New Media in Religious Communication: Supporting WYD Madrid 2011

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Abstract

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and the internet have had, and are having, a major impact on tourism by deeply affecting the pre-, during and post- visit experience, as well as changing the business models. ICT and the internet are also playing an important role in mediating the religious experience (eReligion), yielding a number of experiences, studies as well as official documents within the Christian Catholic Church. This paper presents online communication activities of Word Youth Days (WYD), one of the most important religious youth events. A comparison and analysis is performed from the websites of the last three WYD editions and presents in detail a number activities done by the WYD2011 (Madrid, August 2011) to set-up and increase its online presence and visibility.

Keywords: World Youth Day, youth events tourism, eReligion, eTourism.

1 Literature

Religious Tourism

Within the international academic community several discussions have taken place, and are still taking place, in relation to the definition of a person who travels for religious reasons. There is not an overall consensus on whether the traveller should be seen as a tourist or as a pilgrim (Tsomokou and Velaoras, 2009; Raj and Morpeth, 2007; Rubio and De Esteban, 2008). The World Tourism Organization (WTO, 1985) defines cultural tourism as the movement of persons due to essentially cultural motivations as study travels, travels to festivals and other artistic events, visits to places and monuments, travels to explore the nature, the art, the folklore and the pilgrimages. Thus, according to the WTO, pilgrimage is part of cultural tourism, and in fact religion is one of the most important aspect of a culture. Pretillo and Lo Presti (2009) are of the same opinion that religious tourism involves cultural tourism as well: they actually stated that many people travel to a widening variety of sacred sites not only for religious or spiritual purposes or to have an experience with the sacred in the traditional sense, but also because they are marked and marketed as heritage or

cultural attractions to be consumed. According to the World Religious Travel Association (www.wrtareligioustravel.com, 2009) religious tourism is estimated at $18 billion and counts 300 million travellers. In North America alone, it is estimated at $10 billion and in Italy at $4.5 billion. The Travel Industry Association of America (www.ustravel.com) reported in November 2009 that one in four travellers were currently interested in "spiritual vacations."

eReligion

Religious use of the internet can be traced back to the early 1980's. At that time, religious computer enthusiasts began to explore the ways to use this new means of communication to express their religious interest by forming online groups dedicated to their religion (Campbell, 2006). Heidi Campbell (2006) has identified four major types of online religious activities. She states that the Internet has provided religious practitioners with new ways and channels to explore religious beliefs and experiences through a growing number of websites, chat rooms and email discussion groups. Furthermore, she classified online religious activities according to the following categories: (i) Religious information online; (ii) Online worship and rituals; (iii) Online recruitment and missionary activities. (iv) Online religious communities. In regards to the Christian Catholic Church, according to Arasa, Cantoni and Ruiz (2010), Church institutional communication activities could be grouped in five major areas: media promotion; media relations; media education; pastoral care of media professionals; and internal communications. In another research, Arasa (2008) studied the online communication of nine major diocesan websites worldwide. He found that there is no contradiction or opposition between information giving and evangelization in official diocesan websites. The study also highlighted that dioceses target journalists as a main group of attention, and that journalists consider richness of information the most important quality of a diocesan website. Finally, he also suggested that promotional activities may be improved and that usability criteria need to be considered in the planning, implementation, running and promotion of a diocesan website (Arasa, 2008; Cantoni et al., in press).

2 Introducing World Youth Day Case Study

World Youth Day (WYD) is an international religious and cultural event organized by the Catholic Church, which takes place every three years. Youth from all over the world are invited by the Pope to meet together for a week. The aim is to let youths know Christ's message and create an open atmosphere to reflect and talk about the fundamental matters of life. In October 2010 – the period of reference for this research – the official website was receiving about 5,000 visits per day (as a comparison, by May 2011 it has almost doubled its daily visits) and 233,840 fans on Facebook by August 2011; just before the event it counted 439,340 fans. Before detailing the research design of this case study it is important to underline the purpose of the collaboration with WYD2011: a young researcher was hosted for several months at the WYD2011 headquarters to design a strategy to foster their online communication.

3 Research Design

The analysis of WYD2011 web communication is based on the Website Communication Model (WCM), as presented by Cantoni and Tardini (2006). WCM looks at websites from the point of view of communication, adopting a holistic approach, which goes beyond a naive dichotomy that sees the website either as a mere technological artifact, to be handled by engineers, or as an advertising tool, to be managed by visual communication experts. Each interpretation is only partially true, but both suggest that websites are static objects. Instead, this model presents a website as a dynamic entity with a proper life and typical activities, like a shop or a press agency. It ideally considers all the elements and the actors involved in the communicative activity taking place on the internet. They are grouped in five dimensions or pillars: (i) Contents and services/functionalities - more or less structured ensemble of information pieces and services provided in the site, such as news reporting, buying, polling, chatting; (ii) Accessibility tools - the collection of technical instruments, which make the contents and services accessible, like hardware, software, and interface; (iii) People who manage - the group of people who design, implement, maintain and promote the site; (iv) Users/clients - the group of people who access the site; (v) Ecological context or relevant info-market - which gives to every element of the site its precise meaning, value and place within the broader context of the web.

Only two of the performed analyses are presented in this research paper due to space constrains. In both of the analyses three websites have been considered: WYD2011 website (www.madrid11.com), WYD2005 website (www.wjt2005.de) and WYD2008 site (www.wyd2008.org). The performed analyses regarded: (i) longitudinal contents and functionality analysis (as in Lizzi, et al., 2011; Cantoni et al., 2007; Arasa, 2008) takes into account the first two pillars concerning "objects" and the fifth pillar of info-competitors; (ii) while on the other side a longitudinal backlinking analysis and campaign stressed the human side of the WCM (fourth pillar) and the fifth element the info-competitors (Cantoni and Ceriani, 2007; Baggio, 2007).

4 Results

Contents and functionality analysis
The content and functionality analysis was carried out in five different areas where indicators were grouped following a communicative approach/narration: (i) we are a (religious) event; (ii) offering a (pilgrimage) experience; (iii) in a given city; (iv) that is we who are suggesting you to come; (v) here are the general services we offer to you. This analysis was carried out in October 2010 (10 months before the event) and was very helpful to suggest new contents and improvements for the WYD2011. The most relevant contents, present in every website, were (group i) news and cultural events, (group ii) volunteer and disabled persons, (group iii) hosting city, getting there, what to do and practical information, and (group iv) press office.

These contents can add value, for instance on an event level, with the biography of Benedict XVI (WYD2011), a liturgical glossary, and more interactive tools (tourism related) for users. Tool examples can be virtual tours, the possibility to download a mobile application offering services and amenities young pilgrims may need in

Madrid, or information about Madrid itself, and recommended itineraries for the surroundings.

Back-links analysis and campaign.

Results of this analysis (June 2nd, 2010) showed that 94 websites were linking to the WYD2011 site (www.madrid11.com). Whereas the WYD2005 website (www.wjt2005.de) had 1,009 back-links and the WYD2008 site (www.wyd2008.org) had 892 back-links. Only one website was linking to both WYD2011 and the WYD2005 websites, while the WYD2011 and the WYD2008 websites had no back-links in common. The number of back-links in common among the two previous WYD sites were 8 (Table 1). These results show that 1,892 websites linking to previous WYD editions (1,009 + 892 – 8 – 1) could be asked to put a link towards the current WYD2011 website.

	madrid11.com	wjt2005.de	wyd2008.org
madrid11.com	94	1	0
wjt2005.de	1%	1009	8
wyd2008.org	0%	0%	892

Table 1: Back-links of the last 3 WYD websites. June 2nd, 2010.

Figure 2 shows a distribution of the backlinks of the previous WYD events (2005 and 2008).
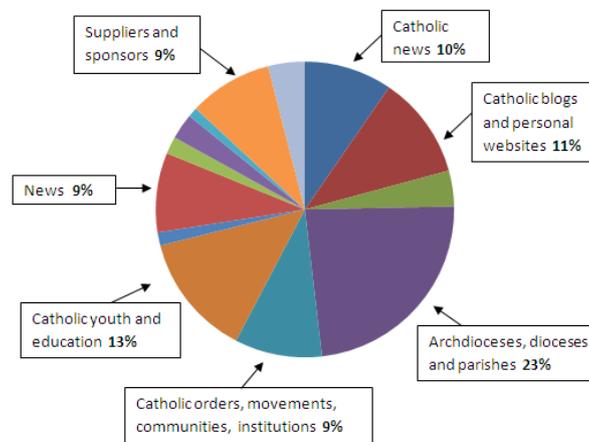

Fig. 2: Main back-links categories of the WYD2005 and WYD2008 websites.

5 Conclusion and Limitations

In this paper a comparative analysis of websites of the previous two WYDs, checked against the current one, has shown the possible areas of improvement and has helped to depict a general contents and functionalities map for such a website. There is not an ultimate "right" way to do WYD online communication. Each event has different needs according to the time as well as to the location hosting it. The backlinks analysis has helped in mapping the "surrounding" websites, and in designing a

promotional campaign to increase website visibility within its relevant context. The literature review showed that tourism, religious studies and technology is a relative new field. Web managers of Catholic event websites should take into considerations that their web users are not simply pilgrims, but also people that are going to a different place from their usual residence and will behave like tourists. Future work will regard the longitudinal study of the WYD2011 online communication together with the creation of quality guidelines for the next WYD event.

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