

# A Study of Web Content Analysis on Cultural Heritage

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## ABSTRACT

The following text presents a research project focusing on cultural heritage through the Internet. The main goal of this study is to identify the mechanisms used to spread the Spanish cultural heritage through municipalities' websites. It is well known that cultural heritage represents one of the tourism industry bases, which is very important to Spanish economy. However, cultural heritage is also an element that helps to shape the social identity of Spanish citizens. Thus, this research aims to carry out content analysis of 500 websites, and then make a cultural portrait of our society in the Digital Age.

## Categories and Subject Descriptors

J.4 [Social and Behavioural Sciences]: Sociology.

## General Terms

Design, Documentation.

## Keywords

Cultural Heritage, Municipal Websites, Web Content Analysis, Web Design, Framing Theory, Social Identity Theory.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage is one of tourism pillars in any city, region or country. It is a consolidated alternative to mass tourism, characterized by the seasonal consumption of sun and beach. Currently, the tourism industry is one of the most powerful in the world. World Tourism Organization reports affirm that this activity has generated 9% of World Gross Domestic Product in 2012 [44]. In the Spanish case, the figures which show the Spanish Institute of Tourism Studies (ITE) are even more

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conclusive: our country received a total of 57.7 million tourists, which make this industry represents 10.8% of Spanish Gross Domestic Product in 2012 [29].

To further contextualize this project is necessary to notice the role of the Internet in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, because our society is strongly influenced by the Information and Communication Technology [10]. Thus, there are on the World Wide Web a volume of 1.37 billion indexed pages [67], whose potential audience is around 34.3% of the world's population; namely, about 2.4 billion users [31]. Back in Spain, the figures are also irrefutable: 59% of the population 14 years old and older are surfing on the web daily, which translates into more than 23 million Internet users [2].

Based on these figures, we can ensure that tourism industry, where cultural tourism is located, is one of the main engines of our economy. Similarly, the Internet is one of the media with more social penetration. Consequently, it seems appropriate to link the two issues and explore Spanish municipalities' websites in terms of cultural heritage. Our purpose is to determine the overall profile of our country that is reflected in the network, a fact that inevitably reverts to the citizens, partly by setting their social or collective identity [1] [9] [51] [56] [57] [58].

The further sections of the present text are the following: we highlight some theoretical keys regarding the research topic, the objectives and research questions, then the method used to address the topic, and finally some conclusions and contributions of our study.

## 2. SOME THEORETICAL NOTES

The heritage of a territory is composed, first, of monuments, groupings and places in regard with nature and culture (tangible heritage); and, on the other hand, behaviour, knowledge and values of human community that inhabits that territory (intangible heritage) [43] [59]. Culture, in turn, is a complex construct consisting of symbols, heroes, rituals and values of a society [24], and determines the identity of a human group in the same way that the personality determines the identity of an individual [23]. Therefore, it is logical that heritage and culture converge in what has been called *cultural heritage*, one of the main assets of tourism, as well as a key factor in shaping the collective identity of a territory.

It is appropriate to note that the relationship between identity, cultural heritage and tourism has generated a fruitful scientific production [4] [16] [33] [40] [43] [45] [46] [49]. However, it hasn't been detected, among the vast literature consulted, the existence of a systematic, objective and quantitative study about the mass dissemination of cultural heritage. Similarly, no

researches were found that have inferred frames on the collective identity of the Spain regions through the network. Here is where the main reason for this project resides: fill a theoretical gap and address, from Framing Theory [21] [27] [38] [53] [54] [62], the study of Spanish social identity in relation to their cultural heritage. Another aim is to compare different regions of the country, and if it is appropriate find differences in this regard.

One of the most important authors on Frame Theory is Robert Entman [17]. He asserts that the framing essentially involves selection and salience. This author says that framing process means select some aspects of perceived reality, making them more salient in the communicative text, that is, more meaningful or memorable to the audience. In the context of this research, consisting on the analysis of municipalities' websites, what matters is to identify heritage assets featured on the web information, which serve as support for the construction of the collective identity of people who inhabit those cited locations. It will therefore be essential to refer our previous investigations, which have resulted in two scientific publications [47] [48]. These publications are a valuable starting point, although they are not the only references. Callahan studies [6] [7], Luna, Peracchio & de Juan [37] or Singh & Baack [55], among others, will be taken into account.

## 2.1 Theoretical scheme

The scheme that summarizes the main theoretical aspects of the research project is shown below:

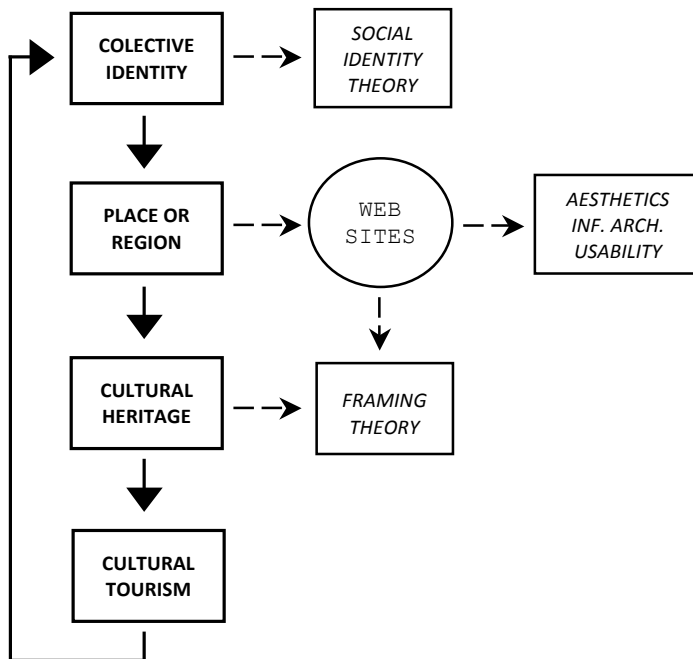


Figure 1. Conceptual scheme

## 2.2 Objectives and research questions

The study of framing cultural identity by content analysing municipal websites is, by and large, the main objective of this research project. In more detail, our first goal is to identify the elements of the cultural heritage of the main towns in Spain that are spread further through institutional sites. Thus, we can identify and quantify the approaches most commonly used in shaping collective cultural identity.

Subordinated to the fundamental objective of the project, focusing on textual and informational dimensions of the websites, the second purpose of the study emerges: to observe the main design aspects of the sites and to detect mechanisms and patterns in the way of spreading the municipalities' cultural identity. That is the reason why we consider issues such as visual appearance or aesthetics, information architecture and usability to determine the state of the web design of the sites analysed.

With respect to the visual appearance or aesthetics of the websites, it is very important to study the way in which the contents are designed, especially those related to the graphic material, like photographs, animations or videos. We performed a thorough visual analysis to check the look and feel of the sites. The information architecture consists on structuring websites to help users find and manage information. And usability refers to the ease of use and navigation of the site by users. Consequently, we have examined the arrangement of the elements of the websites to find out if it works appropriately or not.

To address the objectives, we propose some research questions that will guide the study. These are as follows:

- RQ<sub>1</sub>: What elements of heritage and cultural tourism are highlighted in the website content of the municipalities in Spain?
- RQ<sub>2</sub>: Which approach is given to the identity of the municipalities in terms of cultural heritage and tourism through their websites?
- RQ<sub>3</sub>: Which regions of the country perform wider dissemination of cultural heritage through the websites of their major cities?
- RQ<sub>4</sub>: How websites are designed in terms of visual appearance, information architecture and usability?

In summary, and taking into account, first, the importance of heritage and cultural tourism in the Spanish economy and in shaping collective identities and, second, the role of the Internet in mass propagation of information, our aim is clear: to analyse the approach in terms of cultural heritage which is given to Spain's social identity through the websites of their municipalities.

In addition, as specified above, it is interesting to make a comparison between the different regions that make up the country to detect possible differences in the transmission of cultural heritage. Finally, we know that a good website design facilitates the delivery of information, a reason why it is important to observe how the tourism and heritage information is made available to users.

## 3. METHOD

First of all, it is appropriate to provide some definitions about the methodological technique that we are going to use, the content analysis.

Igartua [28] explains that “content analysis is a research technique for discovering the DNA of media messages, because this analysis allows reconstructing their architecture, knowing their structure, their basic components and the way they work”. Meanwhile, White & Marsh [65] nuance that “it is a flexible research method that can be applied to various problems of communication studies, either as a single method or in conjunction with others”. Lombard, Snyder-Duch & Campanella [35] point that “it is especially appropriate and necessary for the central work of researchers in communication, and in particular to those who are studying mass

communication: analysis of messages”. Colle [14], in line with these findings, argues that “content analysis is the set of methods and research techniques to facilitate the systematic description of the semantic and formal components of all types of message”.

There are several features that characterize this methodology, but it is necessary that we emphasize, with the help of Wimmer & Dominick [66], the most relevant ones. First, content analysis must be systematic in the selection of the sample content, because “you have to follow a standardized procedure and each element must have an equal chance of being included in the analysis”, and also in the process of evaluating them, that “it must also be systematic, trying exactly the same way all the contents examined”. Secondly, it has to be objective, which means that “the particular idiosyncrasies of the researcher cannot affect the results, so if another analyst repeat the process, would necessarily reach the same outcome”. Thirdly, content analysis must be quantitative, because “the aim of this technique is to achieve an accurate representation of the set of messages”.

According to McMillan [39] and Weare & Lin [64], the five major steps in the process of web content analysis are:

- 1<sup>st</sup>: At the beginning, the researcher proposes some research questions or hypothesis which will guide his study.
- 2<sup>nd</sup>: Then, the researcher selects the sample from a population universe.
- 3<sup>rd</sup>: The third step involves defining the categories of analysis.
- 4<sup>th</sup>: After that, coders are trained, they analyse the content and the reliability of their work is checked to know if their work has been successful.
- 5<sup>th</sup>: And finally, the data obtained during the process are interpreted.

These five stages in the process of content analysis are properly ordered. This process should be followed to provide the researcher good results.

Previously, we have seen which are the objectives and research questions of this study. In the next sections of this article we will focus on the intermediate stages of content analysis.

### 3.1 Sample of contents

The study sample is large because we have analysed a total of 500 websites. The sampling strategy was multistage; therefore it has required several steps for processing. First, the universe (in this case, the websites of Spain’s municipalities) was stratified by provinces of the country, 50 in total. In a second step, a critical case as each province has been intentionally selected: the website of the capital. Third and finally, a random sample of 9 more provincial municipalities was performed. They had to meet a requirement based on their population size, that is, to have more than 1.000 people. We have to take into account that this strategy will make a significant novelty with respect to what is usually observed in web content analysis, as most researchers working with convenience or intentional samples [13] [20] [42] [52] [68].

To design the sample, we needed to consult official demography data from Spanish Statistical Office [30], through its web directory of municipalities. In the next table, we show data from each province regarding with the total universe and the sample we took:

**Table 1. Percentages of our sampling with respect to the population of each province**

PROVINCE	UNIVERSE	SAMPLING	%
Albacete	400.007	236.312	59.07
Alicante	1.945.642	484.974	24.92
Almería	699.329	356.369	50.95
Álava	321.417	277.197	86.24
Asturias	1.068.165	566.262	53.01
Ávila	168.825	90.172	53.41
Badajoz	693.729	226.853	32.70
Baleares	1.111.674	476.418	42.85
Barcelona	5.540.925	2.006.376	36.21
Vizcaya	1.156.447	447.801	38.72
Burgos	371.248	238.540	64.25
Cáceres	410.275	159.856	38.96
Cádiz	1.238.492	483.158	39.01
Cantabria	591.888	210.748	35.60
Castellón	601.699	323.666	53.79
Ciudad Real	524.962	135.390	25.79
Córdoba	802.422	390.853	48.70
A Coruña	1.138.161	415.631	36.51
Cuenca	211.899	94.401	44.54
Guipúzcoa	713.818	242.539	33.97
Girona	761.632	191.598	25.15
Granada	919.319	342.529	37.25
Guadalajara	257.723	145.723	56.54
Huelva	520.668	205.039	39.37
Huesca	226.329	89.899	39.72
Jaén	664.916	193.548	29.10
León	489.752	156.188	31.89
Lleida	440.915	170.550	38.68
Lugo	346.005	156.683	45.28
Madrid	6.495.551	3.584.964	55.19
Málaga	1.652.999	704.825	42.63
Murcia	1.472.049	669.419	45.47
Navarra	644.477	246.015	38.17
Ourense	326.724	160.069	48.99
Palencia	168.955	109.913	65.05
Las Palmas	1.103.850	523.738	47.44
Pontevedra	955.050	450.862	47.20
La Rioja	322.027	216.079	67.09
Salamanca	345.548	197.681	57.21
Tenerife	1.014.829	330.696	32.58
Segovia	161.702	70.472	43.58
Sevilla	1.942.155	857.114	44.13
Soria	93.291	69.050	74.01
Tarragona	810.178	297.237	36.68
Teruel	142.183	59.202	41.63
Toledo	706.407	231.747	32.80
Valencia	2.566.474	905.262	35.27
Valladolid	532.284	361.825	67.97
Zamora	188.270	85.870	45.61
Zaragoza	978.638	708.966	72.44
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>46.961.924</b>	<b>20.356.279</b>	<b>43.34</b>

A synthetic interpretation of this data tells us that managing a sample of 500 municipalities' websites (6.15% of the municipalities in Spain, 8.117 in total), the study reaches 43.32% of the total population, which makes it representative. Nevertheless, it is important to take into account that the total audience in municipalities' web sites is not only composed by the citizens living in the specific city, but also it contains people around the world because the Internet can reach people from different regions, countries and continents.

### 3.2 Codebook

Once formulated the research questions or hypothesis and chosen a representative sample from a population, the next step is to develop the codebook. Igartua [28] notes that "it is a comprehensive document which contains all necessary instructions to encoders to successfully complete the work of analysis". Moreover, "the development of the codebook tries to ensure consistency and reliability of the codes managed by analysts involved in research" [19]. In sum, the codebook is to content analysis what an instruction guides to assembling a piece of furniture: a protocol that must be followed to get coherent results.

The codebook consists of items related to the two dimensions referred to this research, content and design of web sites. With respect to the content, the codebook was created based on previous studies [8] [11] [12] [18] [24] [25] [26] [29] [43] [50] [59] [60] [61], the same as in regard with design [3] [5] [6] [15] [32] [36] [41] [63] [68].

With the formerly research questions in mind, the codebook included the following categories of analysis with their variables:

1.– Identification of analysis unit. These are the identification variables: number of website, number of province, number of inhabitants of the municipality (data extracted from Spanish Statistical Office), number of coder and date coding of the website.

2.– General contents. The website offers information about: the geographical location of the municipality, map, number of inhabitants, extension or geographical area, climate or weather, news section, political information, economical information, cultural agenda, history, traffic and municipal transports and, finally, contact (e-mail and/or telephone number). Possible answers were: 0 (no information about) and 1 (information does exist).

3.– Heritage contents. The concept of heritage is divided into cultural heritage (tangible and intangible) and natural heritage. With regard to cultural tangible heritage, the website offers information about: museums and exhibition halls; archaeological deposits; libraries, film libraries or other archival documents; theatres and amphitheatres; cathedrals; other religious buildings such as churches, chapels, hermitages and monasteries; iconic civic buildings such as castles, forts, bridges, walls, or towers; urban centres; squares and courtyards; parks and gardens; statues and sculptures; and finally bullfighting arenas. With respect to cultural intangible heritage, the website offers information about: oral traditions and expressions, like proverbs, riddles, stories, songs, legends, myths, epic poems or hymns; performing arts, like music festivals, folklore, film festivals, dance or flamenco; municipal festivities; religious events; typical gastronomy; traditional crafts; figures or prominent personalities; and bullfighting. Natural heritage presents the following variables: nature reserves or parks; landscapes, paths or caves of heritage

interest; and beaches or seaside formations. Possible answers to all of these questions were: 0 (no information about) and 1 (information does exist). In addition, we have tried to define the approach to each heritage element as follows: 0 (no information about), 1 (local approach), 2 (regional approach), 3 (national approach), 4 (global approach) or 9 (no specific approach is given to the heritage element).

4.– Tourism contents. The kind of tourism that the municipality tends to promote is: cultural tourism, massive tourism (beach and sun), countryside and nature tourism, health and wellness tourism, sport tourism, commercial and business tourism, idiomatic tourism, and scientific tourism. Moreover, this section also contains variables as: existence of virtual tourism office, virtual tour throughout the website, types of accommodation (hotels, hostels, camping, etc.), and presence of the own slogan of the municipality. Possible answers to all of these questions were: 0 (no information about) and 1 (information does exist).

5.– Web design features. This section includes the following subsections:

5.1.– Visual appearance. These features were analysed only in the home page, and we wanted to know things like: number, location and content of the photos, existence of a photographic gallery, number, location and content of the animations, and number, location and content of the videos. Moreover, we focused on the colours in three ways: screen background, menu and text. All of these variables were nominal or ordinal, and they presented different options to response.

5.2.– Information architecture. These features were analysed all over the site, and we wanted to know things like: text font, font size, existence of titles, keywords, paragraph size, contrast between font and background, languages of the information (Spanish, Catalan, Basque, Galician, English, French, German, Portuguese, other), existence, visibility and performance of links, FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions), social networks and blogs. All of these variables were nominal, and most of them consisted on 0 (no information about) and 1 (information does exist).

5.3.– Usability. Same as before, these features were analysed all over the site, and we wanted to know things like: how is the content menu, where is its location, existence of web map and a searching engine, consistency, cleanliness and quality perception of the interface. All of these variables were nominal or ordinal, and they presented different responses.

Once finished the analysis of the sites, encoders should make a screenshot of the home pages in order to have an archived graphic repertoire. This is important because websites may change with the pass of time.

### 3.3 Coding

The coding of all 500 websites according to the codebook was undertaken by 4 analysts who were trained in the research methodology. The period when was implemented the content analysis was since February 24 until April 11, 2014. It was necessary to devote 220 hours to the coding, between 26 and 27 minutes on average for each website.

After that, the reliability of the process was measured by analysing 60 of those websites (12% of the total), randomly selected. By means of Krippendorff's alpha coefficient [22] [34],

which serves to evaluate the agreement by controlling the random, the average of variables amounted to Krippendorf's  $\alpha = .74$ , value that indicates a good reliability bearing in mind that is the most consistent coefficient.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The next research step will be the interpretation of data obtained. We expect to find interesting results. However, we don't still have any quantitative data to share with academic community at the moment, and this is the reason why they don't appear in the present text.

The theoretical contribution represented by this project concerns the effort to develop a conceptual framework, based on Social Identity Theory and Framing Theory, for diagnostics on the approach that is given to the collective cultural identity of the municipalities through their institutional websites. Given the importance of cultural heritage and the role of internet in our society, it is appropriate to implement this conceptual framework to shed light on a subject vaguely treated in an empirical way.

In addition to the theoretical advance, it is also necessary to refer the methodological contribution of the research. In this sense, the design of a strategic, systematic, objective and quantitative web analysis protocol of a large and representative sample, and from the point of view of heritage and cultural tourism, is a new initiative. As noted before, the relationship between cultural heritage and identity has been the subject of numerous studies, but mainly theoretical. Therefore, it is intended to address this issue from an empirical point of view, a fact that will increase our understanding and knowledge of the phenomenon.

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