

THE IMPACT OF PANDEMIC ON YOUTH TRAVEL PREFERENCES – AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT. The pandemic has significantly affected international tourism and in order to reach the level of travel recorded in 2019, a series of measures and strategies are needed that take into account the new perspective of tourists on travel. In this context, the primary purpose of this paper is to provide an analysis of the effect that COVID-19 has on travel activity preferences, subdividing the young tourists, and most important, how their travel behaviors changed following the pandemic. A questionnaire-based survey has been conducted on consumers of tourist services aged 18-29 years of various nationalities. The key topics investigated were the travel motivations, the criteria according to which they choose the destinations, the type of tourist destination chosen, the average length of stay and activities they prefer to do while traveling. It was analyzed if these preferences changed during the pandemics and among Romanian and foreign young tourists. As young tourists represent a significant segment of international tourism, it was considered that is important for the managers to know how consumers' behaviors and preferences changed, so they can adapt to them in an effort to reach the pre-pandemic levels of activity.

Keywords: travel, youth, COVID-19 pandemic, behavior

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Introduction

The pandemic affected severely not only the global economy but also the health, social and livelihood (Cheung et al., 2021). As people travel, consume, learn, work, socialize and communicate, the COVID-19 has perturbed significantly the human behavior (Huen, 2020).

Tourism is an industry “at the right place and time”, relying on friendly framework conditions such as peace, political stability, stable economic growth and good sanitary conditions to travel away from home. Its cross-industry nature makes the tourism industry vulnerable to a variety of dangerous developments that could lead to a crisis (Keller, 2020). COVID-19 is “larger in size and scope than previous epidemics” (Zheng et.al, 2021) and its’ impact on the global travel industry proved to be more severe than previous crises as the strategies to cope with this pandemic included travel restrictions, controls of personal movement and even the closure of public services and businesses in many countries (Richards and Morrill, 2021).

Youth tourism has sprung up with the travel flow of students, volunteers, language learners, participants in cultural exchange programs, backpackers and digital nomads (Asan, 2021). According to WYSE Travel Confederation, 23% of international tourists are young people under the age of 30. Additionally, the youth tourism market generated nearly \$330 billion in tourism revenue in 2018 (WYSE Travel Confederation, 2021).

Young tourists have unique personalities in a well-defined tourist market; they connect easily and make friends; they easily use the Internet and social media applications; and they have the desire to discover and learn about new cultures (Marian-Pantelescu, 2021). Youth visit different destinations and see them as opportunities to study and grow. They are

craving for authentic experiences, want to experience local culture and establish social contacts with their hosts and with other travelers. However, this desire for social contact has become a challenge for the travel industry, particularly as travel itself has been linked to spreading Covid-19 (Farzanegan et al., 2020). Like all travel markets, the youth travel market has declined sharply due to the pandemic.

Richards and Morrill (2021) studied travel businesses that were targeting young travelers during the epidemic. These businesses faced different difficulties compared to travel companies that focus on a larger market. For example, providing social distancing or reducing capacity was very problematic for hostels where rooms are designed for a larger number of guests. The measures adopted as response to the crisis included changing terms and conditions, increased marketing, creating partnerships, shifting business online, improving quality, developing products for local and regional markets and also attracting a new type of client – the digital nomad.

Rončák et al. (2021) investigated the impact of safety concerns on travel behavior of Generation Z Czech students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their study showed that on short term domestic tourism was preferred, but in the long-run international travel should be resumed while individual travel and small accommodation facilities will be favored over traveling in groups. Also, Generation Z is eager to travel and would like to travel in the future the same way as before the pandemic and are not afraid to go to restaurants, bars, discos, and even significant events or travel by public transport and by plane. Safety concerns will continue to play an important role in the decision-making process, hence the destination needs to observe strict health and safety protocols, which will help regain the confidence of young travelers.

Caldeira et al. (2022) conducted a study on young people of Egypt to analyze the impact of COVID-19 on tourism safety perceptions, acceptance of restrictions, and the intention to change behavior during the pandemic. The findings of this research point out that the perceptions of safety increased as the pandemic evolved and young people maintained the intentions for self-regulatory behavior. As they are less affected by severe forms of COVID-19 and are confident in their self-efficacious behavior, the youngsters feel safer about travelling, thus this market segment has a high potential in this crisis context.

Travel motivations and tourists' needs influence the destination choice as tourists will choose the destinations that they perceive will be able to meet them. Also, different market segments have different travel motivations and expectation, thus tourism businesses and policy makers need to develop strategies that are tailored to these particular needs in order to attract tourists in their businesses and destinations (Matzler and Siller, 2003).

The tourism industry is very sensitive to changes in safety and health. In particular, infectious diseases have a direct impact on travel decisions and destination selection. The presence of risk, whether real or perceived, affects tourists' travel plans and travel behavior. Learning more about the changes in travel motivations, behavior and preferences during the COVID-19 pandemic can be very useful for tourism businesses and policy makers to develop and implement strategies to attract young tourists and also to be able to manage better future events of this nature.

Many studies regarding the impact of pandemics have been conducted since the outbreak of COVID-19, but the studies focusing of the young people are limited (Seabra et.al, 2021). Young tourists have longer stays at destinations, are likely to return later in their life (Richards, 2011), manifest an important influence on other generations (Francis and Hoefel, 2018) consequently they represent an attractive segment. Moreover, this segment generally declined less and recovered faster than mainstream tourism when affected by crisis (Richards, 2011). Young people are expected to return sooner to travelling as before (Caldeira et al., 2022) so getting insight on the behavior and attitudes of young generations is of high importance (Caber et al., 2020).

In this context, the purpose of this research was to investigate the impact Covid-19 pandemic had on international young travelers' behavior. The travel aspects investigated were: the preferred type of destination, the criteria used for destination choice, the favorite activities during travel, travel motivations and travel duration. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: the second section provides details about the research methodology employed and formulates the research objectives and hypotheses. The third section is dedicated to the presentation and discussion of the results and the last section concludes the main findings of the research, identifies research limitations and future research directions.

Research Methodology

The overall purpose of this research was to investigate whether and how the COVID-19 Pandemics influenced the travel behavior of young travelers of different nationalities. In order to attain this general goal, the following research objectives were formulated:

01. Identification of youth traveler preferences changes due to the Pandemics regarding the type of destination chosen.

02. Identification of youth traveler preferences changes due to the Pandemics regarding the criteria used for choosing a destination.

03. Identification of youth traveler preferences changes due to the Pandemics regarding the motivation of travel.

04. Identification of youth traveler preferences changes due to the Pandemics regarding the preferred activities during travel.

05. Identification of youth traveler preferences changes due to the Pandemics regarding the length of stay in a destination.

It was investigated if the Pandemics influenced differently the Romanian travelers compared to the foreign travelers so the following general hypotheses were issued:

H1: The pandemics influenced the type of destination preferred, differently among Romanians and other nationalities.

H2: The pandemics influenced the criteria used for choosing a destination, differently among Romanians and other nationalities.

H3: The pandemics influenced travel motivations, differently among Romanians and other nationalities.

H4: The pandemics influenced the preferred activities during travel, differently among Romanians and other nationalities.

H5: The pandemics influenced the length of stay in a destination, differently among Romanians and other nationalities.

Given the above-mentioned research objectives and hypotheses it was employed a quantitative research method, namely a questionnaire-based survey. A questionnaire in Romanian was developed to collect data from the Romanian travelers and another one in English to obtain information from foreign travelers. The questionnaires were implemented online, using Google forms. For data analysis, IBM SPSS 24 software was employed. To test the hypotheses, the Chi Square and ANOVA Tests were used.

Sample characteristics

The questionnaire was completed by 234 respondents, 146 were Romanian youth travelers and 88 from other countries.

The largest share of respondents (68.4%) was aged between 21 and 25 years, 16.2% between 18 and 20 years and 15.4% between 26 and 29 years. Most of the respondents have a monthly income of less than 300 euros, 25.2% have an income between 300 and 500 euros and only 16.7% have an income higher than 1000 euros. The distribution based on gender shows that 50.4% are women and 49.6% are men. Over 61% of the respondents were students while 17.9% declared they hold an execution function and 8.1 % a managerial position (see Figure 1).

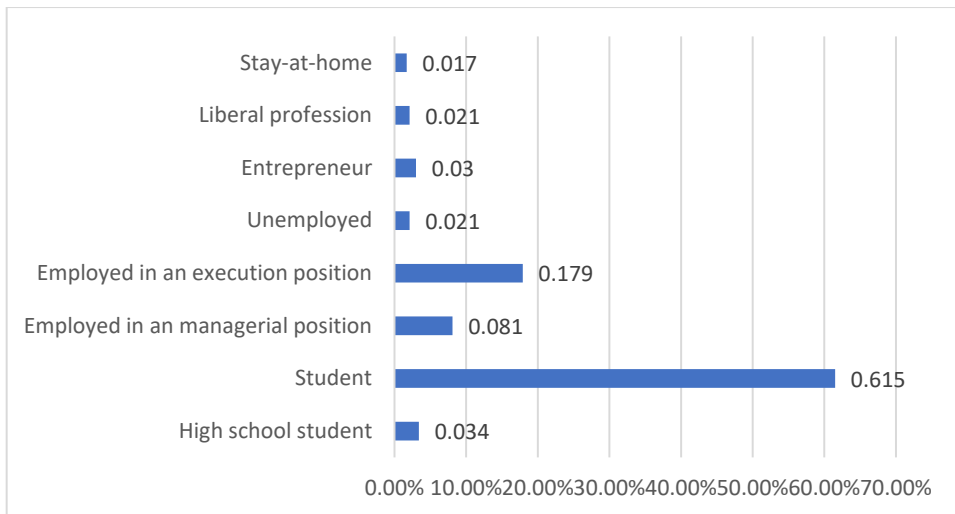


Figure 1. Occupation of respondents

Source: Authors' own elaboration

When it comes to marital status, 49.1% are unmarried, 41.5% are in a relationship, and 8.1% are married. The majority of the respondents were Romanians (62.4%) followed by other European nationalities (29.1%) and Asians (3.8%) (see Figure 2).

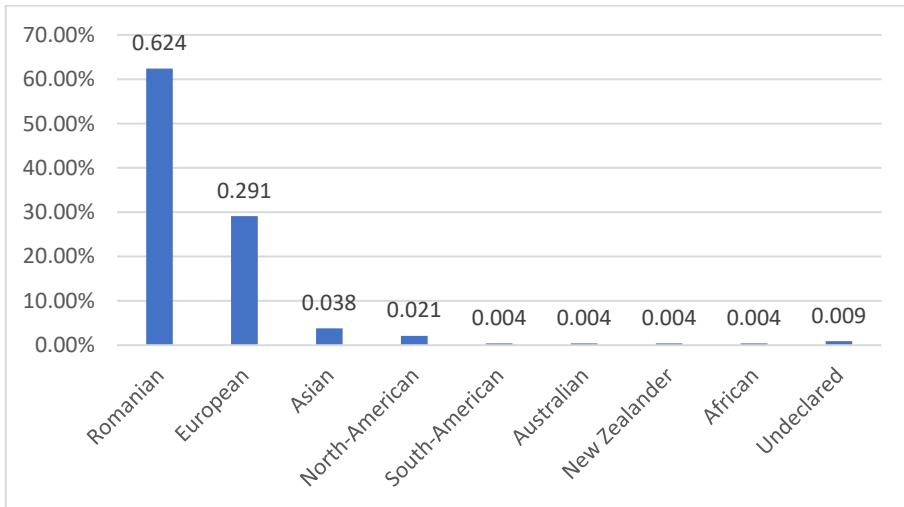


Figure 2. Nationality of respondents

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Results and discussions

01. Identification of youth traveler preferences changes due to the Pandemics regarding the type of destination chosen.

As one can see in **Figure 3**, before the pandemic, the largest share of travelers preferred the cities (73.1%), followed by seaside resorts (58.1%), and leisure destinations (55.6%). Mountain resorts (47.4%) and cultural destinations (40.6%) also hold an important share of tourists' preferences. With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation has changed. Most tourists have preferred in this new context to travel to mountain resorts (48.7%) as they chose to spend more time outdoors, in nature, away from crowds where they could get infected with the COVID virus. The percentage of tourists that preferred this type of destination has not been affected very much by the pandemic, the percentage increasing only with 1.3%. The leisure destinations suffered the largest decrease in the number of tourists (39.4%), probably due to restrictions. One can observe that city visits decreased significantly by 25.7% and also the visits to seaside resorts decreased by 23.1% compared to the period

before the pandemic probably due to congestion in this type of destinations. Not surprisingly, rural destinations have remained at the same weight in tourists' preferences as these destinations are usually not crowded, and the fresh air and peace have attracted tourists to these destinations even during the pandemic.

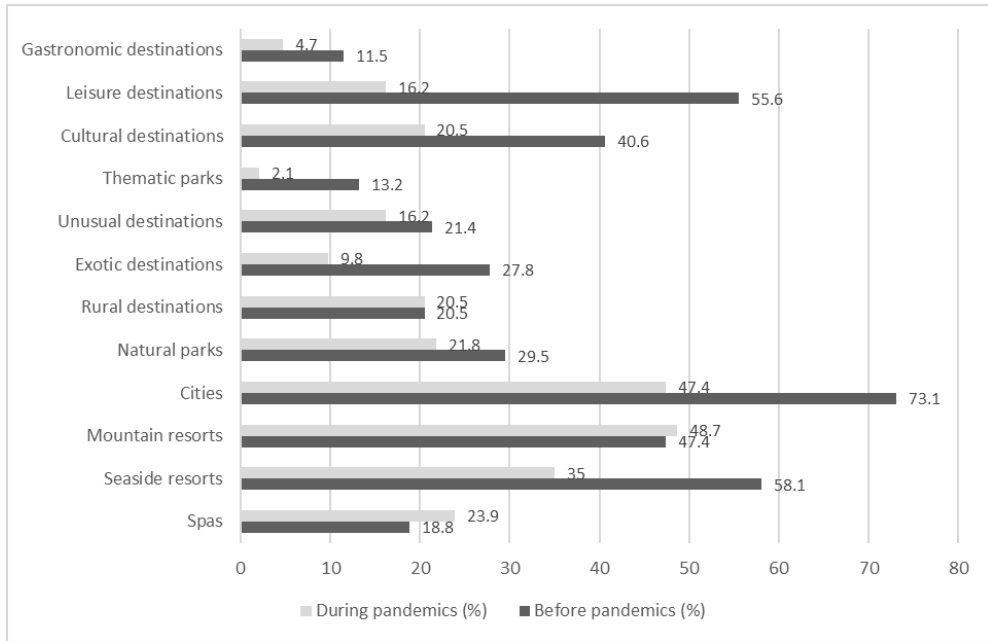


Figure 3. Type of destination

Source: Authors' own elaboration

H1: The pandemics influenced the type of destination preferred, differently among Romanians and other nationalities.

The Chi square test was used to investigate the influence of the pandemics on the type of destination preferred by the young travelers. The results (see Table 1) indicate that the pandemics influenced the Romanian travelers to a larger extent as compared to foreign travelers when it comes to destinations such as seaside resorts, cities, exotic destinations, thematic parks, cultural destinations or gastronomic destinations

(all of them less preferred during the pandemics), or SPA destinations (were chosen by more persons during the pandemics). COVID-19 influenced foreigners in terms of destination choices like Spa resorts (none of the respondents chose to travel in such a destination during the pandemics), exotic destinations and thematic parks (were less preferred during the pandemics). An interesting result is that the Romanian travelers chose during the Pandemics to travel more in SPA resorts whereas the foreigners didn't choose at all such a destination during the Pandemics.

Table 1. The influence of pandemic on choice of destinations
(Chi square test results)

Type of destination	Romanians				Other nationalities			
	Before (%)	During (%)	Chi square	p value	Before (%)	During (%)	Chi square	p value
Seaside resorts	64.4%	30.8%	32.966192	0.000	47.7%	42.0%	0.574188	0.544515
SPAs	20.5%	38.4%	11.142019	0.0012	15.9%	0%	15.209877	0.000
Mountain resorts	56.8%	59.6%	0.225265	.722	31.8%	30.7%	.026	1.000
Cities	78.1%	42.5%	38.674	.000	64.8%	55.7%	1.518	.281
Reservations/ natural parks	27.4%	18.5%	3.273	.094	33.0%	27.3%	.675	.511
Rural destinations	19.9%	19.2%	.022	1.000	21.6%	22.7%	.033	1.000
Exotic destinations	24.0%	6.8%	16.419	.000	34.1%	14.8%	8.894	.005
Outstanding destinations, less visited or known	20.5%	13.7%	2.413	.162	22.7%	20.5%	.134	.855
Thematic parks	11.6%	0.7%	15.157	.000	15.9%	4.5%	6.188	.023
Cultural destinations	33.6%	8.9%	26.538	.000	52.3%	39.8%	2.768	.130
Leisure destinations	14.4%	8.9%	2.130	.201	36.4%	28.4%	1.271	.334
Gastronomic destinations	11.0%	0.7%	14.053	.000	12.5%	11.4%	.054	1.000

Source: Authors' own elaboration

02. Identification of youth traveler preferences changes due to the Pandemics regarding the criteria used for choosing a destination.

The most used criteria for choosing a destination by young travelers both before and during the pandemics was the tourist attractions in that destination (76.9% before the pandemics and 77.8% during the pandemics).

The cost of stay in the destination comes second in the list of criteria used both before and during the pandemics with an increase of 12.3% during compared to before the pandemics. This increase can be explained by the fact that young travelers perceived the pandemic as a crisis so they reduced their travel budget. A significant change can be noticed in the case of safety as a criterion used in the process of choosing the travel destination. Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic this criterion was the 5th in the list of criteria while during the pandemics due to an increase of 27.3% it climbed the 2nd place in this list. This shows a significant fear of getting infected with the virus and also a risk-averse behavior of young travelers. The 3rd most used criterion was both before and during the pandemic the accessible transport to the destination. For this criterion also it can be observed an increase of 11.4% during the pandemics compared with before the pandemics. A possible explanation can be related to the financial reasons but most importantly to the perceived high risk of getting infected during the transportation. An interesting finding is the decrease in importance as a selection criterion of the variety of dining options (17.1%) and of the variety of accommodation options (14.6%) during the pandemics.

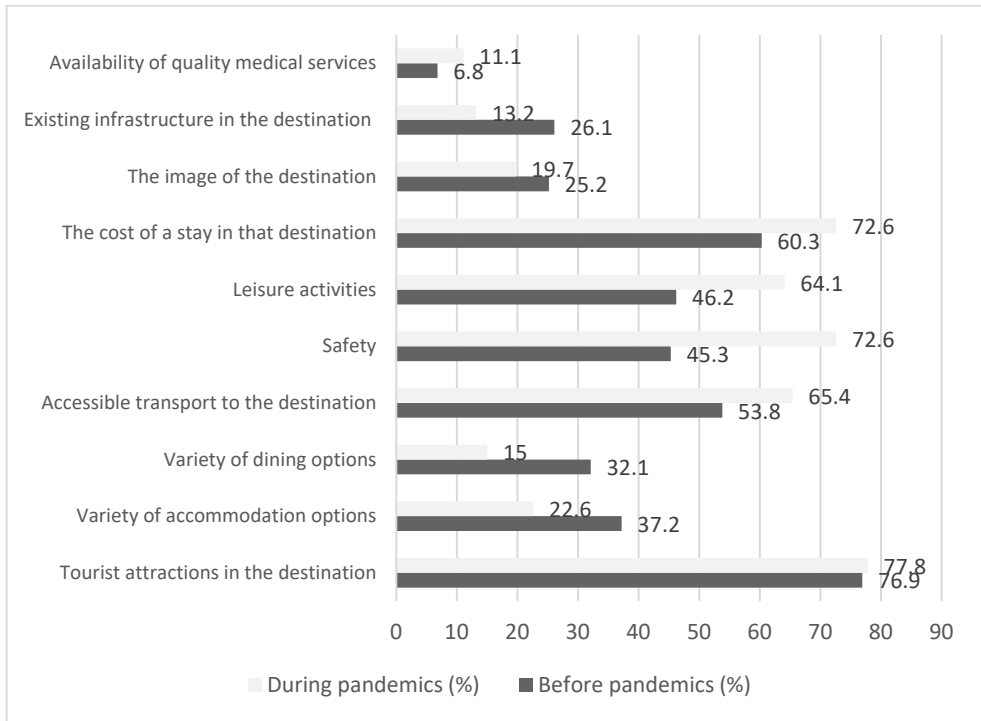


Figure 4. Criteria for choosing a destination to travel

Source: Authors' own elaboration

H2: The pandemics influenced the criteria used for choosing a destination, differently among Romanians and other nationalities.

The Chi square test results (see Table 2) indicate that 8 out of 10 criteria used for selecting the destination were influenced by the pandemics in case of the Romanian young travelers. The criteria: tourist attractions, accessible transport to the destination, safety, leisure possibilities and the cost of the tourist package were considered by more tourists during the pandemics, while the variety of accommodation, the variety of dining options as well as the infrastructure in the destination have been considered by fewer travelers. For the foreign travelers, only 2 criteria were influenced by the pandemics, namely the tourist attractions (which were considered by fewer tourists) and the availability of good quality medical services (which were considered by more tourists during the pandemics).

Table 2. Influence of the pandemics on the criteria for choosing a destination to travel (Chi square test results)

Criteria for choosing a destination	Romanians				Other nationalities			
	Before (%)	During (%)	Chi square	p value	Before (%)	During (%)	Chi square	p value
Tourist attractions in the destination	78.1%	91.1%	9.484	.003	75.0%	55.7%	7.251	.011
Variety of accommodation options	34.2%	13.0%	18.237	.000	42.0%	38.6%	.212	.759
Variety of dining options	25.3%	4.8%	24.084	.000	43.2%	31.8%	2.424	.161
Accessible transport to the destination	58.2%	82.2%	20.056	.000	46.6%	37.5%	1.492	.285
Safety	42.5%	83.6%	52.899	.000	50.0%	54.5%	.364	.651
Leisure activities	46.6%	80.8%	37.026	.000	45.5%	36.4%	1.504	.283
The cost of a stay in that destination	57.5%	82.2%	21.080	.000	64.8%	56.8%	1.168	.354
The image of the destination	13.0%	11.0%	.292	.719	45.5%	34.1%	2.372	.166
Existing infrastructure in the destination	27.4%	5.5%	25.530	.000	23.9%	26.1%	.121	.862
Availability of quality medical services	6.8%	4.1%	1.058	.442	6.8%	23.8%	9.670	.002

Source: Authors' own elaboration

03. Identification of youth traveler preferences changes due to the Pandemics regarding the motivation of travel.

The main travel motivation was relaxation/stress reduction, having a share of 81.6% before the pandemic and registering a 6% decrease during the pandemic. Another important motivation was having fun and adventure, but it decreased between the two periods by 23.9% (the largest decrease of all motivations), this not being so important for tourists with the outbreak of the pandemic. On the 3rd place in terms on the travel motivations is the desire to create new memories both before and during the pandemics but with an important decrease of 17.1% during the pandemics. The same important 17.1% decrease was recorded for the “to get to know different people and lifestyles” and an even higher decrease by 21.8% was registered for the motivation “see more places on Earth” due to the restrictions on international travel imposed by governments but also to the fear of getting infected.

What is noteworthy is that the motivation to strengthen the relationship with the partner registered an 8.1% increase during the pandemics, this being due to the restrictions during the pandemic, to the fear of getting infected or infecting others but also due to the fact that many individuals become more conscious of the importance spending more time with the dear ones.

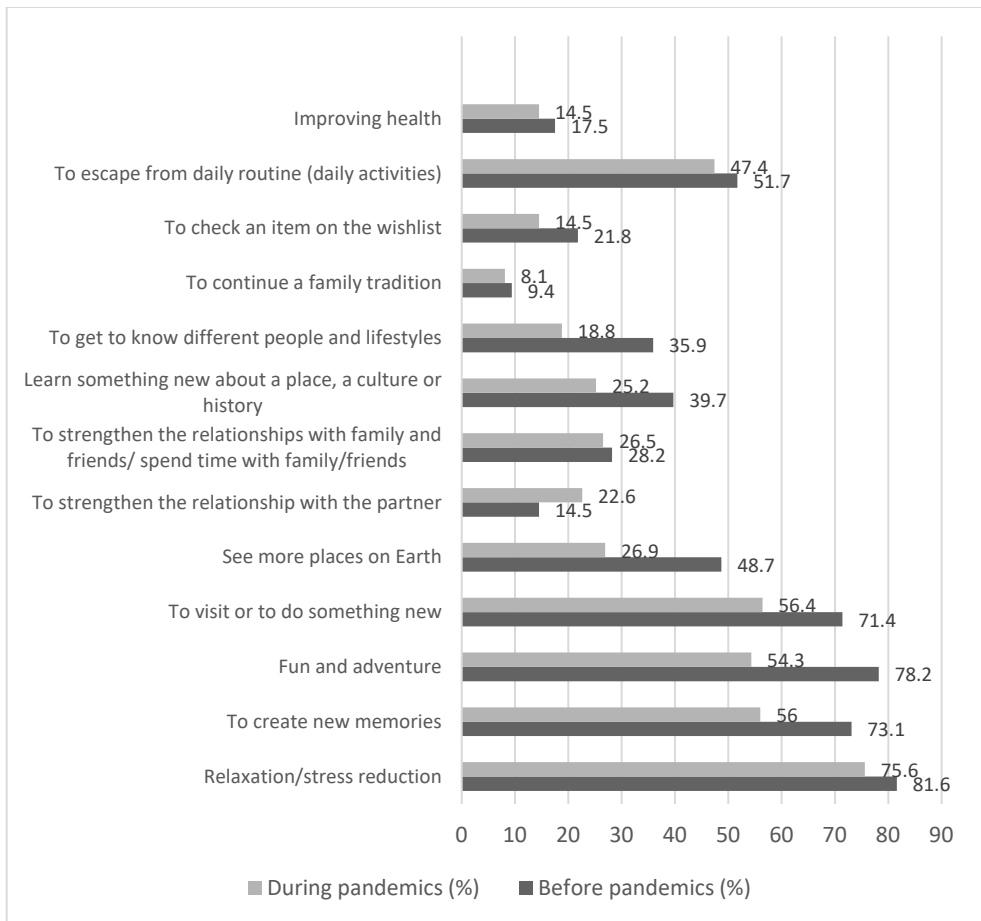


Figure 5. Motivation of travel

Source: Authors' own elaboration

H3: The pandemics influenced travel motivations, differently among Romanians and other nationalities.

In what concerns the influence of the pandemics on the travel motivations of young travelers the results of the Chi square test (see Table 3) indicate that the Romanians were influenced to a greater extent by the Covid 19 compared to the foreign travelers. During the crisis period the young Romanians traveled less for reasons like: the desire to create new memories, fun and adventure, to visit or to do something new, to see more places on Earth, to learn something new about a place, a culture or history, to get to know different people and lifestyles and more with the purpose of strengthening the relationship with the partner. In the case of foreign travelers, the pandemics influence exists only for the travel motivations fun and adventure and to see more places on Earth (both of them were travel motivations for fewer tourists during the pandemics).

Table 3. Influence of the pandemics on the travel motivations
(Chi square test results)

Travel motivations	Romanians				Other nationalities			
	Before (%)	During (%)	Chi square	p value	Before (%)	During (%)	Chi square	p value
Relaxation/stress reduction	88.4%	79.5%	4.286	.055	70.5%	69.3%	.027	1.000
To create new memories	73.3%	52.7%	13.225	.000	72.7%	61.4%	2.572	.149
Fun and adventure	74.7%	47.9%	21.957	.000	84.1%	64.8%	8.628	.005
To visit or to do something new	71.9%	52.1%	12.223	.001	70.5%	64.8%	.649	.520
See more places on Earth	39.0%	15.8%	19.903	.000	64.8%	45.5%	6.638	.015
To strengthen the relationship with the partner	12.3%	21.9%	4.730	.043	18.2%	23.9%	.856	.460
To strengthen the relationships with family and friends/ spend time with family/friends	21.9%	20.5%	.082	.886	38.6%	36.4%	.097	.876
Learn something new about a place, a culture or history	36.3%	21.2%	8.089	.006	45.5%	31.8%	3.451	.088

Travel motivations	Romanians				Other nationalities			
	Before (%)	During (%)	Chi square	p value	Before (%)	During (%)	Chi square	p value
To get to know different people and lifestyles	34.2%	15.8%	13.315	.000	38.6%	23.9%	4.469	.050
To continue a family tradition	6.8%	8.2%	.197	.825	13.6%	8.0%	1.475	.331
To check an item on the Wishlist	21.2%	13.0%	3.475	.087	22.7%	17.0%	.892	.450
To escape from daily routine (daily activities)	54.8%	44.5%	3.082	.101	46.6%	52.3%	.568	.547
Improving health	21.2%	15.8%	1.454	.291	11.4%	12.5%	.054	1.000

Source: Authors' own elaboration

04. Identification of youth traveler preferences changes due to the Pandemics regarding the preferred activities during travel.

The favorite activity of youth before the pandemic was going to the beach, but it decreased during the pandemic by 12.8%. A percentage of 55.1% of the respondents declared that before the pandemic visiting historical attractions was among the activities they preferred, but this share decreased during the pandemic by 30.7%, due to the fact that usually these places are crowded but also another reason was the fact that during the pandemics many of the historical attractions were closed to the public or required a vaccination certificate for visiting. Another favorite activity is mountain hiking. More than half of the young travelers chose this activity as their preferred one in both periods, and even after the onset of the pandemic, the percentage increased by 3.4%. An explanation is that this is an outdoor activity so the risk of infection is reduced. Art museums have disappeared from the list of young tourists during the pandemic, decreasing by a proportion of 24.4% and also serving meals in famous locations recorded an important decrease of 20.1%. The reasons behind this change in preferences are the restricted access in such locations (only based on green certificate) and the fact that they were closed many periods of time during the pandemics.

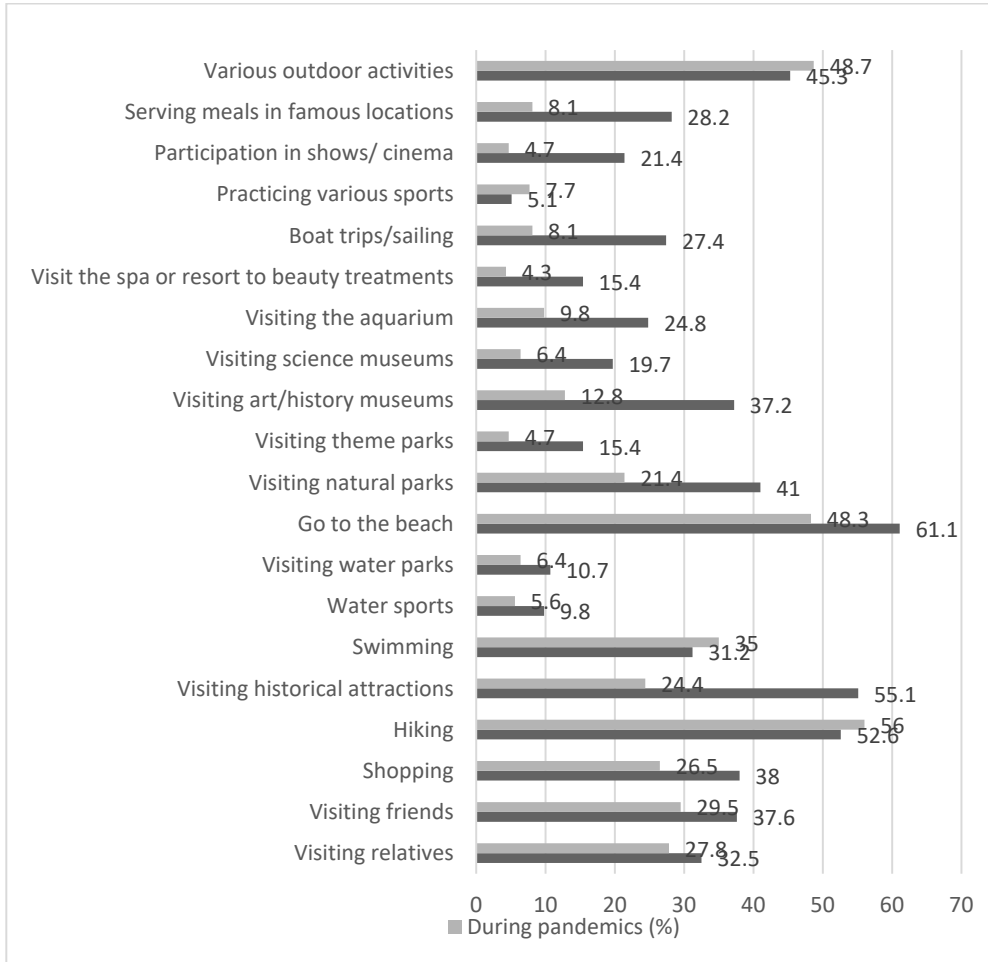


Figure 6. Favorite activities

Source: Authors' own elaboration

H4: The pandemics influenced the preferred activities during travel, differently among Romanians and other nationalities.

The influence of the pandemic on the activities carried out during the trips was statistically demonstrated, in the case of Romanian tourists, for 70% of the investigated activities. For all these activities, with one exception, there was a decrease in their practice during the pandemic (see Table 4). The exception is swimming, which was practiced by more people during

travels in the pandemic period. The pandemic influenced the activities of foreign tourists to a lesser extent, only the practice of three types of activities being influenced by this crisis (in the case of all the number of tourists who performed these activities being smaller during the pandemic).

Table 4. Influence of the pandemics on favorite activities during travel
(Chi square test results)

Activities	Romanians				Other nationalities			
	Before (%)	During (%)	Chi square	p value	Before (%)	During (%)	Chi square	p value
Visiting relatives	29.5%	19.2%	4.187	.056	37.5%	42.0%	.380	.644
Visiting friends	34.2%	20.5%	6.887	.012	43.2%	44.3%	.023	1.000
Shopping	34.9%	23.3%	4.796	.039	43.2%	31.8%	2.424	.161
Hiking	59.6%	65.8%	1.186	.333	40.9%	39.8%	.024	1.000
Visiting historical attractions	58.2%	20.5%	43.395	.000	50.0%	30.7%	6.823	.014
Swimming	23.3%	38.4%	7.774	.008	44.3%	29.5%	4.123	.061
Water sports	2.7%	4.1%	.414	.750	21.6%	8.0%	6.498	.018
Visiting water parks	7.5%	4.1%	1.561	.318	15.9%	10.2%	1.250	.371
Go to the beach	57.5%	52.7%	.678	.480	67.0%	40.9%	12.099	.001
Visiting natural parks	34.9%	14.4%	16.591	.000	51.1%	33.0%	5.969	.022
Visiting theme parks	16.4%	2.1%	17.997	.000	13.6%	9.1%	.903	.477
Visiting art/history museums	32.9%	6.2%	33.157	.000	44.3%	23.9%	8.193	.007
Visiting science museums	20.5%	3.4%	20.289	.000	18.2%	11.4%	1.625	.288
Visiting the aquarium	26.0%	8.2%	16.313	.000	22.7%	12.5%	3.172	.112
Visit the spa or resort to beauty treatments	15.1%	2.7%	13.680	.000	15.9%	6.8%	3.610	.094
Boat trips/sailing	25.3%	1.4%	36.252	.000	30.7%	19.3%	3.030	.117
Practicing various sports	0.7%	6.2%	6.627	.019	12.5%	10.2%	.226	.813
Participation in shows/ cinema	28.8%	3.4%	34.715	.000	9.1%	6.8%	.310	.782
Serving meals in famous locations	32.2%	8.2%	26.020	.000	21.6%	8.0%	6.498	.018
Various outdoor activities	48.3%	58.2%	2.883	.099	42.0%	33.0%	1.552	.276

Source: Authors' own elaboration

05. Identification of youth traveler preferences changes due to the Pandemics regarding the length of stay in a destination.

Regarding the length of the stay, one can see that it has not undergone very big changes between the two periods (see Figure 7). Only the 1-2 days stays have increased by a higher proportion, of 13.7% during the pandemic, this showing a greater interest on weekend or very short trips. One can see that the most common length of stay is that of 3-5 days, which recorded a decrease of only 5.6% during the pandemic. Similarly, tourists chose second both before and during the pandemics, a duration of 6-7 days, decreasing only by 4.7% during the pandemics. Interestingly, although in a small proportion of only 2.1%, stays of more than 14 days have increased during the pandemic. Probably this represent travels to very distant destinations where there were no or only few restrictions and when travelling long distances the length of stay is usually longer.

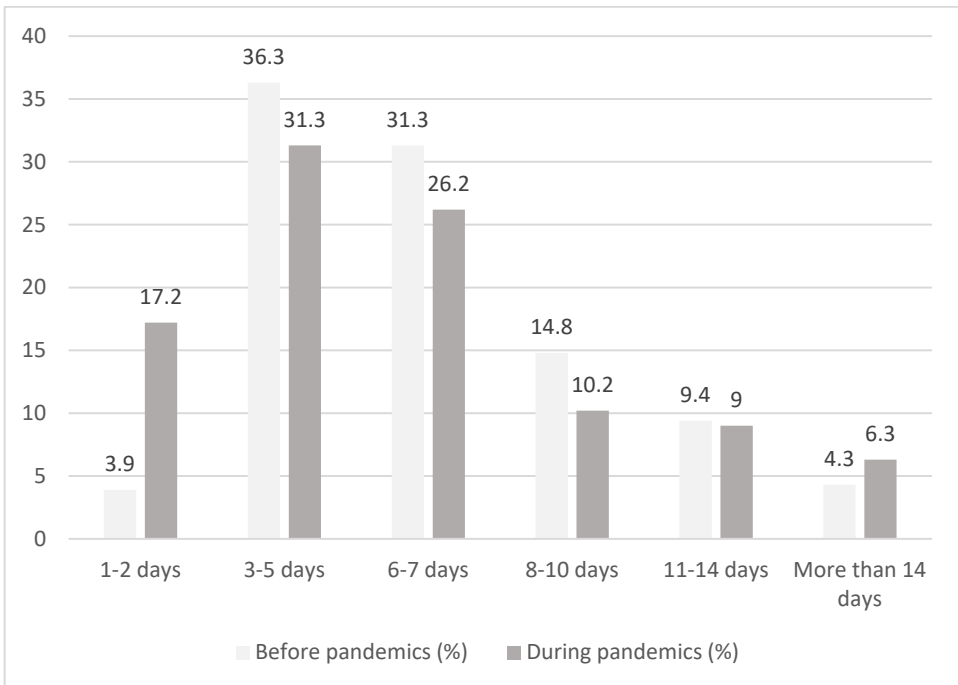


Figure 7. Length of stay

Source: Authors' own elaboration

H5: The pandemics influenced the length of stay in a destination, differently among Romanians and other nationalities.

An ANOVA Test has been performed to see if the pandemic influenced the length of stay. Surprisingly, the results show that COVID-19 didn't influence the average length of stay neither of Romanian youth travelers nor of foreign travelers (see Table 5).

Table 5. Influence of the pandemics on the length of stay (ANOVA test results)

Nationality		N	Mean	ANOVA	
				F	p value
Romanian	<i>Before Pandemics</i>	146	2.68	1.959	.163
	<i>During Pandemics</i>	146	2.48		
Foreign	<i>Before Pandemics</i>	88	3.59	1.294	.257
	<i>During Pandemics</i>	88	3.36		

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Conclusions

The tourism industry is an important sector of the economy, and the coronavirus pandemic has affected this industry to a great extent. Young people are an important segment in the tourism industry. They are curious, eager to know about new places and cultures and ready for adventure. For these reasons, it was considered important to analyze the change in their behavior.

The present research has shown that tourists prefer mountain resorts, seaside resorts and cities to a greater extent. Although the percentage has decreased, these destinations have remained the preferred by the majority of the respondents. Accordingly, the most popular activities were going to the beach and hiking. Also, practicing outdoor activities have increased significantly between the two periods, and those such as going to the cinema, concerts and those in closed spaces have decreased, given the restrictions during the pandemic. The motivation for the trips is mostly relaxation and leisure, and the duration of the trip is usually between 3–5 days.

The correlation tests showed that the Romanian tourists were affected to a greater extent by the pandemic. Compared to the foreign ones, they perceived this pandemic differently. It was considered that the consumer's perception of tourist services during the pandemic can also be influenced by nationality, the culture in which the traveler grew up, the values and perceptions accumulated. It can be concluded that foreign tourists were more daring and continued to travel, and their habits did not change much. They applied caution while traveling and continued to carry out their favorite activities in the tourist destinations.

The main limitation of this study are the small sample size and the fact that the continents were not proportionally represented in the investigated sample, thus the findings of this study can be generalized. Nonetheless, it was considered that some of the findings could be valuable for managers of tourism businesses, policymakers and destination management organizations, in the post-pandemic era and could help them identify strategies and efficiently target young travelers.

As future research directions, the development of a comprehensive scale for measuring the impact of the pandemic on tourist behavior is needed and also more studies should be carried out in the post pandemic period to identify the travel intentions and the effects of the pandemic on tourist behavior at international level. As the present study findings indicate that Romanian young travelers were affected by the pandemics more than the foreign travelers, more research is needed to identify what were the specific factors (including cultural ones) that influenced their travel behavior and in what conditions they would resume travelling post-pandemic.

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