SUMMARY OF ARTICLE: https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/rea.2021.i41.03

The Role of the Web and Social Media in the Tourism Promotion of a World Heritage Site. The Case of the Alcazar of Seville (Spain)

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KEYWORDS

Cultural promotion
Alcazar of Seville
Tourism
Web
Social media

The information and communication technologies have revolutionized tourism and the promotion of cultural attractions. They constitute a tool with which to enhance the cultural heritage and economy of a territory in the context of tourism innovation. Nowadays any destination that wants to be competitive must continually update itself according to the wishes of the visitor. Moreover, tourists now look for applications that can enhance the traditional ways of visiting cultural tourism attractions and often have a desire to intensify the travel experience with interactive content (Battelli *et al*., 2017; Yousaf *et al*., 2020).

Social media constitute one of the communication channels most used by the general public, which is why cultural heritage companies have assigned more funding to these new Internet advertising technologies. In the current market, the use of social media, blogs and image galleries allows the companies that manage historic monuments to get to their potential customers faster and in real time (Handley 2012; Vila & Vila, 2012). The benefits of having a personalised company website are obvious: the possibility of being connected directly to and obtaining information on or from the customer; reducing costs by eliminating intermediaries; and offering the buyer the convenience of purchasing the product or service directly from the comfort of home or a mobile device. Thanks to the Internet, it is both easier and cheaper to update information, adapt to different situations and change strategy according to changing circumstances (Peukert, 2019). Through social media, for example, users exchange information and opinions on products or monuments and museums. A company reading the various comments on social media or platforms like TripAdvisor can easily understand what does or does not meet the needs and desires of the tourist and so take steps to improve its image (Massarotto, 2011; Van der Zee *et al*., 2020).

As the Covid-19 pandemic spreads, millions of people in quarantine have sought out travel and cultural experiences in their homes. The culture was indispensable during this period, and the demand for virtual access to museums, heritage sites, theatres and performances reached unprecedented levels, despite the closure of more than 80% of UNESCO World Heritage properties. Sanitary confinement has demonstrated the importance of new technologies and means in daily life. For this reason, more and more digital solutions are being developed to create virtual tourism experiences.

The article aims to analyze the potential of the website and social media of the Alcazar of Seville—declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO (1987)—in promoting tourism. The quality of this official website and social media was analyzed and evaluated through the 7 Loci model and the Nvivo tool, with weaknesses and strengths being identified.

The contents under study are text and multimedia files—image, video and audio files, for example— taken from the official website, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. The authors analyzed 324 news posts from the Alcazar website, 1,867 Facebook posts, 5,049 Tweets, 216 Instagram posts and three YouTube videos. The data for 2019 are looked at in more detail those for the other years, and are grouped into the following categories: gardens, palace rooms, events and others.

The analysis of the Alcazar of Seville shows how the positioning of its website and links to social media is one of its strengths. However, there are also some weaknesses. For example, the Alcazar should make more use of both the UNESCO brand as a World Heritage Site and the Seville logo on the website and social media. Also, it is essential that this tourist attraction improve the online ticket booking service to avoid inconvenience to customers, optimize the website for viewing from smartphones and tablets, and translate all the website and social media content into other foreign languages (English, French, German and Italian). Another pending issue is the application of the load capacity studies of the palace complex, carried out by Troitiño *et al.* (2020) to help achieve sustainability for the Alcazar and face the challenges presented by an innovative tourism management model.

Social media have changed the experience of visiting a tourist attraction and how institutions relate to their visitors, by allowing these visitors to identify the content they need to communicate and receive, and the best way to do so. The present article highlights the persuasive communication used by the Alcazar and that this mainly details its architectural and landscape attributes. The amount of social big data available from visitors to cultural heritage websites establishes the importance of studying smart tourism applications and services in order to understand user contexts and thus aid decision making, the creation of marketing strategies and more personalized offers, transparency and trust in dialogue with clients and stakeholders, and the emergence of new business models (Del Vecchio *et al.*, 2018).

With the advent of the COVID-19 health crisis, social media have expanded with very positive effects, because since the enforced closure of cultural buildings there has been greater online openness. Cultural initiatives have not ceased, but rather there has been a sharp increase in online cultural initiatives, and this avenue has led to an acceleration in digital transformation processes. Cultural heritage websites and social media now have to offer virtual tours, as well as setting quizzes or running virtually assisted treasure hunts. The evidence of this online activity has stimulated new reflections on the future direction of approaches to digital culture and how it is used (Agostino *et al.*, 2020).

Cultural institutions must manage their communication, promoting interactivity, offering an appropriate response and ultimately disseminating their heritage. Culture, tourism and technologies come together for the management of cultural heritage in a smart economy (Katsoni *et al*., 2017; Koramaz, 2018). Cultural tourism services can develop smart tourism interactions for visitors by collecting and analyzing geo-tagged multimedia data from available social media (Nguyen *et al*., 2017), as well as augmented reality and holographic displays (Dieck & Jung, 2017), gamification and other smart interface options (Ioannides *et al*., 2017).