

CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Daria-Roxana Theodoru^{1*}, Andreea Fortuna Schiopu²

¹ Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania, dariatheodoru@gmail.com

² The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania, andreea.schiopu@com.ase.ro

Abstract

How did hospitality customers perceive the experience of going out during the global COVID-19 pandemic? What concerns did they have about hospitality providers? The purpose of this paper was to clarify how consumers perceived the pandemic and whether or not people feared infection when dining out. The first purpose was to determine how many people went out during the pandemic, and the second aim was to determine how they perceived the performance of the hospitality industry. To measure their perceptions, we proposed several variables: psychological well-being, expected positive emotions, expected negative emotions, desire to avoid, and customer satisfaction. The main objective was to investigate the correlation between the selected variables. For the study, a questionnaire was distributed to different target groups: Adolescents, adults, and middle-aged people. It was found that the population of Bucharest felt a need to socialize and go out during the pandemic rather than a reluctance to do so. This study highlights the importance of anticipated perceptions and how they influence consumers' final perceptions.

Keywords: anticipated positive and negative emotions, mental comfort, desire for avoidance, customer satisfaction, hospitality

JEL Classification: L83

DOI: 10.24818/CTS/4/2022/2.01

1. Introduction

A highly developed hospitality industry is considered a development characteristic for a country. The industry is a collection of four other major sectors, known as the Big Four: food and beverage, travel and tourism, accommodation, and recreation (Novak, 2017), which is why the hospitality industry is considered the largest and richest industry. The hospitality industry is so powerful in terms of economic recovery because it generates GDP, creates jobs for all regardless of education level, and boosts tourism, but it is also so fragile when an unexpected disaster strikes, as was the case with the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019.

The motivation behind the choice of the topic of this paper is to investigate and understand how a powerful industry, the hotel and restaurant industry, was so vulnerable in the context of a global pandemic and how it managed to recover and survive in the economic market, with an almost two-month income gap during the lockdown, while other industries had a constant or even accelerated activity. In the category of great performances during the epidemic, there are the food industry, the drug industry, the TV industry, the social media industry and many others that had a positive result because they adhered to the restrictions imposed by the governments, unlike the hospitality industry that had to switch to stand-by status.

The hospitality industry is definitely present in most people's lives, whether they are outgoing and prefer concerts, nightlife and fun, or more thoughtful and enjoy their cup of coffee in a café. So, since everyone comes into contact with this industry in some way or another, the purpose of this article is to find out and describe how customers behaved during the pandemic. Did people go out during the two-year period? Did they have inhibitions about contacting other customers because of the spread of the virus? And if so, how did they feel about making contact? Did all of these interactions elicit positive

* contact author

or negative emotions? Did the expected emotions affect the customers' behaviour and mental state? Finally, how was customer satisfaction affected?

2. Literature review

2.1 Customer experiences in the hospitality industry

Hospitality has evolved from a gesture of kindness and education to a commercial service. In this case, there is no longer any reciprocity between the guest and the host, except that the guest pays back an amount of money for the services offered by the host (Shamir, 1978). The guest is obligated not to cause any harm to the hotel, the people in it, whether other guests or employees, or the establishment itself. At the same time, employees are obligated to behave in a friendly manner toward the hotel's guests, but without compromising their dignity in any way (Shamir, 1980).

As mentioned earlier, the hospitality industry has been around for a very long time, but as an industry it is still in constant evolution (Brotherton, 2005). Although hospitality is considered the most important industry in contributing to the value of a country's gross domestic product, it cannot be considered solely as a commercial factor (Lashley, 2015). Hospitality is also about emotions, new experiences, socializing, and building relationships with people of different kinds (Volgger and Pechlaner, 2017). Meyer and Schwager (2007) explained the difference between hospitality, which is a social practice, and service, which is a product, stating that services happen to you, while hospitality happens for you. Since the commercialization of hospitality, there has been a constant struggle between hospitality as a gesture and hospitality as an economic factor (Skokic et al., 2016). It is believed that the economic side would have more success if there was a clearer understanding of the social concept (Lashley, 2015).

At the core of the conceptual map of the hospitality industry is a taxonomic categorization of each industry. Accommodation, food service, travel, leisure, attractions, and conventions are the six categories that make up the hospitality industry. Each sub-sector is divided into different market groups, lines, brands, and concepts, among others. Lodging, restaurants, conventions and meetings, airplanes, railroads and other transportation, cruise ships, amusement parks, and the casino sector are all part of the tourism and travel industry, according to Biederman (2008).

The concept of experience has been explored in a variety of hospitality and tourism sectors since the advent of the experience economy, including airlines, cruises, hotels, restaurants, destinations, and peer-to-peer accommodations (Taylor et al., 2021). According to a Forbes (2020) study on customer experience, 200 global marketers emphasized the need for an optimized customer experience strategy as a method for a company to differentiate itself from its competitors, leading to increased customer satisfaction, loyalty, and brand awareness. According to a Malahov and Preda (2021) report on customer experience, hotels that understand their guests have a 13 percent higher frequency of stays. In addition, 63 percent of consumers say they would rather spend their money on an experience (e.g., a restaurant visit) than a product in a store (National Restaurant Association, 2020). In today's hospitality and tourism industry, delivering great customer experiences is critical.

Due to the experiential nature of hospitality and tourism, which is characterized by heterogeneity, inseparability, intangibility, and transience, it is difficult for service providers to provide consistent service quality and create outstanding customer experiences. Moreover, customer experience in the hospitality and tourism industry is created not only by accommodations, entertainment, and food and beverages, but also by supporting facilities and processes such as technology and interactions with service staff and other customers (Kandampully et al., 2018). Thus, managing customer experience has been described as a difficult challenge for hospitality and tourism companies. Customers today can interact with businesses through a variety of channels and digital devices at different stages of the customer journey, such as before consumption, during consumption, and after consumption (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

In the current literature, the term value is defined in a variety of ways (Peng et al., 2022). It is used in a variety of fields, including economics, social sciences, accounting, finance, strategy, product management, information systems, marketing, and tourism research (Huber et al., 2001). Because it is

an abstract term, its meaning varies depending on the situation (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). Baumann and Le Meunier-Fitz-Hugh (2015) also conducted a pilot study to see how episode and relationship values were captured during the service process. They defined episode value as the ability to save resources such as time, effort, and money (Gvili et al., 2020). The active participation of customers can help ensure quality and increase the chances of success and achieving their own goals (Chan et al., 2010).

Customers who participate in the service process can also reduce the financial and performance risks associated with poor outcomes (Etgar, 2008). Consequently, customer experience is more than the consequence of a single encounter: it is influenced by a series of moments during a customer's interaction process with an organisation (Homburg et al., 2017), and it is often co-created by the collaboration and interaction of multiple parties (Shin et al., 2020), making customer experience management an even more challenging task (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020).

Aside from practitioners' perspectives on the importance, difficulty, and popularity of creating and sustaining customer experiences, hospitality and tourism scholars have looked at different types of experiences, including service experiences (Ribeiro and Prayag, 2019), memorable dining experiences (Cao et al., 2019), flow experiences (Zhang et al., 2019), tourism experiences, hospitality experiences, and hotel brand experiences (Islam et al., 2019). A user, consumer, visitor, or guest, among other labels, indicates the perspective from which the experience is evaluated. Since every social and service exchange, regardless of its form or character, contributes to the customer experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016), the term "customer experience" is used broadly to refer to all types of customer experiences.

Providing greater customer value is widely considered a potential source of competitive advantage and a prerequisite for customer satisfaction, loyalty, and future purchase intentions in the hospitality industry (Prayag et al., 2017). In a highly competitive market such as the hospitality industry, the primary goal of any hospitality company is, or should be, to provide exceptional value to its customers. Hotels, as service businesses that are in constant contact with their customers, could benefit from having an important partner or ally in the form of the consumers themselves. In other words: Value can be created through a process of co-creation between the hotel and the customer to provide unique or customised guest experiences that lead to higher levels of customer satisfaction (Mansilla et al., 2019).

Therefore, the customer is influenced by many factors that create what is known as the customer experience. By understanding consumer needs and preferences well and building relationships with consumers through touch points, companies succeed in providing positive experiences that subsequently earn them the loyalty of their customers.

2.2 The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on customer experience

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new coronavirus now known as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (formerly known as 2019-nCoV), which was originally discovered during an outbreak of respiratory illness in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. It was first reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) on December 31, 2019. The WHO declared the outbreak of COVID -19 a global health emergency on January 30, 2020. COVID -19 was declared a global pandemic by WHO on March 11, 2020, the first time since H1N1 influenza was declared a pandemic in 2009 (Bolanle et al., 2022). It is spreading rapidly worldwide, killing thousands of people and posing a major public health threat this year. Fever, dry cough, shortness of breath, headache, body aches, and general body weakness are among the mild to moderate symptoms of COVID -19, while severe cases include difficulty breathing, chest pain, and loss of speech (Nimgampalle et al., 2021). By March 24, 2022, the new 2019 coronavirus pandemic (COVID -19) had caused approximately 472 million illnesses and 6.09 million deaths worldwide (WHO, 2022).

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has affected financial markets around the world. The S&P500 and the Dow Jones Industrial Average, which reflect the U.S. stock market, lost more than one-third of their value in the first quarter of 2020. Authors such as Baker (2020) show that financial

markets suffered from enormous fluctuations in response to the course of the pandemic. According to their findings, some firms benefited from the economic changes brought about by the pandemic, while others suffered from the negative consequences. Meanwhile, markets adjusted and rebalanced as new information arrived.

Although the pandemic had a widespread impact on the market, the extent of the impact varied by industry. Manufacturing, food, healthcare, and information technology saw large positive returns during the COVID-19 outbreak (Narayan et al., 2022), while transportation, entertainment, and hospitality companies experienced significant losses. Asymmetric volatility correlated with stock returns has also been observed in equities. For example, as the industry shifted to telecommuting, companies in the information technology sector that provide resources for telecommuting performed exceptionally well during the epidemic. Transportation sector companies, on the other hand, suffered greatly from reduced business and personal travel.

External and internal variables such as uncertainty, problems, crises, and pandemics have influenced and affected the tourism and hospitality industry for decades. An unforeseen disaster (natural, financial, or health) can jeopardize tourism demand and negatively impact the performance of hospitality businesses. Pandemics and disease outbreaks, for example, can have a significant impact on social and economic development. Tourism and hospitality are highly vulnerable to disasters and crises compared to other industries (Chen et al., 2021), with the tourism sector being one of the most vulnerable industries to crises, disasters, and pandemics (Zhang et al., 2020). Because the hospitality and tourism industries play a major role in the spread of diseases and pandemics between areas and destinations, health-related crises and hazards have significant impacts on tourism (e.g., demand) and the hospitality industry (as a business performance) (Sánchez-Cañizares et al., 2021).

According to tourism and public health scholars and governmental organisations and institutions, epidemics and pandemics pose a significant threat to society and the tourism and hospitality industries (Hall et al., 2020). The impact of epidemics and pandemics on stakeholder perspectives (including financial, social, and emotional well-being) has already emerged and will continue to emerge (Gössling et al., 2020). The recent significant coronavirus epidemic (COVID -19) and subsequent global recession have created great uncertainty and risk in the hospitality and tourism industry. The pandemic spread worldwide through international tourists travelling to their home countries after visiting affected locations.

Consumer attitudes (toward the effects of the coronavirus outbreak) refer to a person's knowledge and involvement in things, behaviors, and events. Epidemic events have created a greater sense of doubt and negativity toward hospitality, tourism, and destinations (Yih et al., 2012). People's intentions are influenced by their opinions. Consequently, customer confidence is critical to the hotel industry's recovery from the trauma of the COVID -19 crisis. Consumers' buying behavior in the tourism sector is influenced by several important aspects, such as family income, estimated health risk, and changing demand metrics due to epidemiological constraints (Lee et al., 2011).

Travelers may maintain social distance, believing that others may infect them if COVID -19 spreads through society. Individuals living in areas where the COVID -19 pandemic was a major problem tended to adjust their preferences for a vacation destination based on the congestion level of the location, which means they chose less crowded areas (Park et al., 2021). The pandemic caused travelers to prioritize domestic tourism over any other type of tourism, not only because of the regulations imposed by foreign countries, but also because of the number of infection cases abroad. According to a recent survey conducted by MMGY Travel Intelligence (2020) on the travel intentions of US citizens, 57% of Americans were willing to take a domestic vacation. This was also found in Romania (Țițău and Shahrazad, 2022) and other countries. To maintain social distance, one third of respondents prefer to drive their own cars, even long distances, rather than use public transportation (MMGY Travel Intelligence, 2020). In addition to a preference for owning a car, Dumitru (2022) observed a decrease in the length of stay during the pandemic.

In addition, Hornoiu et al. (2022) showed that tourists adopted adaptive behaviour and travelled more to natural areas because they felt safer and had a lower risk of infection. There are also scholars who

have demonstrated that some technological innovations could compensate for customers' limited mobility and reduce the risk posed by the interaction. Schiopu et al. (2021) found that the perceived substitutability of virtual reality use in tourism increased as a result of the pandemic. Furthermore, Schiopu et al. (2022) showed that virtual reality was a solution to this type of constrained environment with limited travel opportunities.

The COVID-19 virus seems to have brought the activity of many sectors of the economy to a standstill, especially the hospitality industry, which was most affected by the measures taken by governments, such as the nearly two-month closure, reduced service capacity, shorter operating hours (shorter schedules), etc. At the same time, consumer perceptions were affected by fear of contagion, creating the need for social distancing.

2.3 Emotions, mental comfort, desire for avoidance, and customer satisfaction during the pandemic

Anticipated emotions

The concept of anticipated emotions is to be separated from affective or generic attitudes. They focus on the emotions people anticipate before or after they engage in negative behavior or refrain from positive actions in the future, whereas the attitudinal construct assesses the evaluative features of attitudes; for example, exciting – unexciting (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005). It is important to note that, while affective attitudes focus on how participants perceive and think about the activity itself, anticipated emotions focus on how participants feel about the outcomes of their actions. Anticipated emotions include both optimistic and pessimistic predictions. They illustrate how individuals' behavior is influenced by the comments they expect to receive from their acquaintances. If these responses are positive, the behavior will be performed, but if they are unfavorable, individuals will engage in the action (French et al., 2005).

More specifically, positive or negative feelings that a person might experience in anticipation of a successful or unsuccessful action outcome are called anticipated feelings. This suggests that before customers make a decision, they can predict both positive and negative affective consequences of their decision to do or not to do something (Bagozzi et al., 2016). The concept of predicted emotions is derived from the Model of Goal Directed Behavior (MGB). The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which has been used for social media consumer behavior, has been refined to include more individual aspects, such as predicted emotions, the importance of acting or not acting, and aspirations (Bagozzi and Dohlakia, 2002).

Psychological Comfort

A feeling of ease that promotes peaceful and stress-free emotions for a person in an environment is called psychological comfort. It is characterized as a psychological stability in which a client's stress about a service has subsided, and he or she feels calm, relaxed, and unconcerned about contact with a service provider (Spake et al., 2003). According to Ainsworth and Foster (2017), psychological well-being is a key factor in customer experience perceptions. Similarly, Vrechopoulos et al. (2004) emphasized that the level of comfort is positively influenced by the customer's positive evaluation of the customer experience. Since customers who use services with high credibility may experience emotions such as fear and anxiety (Fernandes and Pinto, 2019), it is crucial to keep their psychological comfort level high. Low psychological comfort is caused by ineffective problem solving (Makara-Studzińska et al., 2021).

Desire for Avoidance

Avoidance behaviour is seen as the need for individuals to avoid all encounters with organisations (Grégoire et al., 2009). According to Grégoire and Fisher (2008), breaking off a relationship out of a desire to avoid conflict is not an act of revenge because it is not done to hurt or inconvenience businesses out of revenge. Even if consumers do not directly affect restaurants by avoiding conflict, they may still stop visiting them and choose a substitute (Bechwati and Morrin, 2003). Attempts to deny, diminish, and push away thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations in response to negative

emotions are referred to as avoidance techniques. This includes escaping from or avoiding circumstances that trigger negative thoughts (De Castella et al., 2013).

Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a critical component of business strategy that influences post-purchase behavior (Olsen et al., 2014). Customer satisfaction affects engagement, word of mouth, and intention to make another purchase or visit; consequently, it can influence a company's financial performance (Kumar et al., 2013).

Consumer satisfaction in a modeling context refers to the overall evaluation of customer opinions about the key components and qualities of a company or brand (Gustafsson and Johnson, 2004). Similarly, most grocery retailing strategies use consumers' evaluations of product and service attributes (Yokoyama et al., 2022). The most important food attributes are cost, taste, color, aroma, and texture (Goić et al., 2021). Other important service characteristics are ease of access, variety, hours of operation, availability, hygiene, information, staff, and waiting time (Wicaksono and Illés, 2022).

Given the characteristics of the COVID -19 pandemic as an emotionally charged environment and its impact on the customer experience, we hypothesize that the emotions expected prior to the use of hospitality services will influence customer behavior in terms of psychological comfort and desire to avoid. The latter variables may also influence customer satisfaction. Therefore, the hypotheses that we will test are listed below:

H1. The anticipated positive emotions have a positive effect on customers' mental comfort regarding consuming hospitality services during the COVID-19 pandemic

H2. The anticipated negative emotions have a positive effect on customers' desire for avoidance during the COVID-19 pandemic

H3. The mental comfort regarding consuming hospitality services during the COVID-19 pandemic has a positive effect on customers' satisfaction

H4. The desire for avoidance during the COVID-19 pandemic has a negative effect on customers' satisfaction

3. Methodology

The aim of this research is to find out how hospitality customers felt during the COVID-19 pandemic, whether their behavior changed due to this unexpected global event, and how they reacted to it. First, it was important to find out if they went out at all. This was the key to the whole investigation. After that, I would like to know how they perceived different situations that they might have encountered while going out during the pandemic.

We organized a survey to examine customers' perceptions of the hospitality industry during the pandemic, particularly in terms of some expected positive and negative emotions evoked by going out and using hospitality services, psychological comfort, desire to avoid, and customers' satisfaction with hospitality services during the pandemic.

The survey is the most appropriate research method for the objectives of this study because it produces the most accurate results compared to other research methods, such as interviews, experiments, or focus groups, whose use is problematic because it is difficult to reach a large number of people in a short period of time and sort their responses.

The advantages of this research method are many. Online survey research benefits from the ability to use the Internet to contact people and groups that would be difficult to reach by other means. Another benefit is the potential time savings for researchers conducting Internet-based surveys. As mentioned earlier, online surveys allow researchers to contact large numbers of people quickly (Yun and Trumbo, 2000). Even with a limited sample, paper surveys are typically expensive, and a traditional large-scale survey that mails questionnaires can cost astronomical amounts. Using online surveys

circumvents this problem by eliminating the need for paper and incurring other costs such as mailing, printing, and record keeping (Llieva et al., 2002).

At the beginning of the questionnaire, the respondents were informed about the purpose of the questionnaire and the anonymity of their answers. It was distributed twice to reach a larger number of people and was completed by 114 respondents. The sample used for this survey is composed of adult (over 18 years old) Romanian individuals from Bucharest. Children and adolescents were excluded from this survey because they are not direct customers of the hospitality industry, as their parents pay for them. Older people were also excluded because they are not active in relation to the hospitality industry and do not have access to technologies and skills to complete this online questionnaire. The reason the survey targeted active adults is because they contribute to the state's economy through their work (taxable income) and automatically contribute to the hospitality industry through their consumption (in our case, through restaurant, hotel, and movie theatre visits, etc.).

Since the questionnaire was created with Google Forms, it was distributed through a social media link to students of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, family members, friends, and their friends and other acquaintances in the period 15th - 22nd of June 2022.

From the sociodemographic point of view, 52% of the respondents were women and 48% were men. In terms of age, most respondents belonged to the youngest category, which means that the sample was mainly composed of young adults between 18 and 25 years old (66.7%, represented by 76 people). From the other categories, the total percentage is 33.3%: in the 26-35 years category there are 12 respondents (10.5%), in the 36-45 years category there are 5 (4.4%), in the 46-55 years category there are 19 (16.6%), while in the last category, over 55 years old, there are only 2 respondents (1.8%). Young people are more inclined to travel, go out, and entertain themselves due to their active lifestyle.

Most of the respondents have income between 2000-3000 RON per month (45%), 38.5% earn over 4000 RON monthly, while only 16.5% earn between 3001-4000 RON. Considering that the sample consisted mainly of young adults, it was predictable that the number of respondents earning around 2000-3000 RON monthly would be higher. Looking at the previous results, it can be seen that the second largest percentage belongs to the 46-55 age group, which makes it clear why the second most common income category is above 4000 RON. These results clearly show that the prototype of the hospitality industry is a young adult with an income equal to or slightly above the minimum wage in Romania.

We used prior studies to derive most of our constructs. The anticipated positive and the negative emotions and desire for avoidance are based on the work of Miao et al. (2022), while mental comfort is measured with items from Pijls et al. (2019). For customer satisfaction with the hospitality industry during the pandemic we created our own item. Table 1 presents the constructs and the items aforementioned, with the Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.804 to 0.889 which show a strong internal reliability for each construct.

The constructs described in Table 1 were included in a questionnaire completed by the respondents themselves, along with some demographic and behavioral questions. Most items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5), except for the demographic questions and a few others that required categorical scales.

The inner consistency of these constructs is very good, as shown by the Cronbach's alpha coefficients in Table 1. The values of 0.804, 0.878, 0.889, and 0.842 indicate a good reliability of these measures. In addition, we used the software IBM SPSS AMOS version 27 to test the measurement model and the structural model. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) indices show that the model is adequate: chi-square = 66.004 with 49 degrees of freedom $p = 0.053$, chi-square/d.f. = 1.347, TLI = 0.971; CFI = 0.983; IFI = 0.983; RMSEA = 0.055; SRMR = 0.0640. All these indices are considered very good (Hair et al., 2010), with TLI, IFI, and CFI above 0.95 and RMSEA < 0.08, indicating a superior model with good measurement capacity.

Table no. 1. Constructs and items

Construct	Abbr.	Items	Cronbach's alpha	Skewness	Kurtosis
Anticipated Positive Emotions	APE1	I felt enthusiastic to socialize with other customers.	0.804	-0.360	-0.326
	APE2	I liked going out and being served at the table in the city, rather than ordering food at home.		-0.740	-0.090
Mental Comfort	MC1	I felt comfortable to be in crowded places such as restaurants, cafes, shopping centers.	0.878	-0.094	-0.993
	MC2	I felt safe to stay at the hotel.		-0.726	0.039
	MC3	I felt relaxed to interact with other customers.		-0.495	-0.174
Anticipated Negative Emotions	ANE1	I felt scared of getting infected nearby other customers.	0.889	0.318	-0.590
	ANE2	I felt tensioned when other customers were trying to interact with me.		0.254	-0.668
	ANE3	I felt negligent in front of others when I started talking with strangers.		0.237	-0.829
Desire for Avoidance	DA1	I tried to keep the distance as much as possible between me and other customers.	0.842	-0.349	-0.746
	DA2	I preferred to stay at home and avoid any crowded place (restaurant, cafe, cinema etc.) to keep the distance from the others.		0.374	-0.992
	DA3	I did not like when, during the pandemic, the employees were getting too close to me.		0.129	-0.897
	DA4	The places where tables were close to each other were excluded from my choices.		0.200	-0.924
Customer Satisfaction	SAT	How satisfied with the Romanian hospitality services (hotel, restaurant etc.) were you during the pandemic?		-1.236	2.481

Source: Survey results

The CFA analysis indicates a good model fit of the measurement tool, and we conclude that we can use these constructs to predict our dependent variable, i.e., customer satisfaction with the services provided by the hospitality industry. To analyze the data, we used IBM SPSS 27 to screen the data, calculate frequencies, correlations, etc., and IBM AMOS 27 to validate the hypotheses associated with our conceptual model (Figure 1). Considering that normality is an assumption of SEM models, we used SPSS to compute the skewness and kurtosis statistics (also shown in Table 1). The data did not show any significant deviations from normality, as they were within the satisfactory range of ± 2 (George and Mallery, 2016), so structural equation modeling (SEM) via AMOS could be used to test the hypotheses.

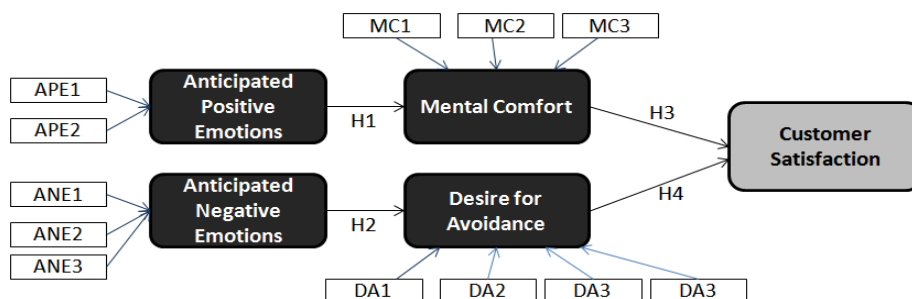


Fig. no. 1. Conceptual model to be tested

Source: developed by the author

4. Results and discussion

Through the first variable, the frequency of outings during the pandemic can be determined, i.e., how often the respondents went out. The average value of this variable is 2.68, indicating that most of the respondents went out between a few times a week and once a week, with a higher tendency to go out once a week, as the value is closer to 3 than to 2. In terms of places visited during the pandemic, there is a higher preference for cafes (67.5%) and restaurants (53.5%), with the remainder accounted for by bars (25.4%), stadiums (football, rugby, etc.) (16.7%), cinemas (15.8%), and hotels (10.5%), which are the least preferred because not many people travelled during the pandemic. Satisfaction with hotel and restaurant services during the pandemic has an average value of 3.59, indicating that respondents are more satisfied than neutral, as the value is closer to 4 than 3. From this value, we can see that the hotel and restaurant industry managed its performance well despite the global crisis, as consumers seemed to be satisfied with the services offered.

As long as the mental comfort is concerned, customers expressed themselves neutral to being comfortable (2.94) in crowded places such as restaurants, cafes, and shopping malls, with a slight increase in feeling safe (3.54) to stay at the hotel and relaxed (3.35) to interact with other customers. From these mean scores, it appears that crowded places were neither a major problem nor a pleasure during the pandemic, but that people perceived the hotel as a safe place where the risk of infection was low, and that they felt relaxed to socialize rather than to keep their distance from others. The anticipated positive emotions make it even clearer that people felt the need to interact with others, as they felt excited to socialize with other customers in a neutral to agree manner (3.27), while the fact that they preferred to eat out rather than order food at home is even more clear with a value of 3.68, meaning that they rather agree than be neutral to this statement.

The desire for avoidance seems to be quite low, as the majority of the responses either disagree or are neutral, as the average values of the choices show 3.34, 2.47, 2.75, 2.76, which means that the respondents disagree or are neutral to the statements about the desire for avoidance. The highest value among this type of research variable is the one related to the fact that some prefer to keep the distance between themselves and other customers, but the value is still close to neutrality rather than agreement (3.34). People did not feel the need to stay at home and avoid crowded places (2.47), nor did they mind staff coming too close to them (2.75) or tables being close together (2.76). From these scores, it can be seen that people were not averse and, in fact, were more inclined, to socialize and go out. The pandemic does not appear to deter people from leisure and pleasure. Regarding the expected negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, emotions from others (Miao et al., 2022), the scores are less than 3 or close to 3, indicating that people were not afraid of getting infected around other customers (2.59 - rejection of the feeling of fear with a tendency to be neutral), they did not feel tense when others tried to contact them (2.41 - rejecting the feeling of fear with a slight inclination toward neutrality), they did not feel careless when starting conversations with strangers (2.38 - rejecting the feeling of carelessness with a slight inclination toward neutrality), or they did not mind if coworkers wore the mask or not (2.99, indicating strong neutrality).

Regarding the measures imposed by the Romanian government against the COVID-19 pandemic, three variables were selected to understand how people perceive them. Interest in the presence of disinfectants in restaurants, bars, etc. before the pandemic is low, with a value of 2.59 (indicating that people were mostly not interested in such criteria before the pandemic, with a tendency towards neutrality), interest in social distance before the pandemic is also low (2.92, indicating neutrality towards distance between tables), and interest in protective measures against the virus shows perfect neutrality, the value of this variable being 3. All other variables show a rather neutral attitude, indicating that respondents do not consider it necessary to protect themselves from the virus by disinfectants, masks, social distancing, or other measures. A relaxed rather than a strict attitude towards the hospitality industry and the way it carries out its activities is evident. Customer-to-customer and customer-to-employee relationships appear to be the same as before the pandemic.

Examining the relationships between different research variables can make it easier to understand the relationship between customers' attitudes and experiences during the pandemic. Thus, taking pairs of variables (one-to-one), one can see the correlation between them. Taking into account psychological

comfort (Pijls et al., 2019) and expected positive emotions (Miao et al., 2022), the value of the correlation can be determined to understand whether customers experience positive emotions in the hospitality industry, despite the fact that the pandemic could jeopardize the experience due to the risk of infection and the measures taken by the Romanian government, such as wearing masks indoors (e.g., in shopping malls). The question of great interest in this context is: did hospitality customers manage to maintain a psychological well-being when going out and experience positive emotions during the two-year pandemic?

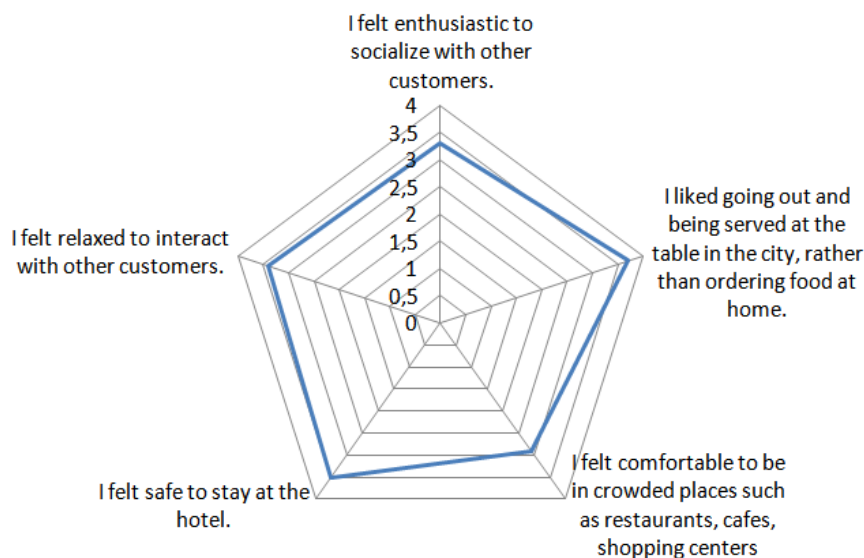


Fig. no. 2. Analysis of means for anticipated positive emotions and mental comfort

Source: developed by the author

In Figure 2, it can be seen that for the five statements related to mental comfort and anticipated positive emotions, the average of the respondents' answers ranged from 2.9 to 3.7, indicating that the respondents were mostly neutral with a tendency to agree. This suggests that the pandemic did not prevent people from feeling safe, relaxed, enthusiastic, going out, and socializing with other customers rather than eating at home and avoiding others around them. All correlations between the statements describing these two concepts, namely anticipated positive emotions and mental comfort, are significant and substantial, as can be seen in Table 2. For example, the statements "I felt relaxed to interact with other customers" and "I felt enthusiastic to socialize with other customers" have a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.869, which is very close to 1, meaning that there is a very high correlation between the two statements. It can be concluded that the correlation between mental comfort and anticipated positive emotions is very high.

Table no. 2. Correlations between anticipated positive emotions and mental comfort

		APE1	APE2
MC1	Pearson Correlation	0.677**	0.549**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
MC2	Pearson Correlation	0.670**	0.570**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
MC3	Pearson Correlation	0.869**	0.630**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000

Obs. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Survey results

The average scores of respondents' answers between 2.2 and 3.3 for the statements describing the anticipated negative emotions and the desire to avoid, shown in Figure 3, indicate that people were mostly neutral with a tendency to disagree. Thus, the pandemic did not cause people to be too anxious or fearful to go to crowded places such as restaurants, cafes, or movie theatres.

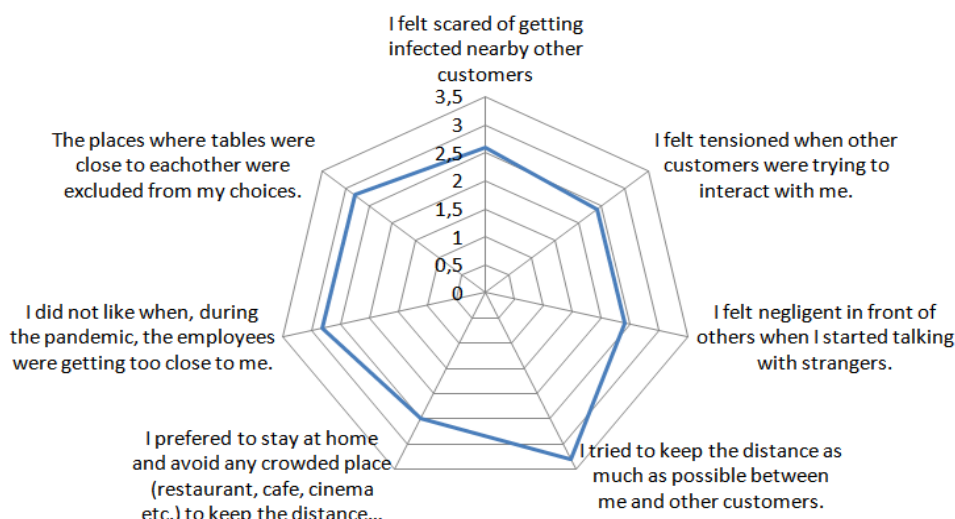


Fig. no. 3. Analysis of means for anticipated negative emotions and desire for avoidance

Source: developed by the author

However, all correlations between statements that describe the anticipated negative emotions and the desire to avoid them were significant and strong, as seen in Table 3. For the two statements "I felt scared of getting infected nearby other customers" and "I tried to keep the distance as much as possible between me and other customers," the Pearson coefficient of correlation is 0.653, suggesting that the correlation between anticipated negative emotions and the desire to avoid them is very high.

Table no. 3. Correlations between anticipated negative emotions and desire for avoidance

		ANE1	ANE2	ANE3
DA1	Pearson Correlation	0.653**	0.611**	0.433**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000
DA2	Pearson Correlation	0.546**	0.636**	0.542**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000
DA3	Pearson Correlation	0.598**	0.591**	0.493**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000
DA4	Pearson Correlation	0.584**	0.605**	0.499**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000

Obs. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Survey results

To further investigate the relationships between the different research variables, the next step was to test the hypotheses of the conceptual model at SEM. The fit of the structural model is also very good, with indices such as CFI = 0.983 (> 0.95, very good); and RMSEA = 0.055 (< 0.08, very good). The standardized parameters coefficients used to decide whether a hypothesis is supported are shown in Table 4.

Table no. 4. Results of parameter estimation: direct effects

Path	Structural Model		Result
	Stand. β	p-value	
H1: Anticipated Positive Emotions → Mental Comfort	0.890	***	Supported
H2: Anticipated Negative Emotions → Desire for Avoidance	0.843	***	Supported
H3: Mental Comfort → Customer Satisfaction	0.264	0.554	Not supported
H4: Desire for Avoidance → Customer Satisfaction	-0.086	0.755	Not supported

Note: ***p < .001, **p < .01.

Source: Survey results

With a p-value for the standardized effect greater than the selected significance level of 0.05, we found support for H1 and H2. The results show that the anticipated positive emotions have a significant and consistent direct effect on customers' mental comfort ($\beta = 0.890$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H1. That is, the more enthusiastic customers are about socializing with others and the more they like

to go out, the more relaxed they feel about interacting with other customers. Moreover, the expected negative emotions have a significant and strong influence on the desire to avoid ($\beta = 0.843$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H2. The negative emotions, such as fear of getting infected around other customers or tension of interacting with other customers, led to higher desire to keep distance from other customers and avoid crowded places. The data do not support the significance of the direct effect of the mental comfort and desire to avoid on customer satisfaction with hospitality services. Therefore, we cannot validate H3 and H4. It appears that customers' satisfaction was not significantly affected by how comfortable they felt when dining out or by their desire to avoid crowded places.

In summary, from the results obtained through the questionnaire, the Romanian population of Bucharest was more likely to feel the need to go out, socialize, and spend time outside their homes. The pandemic did not seem to frighten people, but rather to maintain or even increase the need for interaction, travel, and entertainment, the figures show. Most people preferred to eat out rather than order food at home, and most also expressed neutrality about negative feelings due to the virus spread. The anticipated positive emotions related to eating out and using hospitality services had a significant positive impact on customers' mental comfort, while anticipated negative emotions triggered a higher desire for avoidance.

5. Implications: a high tendency to technology adoption

From the results of the questionnaire, the majority of respondents were young adults between the ages of 18 and 25. At the same time, when going out, each of us can notice that there are more young people in a club, a shopping mall or a restaurant. Young people seem to be more active and more familiar with the hospitality industry than the older population. One of the reasons for this may be the fact that the industry has evolved technologically and the classic barriers of caring a lot about staff behavior have been overcome. Nowadays, the most important thing is to be served quickly and not to be bothered with too many questions. The hotel and restaurant industry, due to a natural evolution, but accelerated by the pandemic, has incorporated technology in its activities and also in its relationship with the customer.

The hospitality industry is constantly evolving. An industry traditionally dominated by interpersonal relationships, message tactics, and the promotion of specific locations and vacation packages is transforming into one in which companies have individual relationships with each customer. For the first time, these interactions are primarily digital, and they are based on two key characteristics: they must be intensely tailored to each potential customer or guest, and they must be naturally rewarding. Therefore, individualization and interactivity are two of the most important developments in the tourism industry and together reflect the current iteration of digitalization (Campione, 2021).

Technological innovation has recently transformed the travel and tourism industry. The introduction of information and communication technology has changed the nature of the travel industry, affecting both the supply and demand for travel services. The roles of suppliers and consumers have changed with the help of the proliferation and improvement of digital platforms, which have also changed the way businesses and customers interact (Tobon et al., 2020). Through innovation and mobile platforms, tourists and service providers collaborate to create unique tourism experiences. As a result, the roles of platform providers have grown, and in the last decade, their business has expanded dramatically (Paulauskaite et al., 2017).

The digitization of the hospitality industry can take many forms, as described in the literature above. Customers can interact with restaurants through social media such as Instagram and Facebook, where they can ask questions, learn about the offerings, and become well-informed. Another form of digitization is to access the menu by scanning a QR code, which was developed due to the proliferation of viruses. It is obvious that technology has entered this industry and people are responding to it; otherwise there would not have been so many approving responses to the questionnaire statements, from which it could be deduced that customers feel excited, relaxed, and eager to go out.

Studies show that digitalization has completely changed the way organizations operate and build relationships with customers, suppliers, and other parties (Scuotto et al., 2019), fostering the

development of new business models and the creation of customer value. The use of digital technologies by an organization to build a new technological business model that contributes to the creation and appropriation of additional value for the organization is referred to as digital transformation (Verhoef et al., 2019). This type of change affects organizational capabilities, operations, and business processes (Li et al., 2018). Traditional interactions between consumers and businesses are changing as a result of digitalization (Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015). Customers can actively and conveniently interact with businesses and other customers across dozens of media platforms, going through an ever-increasing number of touch points in their customer experience (Verhoef et al., 2019).

Literature studies have found that the entire infrastructure of business models is being transformed by digitalization (Volberda et al., 2021), especially in terms of value proposition and customer interactions (Bouwman et al., 2018). The revolutionary change has accelerated the digital transformation of consumer value creation thanks to the growing influence of social media and predictive analytics (Rachinger et al., 2018). Any type of business looking to take advantage of the new opportunities has crowded the market for new applications, services, platforms, information, and gadgets (Zott and Amit, 2017). In light of this, academic research has focused on the proliferation of digital media that focuses on value propositions and customer interactions. Some companies are deeply engaged in high-tech and digitalization, and traditional companies have also begun to innovate through technology adoption (Ghezzi and Cavallo, 2020).

All in all, the Romanian hospitality industry has adapted to the new requirements in the age of high technology, where most of the companies work with the help of technology, and this is also true for the customers, who are very adaptable, especially if they are the younger generation. This type of customer is very flexible and responds positively to any digital implementation made by the hospitality industry or even in general in different areas.

6. Conclusions

The hospitality industry appeared to be severely affected by the worldwide epidemic, which, in addition to the restrictions imposed by governments, resulted in a two-month closure during which the industry could not carry out any activity. All businesses (hotels, restaurants, cinemas) recorded significant losses because they were forced to close, reduce their capacity, or take other measures that have been imposed for about two years. Romanian consumers, who were happy to go out before the pandemic, as the figures show (Romanian National Institute of Statistics, 2022), were not able anymore due to getting infected, being afraid of the virus or being banned by the Romanian government through measures and restrictions such as social distancing, reduced business hours, or even restriction of citizens' freedom through reduced permission outside the residence (Romanian Government, 2020).

However, through the research conducted using the survey method, it was possible to determine how hospitality consumers reacted and how they perceived the spread of the virus when they went out. As the results show, people seem to be relaxed rather than reserved, anxious, or fearful when they are around others. Positive feelings can be observed, such as enthusiasm for socializing and eating at restaurants rather than ordering food at home. From the results of the questionnaire, it can be concluded that the Romanian population in Bucharest feels a strong need to leave the house, socialize, and spend time outdoors. According to the statistics, it seems that the pandemic did not frighten people, but maintained or even increased their need for social engagement, travel and pleasure. Most people preferred to eat out rather than have food delivered to their homes, and most showed no strong emotions in response to the spread of the virus. Anticipated positive emotions had a significant and consistent effect on the mental comfort of customers when eating out, while anticipated negative emotions produced a higher desire to avoid.

When talking about the development of the hospitality industry, one can notice a high tendency of technology adoption. According to studies, the digitalization of companies has fundamentally changed the way they conduct business, develop their interactions with customers, suppliers, and other parties, and promote the creation of new business models and consumer benefits. Digital transformation is the

use of digital technology by a company to build a new technological business model that helps the company create and leverage additional value (Verhoef et al., 2019).

All in all, the hospitality industry is a strong one, but it is vulnerable to unexpected events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Most countries rely on this industry as it is the main source of revenue, and it had a dramatic impact on a global level not only from a health perspective but also from an economic perspective. Digitalization seems to be the solution to many encounters in daily life, but also in this industry.

References

- Ainsworth, J. and Foster, J. (2017). Comfort in brick and mortar shopping experiences: Examining antecedents and consequences of comfortable retail experiences. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 35, 27-35. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2016.11.005>
- Ajzen, I. and Fishbein, M. (2005). The Influence of Attitudes on Behavior. In: Albarracín, D., Johnson, B.T. and Zanna, M.P., Eds.. *The Handbook of Attitudes, Erlbaum, Mahwah*, 173-221.
- Bagozzi, R.P. and Dholakia, U.M. (2002). Intentional social action in virtual communities. *Journal of interactive marketing*, 16(2), 2-21. <https://doi.org/10.1002/dir.10006>
- Bagozzi, R.P., Belanche, D., Casaló, L.V. and Flavián, C. (2016). The role of anticipated emotions in purchase intentions. *Psychology & Marketing*, 33(8), 629-645. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20905>
- Baker, S.R., Bloom, N., Davis, S.J. and Terry, S.J. (2020). COVID-Induced Economic Uncertainty. *NBER Working Paper Series*, 26983. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w26983>
- Baumann, J. and Le Meunier-FitzHugh, K. (2015). Making value co-creation a reality—exploring the co-creative value processes in customer–salesperson interaction. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 31(3-4), 289-316. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2014.956137>
- Bechwati, N. and Morrin, M. (2003). Outraged consumers: getting event at the expense of getting a good deal. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 13(4), 440-453. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327663JCP1304_11
- Becker, L. and Jaakkola, E. (2020). Customer experience: fundamental premises and implications for research. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 48(4), 630-648. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-019-00718-x>
- Biederman, P.S. (2008). *Travel and Tourism: An industry primer*. Pearson/Prentice Hall.
- Bolanle, F.A., Adekunle, B.M. and Saeed, R.A. (2022). Effects of Information Communication Technology on Da’wah Activities Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic, *COVID-19: Tackling Global Pandemics through Scientific and Social Tools*, 10, 125-129. <https://doi.org/10.1016/C2020-0-02335-2>.
- Bouwman, H., Nikou, S., Molina-Castillo, F.J. and Reuver, M. (2018). The impact of digitalization on business models. *Digital Policy, Regulation and Governance*, 20(2), 105-124. <https://doi.org/10.1108/DPRG-07-2017-0039>
- Brotherton, B. (2005). The nature of hospitality: Customer perceptions and implications. *Tourism and Hospitality Planning & Development*, 2(3), 139-153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790530500399218>
- Campione, R. (2021). How digitalization is revolutionizing relationships between customers and service providers in the hospitality industry: personalization and gamification. *Scholarly Journal*, 13(1), 35-52. <https://doi.org/10.29036/jots.v11i21.165>
- Cao, Y., Li, X.R., DiPietro, R. and So, K.K.F. (2019). The creation of memorable dining experiences: Formative index construction. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 82, 308-317. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2018.10.010>
- Cavallo, A., D’Angelo, S. and Ghezzi, A. (2020). *Experimentation and Digitalization: Towards a Brand-New Corporate Entrepreneurship?*, 163-169. <https://hdl.handle.net/11311/1156425>
- Chan, K., Kin, C., Yim, C.K., Lam, S. (2010). Is Customer Participation in Value Creation a Double-Edged Sword? Evidence from Professional Financial Services Across Cultures. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(3), 48-64. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.74.3.048>

- Chen, S., Law, R. and Zhang, M. (2021). Review of research on tourism-related diseases. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 26(1), 44-58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2020.1805478>
- De Castella, K., Goldin, P., Jazaieri, H., Ziv, M., Dweck, C.S. and Gross, J.J. (2013). Beliefs about emotion: Links to emotion regulation, well-being, and psychological distress. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 35(6), 497-505. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973533.2013.840632>
- Dumitru, A.C. (2022). Behavioural Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Romanian Tourists?. *Cactus the Tourism Journal for Research, Education, Culture and Soul*, 4(1), 79-86. <https://doi.org/10.24818/CTS/4/2022/1.07>
- Etgar, M. (2008). A descriptive model of the consumer co-production process. *Journal of the academy of marketing science*, 36(1), 97-108. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-007-0061-1>
- Fernandes, T. and Pinto, T. (2019). Relationship quality determinants and outcomes in retail banking services: The role of customer experience. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 50, 30-41. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.01.018>
- French, D.P., Sutton, S., Hennings, S.J., Mitchell, J., Wareham, N.J., Griffin, S., Hardeman, W. and Kinmonth, A.L. (2005). The importance of affective beliefs and attitudes in the theory of planned behavior: predicting intention to increase physical activity. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 35(9), 1824-1848. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2005.tb02197.x>
- Gastro Expert Profis (2020). *Ce inseamna horeca? Afla care este explicatia acestui acronim*. [online], Available at: <<https://www.gastroprofis.ro/ce-inseamna-horeca/>> [Accessed 31 may 2022].
- George, D. and Mallery, P. (2016). *IBM SPSS statistics 23 step-by-step: A simple guide and reference*. NY: Routledge.
- Goić, M., Levenier, C. and Montoya, R. (2021). Drivers of customer satisfaction in the grocery retail industry: A longitudinal analysis across store formats. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 60. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2021.102505>
- Gössling, S., Scott, D. and Hall, C.M (2020). Pandemics, tourism and global change: a rapid assessment of COVID-19, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 29(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1758708>
- Grégoire, Y. and Fisher, R.J. (2008). Customer betrayal and retaliation: when your best customers become your worst enemies. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 36, 247-261. <https://doi.org/10.1016/10.1007/s11747-007-0054-0>
- Grégoire, Y., Tripp, T. and Legoux, R. (2009). When customer love turns into lasting hate: the effects of relationship strength and time on customer revenge and avoidance. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(6), 18-32. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.6.18>
- Gustafsson, A. and Johnson, M. D. (2004). Determining attribute importance in a service satisfaction model. *Journal of Service Research*, 7(2), 124-141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670504268453>
- Gvili, Y., Kol, O. and Levy, S. (2020). The value (s) of information on social network sites: The role of user personality traits. *European Review of Applied Psychology*, 70(2), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erap.2019.100511>
- Hair, J.F., Black, W.C., Babin, B.J., Anderson, R.E. and Tatham, R.L. (2010). *Multivariate data analysis* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Hall, G., Laddu, D.R., Phillips, S.A., Lavie, C.J. and Arena, R. (2020). A tale of two pandemics: How will COVID-19 and global trends in physical inactivity and sedentary behavior affect one another? *Progress in Cardiovascular Diseases*, 64, 108-110. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pcad.2020.04.005>
- Homburg, C., Jozić, D. and Kuehnl, C. (2017). Customer experience management: toward implementing an evolving marketing concept. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 45(3), 377-401. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-015-0460-7>
- Hornoiu, R.I., Popescu, D., Militaru, I.A. and Raducanu, S.F. (2022). Ecotourism, A Resilient Solution in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic? *Cactus the Tourism Journal for Research, Education, Culture and Soul*, 4(1), 6-17. <https://doi.org/10.24818/CTS/4/2022/1.01>

- Huber, F., Herrmann, A. and Morgan, R.E. (2001). Gaining competitive advantage through customer value oriented management. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 18(1), 41-53. <https://doi.org/10.1108/07363760110365796>
- Ilieva, J., Baron, S. and Healey, N.M. (2002). Online Surveys in Marketing Research. *International Journal of Market Research*, 44(3), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14707853020440030>
- Islam, J.U., Hollebeek, L.D., Rahman, Z., Khan, I. and Rasool, A., (2019). Customer engagement in the service context: An empirical investigation of the construct, its antecedents and consequences. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 50, 277-285. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.05.018>
- Kandampully, J., Zhang, T.C. and Jaakkola, E. (2018). Customer experience management in hospitality: A literature synthesis, new understanding and research agenda. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 30(1), 21-56. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-10-2015-0549>
- Korsmeyer, C. and Sutton, D. (2011). The Sensory Experience of Food, *Food, Culture & Society*. 14(4), 461-475. <https://doi.org/10.2752/175174411X13046092851316>
- Kumar, V., Pozza, I.D. and Ganesh, J. (2013). Revisiting the Satisfaction-Loyalty Relationship: Empirical Generalizations and Directions for Future Research. *Journal of Retailing*, 89(3), pp. 246-262. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2013.02.001>
- Lashley, C. (2015). Hospitality and hospitableness. *Research in Hospitality Management*, 5(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/22243534.2015.11828322>.
- Lee, W.I., Chiu, Y.T., Liu, C.C. and Chen, C.Y. (2011). Assessing the effects of consumer involvement and service quality in a self-service setting. *Human Factors and Ergonomics in Manufacturing & Service Industries*, 21(5), 504-515. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hfm.20253>
- Lemon, K.N. and Verhoef P.C. (2016). Understanding Customer Experience Throughout the Customer Journey. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(6), 69-96. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.15.0420>
- Makara-Studzińska, M., Załuski, M., Biegańska-Banaś, J., Tyburski, E., Jagielski, P. and Adamczyk, K. (2021). Perceived stress and burnout syndrome: A moderated mediation model of self-efficacy and psychological comfort among polish air traffic controllers. *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 96, 102-105. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jairtraman.2021.102105>
- Malahov, C. and Preda, A. (2021). A year of pandemic in HoReCa. Support measures taken in Romania and in other European countries. [online], Available at: <<https://www2.deloitte.com/ro/ro/pages/tax/articles/un-an-de-pandemie-in-horeca-masuri-de-sprrijn-luate-in-romania-si-in-alte-tari-europene.html>> [Accessed 30 May 2022].
- Mansilla, O.G., Berenguer-Contri, G. and Serra-Cantallops, A. (2019). The impact of value co-creation on hotel brand equity and customer satisfaction. *Tourism Management*, 75, 51-65. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2019.04.024>
- Meyer, C. and Schwager, A. (2007). Understanding Customer Experience. *Harvard Business Review*, [online], Available at: https://idcexed.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Understanding_Customer_Experience.pdf, [Accessed 30 May 2022].
- Miao, L., Fung So, K.K., Im, J. and Jiang, T. (2022). The pandemic's effects on customer-to-customer engagement in hospitality consumption: A multi country investigation. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 102, 103158.
- MMGY Travel Intelligence. (2020). Travel intentions Pulse Survey (TIPS): Impact of Covid-19. [pdf] Available at: <https://www.ustravel.org/sites/default/files/media_root/document/2020%20TIPS%20Wave%206%20-%20Summary%20Final.pdf?utm_source=MagnetMail&utm_medium=email&utm_content=7%2E16%2E20%202D%202020%20COVID%20Research%20Weekly&utm_campaign=ust> [Accessed 01 June 2022].
- Mordor Intelligence. (2021). *Romania hospitality industry – Growth, Trends, Covid-19 Impact, and Forecasts (2022-2027)*. [online] Available at: < <https://www.mordorintelligence.com/industry-reports/romania-hospitality-industry>> [Accessed 02 June 2022].
- Narayan, P.K., Gong, Q. and Ahmed, H.J.A. (2022). Is there a pattern in how COVID-19 has affected Australia's stock returns?. *Applied Economics Letters*, 29(3), 179-182. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504851.2020.1861190>

- National Restaurant Association. (2020). *National Restaurant Association releases 2020 state of the restaurant industry report*. [online] Available at: <<https://restaurant.org/research-and-media/media/press-releases/national-restaurant-association-releases-2020-state-of-the-restaurant-industry-report/>> [Accessed 02 June 2022].
- Nimgampalle, M., Devanathan, V. and Saxena, A. (2021). Importance of in silico studies on the design of novel drugs from medicinal plants against 21st-century pandemics: past, present and future. *Epidemiology, Pathogenesis, Prevention, and Treatment*, 12, 211-223. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-323-85662-1.00013-6>
- Novak, P. (2017). *What are the 4 segments of the hospitality industry?*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.hospitalitynet.org/opinion/4082318.html>> [Accessed 28 June 2022].
- Olsen, L.L., Witell, L. and Gustafsson, A. (2014). Turning customer satisfaction measurements into action. *Journal of Service Management*, 25(4), 556-571. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JOSM-01-2014-0025>
- Park, C.L., Finkelstein-Fox, L., Russell, B.S., Fendrich, M., Hutchison, M. and Becker, J. (2021). Americans' distress early in the COVID-19 pandemic: Protective resources and coping strategies. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 13(4), 422-431. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000931>
- Paulauskaite, D., Powell, R., Coca-Stefaniak, J.A. and Morrison, A.M. (2017). Living like a local: Authentic tourism experiences and the sharing economy. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 19(6), 619-628. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2134>
- Peng, P., Jacobs, S. and Cambré, B. (2022). How to create more customer value in independent shops: A set-theoretic approach to value creation. *Journal of Business Research*, 146, 241-250. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.03.066>
- Pijls, R., Galetzka, M., Groen, B.H. and Ad Pruyn, T.H. (2019). Comfortable seating: The influence of seating comfort and acoustic comfort on customers' experience of hospitality in a self-service restaurant. *Applied Ergonomics*, 81. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apergo.2019.102902>
- Pisică, S., Gheorghe, F., Ciucea, A., Sinigaglia, L.C., Ștefănescu, D., Ioniță, A.C., Bălțeanu, L., Cambir, A., Alexevici, N., Cîrstea, F., Dima, I., Simion, A.E., Pintilia, L., Gavrilă, L. and Constantinescu, G. (2021). *Romanian statistical yearbook. Romania National Institute of Statistics. Bucharest: National Institute of Statistics*, [online], Available at: <https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/field/publicatii/romanian-statistical-yearbook.pdf>.
- Prayag, G., Hosany, S., Muskat, B., and Del Chiappa, G. (2017). Understanding the relationships between tourists' emotional experiences, perceived overall image, satisfaction, and intention to recommend. *Journal of travel research*, 56(1), 41-54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287515620567>
- Rachinger, M., Rauter, R., Müller, C., Vorraber, W. and Schirgi, E. (2018). Digitalization and its influence on business model innovation. *Journal of Manufacturing Technology Management*, 30(8), 1143-1160. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JMTM-01-2018-0020>
- Ribeiro, M.A. and Prayag, G. (2019). Perceived quality and service experience: Mediating effects of positive and negative emotions. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 28(3), 285-305. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2018.1517071>
- Romanian Government (2020). *Measures to control and prevent the spread of SARS-COV-2 coronavirus, proposed to enter into force beginning with the alert status from 15 May 2020*. [online] Available at: <https://www.mai.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/masuri-09_05-2.pdf> [Accessed 31 May 2022].
- Sánchez-Cañizares, S.M., Cabeza-Ramirez, L.J., Munoz-Fernandez, G. and Fuentes-Garcia, F.J. (2021). Impact of the perceived risk from COVID-19 on intention to travel. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 24(7), 970-984. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2020.1829571>
- Schiopu, A.F, Hornoiu, R.I, Padurean, M.A. and Nica, A.M. (2021). Virus tinged? Exploring the facets of virtual reality use in tourism as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Telematics and Informatics*, 60, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2021.101575>.
- Schiopu, A.F, Hornoiu, R.I, Padurean, M.A. and Nica, A.M. (2022). Constrained and virtually traveling? Exploring the effect of travel constraints on intention to use virtual reality in tourism. *Technology in Society*, 71, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2021.101575>.

- Scuotto, V., Arrigo, E. and Candelo, E. (2019). Ambidextrous innovation orientation effected by the digital transformation: A quantitative research on fashion SMEs. *Business Process Management Journal*, 26(5), 1121-1140. <https://doi.org/10.1108/BPMJ-03-2019-0135>
- Shamir, B. (1978). Between bureaucracy and hospitality – some organizational characteristics of hotels. *Journal of Management Studies*, 15(3), 285-307. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.1978.tb00925.x>
- Shamir, B. (1980). Between Service and Servility: Role Conflict in Subordinate Service Roles. *Human Relations*, 33(10), 741–756. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872678003301004>
- Shin, M., Back, K.J., Lee, C.K. and Lee, Y.S. (2020). Enhancing customer-brand relationship by leveraging loyalty program experiences that foster customer-brand identification. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 32(12), 3991-4016. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-06-2020-0550>
- Skokic, V., Lynch, P. and Morrison, A. (2016). Hotel entrepreneurship in a turbulent environment. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 53, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2015.11.008>
- Spake, D.F., Beatty, S.E., Brockman, B.K. and Crutchfield, T.N. (2003). Consumer comfort in service relationships: Measurement and importance. *Journal of Service Research*, 5(4), 316-332. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670503005004004>
- Sweeney, J.C. and Soutar, G.N. (2001). Consumer perceived value: The development of a multiple item scale. *Journal of retailing*, 77(2), 203-220. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-4359\(01\)00041-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-4359(01)00041-0)
- Taiminen, H.M., Karjaluoto, H. (2015). The usage of digital marketing channels in SMEs. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 22(4), 633-651. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSBED-05-2013-0073>
- Taylor Jr., S., DiPietro, R.B., So, K.K.F., Taylor, D.C. and Hudson, S. (2021). Building Consumer Brand Loyalty: An Assessment of The Microbrewery Taproom Experience. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*, 22(5), 567-589. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15256480.2019.1708226>
- Țicău, I.R. and Shahrazad, H. (2022). Changes in Post-Pandemic Travelling Behaviour. What Are the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Students' Travelling Interests? *Cactus the Tourism Journal for Research, Education, Culture and Soul*, 4(1), 27-41. <https://doi.org/10.24818/CTS//4/2022/1.03>
- Tobon, S., Ruiz-Alba, J. and Garcia-Madariaga, J. (2020). Gamification and online consumer decisions: Is the game over?. *Decision Support Systems*, 128. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2019.113167>
- Verhoef, P.C. and Bijmolt, T.H.A. (2019). Marketing perspectives on digital business models: A framework and overview of the special issue. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 36(3), 341-349. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2019.08.001>
- Volberda, H.W., Khanagha, S., Baden-Fuller, C., Mihalache, O.R. and Birkinshaw, J. (2021). Strategizing in a digital world: Overcoming cognitive barriers, reconfiguring routines and introducing new organizational forms. *Long Range Planning*, 54(5), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2021.102110>
- Volgger, M., Pechlaner, H. and Pichler, S. (2017). The practice of destination governance: A comparative analysis of key dimensions and underlying concepts. *Journal of Tourism, Heritage & Services Marketing*, 3(1), 18-24. <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.401371>
- Vrechopoulos, A.P., O'Keefe, R.M., Doukidis, G.I. and Siomkos, G.J. (2004). Virtual store layout: an experimental comparison in the context of grocery retail. *Journal of Retailing*, 80(1), 13-22. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2004.01.006>
- Wicaksono, T. and Illés, C.B. (2022). From resilience to satisfaction: Defining supply chain solutions for agri-food SMEs through quality approach. *PLOS ONE*, 17(2). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0263393>
- World Health Organization. (2022). *Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)*. [online] Available at: <https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1> [Accessed 20 April 2022].

- Yih, W.K., Lee, G.M., Lieu, T.A., Ball, R., Kulldorff, M., Rett, M., Wahl, P.M., McMahonill-Walraven, C.N., Platt, R. and Salmon, D.A. (2012). Surveillance for Adverse Events Following Receipt of Pandemic 2009 H1N1 Vaccine in the Post-Licensure Rapid Immunization Safety Monitoring (PRISM) System, 2009–2010. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 175(11), 1120–1128. <https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kws197>
- Yokoyama, N., Azuma, N. and Kim, W. (2022). Moderating effect of customer's retail format perception on customer satisfaction formation: An empirical study of mini-supermarkets in an urban retail market setting. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2022.102935>
- Yun, G.W. and Trumbo, C.W. (2000). Comparative Response to a Survey Executed by Post, Email and Web Form. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 6, 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2000.tb00112.x>
- Zhang, S., Wang, Z., Chang, R., Wang, H., Xu, C., Yu, X., Tsamlag, L., Dong, Y., Wang, H. and Cai, Y. (2020). COVID-19 containment: China provides important lessons for global response. *Frontiers of Medicine*, 14(2), 215-219. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11684-020-0766-9>
- Zhang, S.N., Li, Y.Q., Liu, C.H. and Ruan, W.Q. (2019). How does authenticity enhance flow experience through perceived value and involvement: the moderating roles of innovation and cultural identity. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 36(6), 710-728. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2019.1625846>
- Zott, C. and Amit, R. (2017). Business Model Innovation: How to create value in digital world. *Scholarly Journal*, 9(1), 18-23. <https://doi.org/10.1515/gfkmir-2017-0003>