Analysis of the Way of St. James Friends Associations on the Net

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Abstract.

An analysis of St. James Way Friends Association websites is carried out in this article. The purpose of this analysis is to study the typology of the websites promoted by this type of association, the hosting information, the resources they use, the interactive services at their disposal, and also, the visibility of the same on the Internet. In the information society websites are one of the main tools for dissemination of new technologies and, at times, they can create true virtual communities. In this particular case, St. James Way Friends Associations may promote the dissemination of the information society among the people who have the same interests. This justifies the analysis of these websites, making a quality analysis of the data, assessing the strengths, weaknesses, and, as far as possible, provide guidance that, from our point of view, is fundamental in website design quality.

Key Words: St. James Way, New Technologies, Website, Virtual Community

Resumen.

En el presente artículo se lleva a cabo un análisis de los sitios web de las Asociaciones de Amigos del Camino de Santiago. El objetivo de dicho análisis radica en el estudio de la tipología de portales electrónicos impulsados desde este tipo de asociaciones, la información que albergan, los recursos que utilizan, los servicios interactivos de los que disponen, y también la visibilidad de los mismos en Internet. Los sitios web constituyen, en la sociedad de la información, una de las principales herramientas de difusión de las nuevas tecnologías y en ciertas ocasiones, pueden llegar a crearse verdaderas comunidades virtuales. En el caso que nos ocupa, Las Asociaciones de Amigos del Camino de Santiago, pueden llegar a impulsar la difusión de la Sociedad de la Información entre la población que tenga sus mismas inquietudes. Ello justifica el análisis web de estos portales, con el fin de hacer un diagnóstico de la calidad de los mismos, valorando las debilidades, fortalezas, y en la medida de lo posible, ofrecer directrices que, desde

nuestro punto de vista, son básicas a la hora de diseñar sitios web de calidad.

Palabras clave: Camino de Santiago, Nuevas Tecnologías, Sitio Web, Comunidad Virtual

1. Introduction.

The technological revolution that began to take shape in the early seventies of last century, gave rise to what today is known as the Information Society or Knowledge Society. This new type of society has emerged as a result of the changes that are taking place in society, economy and employment. From the economic point of view, is has passed from one of a goods-producing economy to another of a services producer, while in the socio professional structure and employment, which may be related to repetitive tasks and replaced by machines, it is being transformed by other work stations that require analytical skills and decision (Castells, 2000).

In this process of immersion in the Information Society, the Internet has taken its place as the main tool to control global communications through the computer, allowing instantaneous communication and exchange of information at almost zero cost. The rise of the Internet led authors such as Cairncross (2001), to introduce concepts like "Death of distance" or the "End of Geography" because of the ability to communicate instantly with any part of the planet. The impact of the death of distance will be important once you carry out the widespread use of new technologies. Among the potentials offered include those related to information exchange and currencies, teleworking, electronic commerce, distance education, cultural diffusion, etc. Information technology and communication enables the reduction of the distances and time to the minimum expression, so that the territories that were marginalized and conditioned by the physical factor before this kind of revolution, now have a wide range of possibilities for development if they can exploit it. But for this to happen a new type of society must be disseminated throughout the territories and all social classes, thus reducing to a minimum the phenomenon known as the "Digital Divide".

One of the main elements that make up the Internet are the websites. These are a clear reflection of the level of the spread of new technologies in a territory, from the point of view of architecture, functionality, and the use of citizens within them. With the holding of the First International Agali Congress, with the title A Geographical and Historical Dimension of the Way of St. James: A view from both sides of the Atlantic and new perspectives on the Information Society, an analysis of the Way of St. James Friends Associations was carried out. The purpose of this

analysis lies in the study of the typology of websites promoted by these types of associations, hosting information, resources they use, interactive services at their disposal, and also the visibility of the same on the Internet. Websites are in the information society, one of the main tools to spread new technologies. Sometimes, as in driving initiatives from local authorities or those which are created based on common and individual interests, they may be true virtual communities. These may arise spontaneously or individually and then gain hits from those who are interested in the subject dealt with in the community. On the other hand, there are those communities that are planned such as those driven by the local administration in order to promote a particular territory on the Internet and they can offer local people a variety of Information Society services.

Virtual communities might play an important role in the process of dissemination of information technologies and communication, regardless of their origin and subject matter. In these virtual spaces users communicate with a common interest, publishing information spaces for debate that may be of great interest to the population and created for "digital illiterates" who share those concerns, and may stop being due to the same vocations . In the present case, the Way of St. James Friends Associations can also promote the dissemination of the information society among the people who have the same interests. This justifies the analysis of these websites, to make a diagnosis of the quality of the data, assessing the strengths, weaknesses, and as far possible, offer basic guidelines to consider when designing quality websites.

2. Background.

The recent backgrounds related to this article is the research carried out by Armas Quintá (2009) and Macía Arce (2007). These authors share a common methodology for analyzing websites that have been implemented in their dissertations. These authors based the analysis of websites on two pillars. In the first study, from a quantitative point of view, each of the elements of a website, the type of schedule employed, the media assets that it hosts, languages, interactive services, visibility on the Internet, etc. To interpret the results, all variables were grouped into six thematic sections, "web production, origin and theme, architecture, dissemination and visibility on the Web, information and multimedia elements, and elements of communication and interactivity. In total there were fifty variables that these authors had in mind when carrying out quantitative analysis. The second type of analysis on which this methodology is based has a strong qualitative component. In this type of analysis the authors individually examine each website in order to observe how the elements are structured, if they are dynamic web pages created with advanced programming, or conversely, if they are static websites with information

without updating and, generally, they are merely informational leaflets published on the web from information previously on paper. In this analysis, the authors globally evaluated each of the websites, indicating their strengths and weaknesses as well as those elements that should be improved to muster greater attraction and interest among the local population ,and thus to foster the process of immersion in the information society.

Other research highlighted in this respect is conducted by Joao Sarmento (2004), entitled "Representation, Imagination, and Virtual Space: Geographies of Tourism Landscapes in West Cork and the Azores. He considers fifty-five websites related to the tourism industry of the Azores and the West Cork in Ireland, presenting the most relevant features. The author tries to demonstrate some spatial configurations that are created with the virtual spaces online. The cases that the author analyzes in the two regions are driven by property hotel business owners, those built by the transport companies, and those created by tourism enterprises outside these spaces. For Sarmento (2004), the role of government was especially important in the process of representation and promotion of the two regions. The methodology used for the site selection analyzed is based on thorough research on various search engines, as well as surveys conducted by mailing the two study regions.

Other less recent studies that deal with to a greater or lesser extent analysis of websites were the Vega Baja Digital and SI-Local Projects. The first took place in the region of the Vega Baja in Valencia in 2003 and aimed at implementing a single digital governance model by integrating all municipalities under one institutional website. Following this initial attempt an analysis of all websites in local public administration was carried out, and the content was evaluated. The second study, the SI-Local project took place in the Principality of Asturias in 2003, being funded by the European Commission and the Ministry of Labour and Employment Promotion of the Asturian government. This project is an analysis of Asturian public administration websites, from the interpretation of twenty-seven variables grouped into six themes: information for the citizen, visitor information, business information, navigability, online management and additional services. In order to assess their quality, a "thermometer" was designed which computed points for each of the twenty-seven variables used in the analysis, so the ideal website should add up to twenty-seven points.

There are other studies that also carried out studies associated to the analysis of websites, such as Romero and Vaquero (2001) or Ramilo Araujo (2001) and will not be described in the methodology section, because they are less relevant.

3. Methodological notes.

One of the first actions that took place was the location of the websites under study. Given the aim of the researching the production and characteristics of the websites of the Way of St. James Friends Associations, we chose to limit the analysis to those associations websites belonging to the Spanish Federation of Way of St. James Friends Associations1, although not all available web pages. This involved the study, from a quantitative point of view, of twenty Way of St. James Friends Associations websites2.

As enunciated in previous lines, a web analysis with a quantitative perspective was carried out. This type of analysis includes the study of fifty variables grouped into six thematic sections. In the first, "identity" groups, the ID that it is the identifier of each electronic website, date, URL, parish, municipality, region, author, e-mail contact and origin. In the second block, "architecture", the variables are related to the programming used in the design of the website, the number of sections, the total links, internal links, external links, query time, if the search engine was available, and intranet. The third thematic section, "diffusion", touches on issues related to the spread of the web, both in terms of visibility on the Internet, and in the presence of other themed websites or similar interest. In the fourth thematic section, "content", all aspects that revolve around the contents of the websites among the variables are the theme studied, if the journal is available, number of news and number of lines in the electronic news paper home page, the average of images per page, if it has image galleries, videos, sounds, radio, television, or computer graphics. It also covers issues related to language, so it searches the web is default, all the languages offered on the home page are then offered in the web contents. The fifth thematic section, "communication", is dedicated to researching the communication tools available on the website. It identifies the number of email addresses available to users if there are discussion forums, polls and chat, as well as the number and average attendance in addition to

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[1] See www.caminodesantiago.org. The analysis of the websites was carried out in November 2010.

2 It was analyzed the websites of the following Way of St. James Friends Associations federated: Way of St. James Friends Associations of Zaragoza, Way of St. James Friends Associations of Seville, Way of St. James Friends Associations Astur-Galaico of Inner, Way of St. James Friends Associations of Madrid, Way of St. James Friends Associations Astur-Leonesa, Way of St. James Friends Associations of Cuenca, Way of St. James Friends Associations of Astorga and region, Way of St. James Friends Associations San Macario, Way of St. James Friends Associations of Alicante, Way of St. James Friends Associations of Burgos, Way of St. James Friends Associations Jacobean Studies Centre, Cultural Association Way of Silver Friends, Way of Mozarabic of Ourense, Spanish Federation of Way of St. James Friends Associations, Way of St. James Friends Associations of Guipúzcoa, Way of St. James Friends Associations of Bierzo, Way of St. James Friends Associations of Álava, Way of St. James Friends Associations of L´Hospitalet de Llobregat, Way of St. James Friends Associations of Santiago de Córdoba, Way of St. James Friends Associations of Comunidad Valenciana, Way of St. James Friends Associations of Miranda de Ebro, Lorca Santiago Association, Way of St. James Friends Associations of Pulchra Leonina, Way of St. James Friends Associations of Palencia.

newsletters and targeted advertising. The sixth and final thematic unit that makes up this type of analysis includes information about "interactivity" of the web. Its purpose is to know if the site in question offers interactive services and their type, if you get to do some kind of transaction and, if so, the type of payment used. In total there were fifty variables taken into account when carrying out quantitative analysis, which together with the twenty-three sites studied, results in database of 1,150 records.

4. The Way of St. James Friends Associations on the Net.

This paper researches the characteristics of the Way of St. James Friends Associations websites, so the source and author of such websites is common. They all reflect a culturally religious motivation that revolves around the St. James Way. Web analysis was carried out around 75% of registered associations in the Spanish Federation of Way of St. James Friends Associations, as the others that did not have, at the time of analysis, a website.

With regard to the website architecture, the most important is the type of program used and the content structured into sections. In the case of the Way of St. James Friends Associations websites, more than half of them are developed with dynamic programming, which allows more updated content, the presence of multimedia resources, and greater interactivity. This highlights the interest and effort of such associations to become visible on the Web and to set a path towards immersion in the information society. Another important consideration in designing a website is the structuring of content into sections. There is no set number of sections in a website, because this will depend on the type of site and the information or products that need to be promoted. However, it should be kept in mind that it is necessary to avoid saturating the home page, both of content and sections, and to put more emphasis on the proper structuring and placement making a selection of those which draw the users attention. An abuse of content sections and links on home pages, in many cases can cause counterproductive effects on that initially obtained. In this particular case, we detected an excessive number of sections (see Figure 1). In 25% of the websites analyzed more than ten sections were found, and 40%, between seven and ten. Given the thematic of these sites, more than half organized their content in a large number of sections making navigability and access to content difficult.

Two elements that were considered from the point of view of the architecture are the search engine and intranet presence. In the case of a browser, its presence or absence alone does not indicate a higher or lower quality of a website, and it is necessary to consider other factors, such as scheduling and the amount of information that page hosts. In our case,

three in four sites do not have search engines, even though half of them are designed with dynamic programming with associated databases. Search engines are useful tools for looking for web content quickly and easily, such as forms, reports, etc. that in many cases, are not very visible on the web. The presence of an intranet is not representative because over 95% of websites do not have it. In spite of being very useful information for sharing between a restricted number of users, such websites are not valued as a negative aspect, due to having a low content volume.

Figure 1: Friends Association of Santiago's Way of Zaragoza.

Source: www.peregrinoszaragoza.org. Date of capture, December 2010.

Among the variables analyzed in the thematic area dedicated to the dissemination, highlights the scope of the website, updating content, and visibility on the Web. As regards to the scope of action contemplated, two websites create their content for Spanish users, and those who do seek hits beyond the borders. In this research, three in four sites have a national scope and content in one language. Given the subject matter of these sites, it is considered a weakness to not have more than one language to reach more users, even if it means making serious efforts for entities that, in most of cases carry out their tasks as volunteers in a non-profit way. The update is one of the weaknesses of these websites, as eight in ten sites has an irregular update (see Figure 2). For a site to have visibility on the Web, it is necessary create content periodically to attract user's attention. The Way of St. James Friends Associations websites are not very visible in Alexa. Of the sites analyzed, 10% are not indexed by Alexa, and almost half had an index above 10 million (see Figure 3). Only the website of the Spanish Federation
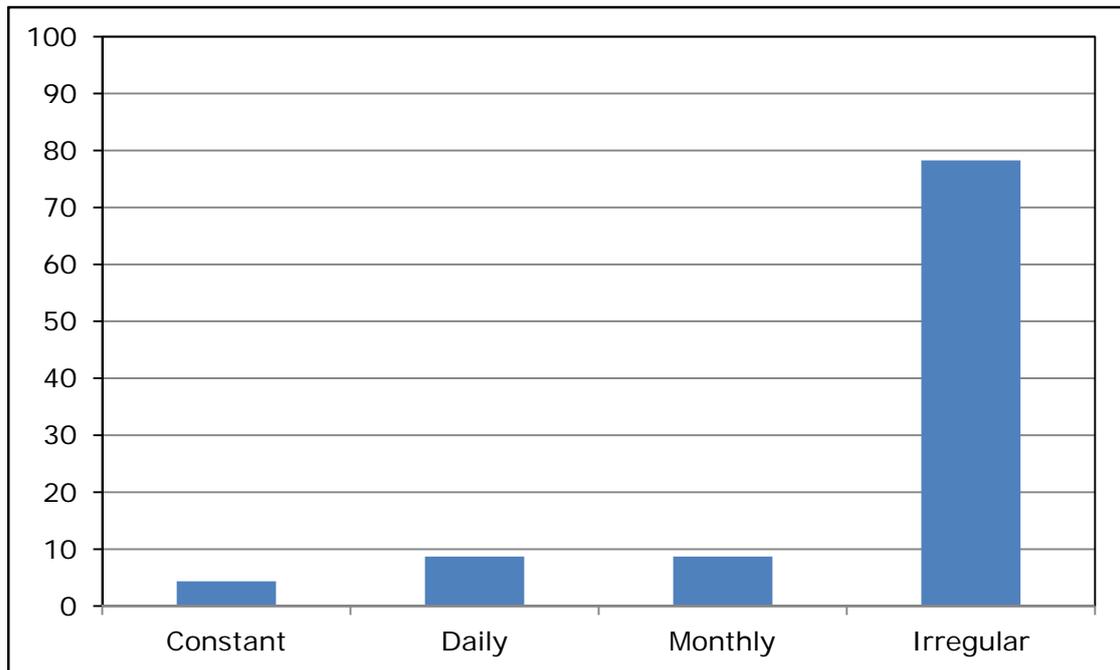
of Way of St. James Friends Associations has a high visibility on the Internet at a Alexa rate of 775,307 (November 2010).

In the themed block dedicated to contents, include the presence of the journal, the type of media resources available, and languages of the contents. The electronic journal has a significant presence on the Way of St. James Friends Associations websites, being present in almost 40% of them, considering that it is an element that is essential for all websites (see Figure 4). Based on the type and theme of the site it will evaluate the potential importance of the eJournal. A government website that offers different services to users, and information from varied cultural heritage, landscape, etc.., the inclusion of the newspaper is valued very positively. Against the websites they are oriented strictly to electronic commerce, the newspaper is not perceived as a fundamental tool.

Multimedia resources that are present in analyzed websites are basically limited to images, which appear in all of the webs. However, resources such as sound and digital video are very scarce or none-existent, no website has sounds and infographies, and only two in ten has videos (see Figure 5). The presence of multimedia elements on the web is a factor to take into account when assessing their quality. The images help to reinforce the information presented throughout the text and, furthermore, facilitate the understanding of the content. The remaining resources, sounds, videos and infographies, look to the same objectives and its incorporation were later given the greater technical demands they require. In the present case, more than half of the webs have advanced programming allowing them to make use of such resources. These could be of great interest for attracting users who share the same concerns and interests.

Another aspect studied in the block-themed content was language. This factor is a clear indicator of the intention of the promoters of the web to reach more users. It is important to note if the languages offered by websites on the home page are available in the content, it is because, in many cases, only the sections and presentation of the site are translated. In the webs of the Way of St. James Friends Associations, there was a weakness in the language, since 70% of them only have their contents in one language. Moreover, the remaining 30% has more than one language on the home page, only a third of all content available in the languages offered. This can be assessed as a negative element given the international significance of the St. James Way and its pilgrimage routes.

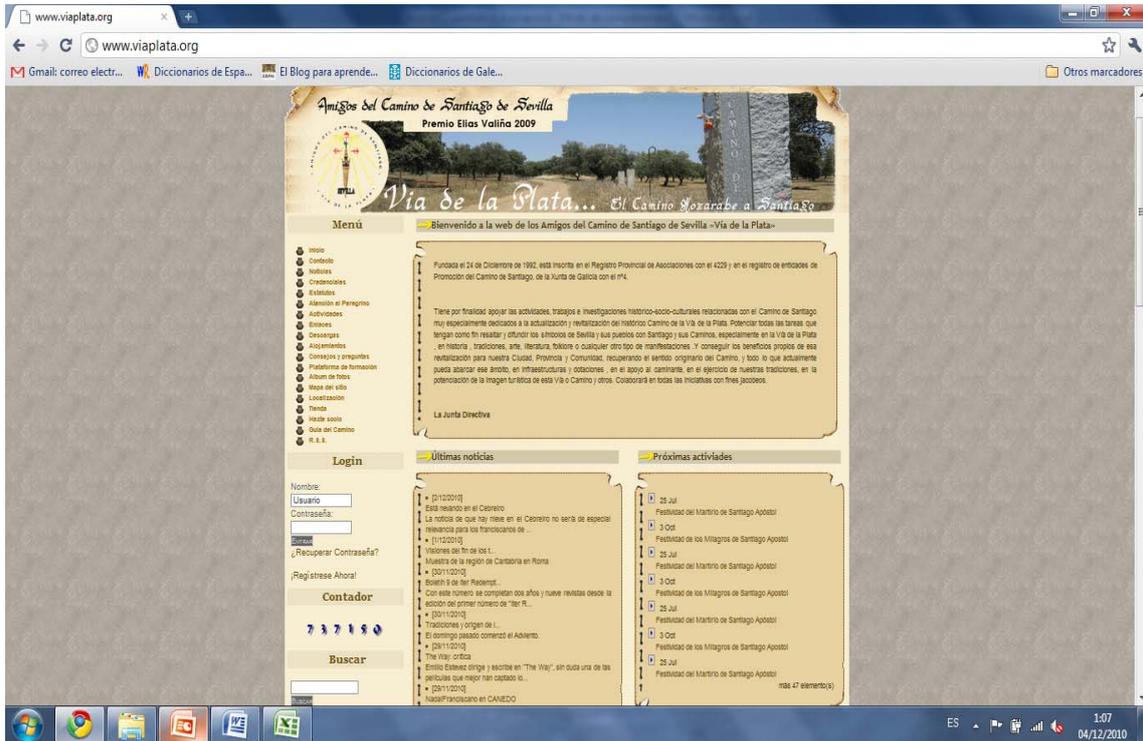**Figure 2: Updating contents.**

Source: Authors.

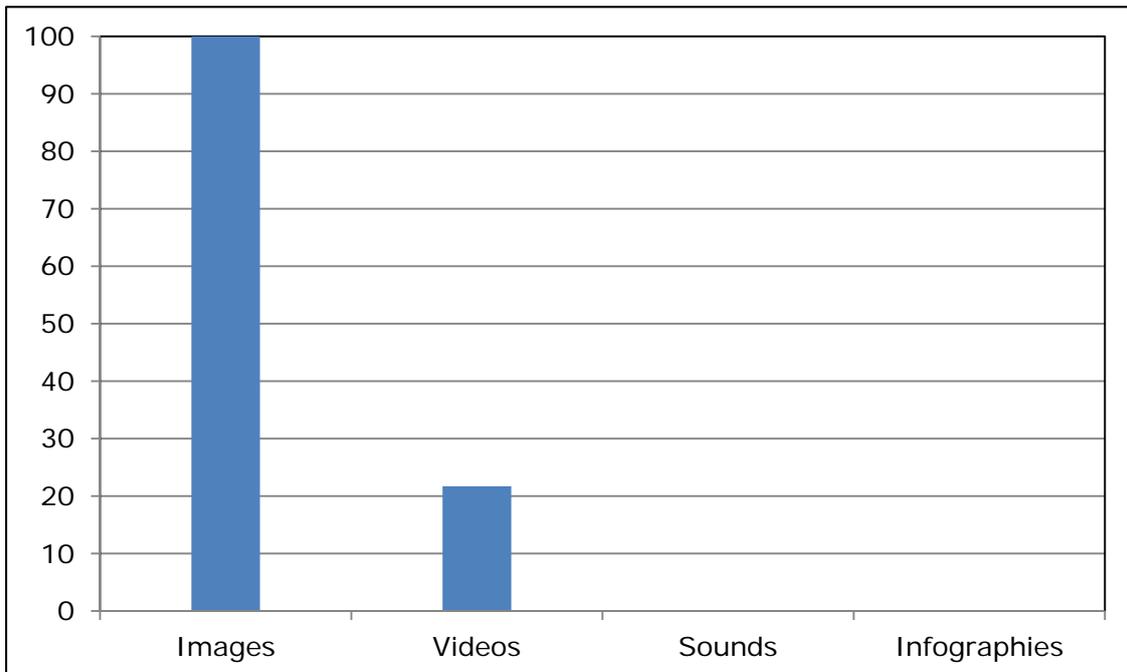**Figure 3: Visibility on the Internet according to Alexa.**
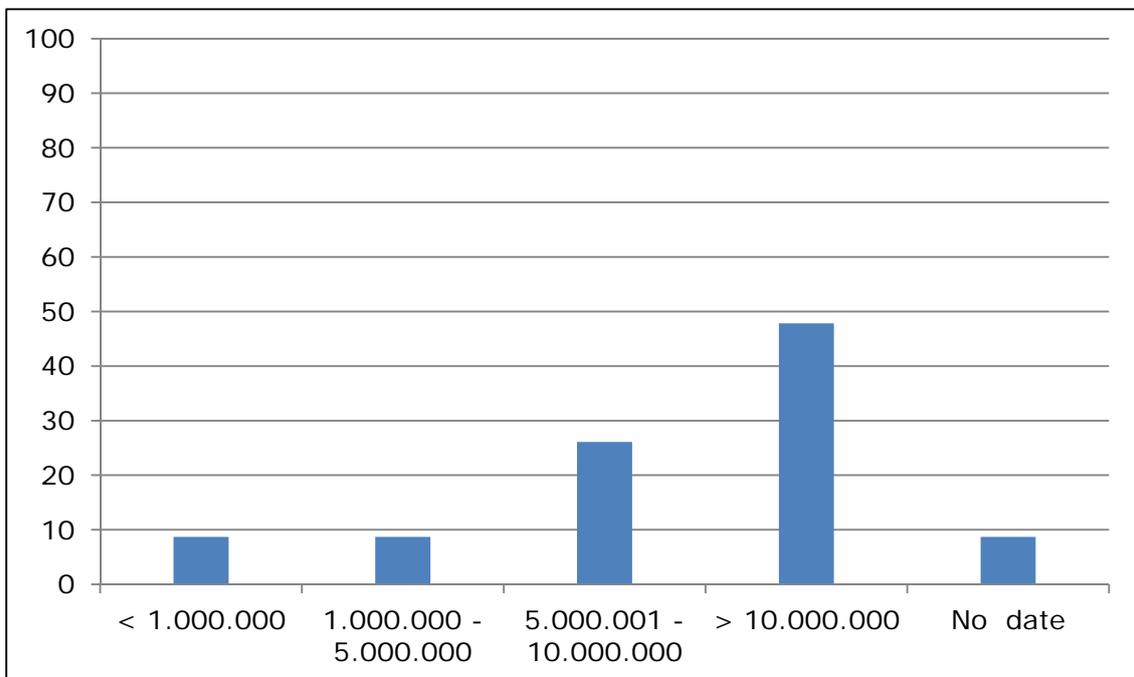
Source: Authors from www.alexa.com.

Figure 4: Way of St. James Friends Associations website of Seville

Source: www.viaplata.org. Date of capture, December 2010.

Figure 5: Types of multimedia resources.

Source: Authors.

The email is the most widespread communication element and the most popular on the websites, followed by the forums and polls. To assess the quality of a website it is necessary to consider, in addition to this communication service, their number and user participation. In the present study, we have found a significant deficiency in regard to the communication elements. Email is the most popular tool and it is present on most websites, nine in ten, but not so with the forums and polls. Only 17% of sites have forums, and none of them have polls (see Figure 6). Given the subject of these sites it would be very attractive and interesting for users to register their experiences on the St. James Way, either through the forums and opinion polls. Likewise it could be very useful to users who intend to do the Way, being able to consult this kind of information and, at the same time, be more visible on the Web

Figure 6: Communication elements.
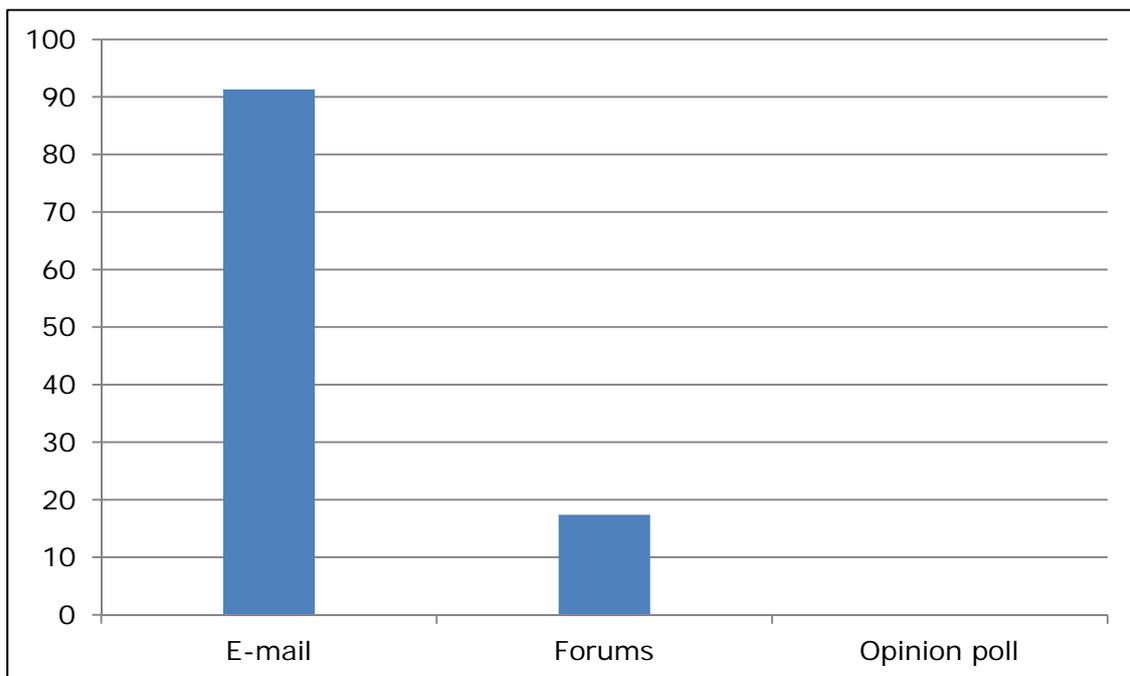
Source: Authors.

One of the most prominent features of the websites are interactive services, allowing citizens to carry out a multitude of online transactions without having to travel as well as access to a large amount of information. They can be considered one of the handiest tools of the website and are as varied as the companies or institutions that offer them. Interpretation of Interactive Services Results Analysis, reveals that these are presenting most of the websites of the Way of St. James Friends Associations (three in four).It is necessary to try to nuance these basic services, being limited to downloads, but it is not valued as a negative element in view of the subject

and origin of the website. This shows a significant effort on the part of such associations, to create as many quality websites and services as is possible.

5. Finals thoughts.

One of the most important aspects and one of the main strengths of the websites of the Way of St. James Friends Associations, is the type of programming they are seated. More than half designed their sites with dynamic programming and associated data bases, being crucial factors when creating quality websites. Host, usually a lot of important information, considering its source and thematic, although weaknesses were noted in structuring it with a large number of sections which makes navigability difficult and misleads the user. Other weaknesses are related to irregular updating of the content, the absence of electronic journal and the lack of multimedia and communication elements, especially forums and polls. These elements are remarkable pieces for attracting the number of users, allowing the exchange of experiences; create community and attract new users, making them more visible on the Net. Finally, it highlights the presence and strength of interactive services in most of the websites, despite being limited to only downloading documents.

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