published by the site manager and other users. The fear of negative comments and the loss of control over the information on the brand, the main obstacles for the full implementation of the web 2.0 model, must be overcome to favour a relational approach by the brands and the acceptance that the latter are owned and built by the consumer.

Similarly, tourism websites should integrate built-in channels for user to make queries and improve the responses of DMO. As it has been confirmed, in most cases, and despite replies are provided quickly, the information tourism websites provide is partial or only redirects the user to other websites or companies, and there are some websites that do not even reply.

With regards to the use of the tools and functions of the social web and social media presence the results allow us to partially verify the second hypothesis. Tourism destinations are all present in the major social networks but not all of them integrate in their websites the contents posted in these social networks nor enable user to share the textual and audiovisual contents of social networks through them. Therefore, it is concluded that DMO largely satisfy the new expectations of the tourist 2.0 with regards to the interaction with other users (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008), the ability to share experiences and obtain information (Caro *et al.*, 2015), based on the experiences of other users and through wikis, forums, blogs, etc. (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008).

In general terms, the tourism destinations appear to have little interest in promoting relations with their users and between users through their websites, but they are interested in doing so through social media. Most of the analysed tourism destinations have included in their marketing and communication strategies the main social networks: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. Luna-Nevarez and Hyman (2012: 104) and Míguez-González and Fernández-Cavia (2015: 28) also identified Facebook and Twitter as the most used social networks, and YouTube also as a fairly-widespread platform. The research confirms the important evolution of YouTube, which is used by 95% of the tourism destinations, and the increasing prominence of Instagram, used by 80%. However, we should also note the possibility of improving the results of their strategies through the use of specialised recommendation-based external social networks in tourism products and services such as TripAdvisor and Minube, which are linked-to in only 35% of the analysed websites. With regards to blogs, and contrary to the belief of Martínez González (2011), who consider them a predominant tool of marketing 3.0, they are hardly used by the analysed destinations.

Morrison (2013: 73) affirms that the websites of DMO have become powerful tools for marketing and, in the suitable channels, to establish communication with current and potential tourists. However, the research proves that destinations are focusing all their efforts on social networks and are neglecting other tools and features which foster dialogue with their users through the website. Promoting the interactivity and social functions of the websites improves the user experience and allows DMO to attract new users through reviews and opinions. In addition, equipping websites with spaces and tools that allow users to interact with the site managers and other users makes them an invaluable source of information about current and potential consumers. In this regard, we agree with Míguez-González & Fernández-Cavia (27: 2015) and Li & Wang (2010: 545), as we have confirmed that the efforts made by public organisations to establish relationships with their consumers are focused outside the official websites. This confirms the description offered by Martínez González (2011) of marketing 3.0 as a stage characterised by greater use of social networks, blogs and clusters to the detriment of the use of the website.

The observed reality does not allow us to conclude that Spanish destinations are implementing the premises of relational and collaborative marketing (Serrano Cobos, 2006), nor that they have adopted the concept of RICT (Marfil-Carmona *et al.*, 2015) as they are not enhancing the possibilities of the website to establish relationships with their users and achieve conversion, loyalty and recommendation (Castelló Martínez *et al.*, 2014: 24). Tourism destinations need to implement a new approach to their commercial communication, which is known as public relations 2.0 (Aced, 2013: 65).



The research we have carried out, focused on the websites for national and regional (of autonomous communities, provinces and islands) sun and beach destinations, raises new issues that have to be addressed from a broader perspective that covers municipal websites and even international websites in order to gain insight into the extent to what the relationships established through digital media contribute to the success of the tourist destination. Similarly, this study highlights the need to complement the obtained results with an evaluation based on the point of view of the users, like the one carried out by Fernández-Cavia *et al.* (2013), in order to determine the extent to what the efforts made by the tourism destinations to establish relations with their users contribute to the improvement of brand perception and loyalty.

This work also proposes the development of a future research project about the use of social networks by DMO. The high number of social networks on which DMO are present questions their ability to properly manage them. Along this line, we consider it is appropriate to pursue this research about the implementation of relational and collaborative marketing in the tourism sector, in the field of social networks.

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