

Article

Marketing Strategies of Travel Agencies: A Quantitative Approach

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Received: 11 November 2020; Accepted: 17 December 2020; Published: 20 December 2020



Abstract: The necessity of continuously analyzing and innovating the tourism industry is an essential prerequisite in developing this important branch of the economy in a sustainable manner in the context of our modern society. To this effect, the purpose of this quantitative research study is to determine the impact of sales promotion techniques used by different suppliers of tourism services, in the form of 240 travel agencies. Our research focused on determining the effect of utilizing certain sales promotion techniques in order to increase sales in tourism services. Furthermore, we analyzed the way in which travel agencies engage in utilizing sales promotion techniques. We found that grouped sales, early booking, and last-minute techniques are essential practices in the perceptions of the respondents, that associating accommodation with eating services is a very important aspect for the consumer, that including recreation services is preferred but not demanded, and that included transportation services represent additional motivation in the purchasing decision. Additionally, we found that offering free services differentiates agencies from the competition and increases customer loyalty. The important contribution offered in this research paper represents a basis for future studies in the continuous improvement of marketing strategies in the constantly evolving tourism sector.

Keywords: tourism; sales promotion techniques; accommodation; tourism services; travel agencies; marketing

1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the most profitable and dynamically developing branches of the economy. International experience indicates high levels of social and economic efficiency in tourism activities [1]. Furthermore, tourism has an important snowballing effect, stimulating production in other areas of activity, which is a result of its interference and synthesis character [2]. Previous studies confirmed tourism's positive economic impact in most, but not all, circumstances [3]. The growth of tourism in developing countries is increasing at a faster pace than in their already developed counterparts [4].

We can synthesize the tourism industry components, presented by Eurostat, in five main sectors: accommodation facilities, recreation sector, transport sector, voyage organizers, and tourism authorities [5]. Furthermore, other branches of the economy participate in tourism development, which have their uses independent of tourism activities. Creating a solid and viable infrastructure (transport and communications), building and permanently improving the technical and material tourism specific base, diversifying agribusiness products and consumer goods: all raise the tourism potential of a particular territory and represent essential elements in creating tourism products.

There is a necessity in clarifying the way in which sales promotion techniques are utilized by travel agencies, whether they are big or small. Rigidity and offer perishability, doubled by demand variability, characteristics that are tourism specific, force the tourism services suppliers into utilizing a particular set of marketing instruments, in order to balance supply and demand. Therefore, it is

imperative to constantly analyze and identify the most effective sales promotion techniques in order to properly adapt to the ever-changing conditions of the volatile tourism sector.

In the current pandemic situation, almost nobody is thinking about vacations or the early acquisition of such products. Thus, all these connected sectors have been and are still being affected, some more than others, by this current global crisis. A major determining factor in a traveler's decision to visit a destination resides in the perception of safety and security in that destination. Specific events or a series of events may undermine these perceptions [6]. As a direct consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, The World Travel and Tourism Council estimates unprecedented losses in the tourism and travel industry for the year 2020. These losses will amount to 2.7 trillion dollars in the US economy, which equates to 30% of its GDP. The impact of the COVID-19 crisis is estimated to be 5 times greater than the worldwide financial crisis of 2008. This will inevitably lead to a rise in unemployment by a factor of 2.9%, generated by the losses in the tourism and travel industry [7]. Even though the data for this paper had been gathered before the pandemic started, the results obtained are meant to help travel agencies more easily navigate through this very difficult period for the global tourism industry.

Tourism officials state that people no longer make plans regarding holidays or excursions, and the activity of tourism reservations has ceased almost entirely [8]. Therefore, our analysis regarding the effectiveness of tourism marketing in the form of sales promotion techniques is more important than ever in this period of low demand because it allows tourism operators to properly identify the most effective techniques and increase them in the direction of the customer demand. In order to attract tourists, travel agencies will now have to increase the volume and frequency of the most desired type of tourism offers. Furthermore, this increase will not be downgraded when the pandemic crisis passes, because the tourists will have become accustomed to the new way of sales promotion implementation and the tourism operators will have to maintain these practices in order to not lose tourists to market competitors.

In addition, managers should initiate two-way communication with the staff to gain a full understanding of employee concerns and thus design effective and appropriate HR policies. To relieve work-related stress, managers should balance the workload among staff members instead of following the tendency to over-burden a small number of employees [8]. A decreasing number of visitors, a decreasing number of overnight stays, and decreasing sales are characteristics of this period. It is now a prerequisite for success in tourism to offer new, unique products to help tourism destinations, as well as the individual providers of services, who should be able to differentiate themselves from the competition [9].

In the current context, the activity of travel agencies and their way to survive this situation and efficiently mitigate the damage, having as few losses as possible, is of major importance to the tourism sector. Even though tourism, similar to other branches of the economy, experiences an exponential increase in online activities, [10,11] there are still many people that prefer to buy their holiday products through travel agencies, planning and discussing everything with tourism specialists. This happens because this type of activity has a particular level of charm associated with it. More importantly, it because visiting a travel agency has other important benefits, like the protection of personal information and increased payment security, eliminating hacker intrusions or other accidents that can happen via online reservations [11]. Another study reveals that trust is a sufficient condition for high customer loyalty only in the offline shopping context. In the online shopping context, travel agencies must combine trust with perceived value or with perceived quality to achieve high customer loyalty [12].

Travel agents come as a blessing in such times as these, as they handle all the travel—right from booking the airfare to reserving hotel rooms [13]. Travel agents are professionals that can help the traveler arrange for all their traveling needs. Despite the massive use of the internet for travel-related services, there are still instances when hiring travel agents is necessary [14]. Many traditional travel agencies now have full-service web sites so that you can get the best of both worlds: combining the convenience of self-serve through online booking with the benefit of talking to a real person when you

need it. Evidently, the Internet is having a major impact as a source of information for tourism [15]. There are some studies that show us that, regarding accommodation service, for example, there is a significant impact of hotels' advertisement and hotels' direct sale on hotel performance, whereas hotels' website has no significant impact [16].

Practically, tourism services suppliers are looking to influence and steer the consumers in the direction of tourism product acquisition in periods in which the demand is lower than the supply, typically during extra-season, more precisely in pre and post season and, also, in unforeseen circumstances, like the global COVID-19 situation that we are experiencing. These instruments include those that make up the sales promotion category.

To be competitive, traditional travel agencies must reconfigure their business processes [17]. Thus, instituting a sustainable future direction in efficiently utilizing sales promotion techniques in tourism is of the utmost importance, especially now in the context of the current global pandemic. The conduct of a quantitative research study among travel agencies allows for monitoring and enhancing the mechanisms utilized by firms that use sales promotion instruments in tourism activities in order to persuade more people to engage in tourism activities in this period of low demand.

2. Sales Promotion in Tourism

All marketing is an honest relationship between a seller and a buyer in which both obtain what they want. Tourism marketing is used to develop the sector as it provides economic benefits to the community. While tourism has always existed, growth in this sector has been affected by ease of transportation, growing wealth of individuals, and the ability to easily access and share information [18]. Promotion is an important part of the marketing method [6,19]. In order for the promotion process to run effectively, the tourism company must use a marketing strategy for its products [20].

The concept of integrated marketing communications is a process adopted by more and more firms [21]. This concept focuses on integrating the numerous channels of communication of an organization in order to create one clear, coherent and convincing message that encompasses the defining characteristics of the firm, its brand, and its products [22]. Integrated Marketing Communications fulfills the role of introducing the concept of comprehensive planning in order to evaluate the strategic role of the various elements of marketing communications, such as public relations, advertising, direct sales, promotions sales, and interactive marketing, and provide clarity, consistency, and increase the process of communication [23].

Tourism marketing uses a wide variety of communication strategies and techniques in order to promote different areas and destinations [24]. In competitive environments, managers need marketing tools. One of the most important tools is sales promotion, which is used in various industries. The more important elements of the promotion mix include advertising, public relations, personal selling, and sales promotion. Modern marketing is more than just good products, good pricing, and customer accessibility to goods. Companies need to connect with their customers and this decisive communication process should not be left to chance. One of the tools that can encourage consumers to buy new products or services is sales promotion [21,25]. For example, a study about the effects of sales promotions on consumer behavior revealed a significant relationship between sales promotion and both purchase intentions and sales volume [26].

The success of promotional efforts can influence tourism demand [27]. Considering that competition is fierce in all areas of the market, the firm has to properly and efficiently communicate with both current and potential customers, but also has to maintain an inverse relationship with the market, in which a determining factor in the success of an organization is the ability to receive and correctly interpret and process feedback information obtained from the consumer.

Sales promotion is one of the most important tools in improving a marketing program because this marketing technique provides motivation [28] and information [29] to the consumer. However, no matter how qualified a product or service is, if the consumer has never heard of it and is not sure that the product or service will be of use to them, they will never buy it [30].

The manner in which this type of communication is being realized is also an important factor. Marketing communication can shape brand equity and improve promotional performance [31]. Therefore, customer focus is a major company strategy when expanding both client base and profit margin, due to the deeper understanding and satisfying of the clients' needs. Mismanagement in this sector can lead to unnecessary costs and can damage the business overall because in this situation the financial and human resources of an organization are not used properly and efficiently [1].

The activity of tourism product promotion is a specific form of communication that focuses on transmitting information, by different means and channels, through which both the tourism operators and the potential tourists can be made aware of the characteristics of the tourism product and of the different components of tourism services, and to instill in them a positive attitude towards the tourism firms [32].

Over time, certain sales promotion techniques have been more utilized and they have been differentiated on tourism form (stay-in-one-place tourism or circuit-based tourism), on tourism destinations (external and internal), and on the basic components of the tourism product (accommodation, eating, recreation, and tourist attractions). Moreover, the basic tourism services suppliers are the ones that grant a series of benefits (price reductions, grouped sales, etc.), which are also being used in specific forms in travel agencies' offers.

An important aspect of the tourism sector is the proper implementation of effective promotional techniques. These can be new techniques or improved versions of established ones. As an example, a concept that has been widely used in recreational or amusement areas has been that of combining different elements that have a common theme, like bungalows, water sports, theme parks, marinas, golf courses, etc. [33]. In present times, another effective sale promotion method is that of virtual reality (VR). From a marketing perspective, VR offers the potential to build a sensory experience of a tourism destination or attraction and can be used in sales contexts to complement, or indeed, supplant traditional promotional tools such as brochures. The immersive nature of the experience offers a deeper and more emotional assessment of the tourist offering from the consumer's perspective, and an opportunity to build imagery and influence the consumer decision-making process from the marketing communicator's viewpoint [34]. Despite the major benefits that VR can bring to a travel agency, this technique is rarely utilized in Romania.

Utilizing marketing techniques can significantly help a tourism destination and/or a tourism operator by attracting more tourists and is a major contributor to improving competitiveness on both regional and national levels. Therefore, in the current global pandemic situation, marketing techniques in the form of sales promotion have an extremely important role in persuading more tourists to engage in tourism activities. But all these activities must be based on a solid foundation: a diversified range of accommodation services, proper eating/restaurant services, and many recreational activities, all undertaken with the proper health safety regulations implemented in the context of the current COVID-19 challenge.

The risks associated with marketing techniques utilized as a smokescreen for an underdeveloped destination have long term consequences and can have dire ramifications, besides that of mere diminishment in the number of tourists, because of the intricate connections between the tourism sector and other branches of the local economy [35].

There are a lot of studies that show that consumer behavior is highly influenced by the cultural, political, social, and economic environment of the targeted consumer [30,36–40]. This is why, in our research, we focused on the perception of tourism specialists regarding the impact of sales promotion techniques on the consumer behavior of Romanians. Additionally, an important aspect is the purveying global tendency of tourism sustainability, regardless of the typology of the tourism activity in question.

A recent qualitative research study found that the issue of environmental conservation is an important aspect for the tour-operators from the perspective of attraction elements in destinations and with regards to ensuring the health and safety of tourists, and not so much from the perspective of conserving biodiversity and ensuring the protection of the targeted ecosystems. To be fair, the relationship

of tourism with the latter is mediated by the Sustainable Management of Tourism Destinations, which is a relatively new concept that mostly falls in the responsibility of local communities. Tour-operators can contribute to this endeavor by informing tourists and prioritizing and promoting destinations that are sustainably managed [41]. Tourism marketing has typically been seen as exploitative and fueling hedonistic consumerism. Sustainability marketing can, however, use marketing skills and techniques to good purpose, by understanding market needs, designing more sustainable products, and identifying more persuasive methods of communication to bring behavioral change [30].

3. Research Objectives and Hypotheses

3.1. General and Derived Objectives

By defining a set of general objectives, expanded into more derived objectives (Table 1), we make sure that we obtain the necessary information needed to clarify the research issue and to fulfill the purpose of this research study.

Table 1. General and derived objectives of the quantitative research on travel agencies.

General Objectives	Derived Objectives
Determining the influence of sales promotion techniques on accommodation services (O ₁)	Determining the influence of grouped sales on accommodation services (length of stay) (O _{1.1})
	Determining the influence of paying in-advance (early booking) on accommodation services (O _{1.2})
	The influence of included services, like discounts for children below a certain age, tourist assistance, 3rd adult discount, etc. on accommodation services (O _{1.3})
	Determining the influence of grouped sales on accommodation services (apartments vs separate rooms) (O _{1.4})
	Impact of last-minute type offer on accommodation services (O _{1.5})
Determining the influence of combining accommodation services with eating services on tourism activity (O ₂)	Influence of accommodation associated with all-inclusive type services (O _{2.1})
	Determining the impact of accommodation services sold together with eating services (all-inclusive type) on choosing possible tourism destinations (internal vs. external) (O _{2.2})
	Determining the influence of accommodation associated with breakfast included type services (O _{2.3})
	Determining the influence of accommodation associated with two meals (half-board) on tourism services sales (O _{2.4})
Determining the influence of including recreation and spa treatment services in tourism offers (O ₃)	Determining the influence of including recreation type services in the tourism offer on sales (O _{3.1})
	Determining the influence of including spa treatment services in the tourism offer on sales (O _{3.2})
Determining the influence of including transport services in the tourism offer on tourism activity (O ₄)	
Influence of including certain free services in tourism circuits (O ₅)	Determining travel agency size (O _{6.1})
	Identifying travel agency typology (O _{6.2})
	Determining the importance of marketing activity for travel agencies (O _{6.3})
	Identifying the marketing activities coordinator inside a travel agency (O _{6.4})
	Identifying travel agencies that engage in negotiating certain discounts with suppliers for their clients (O _{6.5})
	Determining differences between supplier tariffs when purchasing combined services vs separate acquisition at the destination (O _{6.6})
	Identifying the way in which granting certain benefits in periods with reduced demand has an effect on sales (O _{6.7})
	Determining the primary tasks and duties of the tourism agent working in an agency (O _{6.8})
	Determining agent work experience in tourism activities (O _{6.9})
	Identifying the way in which the agent has acquired abilities and qualifications in tourism activities (O _{6.10})
Estimating current research value and the way in which travel agencies engage in utilizing sales promotion techniques (O ₆)	

The quantitative research will be primarily focused on discount techniques and, to some extent, on publicity at the place of sale. Other techniques, like bonuses, promotional gifts, contests, and promotional games, and free product samples [16] are not in the area of interest of travel agencies, and, implicitly, of the suppliers.

3.2. Research Hypotheses

The research hypotheses are formed consistently with the objectives that were established prior, but also take into consideration the analysis of the specialty literature, with aspects presented in the first part of the article. Based on the literature review, we formulated the research hypotheses. Moreover, the hypotheses are to be validated or not based on the majority of answers obtained. We define majority as the highest percentage of respondents.

The complexity of tourism products results from the multitude of services included in the tourism package, namely transport, accommodation, eating, recreation, etc. to which can be added a series of complementary services. This gives the tourism service providers the possibility of offering products in a more complex and/or original manner, thus differentiating themselves from the competition. Thus, in terms of accommodation services, most of the time, the unit is represented by a day. For example, during the regular season, there are often offers such as “3 nights + 1 free”. Additionally, from our previous qualitative research studies, we discovered that tourism specialists affirm that early booking and lastminute type offers are useful techniques in attracting customers [2,16,35,42–44].

For the first general objective, the hypotheses are the following:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *The majority of tourism agents think that selling longer trips at a daily lower price is an effective technique of increasing revenue, and the most important reason for acquiring an apartment type accommodation (grouped sale) in favor of multiple rooms acquired separately is that, from a tourist perspective, it offers the possibility of being closer to their family members;*

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *The majority of respondents consider that both early booking type accommodation services and last-minute type accommodation offers are sold more rapidly due to the lower overall price of these kinds of services when compared to regular accommodation services;*

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *The majority of services included in the accommodation offers represent ways in which the consumer can differentiate between tourism services suppliers;*

Accommodation and eating services have an essential role in the tourism industry, representing the basic services offered to tourists at the holiday destination. The food sector occupies a particularly important place in this industry. In general, up to 50% of a hotel’s revenue comes from food, but due to its complexity, its own costs are higher, which is why the sector provides, on average, only 10–20% of the hotel’s total profit. Many travel agencies regard the eating services sector as a promotional tool, which aims, firstly, at attracting customers, and secondly, at making a profit. When the food services are of quality, the reputation of the accommodation providers is decisively increased. In recent years, the all-inclusive system has become extensively utilized and represents an important grouped sales technique used by travel agencies [2,35,45].

For the second general objective, which refers to grouped sales that include accommodation and eating services, the hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *Most tourism agents consider that the consumers think that including eating services in the tourism offer represents an additional incentive in acquiring the tourism product and that the success of the accommodation services that are being sold together with eating services, like all-inclusive type offers for external destinations, is due to the high quality of the tourism services being offered;*

Hypothesis 5 (H5). *The majority of tourism agents consider that clients prefer acquiring products that consist of accommodation with breakfast included rather than acquiring products that consist of accommodation with two meals included (half-board) because the latter makes their schedule more difficult to organize;*

In the recreation sector, many travel agencies do not include a large number of recreation activities in their base offers, but allow the personalization of their packages according to their customer needs and wants. Some recreation services, like spa treatment services, are more predominantly chosen by tourists. In the case of recreation services grouped sales, the technique is utilized in order to attract as many tourists as possible, but also to increase their effectiveness, when calculating the total number of tourists [46].

In the case of recreation and spa treatment services included in the tourism offers, as mentioned in the third general objective, the hypothesis is this:

Hypothesis 6 (H6). *Most tourism agents think that clients are not interested in recreation services included in the base offer, because they consider that the increase in price for services that they do not particularly want is not justified, but are interested in spa treatment services included in the base offer;*

A determining aspect of a destination's attractivity is the ease of access. Tourists have to easily reach or leave a destination and freely move inside it. The ease and speed of travel and having multiple choices in transportation methods (land, air, naval) are important characteristics when choosing a holiday destination. Thus, among the first aspects that the tourist wants solved is the provision of transport to and from the destination. Due to this, many travel agencies include transportation in their tourism offers [42].

For the fourth general objective, which refers to the inclusion of transportation services in the tourism offer, the hypothesis is the following:

Hypothesis 7 (H7). *In the perception of the majority of respondents, consumers think that included transportation is a decisive element in choosing a certain tourism product;*

Diversifying the tourism offer is an effective tool in satisfying the ever-changing needs and wants of the diverse range of tourism consumers. By introducing free areas or services into the tourism offer, travel agencies can differentiate themselves from the competitors and attract more customers. Tourism circuits are generally carried out by travel agencies, which also deal with negotiating free services and including them in their offers [16,45,47].

Regarding the inclusion of certain free services in tourism circuits, an aspect that is targeted by the fifth general objective, the hypothesis is the following:

Hypothesis 8 (H8). *The majority of travel agencies that include free entrances for particular tourism attractions in their circuit offers are much more advantaged than the ones that do not;*

Travel agencies in Romania are primarily tour-operating oriented. The use of marketing techniques has increased in recent years and most travel agencies, even the small ones, now need to extend the use of marketing activities in order to keep up with larger competitors on the tourism market. This also has the effect of more and more travel agencies negotiating discounts with suppliers in order to attract more customers [16,42,45–49].

For the last general objective, which refers to the degree to which travel agencies understand and apply sales promotion techniques, we have the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 9 (H9). *The majority of travel agencies are small and tour-operating agencies;*

Hypothesis 10 (H10). *The majority of travel agencies consider that marketing activity is important, and, as a consequence, it is being coordinated by a specific person, a marketing specialist;*

Hypothesis 11 (H11). *The majority of travel agencies demand certain discounts to the suppliers, considering the fact that the prices of the suppliers, when combining services, are lower than that of acquiring services separately, at the destination;*

Hypothesis 12 (H12). *The majority of travel agencies consider that giving certain benefits during periods of lower demand has a significant effect on the increase in sales;*

Hypothesis 13 (H13). *The primary tasks and duties of the tourism agent inside the agency are sales and customer service, and these employees have between 3 to 5 years' experience and have gained the abilities and aptitudes in tourism activity by finishing certain specialized long-term courses.*

4. Methodology Used in Researching the Perceptions of Tourism Specialists

This research wants to explore the way in which certain sales promotion techniques and facilities are influencing the tourism market, from the point of view of the travel agencies. To this end, we will survey different techniques used by the agencies in order to promote their products. When analyzing the accommodation component, we will investigate how much of an impact do early booking, discounts, grouped sales, and last-minute type services have on influencing sales in their targeted products. We will also explore the impact of eating services offers, like all-inclusive, breakfast included and half-board (two meals/day), and analyze how much do these offers influence tourists in acquiring certain types of tourism services over others. When looking at the recreation component, we will analyze in what way does including recreation and transport facilities influence the sales of certain tourism products. Furthermore, we will investigate the impact of including particular free services in tourism circuits. Lastly, the research targets knowing the way in which travel agencies engage in utilizing sales promotion techniques, by taking into consideration multiple aspects like agency size and typology and the importance given by the agency in coordinating and allocating funds for marketing activities.

In conclusion, the purpose of this quantitative research marketing study is that of determining the effect of sales promotion techniques used by different suppliers of tourism services, both as a whole and also structured by tourism destinations, tourism forms, and, most importantly, tourism product components.

The purpose and objectives of the research have been taken into consideration when selecting information sources and determining the research coordinates. This being the reason, apart from practical considerations, that we have opted that this research will be a case study on travel agencies situated in the municipality of Bucharest.

The method of research has been that of direct research, and the information source has been the tourism specialist.

The researched collectivity, specific to this quantitative marketing research study, has been represented by the totality of travel agencies that operate in Bucharest.

The observed unit has been the travel agency.

The survey unit specific to this quantitative marketing research study has been represented by the tourism specialist that had at least 1 year of experience in tourism product sales.

Sample size and structure

Taking into account the research purpose, the sample composition has been that of travel agencies that operate in the city of Bucharest. According to data obtained from the Ministry of Tourism in Romania, in the year 2019, 2647 licensed travel agencies were active in Romania. From those, 835 had

headquarters in Bucharest (138 retailer agencies and 697 tour-operating agencies) [48]. Using the method of sampling statistics, we made the sample relevant for Bucharest and selected a share of 75% for tour operating agencies, and a share of 25% for retailer agencies. Furthermore, taking into account the size of the agencies, we have selected a share of 30–40% for small-sized agencies and the same percentage for medium-sized agencies.

For this quantitative research study, we made sure that the sample was representative of the market, thus the sample size has been determined based on the following calculation, where t and Δ_{ω} are values recommended by specialty literature [50] and also used in other research studies.

$$n = \frac{t^2 * p(1-p)}{\Delta_{\omega}^2} = \frac{1.96^2 * 0.32(1-0.32)}{0.05^2} = 334.37 \text{ where in order to guarantee a result probability of 95\%} \\ \Rightarrow t = 1.96.$$

- $p = 0.32$ (32% of agencies are in Bucharest)
- $\Delta_{\omega} (\pm 1\%; \pm 5\%); \Delta_{\omega} = \pm 5\% = 0.05$
- sample size: $n_c = \frac{n*N}{n+N} = \frac{335*835}{335+835} = 239.1 = 240$

The research had been designed and undertaken from September 2019 to February 2020.

The gathering of information was accomplished by submitting an online questionnaire, using the e-mail addresses published on the official sites of the travel agencies in Bucharest.

The analysis of the data obtained through the quantitative research undertaken on the travel agencies specialists was done by utilizing IBM SPSS Statistic program, version 23.0.0.0., and some of the tables were done by utilizing Microsoft Excel.

The questionnaire was devised by thoroughly reflecting the general and derived objectives in the content of the questions being asked. Therefore, the influence of sales promotion techniques on tourism services has been researched by exploring several directions: the separate components of the tourism product: accommodation, eating, recreation, transportation; circuits; elements related to the particularities of travel agencies and, implicitly, their marketing activities. Furthermore, the questionnaire construction was based on results obtained through two previous qualitative research studies—one observation research study and one in-depth interview research study.

The first five questions of the questionnaire captured elements of sales promotion techniques used in the case of accommodation services. The following four questions addressed the sales promotion techniques of including food services in the tourism package. The following questions focused on including recreation services in the tourism offers. The next two questions were about the way in which including transportation and free entrances at venues in tourism circuits influence the buying decision of the customers. The final questions were aimed at obtaining information regarding the agencies that were researched: agency size, agency typology, the importance of marketing activities inside the agency, marketing activity coordinator, agency discounts from suppliers, workforce skill level, and professional training inside the agency.

All the scientific requirements of designing and carrying out a marketing quantitative research (statistical survey) have been respected thoroughly in elaborating this paper. All of the necessary steps have been taken: defining the research issue and research purpose, indicating the objectives and the hypotheses, defining the research variables, establishing the research coordinates and information sources, choosing the methods for obtaining data, and writing up the questionnaire [50].

5. Research Results

In the data processing and analysis, we have identified and selected a series of correlations, more precisely 217 valid ones (Chi-Square < 0.05). The Chi-Square test is a statistical test that compares the observed results with predicted results. It shows the differences between observed data and expected data, the measure in which these differences are due to chance or due to a strong relationship between the studied variables. Thus, the Chi-Square test is an excellent choice in helping us understand and better interpret a connection between the two categories of variables.

On this basis, we wanted to analyze each question separately, through answer distribution, and by correlating it with other questions, in the case in which the Chi-Square test shows the fact that there is some degree of homogeneity in the respective table. Therefore, we have chosen 7 correlations for analysis, those most significant ranked by their homogeneity coefficient, which shows us a stronger relation the closer it is to 1.

Through this endeavor, an important comparison can be made between the results obtained through this research study and the results obtained in future research studies that target the tourism product consumers.

The analysis of the information has been structured in conformity with the research objectives: grouped sales in accommodation services, tourism services specific discounts, grouped sales in associating accommodation services with eating services, free offers, and the degree of sales promotion utilization by the travel agencies.

Grouped Sales Utilized for Accommodation Services

In tourism, grouped sales are made by marketing a package of services at a lower price than that of the services acquired separately [51]. So, we want to know the perceptions of those who sell these services to consumers, perceptions regarding the wishes and wants of potential clients. The information has been obtained through the first question of the questionnaire. When analyzed individually, it can be observed that in the case of grouped sales for accommodation facilities, the sale of a particular number of nights sold at a lower price than the standard price for each of the nights combined is, for most of the respondents and in approximately equal percentages, a revenue increasing technique (30%) or an occupancy enhancing technique (31.3%). When summing the percentages of both the answers, we can ascertain that, for the majority of the respondents, grouped sales represent an effective technique of enhancing occupancy and, implicitly, of increasing revenue (61.3%).

Additionally, the first question has been correlated with question no. 18, which highlighted one of the strongest correlations (Table 2). The data analysis emphasizes the fact that most of the respondents who think that grouped sales represent an effective technique for increasing occupancy and enhancing revenue are the same that engage in discussions with suppliers regarding the granting of certain discounts for the clients of the agency in which they work.

Table 2. The distribution of preferences regarding grouped sales in accommodation services in relation to negotiating discounts with the suppliers.

Answer Options		(Q18) In Your Experience, When Working with Suppliers, at the Moment of Contracting, do you Suggest that they Offer Certain Discounts for the Clients of the Agency in Which you Operate:		Total
		Yes	No	
(Q1) In your experience, selling longer trips at a lower daily price than that of the daily price for shorter trips, represent:	An efficient technique for increasing revenue	53 34.6%	19 21.8%	72 30.0%
	An efficient technique for enhancing occupancy	52 34.0%	23 26.4%	75 31.3%
	A client loyalty increasing technique	28 18.3%	23 26.4%	51 21.3%
	There are no significant effects	20 13.1%	22 25.3%	42 17.5%
	Total	153 100.0%	87 100.0%	240 100.0%

When taking into account the responder perception related to tourism preferences, especially those with families or those who travel in groups, regarding accommodation services, more precisely if the tourists prefer apartments to separate rooms purchased together at a higher overall price, the majority of respondents (52.1%) consider that grouped sales in this situation is desired for the advantage of the

tourists being closer to their family members, especially in the case of families with small children. Analyzing the acquired data, we can affirm that the hypothesis H1, which refers to accommodation grouped sales, is confirmed.

Tourism Services Specific Discounts (Early Booking and Last-Minute Type Offers)

In the following section, we will analyze the perceptions of tourism specialists regarding the two most common tourism specific discount types, known as early booking and last-minute. Analyzing the obtained data, we can observe that the majority of respondents (50.4%) think that in-advance sales targets an already established market segment, with tourists that prefer this type of offer.

An important correlation can be distinguished between questions no. 2 and no. 15. This correlation is based on a possible difference in the work experiences of the two types of travel agencies (Table 3). In this situation, we can observe that the majority of respondents that work in tour-operating agencies (51.4%) consider that early booking type offers preponderantly sell to an already established market segment that prefers this type of offer. On the other hand, from the respondents that work in retailer agencies, almost half (49.2%) affirmed that in-advance accommodation services sell more rapidly due to the lower price, while the other half (47.5%) consider that these sell better to an already established market segment that prefers this type of offers.

Table 3. Preferences distribution on early booking type offers in accommodation services, in relation to agency typology.

Answer Options		(Q15) Agency Typology		Total
		Tour-Operating	Retailer	
(Q2) In-advance accommodation services (early booking) are sold, in comparison with normal accommodation services	More rapidly, due to their lower price	56 31.3%	30 49.2%	86 35.8%
	Preponderantly to an already established market segment, made of consumers that prefer this type of tourism offer	92 51.4%	29 47.5%	121 50.4%
	With difficulty, because of the necessity of scheduling vacations with a lot of time in advance, which is a thing that consumers usually avoid	6 3.4%	0 0.0%	6 2.5%
	To the same extent, because consumers exist for both types of offers	25 14.0%	2 3.3%	27 11.3%
	Total	179 100.0%	61 100.0%	240 100.0%

For last-minute type offers, most of the respondents (41.7%) stated that the reason that they are acquired much faster is the advantageous price when compared with standard offers. Going further, if we add the percentages for the two most given answers, we can affirm that, in the assessment of tourism specialists, last-minute type offers are acquired fast because of the advantageous price and are more desired because they do not require the planning and purchasing of a vacation with a long time in advance (76.7%). Thus, the hypothesis H2 is partially confirmed.

Grouped Sales by Associating Accommodation Services with Eating Services

In tourism, usually, the largest share of the services is related to accommodation and eating, followed by recreation and transportation. As such, in the following section, we will analyze the perception of tourism specialists regarding the impact of associating accommodation and eating services in the form of grouped sales. In this case, also, grouped sales refer to the simultaneous sale of two or more services at a lower overall price than if acquired independently [52].

When generally associating accommodation with all-inclusive type services, most of the respondents (38.3%) consider this to be an extra incentive in the purchasing decision, followed closely, at a difference of approximatively one percent (37.1%) by those who consider this type of association to be a decisive element in selecting a tourism destination.

In the case of associating accommodation services with all-inclusive type offers for external destinations preferred by Romanians, such as Bulgaria, Turkey, and Greece, this combination (25.4%) is

perceived to be within close range with that regarding the tourism services quality-price ratio (30.0%). In this situation, the hypothesis H4 is partially validated.

Further, we will analyze the impact of associating accommodation services which include breakfast or with two meals (half-board). The majority of respondents (62.1%) perceive this association type, that of accommodation and breakfast, like a single entity, because the tourism services consumers do not separate the two anymore, assimilating the breakfast with the accommodation product. The current global pandemic crisis has not changed this situation, because the tourism operators have adapted and incorporated the practice of room served breakfast. Therefore, in this period, associating breakfast with accommodation services is generally seen not as a deal-breaker but rather as an opportunity to have breakfast in a more relaxed and safer environment [53].

In the next correlation, the one between questions no. 8 and no. 15 (Table 4), we can highlight the fact that, for accommodation with included breakfast type services, similar percentages for both tour-operating and retailer agencies (approximately 60%), consider that included breakfast in the accommodation service is a widespread practice.

Table 4. Distribution of preferences for accommodation with included breakfast type offers, in relation to agency typology.

	Answer Options	(Q15) Agency Typology		Total
		Tour-Operating	Retailer	
(Q8) In your experience, how do clients perceive accommodation with breakfast included type offers	The majority of consumers prefer this type of offer	48 26.8%	10 16.4%	58 24.2%
	The consumers do not prefer this type of offer because they do not wish to be conditioned on a particular waking hour	3 1.7%	6 9.8%	9 3.8%
	Included breakfast in the accommodation service is a widespread practice, becoming a single entity that the tourism service consumer does not separate anymore	110 61.5%	39 63.9%	149 62.1%
	The quality and the diversity of the breakfast that is served in conjunction with the accommodation service is a decisive factor in choosing the accommodation service	18 10.1%	6 9.8%	24 10.0%
	Total	179 100.0%	61 100.0%	240 100.0%

We can observe that breakfast has become a constant integrated practice in accommodation services because the consumers do not separate the two anymore. Thus, separating the two would be an inadequate decision and a negative factor in competing with market competitors. Breakfast has remained, even in this difficult period, an important service that most tourists desire, especially when given the opportunity of being able to have it in the safe environment of their rooms. Moreover, even in the cases in which accommodation services are associated with half-board services in the offer, most of the respondents (42.9%) consider this aspect an important factor in accommodation product selection. The next most picked answer option by the respondents is the perception that tourists prefer this type of offer because of logistic reasons (25.2%). Therefore, we can affirm that the respondents consider the association between accommodation and half-board services in the offer an important aspect for the consumer. So, the hypothesis H5 is not confirmed.

Gratuities Included in Tourism Offers

Another frequently utilized tourism promotional technique is that of granting certain gratuities offered, especially in the case of particular tourism services, but also to some consumer categories. Due to this reason, we want to highlight the impact of these benefits on sales, according to tourism specialists.

Firstly, we analyzed the impact of offered gratuities in accommodation services, most of these being granted to families with children, for children that are below a certain age. Our analysis revealed that almost half of the respondents (46.7%) consider that granting gratuities is a useful tool for accommodation type services suppliers to differentiate themselves from the competition and to increase customer loyalty. Therefore, the hypothesis H3 is confirmed.

In the case of recreation services that are included in the tourism offer, the situation is a little bit different. For included recreation services, the majority of the respondents say that they have a favorable perception regarding this practice, a conclusion easily made by adding the results of the two possible positive answers (82.1%). Therefore, most of the respondents consider that including recreation services in the tourism offer is preferred by the consumers. In the context of the current global pandemic, the recreation sector has adapted to the imposed necessary health safety regulations, in a similar manner with services like room served breakfast [54]. These types of recreation services are attractive for tourists that do want to engage in tourism activities, as long as they are done in a safe environment, limiting the number of participants and ensuring all necessary safety precautions.

Further, we have underlined three correlations that are strongly linked, the correlations between the answers for question no. 10 and the answers for questions no. 15, no. 18, and no. 20.

The preference distribution for offers that include recreation services is presented in Table 5. We can observe that most of the respondents that work in tour-operating agencies (43.0%) consider that including recreation services in the tourism offer is preferred by most consumers.

Table 5. Perception distribution regarding tourism offers with included recreation services, in relation to agency typology.

Perceptions Regarding Tourism Offers with Included Recreation Services		(Q15) Agency Typology		Total
		Tour-Operating	Retailer	
(Q10) In what way does including recreation services influence tourism services sales:	The majority of consumers prefer that these services be included in the tourism offer	77 43.0%	23 37.7%	100 41.7%
	The majority of consumers are not interested in this type of services because they consider that they pay an overall higher price for services that they do not really desire	39 21.8%	4 6.6%	43 17.9%
	It is an important factor in selecting a tourism service supplier in a particular destination	63 35.2%	34 55.7%	97 40.4%
Total		179 100.0%	61 100.0%	240 100.0%

On the other hand, most of those that activate in retailer agencies (55.7%) have a more general approach regarding this topic, considering that including recreation services in the tourism offer is an important factor in choosing the tourism service supplier.

For the correlation between questions no. 10 and no. 18 (Table 6), we have analyzed the same type of offer, namely the preference distribution for recreation services included in the tourism offer depending on the negotiations made with the suppliers, by the travel agencies. We can observe that those who solicit certain discounts from the suppliers for the customers of the agencies in which they operate (42.5%) consider that including recreation services in the tourism offer is preferred by the consumers. On the other hand, the majority of respondents (50.6%) that affirm that they do not try to obtain discounts from the suppliers perceive this type of offer as being an important factor in choosing the tourism supplier in a certain destination.

Table 6. Perception distribution regarding the inclusion of recreation services in the tourism offer, depending on discount negotiating made with the suppliers.

Perceptions Regarding Tourism Offers with Included Recreation Services		(Q18) In Your Experience, when Working with Suppliers, at the Moment of Contracting, do you Suggest that they Offer Certain Discounts for the Clients of the Agency in Which you Operate:		Total
		Yes	No	
(Q10) In what way does including recreation services influence tourism services sales:	The majority of consumers prefer that these services be included in the tourism offer	65 42.5%	35 40.2%	100 41.7%
	The majority of consumers are not interested in this type of services because they consider that they pay an overall higher price for services that they do not really desire	35 22.9%	8 9.2%	43 17.9%
	It is an important factor in selecting a tourism service supplier in a particular destination	53 34.6%	44 50.6%	97 40.4%
Total		153 100.0%	87 100.0%	240 100.0%

Continuing, the third strong correlation (Table 7), which we observed by processing our data in SPSS, was that between question no. 10 and question no. 20. Those who affirmed that granting certain promotional benefits in periods with reduced demand has a relatively significant effect in increasing sales were a large portion of the respondents (42.7%), from the total of 240 respondents. From these, those who consider that the majority of consumers prefer the inclusion of recreation services in the tourism offer and those who consider recreation services to be an important factor in choosing tourism services are approximatively the same (39.8%), and together make up the bulk of those that concur with this type of offer—with recreation services included in the tourism offer.

Table 7. Perception distribution regarding the inclusion of recreation services in the tourism offer, depending on the effect of granting promotional benefits in periods with reduced demand.

Perceptions Regarding Tourism Offers with Included Recreation Services		(Q20) In Your Assessment, Granting Certain Benefits in Periods with Reduced Demand has the Following Effect:			Total
		A Relatively Significant Increase in Sales	An Insignificant Increase in Sales	No Effect on Sales	
(Q10) In what way does including recreation services influence tourism services sales:	The majority of consumers prefer that these services be included in the tourism offer	68 39.8%	22 38.6%	10 83.3%	100 41.7%
	The majority of consumers are not interested in this type of services because they consider that they pay an overall higher price for services that they do not really desire	30 17.5%	13 22.8%	0 0.0%	43 17.9%
	It is an important factor in selecting a tourism service supplier in a particular destination	73 42.7%	22 38.6%	2 16.7%	97 40.4%
Total		171 100.0%	57 100.0%	12 100.0%	240 100.0%

In the situation of including gratuities in tourism offers in the form of spa treatment services, a large number of respondents, more precisely 197 from the total of 240 persons (82.1%), consider that

this sales promotion technique is only attractive for tourists that are interested in this particular tourism type (Table 8). So, taking into account the aforementioned data, we can conclude that the hypothesis H6 is partially validated.

Table 8. Perception distribution regarding the inclusion of spa treatment services in the tourism offer, in relation to agency typology.

	Answer Options	(Q15) Agency Typology		Total
		Tour-Operating	Retailer	
(Î11) In what way does including spa treatment services in the tourism offer influence the sales of tourism services	They attract only tourists that are interested in this type of tourism—spa treatment	140 78.2%	57 93.4%	197 82.1%
	The majority of consumers prefer that these services be included in the tourism offer	29 16.2%	4 6.6%	33 13.8%
	The majority of consumers are not interested in the inclusion of this type of services in the tourism offer because they consider that they pay an overall higher price for services that they can separately and directly acquire from the supplier, and be personalized to their own needs	10 5.6%	0 0.0%	10 4.2%
	Total	179 100.0%	61 100.0%	240 100.0%

The strongest of the 217 valid correlations obtained by processing our data in SPSS, based on the homogeneity coefficient that is closest to the value of 1, is that between questions no. 11 and no. 15 (Table 8).

In the case of spa treatment services included in the tourism offer, the majority of respondents from both types of agencies (78.2% from tour-operating agencies and 93.4% from retailer agencies) consider that these only attract tourists that are interested in this type of tourism.

For general objective number four, the one that refers to the inclusion of transportation in the tourism offer, the majority of respondents (61.3%) think that this convenience is an important additional motivational factor in the purchasing decision. Taking into account the analyzed data, the hypothesis H7 is not validated.

Regarding the practice of including free services in tourism circuits, like entrances to certain tourist venues, aspect covered by general objective no. 5, we have used the Likert scale, in order to measure the impact of this type of benefit. We can therefore observe in Table 9 that most of the respondents, almost half of them (48.8%), consider that companies that grant these services have an advantage over the competition. Moreover, the ones that chose the next most given answer (22.1%) were the ones that think that including these services has a big advantage over the competition. Therefore, when adding the two most given answers (70.9%), we can observe that the majority of respondents consider that agencies that include free entrances/services at venues in their tourism circuits offers are advantaged when compared to other agencies. Consequently, the hypothesis H8 is partially confirmed.

The information in this research study has been gathered from specialists that operate travel agencies located in Bucharest, Romania. In the interpretation of the acquired data, it is useful to take into consideration information regarding the activities of these agencies and, also, information regarding the competence and activities of the responder specialists.

In order to understand the way in which these agencies manage their marketing activities in general, and their sales promotion activities in particular, we wanted to know the size and typology of every agency, in order to validate some correlations analyzed in our paper.

One of the questions targeted the agency size, dividing them into 4 possible types: micro, small, medium-sized, and big. A significant number of agencies were small ones (41.7%), followed by medium-sized ones (33.8%).

Table 9. Impact of including free services in tourism circuits.

Perceptions Regarding the Degree in Which Companies That Utilize this Technique are Advantaged	Answer Frequency	Percentage (%)
Big advantage	53	22.1%
Advantage	117	48.8%
Neither advantage nor disadvantage	36	15.0%
Small advantage	30	12.5%
Insignificant advantage	4	1.7%
Total	240	100.0%

Another question targeted the agency typology. From our investigated sample of agencies, the majority of agencies were tour-operating ones (74.6%), while the rest were retailer ones (25.4%). Therefore, the hypothesis H9 is partially confirmed.

Next, we wanted to determine to what extent is the marketing activity considered an important aspect for each agency and the way in which it is coordinated. These aspects show us the motivations behind particular decisions made by travel agencies and reveal certain perceptions that the agency has about the market and its clients. Utilizing the Likert scale, we have discovered that marketing activity is considered to be very important by most of the agencies, an aspect confirmed by a large percentage of respondents (68.8%). Similar numbers (68.3%) were that of the respondents confirming the presence of a dedicated marketing component in the agency (job, department). Thus, hypothesis H10 is partially confirmed.

Continuing in the direction of travel agency management and utilization of sales promotion tools, we wanted to know if travel agencies request certain discounts to the suppliers, and also to know the perception of the agencies about the prices of their supplier partners. Over half the respondents (63.7%) affirmed the fact that they ask the suppliers for discounts, and, furthermore, for most of the respondents, the supplier prices are perceived as being similar to those of the agencies. So, hypothesis H11 is partially confirmed.

For most of the respondents (71.3%), promotional benefits granted in periods with reduced demand have led to a significant rise in sales. Consequently, hypothesis H12 is confirmed.

Almost a third of respondents are engaged in sales and customer service activities (36.3%), and similar percentages reveal that a large portion of respondents is formed by those who work in management positions (23.3%) and in tourism marketing and promotion positions (22.9%). Regarding responder tourism activity work experience, most of them have a work experience of over five years (39.2%), followed by those with 3 to 5 years' experience (32.5%).

The majority of responders (55.4%) said that the way in which they obtained their tourism abilities and aptitudes were by graduating from specialty long-term training programs, an aspect that makes us trust the answers obtained during this research study because they come from well-trained professionals within the field of tourism. Observing the aforementioned data, we can affirm that hypothesis H13, regarding the investigated variables, is partially confirmed, the majority of responders having over 5 years' experience in tourism activities.

6. Discussion

The main points that emerged from the analysis of the data obtained from those who work in travel agencies are as follows. Grouped sales represent an efficient technique of enhancing occupancy, and, implicitly, of increasing revenue; furthermore, the respondents that are of this perception are the ones that negotiate discounts with the suppliers for their clients. The grouped sale technique utilized for accommodation services has the main advantage of enabling the client to be closer to family members, by choosing apartments instead of individual rooms.

The early booking technique targets an already formed market segment that prefers it and closely monitors the market for this type of offer. Last-minute type deals are rapidly purchased due to their advantageous price and are preferred because they do not require planning and paying for tourism

services a long time in advance. These types of sales promotion techniques have been successfully utilized in Romania only in the last decade because prior to this period, the travel agencies in Romania were not aware of these techniques [55].

Associating accommodation services with all-inclusive eating type services is regarded as representing additional motivation in the buying decision, but in similar proportions, it is considered a decisive element in choosing a particular destination. The same type of association, between accommodation services and all-inclusive eating services, this time for external destinations, is preferred mostly due to the quality-price ratio of the tourism services. This type of association is more rooted in the practices of the Romanian travel agencies than any other [56]. The association of accommodation services and breakfast is a constant that tourism services consumers no longer separate from the accommodation service itself. Accommodation and half-board meals represent a very important aspect for the consumer, from the perspective of tourism specialists.

The granting of free services in the accommodation service itself is seen by those who work in travel agencies as a way for accommodation providers to differentiate themselves from the competition in the tourism market and to aim at increasing consumer loyalty. The inclusion of recreation services in tourism offers is preferred by consumers, however, gratuities given in the form of spa treatment services are attractive only to consumers who are interested in this type of tourism. The inclusion of transportation services in the tourism offer is considered to be additional motivation in the buying decision. Agencies that include free entrances to tourist attractions in their circuit offers are significantly advantaged when compared with those that do not. This method was not significantly used in Romanian travel agencies in the past, but we can observe that the travel agencies have included these practices in order to adapt to consumer behavior [57]. Additionally, specialists observed the fact that promotional benefits granted in periods of lower demand have led to a significant increase in sales.

7. Conclusions, Research Limitations, and Future Directions

Synthesizing all of our gathered data, these are the main points that emerged from this research study: grouped sales represent an effective marketing technique that increases both occupancy and revenue; early booking technique targets an already established market segment; last minute type offers are preferred because of their advantageous prices and do not have a specific target market; associating accommodation services with all-inclusive eating type services is an important factor in the tourist decision; breakfast is a constant that tourism services consumers no longer separate from the accommodation service itself; free services included in the accommodation services is a technique utilized in order to increase consumer loyalty and a way to differentiate a travel agency from their competitors; the inclusion of recreation services in the tourism offer is preferred by consumers; the inclusion of transportation services in the tourism offer represents additional motivation in the buying decision; spa treatment services are attractive only to consumers who are interested in this type of tourism; free entrances to tourist attractions in circuits represent an advantage for the travel agency that includes them in their tourism packages; promotional benefits granted in periods of low demand represent an effective sales increasing technique.

Although this research study contributes to the application, in tourism practices, of theoretical principles in sales promotion, a number of limitations from the research can also be revealed. At the same time, they give us the opportunity to discover new directions for future research.

Firstly, due to the dynamic and temporal character of the data obtained through the quantitative research, it would be desirable to verify the stability over time of the discovered results by conducting similar research studies in the future.

Secondly, another limitation concerns the extension of our results at a national level, considering the fact that the researched community was selected from the city of Bucharest. Although we have discovered significant differences between the way in which tour-operating agencies perceive the subject of our research in comparison with retailer ones, there is a possibility that these types of agencies

may have evaluations tending towards homogeneity, if we were to refer to specialists from other cities from Romania. In order to generalize the results, this research should be applied at a national level.

Thirdly, another limitation is that the validity test for our hypotheses was made based on the majority of answers obtained through our questionnaire. Furthermore, the questionnaire was submitted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, further testing can be made in order to compare our findings with similar data gathered when the global situation will return to normal.

Finally, one last limitation is due to the fact that the terminology used was specialized. This aspect represents a limitation for the research carried out because there may have been differences in understanding the used terminology, thus generating distorted results.

Although these research limits are relevant from a scientific point of view, they do not fundamentally alter the value of the obtained results and only represent aspects that are inherent in the conduct of any research activity. Additionally, their impact can be reduced by further expanding the presented scientific approach. This can be done by applying this research at a national level, in order to obtain data from a more diverse range of travel agencies in Romania. In this way, we would be able to verify the effectiveness of the sales promotion techniques used in the COVID-19 period and compare the results with data gathered before the pandemic. Furthermore, the results from this paper can be corroborated with results from our two previous qualitative research studies on this subject and compiled into a model that can be applied at a national level.

We wanted a current situation analysis in the tourism sector, in which we would be able to determine relevant aspects regarding the way in which specialists perceive tourism consumer behavior, thus better understanding the way in which specialists organize and offer their products in the tourism market. By identifying the most useful and desired sales promotion techniques and structuring them in this article, tourism operators have the opportunity to utilize the gathered data to increase the use of the most effective techniques in order to persuade more customers to engage in tourism activities in the current global pandemic situation in which the demand for tourism activities has decreased.

Given the continuous expansion and diversification of the tourism sector and the fact that this field is constantly evolving, the need to conduct research and identify solutions based on the obtained results is an essential one. Therefore, the scientific approach presented in this paper is an important contribution in clarifying some theoretical and practical aspects of the tourism sector, and also represents the basis for future research studies made in the field of tourism that are necessary for adapting marketing techniques to new tourism trends and to future consumers.

We now know that unforeseen situations can disturb entire industries. We can assume that the future will hold many other challenges for the tourism sector as well. Therefore, the ability to identify and utilize the most effective marketing tools will be an important weapon in the arsenal of tourism operators. This paper can serve as a benchmark and, along with similar research studies developed in the future, function as a complementary resource that can be practically applied in the tourism sector in order to maintain and enhance the versatility and adaptability of the ever-growing tourism industry.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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