

SPANISH SME USE OF WEB 2.0 TOOLS AND WEB LOCALISATION PROCESSES

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ABSTRACT

The impact of Web 2.0 technologies on the current social and economic environment has made it essential for any internationalising company to establish a solid and professional online presence. Particularly, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) can benefit from the use of diverse online tools because these can help them implement their business abroad in exchange for a small investment. However, it must be borne in mind that interactions with users belonging to a variety of sociocultural and linguistic contexts may take place. In this scenario, social media platforms and web translation and localisation processes are two resources of great value. This study focusses on Spanish SME processes of information dissemination and interaction with users by analysing their presence on social media platforms and their application of web translation and localisation processes. The sample includes 70 Spanish SMEs drawn from a selection of 1000 European companies compiled by the London Stock Exchange. Results suggest that Spanish SME online presence lacks professionalism, a defined strategy and willingness to interact with users.

KEYWORDS

Websites, Translation, Web Localisation, Small and Medium Enterprises, Social Networks, Web 2.0

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the Internet has become an unprecedented communicative phenomenon, essential in information dissemination and marketing processes in most economic sectors. This circumstance is unquestionably transforming the way in which companies and markets come into contact. Additionally, the emergence of the so-called Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005) has seen users go from being passive recipients of information to being able to adopt an active attitude and become emisors and opinion makers themselves. In this context, social media, one of the maximum Web 2.0 exponents, not only enables information dissemination but also promotes dialogue with users. Moreover, these digital platforms are even capable of generating emotional commitment between companies and audiences (Navarro, 2011), providing consumers with a virtual space that helps complement and expand relationships established in the real world (Arroyo Almaraz, Martín Nieto and Farfán Montero, 2013).

In the Spanish economic environment, small and medium-sized enterprises (hereafter SMEs) play a crucial role. According to the data published by the General Secretariat of Industry and Small and Medium Enterprises (2018), SMEs represent 99.8% of the Spanish business sector. Very often, SMEs are characterised by having limited resources, not only capital but also human and technological (Davis and Vladica, 2006). Therefore, they face greater barriers when it comes to incorporating the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). For those companies that decide to pursue internationalisation, establishing a solid, professional online presence is an unavoidable step, not only because it contributes to the dissemination of corporate information and interaction with potential customers, but also because it improves the corporate image and can help a company differentiate themselves from the rest.

Two frequently used strategies when establishing an online corporate presence are the creation of a corporate website in several languages, and the setting up of professional profiles on various social media sites. Some of the advantages offered by the creation and proper maintenance of a corporate website are the following: increased business visibility and competitiveness, improved corporate image, removal of

intermediaries and geographical restrictions, and diverse benefits linked to e-commerce such as real-time transactions and access to contact information and customer preferences (Marín Dueñas and Lasso de la Vega, 2017; Mbatha, 2013). These benefits are multiplied if the website undergoes a translation or localisation process. According to its most popular definition, localisation in the field of translation refers to the activity that involves taking a product (in this case, a website) and making it linguistically and culturally appropriate for a locale, that is, the target country and the language in which said product will be used and sold (Lommel and Ray, 2003).

However, a considerable proportion of Spanish SMEs do not yet have a corporate website, and those that do either rarely have their contents localised or the localisation is of poor quality. According to Urueña et al. (2017), although 77.5% of SMEs with 10 or more employees have their own website, this percentage drops to 31.5% in the case of SMEs with fewer than 10 employees. Regarding Spanish SME websites (Gutiérrez-Artacho and Olvera-Lobo, 2017a, 2017b), the information they provide and their technical aspects show an acceptable quality. However, a number of deficiencies can be found as regards their service quality. Another improvable aspect is the fact that the vast majority of these websites do not exhibit responsive design. In a previous study using a sample of SMEs belonging to the Spanish chemical sector (Gutiérrez-Artacho and Olvera-Lobo, 2017b), less than half of the companies (48%) were active on social media and, within these, only 15% enabled the creation and publication of opinions and contents. It was also concluded that website localisation quality had to be significantly improved. Translated or localised versions had a drastically reduced amount of information compared to the original website and many of the links redirected to websites in Spanish (Gutiérrez-Artacho and Olvera-Lobo, 2017a, 2017b).

As pointed out previously, social media channels are contributing to the development of new communication spaces and show great potential as a marketing tool. However, there is a significant number of SMEs that are not yet using these platforms. Batikas et al. (2013) reveal that only 61% of SMEs established in the following six countries use social networks: United Kingdom (90%), the Netherlands (79%), Latvia (75%), Spain (54%), Bulgaria (37%) and Italy (28%). Companies not employing social media argue that they cannot find a compelling reason to do so. However, 29% of companies that use them pointed out that their financial situation had improved over the three years prior to the study, compared to 18% of companies that do not make use of social network sites.

To the best of our knowledge, there is very limited research in the academic setting on the level of adoption of social media and the cultural and linguistic adaptation of corporate websites by Spanish SMEs. Marín Dueñas and Lasso de la Vega González (2017) point out that the quality of the contents of corporate websites belonging to SMEs in the province of Cádiz is very low, although they score well in other aspects such as the clarity of the language employed or the usability of the website. One of the few studies dealing with Spanish SMEs and social media is that of Sixto García, Aguado Domínguez and Riveiro Castro (2017), who focused on Galician SMEs and concluded that the use of social media by these companies lacked engagement and user interaction. Research pertaining other regional areas include Ahmad et al. (in press), who found no relationship between social media adoption and the business performance of SMEs in United Arab Emirates. These findings are inconsistent with those of Ainin et al. (2015), who determined that using Facebook has a very positive impact both on the financial and non-financial business performance of Malaysian SMEs and pointed out compatibility, cost effectiveness and interactivity as the main factors that influence SME use of Facebook. Likewise, Negoită (in press) finds a strong correlation between social media usage and the online success of a sample of Romanian SMEs. Similarly, Meske and Stieglitz (2013) examines the level of adoption and benefits of social media usage in Germany and concludes that German SMEs still face problems to manage adoption and to identify relevant business values. Kim et al. (2011) obtained similar results in a study on 100 US SMEs. Regarding research focused on an economic sector, Tajvidi and Karami (2017) pointed out a positive relationship between the use of social media and the performance of a sample of hotels in the UK. Additionally, McCann and Barlow (2015) signal the importance of measuring the return of investment (ROI) of social media usage paying attention to both qualitative and quantitative indicators and they provide a model for such purpose. As pointed out by Fuchs-Kittowski (2009), one of the main obstacles for social media adoption is that cost-benefit analyses yield unclear results.

In Spain, according to a report by Telefónica (2014) concerning microenterprises, social media management is rarely professionalised – instead, it is often done by non-specialised internal staff and content publication often lacks planning and strategy. Moreover, companies that do not use social media argue that they do not perceive any associated benefits in the way of new customers or an increase in business volume.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning that social media is not a type of technology aimed at increasing the number of transactions, but rather at encouraging collaboration and communication between groups inside and outside the company (Bharati et al., 2013).

However, Spanish SME activity on social media does not seem to match that of the rest of the population. According to an annual study on social networks conducted by the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB Spain 2017), an organisation representing the advertising and digital communication sector in Spain, social media penetration reaches 86% of Spanish Internet users between 16 and 65 years of age. Facebook is the most used social media service (91% of respondents use it) followed by WhatsApp (89%), YouTube (71%) and Twitter (50%). Instagram is the service with the biggest increase in number of users (45% use it) and visit frequency compared to the previous year. For its part, Twitter is the social platform with the poorest retention rate (its use has dropped 13% compared to the previous year), followed by Telegram, Google+ and Snapchat. Google+ is also one of the networks with the worst rating by users. With regard to the relationship between social networks and companies, it is remarkable that 8 out of 10 users in this study declare they follow brands on social media.

The objective of this study is to analyse the processes of multilingual information dissemination and interaction with Web 2.0 users that Spanish SMEs are carrying out. With this aim, we have examined their online presence by analysing their corporate website and the number and variety of languages into which their contents have been translated or localised. Likewise, we have examined SME presence on a broad range of social networks and we have applied a series of indicators that help us explore the way in which these companies use social platforms. Finally, we have examined if there is a correlation between the different factors analysed that could help establish which type of practices have a more positive impact on SME business development.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Study Sample

The 1000 Companies to Inspire Europe 2017 report carried out by the London Stock Exchange Group (2017) is a selection of the 1000 "fastest-growing and most dynamic" European SMEs in the year 2017. The 70 Spanish companies that can be found in this selection constitute the study sample.

2.2 Indicators for Evaluation

A growing body of research points to appropriate online presence as a beneficial factor for achieving SME objectives (Michelidou, Siamagka and Christodoulides, 2011). Nobre and Silva (2014) argue that presence on social media can have a positive influence in both relationship influence and increased sales of SMEs. Lopes and Melão (2016) concluded that website content and design features are positively related with enterprise size in the SME context. Additionally, Yamazaki (2011) found out that Japanese SMEs with corporate websites in a single language in 2007 had ceased their business or merged with other companies by 2011, while SMEs with multilingual websites had managed to survive. In light of this previous research, the following indicators regarding SME online presence have been considered:

- Social media
 - SME presence on social media
 - Number of profiles on social networks
 - Profile updating
 - Location of social media links on corporate websites
 - Visibility given to social networks on corporate websites
- Websites
 - Ownership of a corporate website
 - Translation/localisation languages: identification and number
 - Degree of translation/localisation
 - Identification of languages into which websites have been translated/localised

The data relative to the presence of the sample SMEs on social media were collected on the following platforms: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Google+, Instagram, Vimeo, Flickr and Pinterest. The procedure used to determine the existence of profiles on these networks consisted in checking if there were any links to social media on the corporate website of each company. Likewise, additional searches were performed using both Google ("[company name] Facebook" or "[company name] LinkedIn") and the internal search engine of each social network. This was done in order to rule out the existence of profiles whose links had not been incorporated to the corresponding corporate website. Profiles created on other social media platforms that had not initially been considered were also recorded whenever there was a link to them on the corporate website.

The evaluation of the remaining indicators (degree of translation/localisation, languages) was carried out by exploring the corporate websites of each sample SME.

Data were collected during January and February 2018.

2.3 Data Analysis

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to examine Spanish SME online presence. The statistical package SPSS was used to analyse data. Descriptive statistics were employed to provide background information such as the mean number of languages on corporate websites and social network platforms used and the range of revenue of the sample companies. Furthermore, we analysed the possible existence of correlations by calculating Pearson's correlation coefficient between the following variables: number of social networks, maximum revenue and number of languages.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We present our results organised around two main aspects: use of social networks and presence of translation/localisation on corporate websites.

3.1 Social Media

3.1.1 Presence on Social Media

The sample SMEs (70 companies) have a total of 261 profiles on social media. The average number of profiles per SME is 3.73 (standard deviation 2.21). Almost 90% of the sample SMEs have a profile on at least one social network. Only 8 out of the 70 sample SMEs (11.4%) do not have a profile in any social network.

SMEs that decide to make use of social networks tend to create profiles on more than one. The majority of SMEs (21.4%) have profiles on 5 social networks. Two companies have the highest number of profiles, specifically 9. Furthermore, the percentage of SMEs that have profiles on 3 or more networks amounts to 70%.

Table 1. SMEs with Profiles on each Social Network

Social network	# of SMEs	Social network	# of SMEs
Facebook	74% (52)	Google+	40% (28)
LinkedIn	69% (48)	Instagram	29% (20)
Twitter	64% (45)	Vimeo, Flickr, Pinterest, other	36% (25)
YouTube	61% (43)		

Facebook is the social network which companies most use – 74% of sample SMEs have a profile on it. The second most used social media service is LinkedIn – however, this network only holds the seventh place on the list of most used social networks by Spanish Internet users (IAB Spain, 2017). Nevertheless, the characteristics of this professionally-oriented social network would justify its high use in the business sector. Twitter's third position is striking considering that it is one of the social networks with the biggest loss of users in recent years.

3.1.2 Posts on Social Media

Another aspect considered was the existence of social media profiles that do not display any posts. Although percentages are not excessively high, the highest number of profiles without posts were found on LinkedIn (29% of profiles do not have any posts) and Google+ (21%). In the case of the latter, this would confirm that SMEs do not use it with the intention of communicating with their followers. No "empty" profiles have been found on YouTube, Vimeo, Flickr, Pinterest or other social media platforms.

In order to determine the degree of activity of corporate profiles on social media, we registered profiles where at least one post had been published during the data collection period. Although only 29% of SMEs are registered on Instagram, it is noteworthy that 85% of them updated their profiles at some point throughout the data collection month. Twitter profiles were also updated more often than other social media profiles (78% of profiles were updated during the analysed period). Both microblogging social networks feature short posts with minimum text and predominance of audiovisual content (especially in the case of Instagram), which makes it easier to disseminate information to a large number of users quickly. The third most updated social media platform is Facebook (69%), probably because it is still the most widely used network (IAB Spain, 2017) and therefore posts on this site are disseminated more widely. Less than 50% of profiles on other social media sites were updated. The percentage of updated YouTube profiles is 21%, which might be related to the greater amount of resources required to produce a video.

3.1.3 Links to Social Media

Another factor considered was the specific location of links to social networks within the corporate website of each SME. In order to determine this aspect, we analysed the website homepage in its source language.

A considerable percentage of SMEs (31%) do not include links to their social media profiles on their homepage. The percentage of SMEs that link their social networks from any area of the footer (33%) is greater than those that place links on any area of the header (26%). However, the most frequent location is the right side of the header (21% of SMEs). Considering that users normally scan web pages using an F-shaped ocular movement (Nielsen, 2000), the choice of placing links on the header may be deemed more appropriate.

3.2 Websites

100% of sample SMEs have a corporate website. For our analysis, special attention has been paid to the variety of languages offered on these corporate websites as well as the degree to which they have been translated.

3.2.1 Languages

It is interesting to note that despite 95.7% of SMEs showing their website in Spanish, there are 3 companies that have decided to publish their website only in English. This decision may indicate that these companies have undergone a deep internationalisation process and have given priority to users from anywhere in the world being able to access their information, considering the current status of English as a lingua franca. English is also the most frequent target language, used by 74% of sample SMEs and followed a long way behind by French (24%), Portuguese (17%) and German (17%). With respect to the Spanish co-official languages, there is a predominance of translations into Catalan, although only 10% of SMEs offer their contents in this language. Similarly, only 2 SMEs have had their website translated into Basque, and 1 into Galician. Other languages found on the sample websites are Italian (11%), Russian (7%) and Chinese (7%), among others.

The average number of languages used on each website is 3.16 (standard deviation 3.29).

3.2.2 Translation/Localization

Nearly three quarters of the SMEs in the sample (74%) have had their website contents translated, either partially or totally, into at least one language. 26% (18 SMEs) offer their contents in one single language, which is always Spanish except in the case of 3 companies that only use English, as indicated above. It must be noted that, although there is a clear distinction between the concepts of translation and localisation (see Introduction), for the purposes of this study we have only focused on the degree of translation of texts.

Varying degrees of translation could be found within the translated websites. Partial translations have a negative impact both on the way users access the provided information and on the company image, and in this study, we have considered such cases of partial translation to be every website in which at least one source-language sentence could be found in its localised versions. In the vast majority of cases, however, the amount of untranslated text was not limited to a single sentence. Instead, there were entire untranslated pages and sections such as contact forms, footers, legal provisions, blog entries and news. According to the criterion used, 36% of sample websites were completely translated, 38% were partially translated and 26% had not been translated into any language.

Another error that has been noticed on translated websites is the considerable number of broken links or links that redirect to pages in the original language. Furthermore, there are a number of cases where some of the languages that appear on the language selector cannot be accessed. As a positive aspect, some of the companies that have completely translated websites have also dubbed their corporate videos into all the target languages offered.

Finally, Table 2 shows a summary of the analysed data. The revenue band of each company is included in the London Stock Exchange report from which the sample has been drawn.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Analysed Variables

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation	Variance
Languages	70	1	18	3.16	3.29	10.859
Social networks	70	0	9	3.73	2.21	4.925
Maximum revenue	70	20	250	56.07	39.926	1594.125

As a final aspect of this study, we analysed the possible existence of correlations by calculating the Pearson's r between the following variables: number of social networks, maximum revenue and number of languages. Nevertheless, no significant correlation coefficients between these variables were found as all of them resulted in r values far from ± 1 . It could have been expected that companies with higher levels of income, for example, had registered on a higher number of social networks, since their greater amount of resources may allow them to have some kind of professionalised management of their online presence. It could also have been expected of companies with higher levels of income to have invested in offering a wider variety of languages at some point in their development. However, our results do not confirm such hypotheses. SMEs specialised in fields such as tourism, for example, must necessarily offer a large number of languages, regardless of their income. Therefore, given that there are many factors that influence SME business performance, it is not possible to draw conclusions as to what type of practices related to information dissemination and interaction with Internet users contribute to boosting SME activity.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study analyses several factors related to information dissemination processes and interaction with Internet users by Spanish SMEs. The first aspect analysed was the presence of these companies on some of the major social networks. The social networks where most SMEs were registered were Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. The average number of social networks used by each SME was 3.73, although most companies used 5 networks. Only 11.4% of SMEs did not use any type of social media. On corporate websites, links to social networks were usually located anywhere on the footer, but if a more precise distinction was made between the different areas, the most common location was the right side of the header. However, almost 1 in 3 websites did not offer any links to their social media profiles.

Additionally, the greater or lesser popularity of each social network in Spain did not seem to match their intensity of use within the sample SMEs. A striking example of this is Instagram. This platform went from a 35% to 45% usage rate between 2016 and 2017 in Spain (IAB Spain, 2017) and, as we have seen, profiles created by the sample SMEs were followed by a very considerable number of users. However, only 20 out of 70 the sample SMEs used this network. Meanwhile, more than half of the sample SMEs used Twitter, a network whose user numbers are in decline. In any case, companies published on Instagram and Twitter more

often than on Facebook. As pointed out at the beginning of this study, the use of social networks by SMEs indicates a certain lack of professionalism, planning and awareness of current trends. Additionally, their presence does not seem to respond to a willingness to interact with users – rather, what SMEs apparently want is simply "to be present".

Out of the 70 sample SMEs, 74% of sites translated their content, to a greater or lesser extent, into at least one language. The average number of languages offered by each website was 3.16 and the most common number of languages was 2. More than half of the companies translated their website only partially, which means that a large part of the information they offer was missing in the translated version (blogs, news, contact forms, legal notices). This, which may suggest that these websites were not translated by professional translators or localisers, has an extremely negative impact on both the corporate image and the quality of the information users can access. The most used languages by the sample websites were Spanish and English followed a long way behind by French, Portuguese and German. When information was offered only in two languages, these were normally chosen between Spanish, English and Catalan. One of the most striking cases observed during the language analysis was that of 3 SMEs (4.2%) that only offered their website in English.

Our results are in line with those of Sixto García et al. (2017), who argued that Galician SME use of social media lacks consistency and denotes lack of willingness to interact with users. However, it should be noted that both the size and characteristics of the sample limits the generalizability of our results to other countries or even to the Spanish SME context as a whole. Companies in the sample have been singled out by an international organisation and defined as some of the fastest-growing, most dynamic SMEs in Europe, therefore considerably worse results should be expected if the same analysis were to be performed using a different sample. It must be emphasised that the Internet, the context to which our study belongs, is characterised by an extremely rapid evolution, which makes it even more difficult to obtain conclusions with long-term validity.

Future studies may focus on qualitative indicators of user interaction or use a bigger sample that allows researchers to find possible similarities between SMEs belonging to the same economic sector or type of activity. Likewise, an in-depth analysis on the relationship between business performance of SMEs (from Spain or other European countries) and their online presence remains to be done.

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