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Multilingual dissemination of corporate websites from the healthcare sector

A Spanish perspective

Abstract. Companies have nowadays numerous opportunities to open new markets and expand their business thanks to globalization and the development of new technologies. Among the resources and tools available, multilingual corporate websites can be great allies for enterprises to reach clients globally at a considerably reduced cost. However, companies, especially small and medium-sized ones, have to face challenges such as language and cultural barriers when starting their internationalization processes. This paper aims to analyze the web presence of Spanish companies from the healthcare sector along with the multilingual dissemination of their corporate information. To this aim, a sample of 385 Spanish companies from the healthcare sector has been analyzed. Results show that there is still a long way to go, as less than a half of the analyzed companies had a website and only 27% of them offered their contents translated into other languages. In addition, correlations are found between the size of the companies and having a corporate website as well as offering its content translated.

Keywords: Corporate websites, Healthcare sector, Multilingual information, SMEs

1 Introduction

Nowadays, globalization and the modern information society give companies great opportunities when it comes to establishing and expanding their business, including, opening new markets, and reaching international clients. This is highly relevant for companies settled in regions with strong tourism and immigration flows, which is the case for Spain [1, 2]. Nonetheless, despite the advantages offered by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), such as spreading messages globally at a reduced cost, companies, and especially small and medium-sized ones (SMEs) have to overcome numerous obstacles for opening new markets [3–5]. One of these challenges are language and cultural barriers, which are highly relevant for fields such as the healthcare sector, which is often dealing with sensitive information. Therefore, companies aiming to achieve international projection, regardless of their size and field of activity, should focus on the multilingual dissemination of their corporate information [6]. To this aim, the Web plays an essential role, given that it is not subject to geographical limitations and can reach large audiences allowing users from different linguistic and context to be brought closer together.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the web presence of Spanish SMEs from the healthcare sector, as well as the multilingual dissemination of their corporate information. This main objective is divided into two specific objectives: SO1) To identify the strategies applied in the multilingual dissemination of the corporate Web sites of the Spanish healthcare sector SMES and, SO2) To determine the role played by commercial factors (size, scope, etc.) in their language management

2 Background

It is beyond question that SMEs are a key element in the global economy. In fact, most of the enterprises in the European Union, including Spain, are small and medium-sized enterprises [7, 8] and more than 70% of them have a corporate website [9]. More specifically, as regards to business activity by sector, according to the official data, more than 80% of Spanish enterprises belong to the service sector, being the healthcare the second biggest group concerning business creation in net terms [8].

Undoubtedly, as mentioned before, globalization and ICTs are great allies for SMEs when it comes to entering new markets and, to achieve this aim, having their corporate websites available in different languages helps these companies to encourage a friendly environment, generate engagement and develop a branding strategy while increasing competitive strength [3, 10, 11]. Subsequently, ICTs are a good indicator of the ability of companies to modernize and compete in globalized environments [12]. As a result, one of the first steps for companies when getting started in digital marketing is the creation of an appealing website in line with the company's objectives and interests. Thus, corporate websites act as public relations vehicles and allow companies to inform, promote and commercialize their products and services [13].

Concerning the healthcare sector, the Web has become a regular source of information, allowing users to connect to health content, experts and support [14] and, consequently, medical corporate websites have become one of the main sources of information for the general public, counting with a considerable volume of users [15].

However, in order to achieve international projection, it is essential to use one or more foreign languages [6]. Therefore, translation, website localization – the cultural adaptation of the content and language of a website for a specific market – and transcreation – the process through which certain parts of a text are translated and others are creatively reinterpreted – foster SMEs internationalization and help SMEs to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers [16, 17]. Website localization and transcreation have been proved to be relevant with regard to the geographical expansion of companies, to improving the buying experience for customers and to achieving success in foreign markets [3, 18–21]. In the light of this scenario, it is important to study the characteristics of the dissemination of corporate web information to deepen the existing knowledge about the keys for successful language management during internationalization processes.

3 Methodology

3.1 Sample description

The object of study was selected using information from the Sectoral Ranking of Companies by Turnover offered by the Spanish source *elEconomista.es*. The data from this Company Ranking comes from the *INFORMA D&B S.A.U. (S.M.E.)* database (which boasts the *AENOR* quality certificate) and is fed from a number of public and private sources, including the *Official Companies Register Gazette*, the *Official Accounts Rec-*

ords, the Official State, Autonomous Regional and Provincial Gazettes, national and regional press, ad hoc studies and other publications. The data were collected during the months of May and June 2021

The sample was calculated for a finite population ($N = 906$) for a confidence level of 99% with margin of error of 5% [22]. Therefore, the sample was formed by 385 companies of Spanish SMEs included in the sector 8621 of the Spanish classification of economic activities (CNAE): General medicine activities [23]. Regarding the size of the selected companies, in order to have a representative and objective sample, 193 companies were medium-size (50.1%) and 192 were small-size companies (49.9%).

The companies were located throughout Spain. Almost every Spanish region is represented in the sample, although Madrid and Barcelona represent 40% of the sample (21% and 19%, respectively). So, the sample selected was very representative of the sector in geographical terms. In Fig. 1, the geographical distribution of the sample is shown.

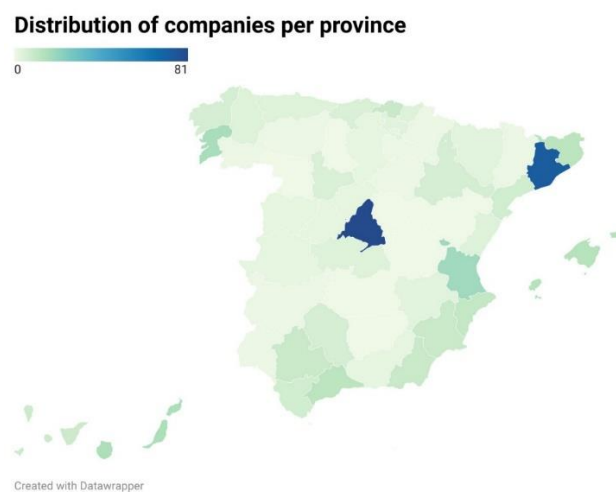


Fig. 1. Distribution of the analyzed companies per province

3.2 Analysis criteria and instruments

First, the data – name of the company, size according to turnover, location, website address (if available) and translation languages (if available) – from the companies according to the information provided by the Sectoral Ranking of Companies by Turnover were compiled. All the companies' websites were located both using the information available in the ranking or via Internet searches using the company or commercial name. If it was not possible to locate the link to the corporate website or it could not be verified the effective belonging of a website to a given company, it was determined that the SME did not have, or it was impossible to locate, a corporate website. In addition, broken links and websites under construction were omitted.

The data were analyzed using SPSS statistical package via the analysis of frequencies and Pearson's bivariate correlations. MS Excel and Datawrapper were used for chart creation.

4 Results

4.1 Availability of corporate website

The frequency analysis provided the following results. As for the management of their corporate communication online, the results obtained were the following. Only 188 companies had a corporate website (48.8%), compared to 197 (51.2%) that did not have. Thus, less than half of the studied SMEs have an online presence. So, our language diversity analysis was made considering those 188 websites.

4.2 Language diversity

Regarding the language management of their online information, the default language of the websites was Spanish, for 157 websites (83.5%); Catalan, for 20 websites (10.6%); English, for 6 websites (3.2%); German for 4 websites (2.1%) and Dutch, for 1 website (0.5%).

After analyzing how many languages the websites offered, a frequency analysis showed that they presented their content in 1.44 different languages on average (including the original language of the URL). The maximum number of languages available in a single website was 8. However, 137 (72.9%) websites had their content available in just one language, thus, not offering any translated version. Only 51 (27.1%) websites offered multilingual content (content in more than one language). This means that the analyzed companies presented very low levels of language management. In addition, when a website offered multilingual content, it did so in a reduced number of languages: 33 websites provided only one translated version of their content (17.6%), 11 provided two versions (5.9%), 5 provided three versions (2.7%) and 2 provided more than three versions (1.1%). See Fig. 2 for details.

Number of translated versions and percentages

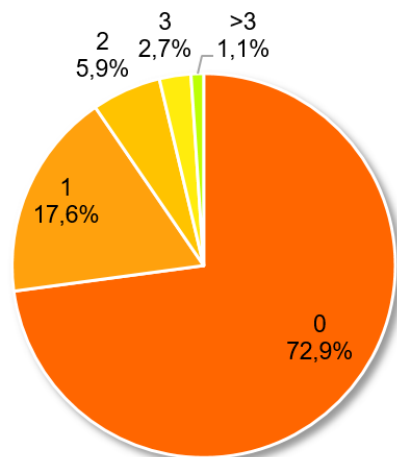


Fig 2. Distribution of the sample according to the number of translated versions

Overall, the websites offered up to 14 different languages. The frequency analysis determined that the most frequent was Spanish (present in 177 websites, 94.1%), followed by Catalan (29 websites, 15.4%) and English (28 websites, 14.9%). Other international

languages in which websites offered their content in are German, French, Russian, Swedish, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch, Finish and Chinese, although their presence is rather reduced. The prominent place of Catalan (regional language in North-East of Spain) contrasts with the small presence of other regional languages such as Galician and Basque. Fig. 3 shows the languages present in the sample in decreasing order of presence. The codes of the ISO 639-4:2010 standard have been used to identify each language [24].

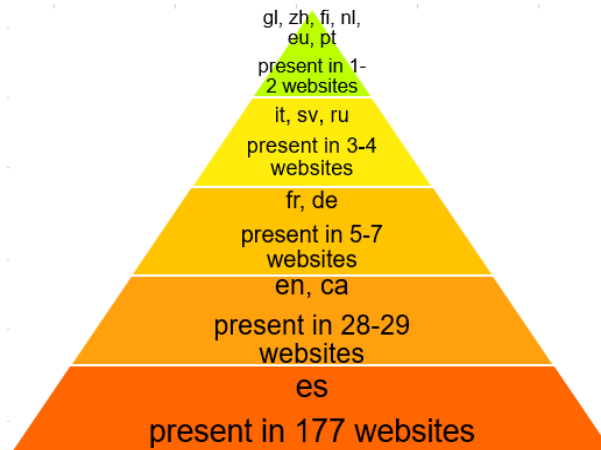


Fig. 3. Languages present in the sample classified by number of websites.

4.3 Data triangulation

Data on sample description were triangulated with information on linguistic diversity through Pearson's bivariate correlations. This analysis showed that there was a low although very significant correlation (coefficient = .205**) between the size of the company (medium- or small-size) and having online presence through a website. In the same line, there was a low very significant correlation (coefficient = .212**) between the size of the company and the number of translated versions present in the website. This is, medium-sized companies were more likely to have a corporate website than small-size companies, and also to offer more translated versions of their content.

Moreover, it was observed that multilingual content was moderately correlated with the presence of a version of their content in English (coefficient = .585**) and the presence of a version of their content in Catalan (coefficient = .435**). This is, if these companies were to decide to translate their corporate websites, English and Catalan would be the languages of choice. However, it was observed that, while the number of translated versions present on the website was highly correlated with the presence of a version of their content in English (coefficient = .648**), it was very lowly correlated with the presence of a version of their content in Catalan (coefficient = 0.178*). See Tables 1 and 2 for more details. This means that, the more languages a website was translated to, the more likely it was to find their content in English, while it was not as likely to find its content in Catalan. So, companies offering their content in Catalan do not tend to offer their content in a multilingual form.

Table 1. A. Pearson's correlation for Number of translated versions*Is there a version in English?

		Number of translated versions	Is there a version in English?
Number of translated versions	Pearson's correlation	1	.648**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	188	188
Is there a version in English?	Pearson's correlation	.648**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	188	188
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table 2. B. Pearson's correlation for Number of translated versions*Is there a version in Catalan?

		Number of translated versions	Is there a version in Catalan?
Number of translated versions	Pearson's correlation	1	,178*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,015
	N	188	188
Is there a version in Catalan?	Pearson's correlation	,178*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,015	
	N	188	188
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).			

5 Conclusions

This study analyzes the web presence of Spanish SMEs from the healthcare sector along with the multilingual dissemination of their corporate information. In addition, correlations between the size of the company and variables such as having a website and the number of translated versions available on the website have been studied. First of all, it should be noted that Spanish SMEs from the healthcare sector have still a long way to go when it comes to their online presence as less than a half (48.8%) of the analyzed companies had a corporate website. These results are considerably lower than those offered by official reports, which pointed out that more than 70% of the SMEs had a website [9]. However, this results are in line to those obtained by similar studies [25, 26], which showed that only around half of the companies analyzed had a website. In addition, most of the companies, around 73%, did not offer the content of their corporate websites in more than one language. These results are similar to those pointed out by [25, 26], showing a generalized lack of translations regarding corporate websites. This study has shown that the analyzed companies present very low levels of language management, as most of them did not translate their websites and, if they do it, they normally do not offer more than one translated version. That contrasts with studies that claim that enhancing the usability of a company's website by providing multilingual versions is worthwhile not only

for better performance and attitudes to the company (corporate image or branding), but also eventually for more sale.

This research has also studied the correlations between some of the studied variables. Thus, there might be a relation between the size of the company and the availability of a corporate website as well as the number of translated versions of the given website. In this sense, medium-sized companies are more likely to have corporate websites and to offer translations of their content. Similarly, previous research showed that, at a regional level, medium-sized companies were more likely to have websites than small companies [26].

Moreover, these results may prove that the choice of languages to disseminate corporate information may depend on the scope of the company. So, the choice of English for Spanish SMEs could indicate that the company is targeting a multilingual and multicultural audience (even international), whereas the choice of Catalan may imply that the company has a national (or even regional) scope.

Therefore, this research contributes to deepen the knowledge on the situation of SMEs with regard to their internet presence and the multilingual dissemination of their corporate information. In the light of this scenario, it can be concluded that more research is needed concerning the digitalization and internationalization process of the SMEs. Thus, future lines of research should include an expansion of the object of study, including other countries and sectors of activity and it should also be advisable to elaborate on the perception of companies and users concerning the digitalization and internationalization process.

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