

USING INTERNET AND TRAVEL AGENCIES IN PLANNING A TRIP. A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

Oana Țugulea*
Claudia Bobâlcă†
Andreea Maha‡
Liviu-George Maha§

Abstract: *The purpose of the present research is to discover and to understand young people's touristic behaviour. We investigated the process of planning a trip, the perception about travel agencies and about Internet using qualitative methods. The aim of this paper is also to establish how important are qualitative methods when trying to understand touristic behaviour. We used exploratory qualitative research. Even we made only a qualitative research there are some managerial implications of this study. Managers must focus on human factor when promoting a touristic product. They can use Internet to inform young tourists but they must understand the importance of presenting the real conditions and not an improved option of the real offer. Travel agencies must be as flexible as the situation allows. This paper is important because it investigates in-depth the young tourists opinions and allow a comparison between the perception on travel agencies and the Internet.*

Keywords: travel agencies; Internet; travel behaviour; qualitative research.
JEL Classification: L83; M31.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism represents a unique segment from the business environment because the services achieved cannot be tested before the purchase. Travelers have to believe the indirect or virtual experience. This is why the way you present the travel destinations is one of the most important success factor. Potential travelers can choose between contacting a travel agent or going online when planning a trip.

Travel agents are having quite a success in creating professional catalogues and brochures, where consumers can find important and well selected information combined very well with nice photos, useful tips and tricks, guiding maps and so on.

* Lecturer at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania; e-mail: ciobanu.oana@uaic.ro.

† Lecturer at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania; e-mail: iuliana.bobalca@uaic.ro.

‡ PhD Candidate, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi; e-mail: andreea.maha@gmail.com.

§ Associate Professor at the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania; e-mail: mlg@uaic.ro.

On the other hand, nowadays it gets more and more difficult for “brick and mortar” travel agencies to compete and keep up with the Internet and its online booking potential. It seems that most of the travelers tend to prefer the online experience, because its better manner of visualising destinations.

Qualitative methods, like focus groups, interviews and other techniques can be useful in filling the missing answers from a quantitative research. Qualitative methods can be also used to improve the design and the analysis of investigations. For various reasons, researchers’ attention was caught by qualitative methods: “Qualitative research is vital to understanding the complexity of transportation behaviour, which rests upon the subjective beliefs and behaviours of the individual person” (Poulenez-Donovan and Ulberg, 1994).

Bon et al. (1998) conducted an exploratory study for analysing those travelers that seek information through Internet. The study concluded that most of the respondents, from each demographic category, use Internet for searching information about the travel destinations they are interested in. It also indicates that those that use Internet as an instrument for collecting touristic information are, most probably, more educated, younger, that have a high income, have the tendency to use plane as a mean of transportation and invest a significant amount of money in travel expenses.

Weber and Roehl’s (1999) observed that tourists that buy products or services online are, most probably, people aged between 26 and 55 years old, with high incomes, important professions and a notable experience in using the Internet comparing to those that refuse to inform or to shop online. However, the same study reveals at the same time, that those who don’t use Internet for informing or buying online and who prefer travel agencies, they tend to be aged under 25 years old and over 55 years old, with low incomes, correlated more often with the position of teacher or student compared with their counterparts that prefer Internet.

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING YOUNG TOURISTS’ BEHAVIOR WHEN PLANNING A TRIP

Turban et al., 2000 states that understanding the way that tourists behave represent a crucial issue for the providers of touristic services, but also for the authorities in tourism for developing a proper marketing strategy. Internet became such an important tool in tourism industry, not only because it allows

too achieve products and services through its electronic channel but also because it represents a huge information environment.

UNWTO and WYSE Travel Confederation* consider youth travel as a very important matter because it is a market for the future. *The power of youth travel* report shows that young travelers use to spend more money than other tourists, they are likely to return to the same destination over their life time and of course it is a growth market at a global level and also young travelers are the most familiar with using the new technology.

Youth travel is considered a very important segment and also a vital resource for innovation and change. Young travelers want to experience the new, in one word they think outside the box. According to the World Youth Student and Educational Travel Confederation, in 2010 young travelers generated 165 billion USD towards global tourism receipts, confirming their financial importance to the global tourism industry and local economies. Currently, the global youth travel industry is estimated to represent about 190 million international trips per year and by 2020 UNWTO forecasts almost 300 million international youth trips per year. (*The power of youth travel report - UNWTO*)

If their market is considered so important automatically we consider a point of interest to understand the young travelers' behaviour, investigating their process of planning a trip, the perception about travel agencies and about Internet.

2. USING INTERNET AND TRAVEL AGENCIES IN PLANNING A TRIP. ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Young travelers use the Internet when they decide to plan a trip. It is an environment for social interaction, where they can consult photos or reviews from friends past trips posted on Facebook or by unknown travelers that post reviews on sites like TripAdvisor, this way their decision will be influenced in a positive or negative way.

Young tourists tend to be very well informed, consulting a wide range of resources before departure. Internet is the main form of collecting information, overtaking family and friends. A study

* World Youth Student and Educational Travel Confederation

from 2003, realised by TNT/Uni Travel, concluded that 44% from the young tourists surveyed in Australia used Internet to gather information prior to arrival.

Referring at booking their trips, most respondents prefer to use travel agencies. Young travelers contact a specialist youth or student travel agents ('The Global Nomad: Backpacker Travel in Theory and Practice' Richards and Wilson, 2004 – survey conducted by ATLAS and ISTC).

Travel agencies tend to offer traditional information support, like printed materials (like catalogues, flyers, brochures) which represent a limited source of information. As Middleton, 1994 states, printing represents a fixed environment, that has a partial capacity to communicate such a complex tourism experience. They also involve semnificative costs, time and also they become rapidly outdated.

Zins (2007) indicates that for young travelers, the Internet represents an important source of information. Still, many travelers combine the online woth offline when planning a trip (Lee, Soutar and Daly, 2007, p. 165).

Every young tourist is interested in a customized pack of information, with different needs and requirements, and the improvement of information technology can deliver a solution to this “knowledge gap” (Buhalis, 2000).

3. YOUNG TOURISTS' BEHAVIOUR. QUALITATIVE STUDIES

A complex study dedicated to students and young travelers was realized in 2002 by ISTC (International Student Travel Confederation) and ATLAS (Association of Tourism and Leisure Education). The project was conducted and analysed by Greg Richards and Julie Wilson. The goal of the survey was to gather valid information on the youth and independent traveler market combining data on the social and cultural aspects of young travelers (their backgrounds, motivations and experiences) with data on travel purchases, information gathering, destinations and previous travel experience. The data was collected from 2.300 young people and students from 8 different countries using a survey (most of the questions that were completing the survey were tried and tested in different tourism surveys): Canada, the Czech Republic, Hong Kong, Mexico, Slovenia, South Africa, Sweden and the UK.

The survey discussed is considered unique because first of all it covers all aspects regarding to the “whole journey” and second because it is based on primary research at a global level with young consumers themselves, rather than by analysing conclusions from national tourism statistics.

According to this report *New Horizons in Independent Youth and Student Travel* when planning a trip the main information sources are the Internet (71%) and friends/family (70%). The study reveals also that less experienced travelers trust more the travel agencies for information. When they decide to book their travel details (accommodation and activities during the trip) the study finds that most of young people use travel agents to book their travel (65%). As they start to get more experienced, travelers tend to prefer making their own travel arrangements using the Internet, instead of contacting travel agencies. Considering the way they reach their destinations, the main mode of transport preferred is air travel (82% and higher percentage for long haul destinations) followed by rail travel (30%).

Google Travel Spain sponsored a Phocuswright report *Information and Purchasing Habits of Spanish Travellers*, for the years 2009 and 2010 editions. There were collected more than 88.000 surveys by over 40 travel companies in Spain. The sample was formed by young travelers aged from 18 – 24 and from 25 – 34 as separate groups and they wanted to look whether their travel behaviours is different. The study concluded that for specific services, the Internet plays the most important role in finding accommodation, in this matter search engines are very used. Traditional agencies currently play a marginal role as a source of information for planning a trip. The younger the traveler is, it was considered that they have the less value perceived for travel agencies „brick and mortar” type. For both analysed groups Internet plays the main role when they gather information, search engines being most used (27%). Also opinions offered by friends and relatives are considered a very reliable information (27%). Brochures were considered totally irrelevant when planning a trip, exception being made when young travelers start planning a cruise.

Travel Agents vs. Online Booking: Tackling the Shortcomings of Nowadays Online Tourism Portals represents a qualitative study that aimed to identify the reasons that lead many consumers still rely on traditional travel agencies instead of booking their trips through Internet. The study starts from the main research question: *Why do people go to travel agents instead of booking online?* Study hypothesis were formulated based on the literature review and the information obtained through a semi-structured interview. The sample was composed from 10 PhD students from the Faculty of IT, University

of Technology Sydney, Australia. Based on the hypotheses, there was constructed a questionnaire, that was tested and improved. After the refinement, the questionnaire has been used to collect data that provides evidence in favour or against these hypotheses. Some of the results from the interview and also from the literature consist in some suppositions: “The majority of people prefer booking their international trips from a travel agent. Domestic trips are usually booked online”, “Human expertise is an important convenience factor that is missing in online booking (Stewart, 2005)”, „Social interaction with a travel agent is the key to a good customer experience” (Prasarnphanich & Gillenson, 2003; Stewart, 2005), „Security and trust towards humans is higher” (Stewart, 2005), „The way package deals are composed now is not satisfactory and can be done better on the Web” (Klein et al., 1999). To validate the data, the survey was applied on 132 people from 25 different countries filled in the questionnaires (61% male, 39% female).

After verifying the hypothesis, the study confirms that various people still prefer to contact travel agents when planning a trip, instead of using the Internet. It shows also that respondents value the *expertise of travel agents*, the *possibility to receive help with impulse decisions* and feel a need for *social interaction before making an important decision*. Comparing to travel agencies usability, travelers like the convenience of booking online, where *they can enjoy the comfort of their familiar environments, fast responses on travel-related requests and multitasking*. The researchers of the analysed study recommend that the convenience of Internet should be combined with the convenience of a simplified decision making and collaborative booking from traditional travel agents. The expertise of travel agents should help online customers to find the best travel option under given constraints and provide efficient support for impulsive decisions. (Bogdanovych, et al., 2005)

The **purpose** of the paper is to investigate young tourist’s behaviour in planning a trip. We want to understand how young people make decisions when they decide to go on a trip, in their country or in a foreign country, the process of searching information and their opinions about travel agencies services and about using Internet for planning a trip.

The **objectives** of this research are:

1. Identify the sources of information and the reservation manners used to plan a trip (Internet versus travel agency);
2. Identify the advantages and disadvantages of using a tourism agency services;

3. Identify the advantages and disadvantages of using the Internet in planning a trip;
4. Investigate the usefulness of promotional materials offered by travel agencies;
5. Investigate the trust in Internet vs. travel agency when planning a trip;
6. Understand the trip planning behaviour (choosing the destination, the means of transport, the accommodation units, the tourists' attractions).

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research method

We used qualitative exploratory research. The purpose of this research is to investigate, to understand tourist's behaviour. For this reason, we consider qualitative research is the best first step in the research. This type of research is suitable "where the research emphasis is on in-depth understanding of how, why and in what context certain phenomena occur" (Carson et al., 2001, p. 8). This research is an instrumental one. Based on the results of the focus groups we developed some hypotheses and also we built the questionnaire.

Next step will be a quantitative approach, based on a survey, as a future direction study. On the other hand, there are different particularities in young Romanian people' touristic behaviour and we cannot expand and generalize the results of previous foreign studies.

As a method, we have chosen focus groups. Focus group is "in-depth group interview employing relatively homogenous groups to provide information around topics specified by researchers" (Hughes and DuMont, 2002, p. 258). Using focus groups permitted us to observe a large amount of interaction on a specific topic in a short time. It is a quick and easy way to gather data (Alasuutari et al., 2008, p. 4). Participants are allowed to develop ideas collectively, to stimulate each other, to be more creative. This method allows students to respond in their own words as well as enhance the richness of the data (Taylor et al., 2011, p. 76). On the other hand, we are aware of the problems this type of research might involve: results are not representative for the population, moderating focus groups represents a complex and delicate action, the achieved data can be difficult to transcribe and analyse (Pini, 2002).

Three focus groups were used to collect data for the study. The number of focus groups necessary for a specific theme depends on the moment we reach a point of saturation, meaning the answers start repeating from one discussion to another, no more new things are revealed.

4.2. Population and sample

The investigated population is represented by bachelor's degree students, master's degree students and PhD students. The sample is represented by 21 students, 10 men and 11 women, ages 19-26 years. The unit of analysis is the group.

Young consumers (ages of 18-25) consist into a powerful segment, with distinctive features. For this reason this segment needs to be treated distinctively (Ness et al., 2002). The study of Shukla (2009) presents reasons that support the importance of this market for managers. Young people influence the family budget allocation, have bigger financial potential for the future and, usually, come with new tendencies. The studies show that this market has the biggest capacity to influence other segments' behaviour. Determining the factors that influence the young's buying patterns became a significant aspect in marketing research (Martin, Bush, 2000). We consider that students are an educational market, continuously shaping, profitable for tourism companies. Comfort ability, minimum costs and high response rate make students an attractive variant for academic research (Enis, et al., 1972).

We selected 7 people for each focus group. There are some theoretical opinions that recommend a number of 12 participants (Kreuger, 2002) but we consider this number is too big and that some participants will remain silent and will not have a chance to speak. Smaller groups, with 4 till 8 people, give the participants more space and more time to discuss, to connect to each other and to explore the suggested themes more deeply (Brannen et al., 2002 in Alasuutari, et al, 2008).

In the process for choosing participant for focus groups, there are important factors that must be considered: personal characteristics, location and research issue knowledge (Kolb, 2012, p. 2). Our research investigates a purchasing behaviour and, according to Kolb (2012, p. 4), demographic characteristics may be the most important consideration.

We selected students, ages between 19-26 years, men and women, studying in Iasi, Romania, who made at least one trip in the last half year, using Internet or travel agency services, so they can have at least one recent experience as tourists. Another condition was for them to be open to participate to a

discussion about their tourist experience. The sample is formed in order to respect the principle of homogeneity (Krueger, 2002, Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). As Hughes and DuMont (2002, p. 258) explained, “within-group homogeneity prompts focus group participants to elaborate stories and themes that help researchers understand how participants structure and organize their social world”. For the selection, we used a small questionnaire, with filter questions, in order to find the participants with the required characteristics.

We used “snowball” sampling. We selected two students during a class and each of them referred others with similar characteristics. We chose this sampling type because we wanted to reduce the tension a students must feel interacting with a teacher for a research.

4.3. Research instrument

The focus group was conducted respecting the suggested rules and techniques of the specialty literature.

We used open-ended type of questions to discover unknown topics and explore them: questions investigating the experience (*Tell us how was the last trip you had. Tell us about an experience you had with a tourism agency. Tell us about how you used the Internet in order to plan your trip. How do you choose the touristic destination? What kind of information are you generally looking for on the web pages when you plan a trip? Tell us about a pleasant experience you had when you used the services of a tourism agency. Tell us about an unpleasant experience you had when you used the services of a tourism agency. Tell us about a pleasant experience you had when you used the Internet to plan a trip. Tell us about an unpleasant experience you had when you used the Internet to plan a trip. What advantages/disadvantages has the travel agency for you, as a tourist? What advantages/disadvantages has the Internet for you, as a tourist?*) and questions investigating feelings (*Do you trust tourism agencies in Romania? How did you feel when you used the services of a tourism agency?*). In order to extract more opinions about travel agencies, hypothetical interaction was used: *Imagine you run a tourism agency; what would you do to attract clients among young tourists?* The interview guide included a contrast questions, helping us to extract advantages and disadvantages of Internet and travel agencies: *In what way is Internet different from a travel agency for planning a trip?* Discussing about using Internet and

travel agencies in planning a trip, the four-question sequence was used in order to deeply investigate these aspects: open-ended questions, follow-up questions, probing questions and prompted questions. We avoided closed or leading questions and also the *Why?* types of questions.

The focus groups were organized respecting the rules and the suggestion from other researches (Alasuutari, et al., 2008; Krueger, 2002). Participants were arranged on a round table, with snacks and refreshments on it, in a room with no distracting elements. The focus groups were videotaped, for a better understanding and analysis of the data. We were interested both in what people say and how they say something.

The beginning of the focus group is very important as much of its success can be attributed to the development of this open environment (Krueger, 2002, p. 4). First, the moderator made an introduction, presenting himself and then he announced the topic of the discussion. Then he presented general guidelines of the focus group such as: there were no right and wrong answers, only different points of view; every participant was encouraged to answer each question; they didn't have to agree with other participants but they had to listen respectfully as others shared their views.

Every discussion lasted approximately 100 minutes. The moderator was the same for every focus group, in order to keep the same conditions for every discussion. The moderator had previous experiences in conducting focus groups and was a well-trained person, trying to maintain his objectivity while he was flexible and involved. He maintained a comfortable and a relaxed atmosphere. For an in-depth investigation, during each discussion, the moderator asked probing questions (Krueger, 2002) such as: *Can you tell me more about this? Hmm, interesting, tell me more; I am not sure if I understood correctly; please explain me more about it; Why would you say that? Would you explain further?*

5. RESULTS

The first step in the process of analysing data was to listen and transcribe the tapes for each focus group. We identified patterns or themes and we organized them into coherent categories (Taylor-Powell and Renner, 2003). We included participants' statements on specific discussed issues because their "own language and mode of expression is crucial to the investigation" (Kassarjian, 1977, p. 11).

We identified the following *themes: sources of information, the utility of a travel agency, the utility of Internet, trust in travel agencies, trust in Internet, advantages of travel agencies, disadvantages of travel agencies, advantages of Internet, disadvantages of Internet, criteria for selecting a destination, people who influence the subjects, transport means, accommodation types, booking and tourist's attractions.*

For every theme, we identified the corresponding **categories**.

(a) Sources of information

Students use as sources of information the following:

Mass media sources- Internet websites, flyers, catalogues, magazines, TV, radio: “I look for information on Internet”, “I consult different materials I got, such as flyers and catalogues”, “sometimes I watched a magazine, it gave me an idea about the future destination to choose”

Family, friends and colleagues: “my friends’ opinion is very important for me, especially if I go on a trip with them”, “my parents helped me to choose a destination”

Presentation materials - presentations movies on YouTube, maps, pictures, images: “first thing I do is watching a clip on Internet about a destination”, “I look for pictures to see if I like it”, “I look for a map, it is useful”.

People with experience, who already have visited the place or worked with an agency (web reviews, oral recommendations): “when you choose a travel agency, the other peoples ‘opinion is crucial”, “for me, it is important to read reviews on the Internet”, “if a person I know tells me she wasn’t pleased with a travel agency services, I won’t go there”.

Travel agent: “a travel agent helps you to choose”, “he recommends you staff”, “it is easier when you talk with an agent”.

(b) The utility of a travel agency

Students consider that a travel agency is useful for:

Inform activity about potential tourist destinations (ideas about a new destination, reviews, pictures and presentation), transport means, accommodation, prices and tourist attractions): “I use materials from more travel agencies to collect information about the destination I am interested in”, “watching presentations made by travel agencies, I have new ideas about places I would like to visit”

As materials, most students usually use flyers, prints and catalogues.

Comparing prices and offers: “I look on travel agencies’ websites to compare prices”, “I want to know what offers they have”.

Only a few students use travel agencies to compare prices.

Buying airline tickets

Most students prefer a travel agency when they need to buy an airline tickets: *“it is safer to buy airline tickets from a travel agency, for abroad travels”.*

For reservation of accommodation and booking transport, they prefer to use the phone: *“phone is more personal”, “you hear a human voice”, “I have more confidence that way”.*

Students don’t trust to buy or book tourist products using Internet: *“you don’t know who are you talking to, it is risky”, “I have heard about friends how were cheated using Internet”.*

(c)The utility of Internet

Inform activity. All participants consider Internet useful for *collecting information* about potential tourist destinations (reviews, pictures and presentation), transport means, accommodation, prices and tourist attractions): *“when I need information, I look on the Internet”.* All participants declared they use Internet to collect information.

(d)Trust in travel agencies.

Most students trust a travel agency only if a friend/familiar person recommends it: *“I trust the agency only if someone I know recommends it to me”.*

Half of the students trust a travel agency if they had a previous satisfying experience with it: *“I trust it if I was satisfied last time I have worked with them”, “I will look for more information about the agency but I don’t really trust it”.*

Half of the students trust the materials a travel agency offers: *“I trust the materials they gave it to me (flyers, catalogues, prints)”.*

Only a few students trust the information presented on travel agency web site: *“yes, somehow I trust the information on their Internet page”.*

(e)Trust in travel Internet

Most students don’t trust the Internet for buying touristic products and for booking: *“you cannot be sure about the information posted on web pages”, “you don’t know the people involved in”.*

(f)Advantages and disadvantages of travel agencies

Table 1 presents the advantages and disadvantages of travel agencies in planning a trip, identified by the participants.

Table 1 - Advantages and disadvantages of travel agencies

Advantages	Disadvantages
Little effort (the agency organizes it all) Time to save (the trip is planned from the very beginning) It presents more offers to choose from Comfort ability Clear information obtained from the employees More information obtained from the agency's employees than from other sources Conversations with specialized employees It helps you decide if you are not decided The specialized employees clears out uncertainties You can benefit of a personalized touristic offer You can receive recommendations about what you need You get benefit of a touristic guide You can get discounts if you are a loyal client You can negotiate the touristic offer It allows the online payment of the touristic offer	The agency has a fix programme No confidence You don't have freedom concerning the trip's schedule You don't know how the people you go with during the trip are (for the group trips case) High prices Not all received information correspond to reality The offers are not very well promoted You depend on the agency's working schedule If you cancel the trip, you pay penalties

(g) Advantages and disadvantages of the Internet

Table 2 presents the advantages and disadvantages of the Internet in planning a trip, identified by the participants.

Table 2 - Advantages and disadvantages of the Internet

Advantages	Disadvantages
Offers more information It is easy to find what you want It costs less than using a travel agency It has no time limit for information search It allows trip planning as you wish (more freedom) You can see images or movies with the chosen destination It offers contact information of the hotel/place I want to get accommodation in There is no need to visit the agency's place You can access the information from any place with Internet connection You can find opinions of other persons (reviews) It is non-stop available You can compare offers easily You can postpone a trip with no penalties You can quietly take a buying decision, with no pressure from the agency's employee	I have no confidence as I can't see the person I chat to Information may be fake Images may be fake Not all information is updated The reviews aren't always real The reservation is not certain Is uncertain due to viruses and/or hackers You can't ask for a specialized employee's opinion You can't negotiate the touristic offer's price You don't know the person you write to A lot of time spent to get information

(h)Criteria for selecting a destination

Most students choose a destination taking into consideration the following elements: prices, distance until the destination, available means of transport, attractions in the area, other people's company: *"costs are very important"*, *"it is important to go with someone you can have fun with"*.

(i)People who influence the subjects

Most participants at the three focus groups we conducted mentioned that they were influenced by friends and family when they want to plan a trip: *"my friends' opinion is very important to me"*.

Other sources are: people who already travelled there, travel agents, people from mass media (VIP, TV moderators) and teachers.

(j)Transport means

Students presented at the focus groups talked about the comfort planes are offering, reducing the time of the travel and being more secure than cars. Most students preferred plane for outbound trips. Other transport means are train, car and minibus/bus.

(k)Accommodation types

Most students declared they prefer to stay at a hotel or even a tent, depending on the destination type.

(l)Booking

Participants preferred to use phone for booking because its human factor advantage they trust the phone more because they can hear someone's voice and they can judge better her credibility.

(m)Tourist's attractions

The main reasons students travel as tourists are: assimilate new information, having fun and knowing new places.

CONCLUSIONS

The most used information sources that students use are: mass media (Internet websites, flyers, catalogues, magazines, TV, radio), recommendations from family, friends and colleagues, presentation materials (presentations movies on YouTube, maps, pictures, images), information from people with

experience, who already has visited the place or worked with an agency or from travel agents. The main booking instrument is the phone.

The main advantages of travel agencies are: help for potential tourists (personal consultancy services, recommendations and experience, presents more offers, offer a lot of information), reduce customers' effort and time, convenience, customized offers financial benefits for loyal customers, online payment. The main disadvantages of travel agencies are: less flexible (agency schedule), the gap between reality and promises, lack of trust, big prices and penalties for cancelling the trip.

The main advantages of Internet are: free (no costs), nonstop schedule, offers a lot of information, no time or space limits, more freedom, offers images with destinations, presents other people's reviews, no penalties paid for cancelling the trip. The main disadvantages of Internet consist in: lack of trust, it is not a safe environment, negotiation not allowed.

As materials from travel agencies, most students prefer to use flyers, prints and catalogues. They consider these materials useful for their *informing activity* about potential tourist destinations (ideas about a new destination, reviews, pictures and presentation), transport means, accommodation, prices and tourist attractions.

Most students trust a travel agency only if a friend/familiar person recommends that agency or they had a previous satisfying experience with it. Participants don't trust the Internet for buying touristic products and for booking.

The main criteria used for choosing a touristic destination are: prices, distance until the destination, available means of transport and the attractions in the area. Most participants are influenced by friends and family when they want to plan a trip. As transport means they prefer planes and for accommodation they prefer to stay at a hotel or even a tent, depending on the destination type.

Digital channels need to be the fundament to any communication strategy as the Internet is developing as the heart of the young travelers world.

Using qualitative data, seven hypotheses were developed:

H1: The Internet offers more useful tools in planning a trip than the travel agencies do;

H2: Received help is an important factor when young tourist use the services of an agency to plan a trip

H3: Lack of trust is an important factor when young tourist use Internet to plan a trip

H4: Recommendations of the people that already visited a destination represent the most confident source of information;

H5: Young tourists are more influenced by friends when planning a trip;

H6: Young tourists prefer planes as means of transportation for a trip;

H7: Young tourists prefer hotels and tents as accommodation places for a trip.

These hypotheses will be tested in a quantitative survey.

Research implications

This paper offers a deeply understanding of young people touristic behaviour. Based on the results and the literature review, a questionnaire draft was framed. The questionnaire was tested on 30 students from the same population.

Managerial implications

The young tourists market is continuously shaping and it has a big potential. The young tourists' manner to choose a touristic offer is different comparing to the older generations manner.

This research results indicate a lack of trust in Internet but also in agencies. Managers need to work more on this confidence aspect by offering more quality and delivering according to what they promise.

The agencies can offer more warranties. They can communicate more often personally with potential clients.

The human factor grows credibility in any environment (Internet, agency). A voice on the phone, people's reviews, all these human aspects are more convincing.

A few suggestions to attract young clients by agencies

•first of all travel agencies must first understand the market – as a suggestion we recommend to consult reports published by WYSE Travel Confederation in partnership with UNWTO – they are available on their official website www.wysetc.org;

•second they have to develop as many partnerships they can support;

•effective marketing strategy – aiming the young travelers specific market;

•collaborate with the National Authority for Tourism (ANT)* to improve credibility;

•higher agency flexibility in order to allow clients to create their own offers;

* ANT is a public institution with legal personality, subordinated to the Ministry of Economy

- lower prices;
- a better promotion of Romanian travel agencies;
- a better promotion of travel agencies' offers;
- promote some less known destinations.

Limitations of the research

The selected population represents a limitation of this research. Some studies identify differences between studies using students as samples and those that use other sample composition (Sheth, 1970; Burnett, Dune, 1986; James, Sonner, 2001). Enis et al. (1972) are supporters of samples that are composed of students. Their answers quality can be better than if using other groups, due to factor structure analysis and correlations (Burnett, Dune, 1986). Another limitation of this research is the consistency of the group. There are researchers who recommend organizing distinctive focus groups for men and women (Churchill and Brown, 2004; Fern, 2001; Taylor et al., 2011). The results are not representative for the entire population and the hypothesis must be tested in a quantitative survey.

Further research

- The first step of the future research is developing a quantitative research to test the hypotheses we generated due to this study, using the questionnaire that resulted from this qualitative study.
- Also, we aim to develop a new qualitative followed by a quantitative study in order to better understand the Internet and agencies confidence issue.
- Another area of interest is Internet shopping in the tourism area in Romania. This aspect also needs a new qualitative followed by a quantitative study.

REFERENCES

- Alasuutari, P., Bickman, L., Brannen, J. (2008) *The SAGE Handbook of Social Research Methods*, SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Bogdanovycha, Anton; Bergerb, Helmut, Simoffa, Simeon și Sierrac, Carles (2006) *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism - Travel Agents vs. Online Booking: Tackling the Shortcomings of Nowadays Online Tourism Portals*, Springer Vienna, pp. 418-428, available at:

<http://195.130.87.21:8080/dspace/bitstream/123456789/779/1/Travel%20agents%20vs.%20online%20booking.pdf>

- Bonn, M.A.; Furr, H.L. și Susskind A.M. (1998) *Using the Internet as a Pleasure Travel Planning Tool: an Examination of the Sociodemographic and Behavioral Characteristics Among Internet Users and Nonusers* - Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research, vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 303 - 317.
- Buhalis, D. (2000) *Relationships in the distribution channels of tourism: Conflicts between hoteliers and tour operators in the Mediterranean region*, International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration.
- Buhalis, D. (2000) *Tourism and information technologies: Past, present and future*, Tourism Recreation Research.
- Burnett, J., Dunne, P. (1986) *An Appraisal of the Use of Student Subjects in Marketing Research*, Journal of Business Research, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 329-343.
- Carson, D., Gilmore, A., Perry, C., Gronhau, K. (2001) *Qualitative Marketing Research Justification of a Qualitative Research Methodology*, Sage Research Methods, SAGE Publications, Inc., pp. 8-15
- Churchill, G. A., Brown, T. J. (2004) *Basic marketing research*, Mason, OH: South-Western
- Enis, B.M., Cox, K., Stafford, J. (1972) *Students as Subjects in Consumer Behavior Experiments*, Journal of Marketing Research, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 72-74
- Fern, E. F. (2001) *Advanced focus group research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE
- Hughes, D.L., DuMont, K. (2002) *Using Focus Groups to Facilitate Culturally Anchored Research*, pp. 257-290, in Revenson, T.A., Augelli, AR, (2002) *Ecological Research to Promote Social Change: Methodological Advances from Community Psychology*, Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, New York.
- James, W., Sonner, B. (2001) *Just Say No to Traditional Student Samples*, Journal of Advertising Research, pp. 61-73.
- Kassarjian, H.H. (1977) *Content analysis in consumer research*, Journal of Consumer Research, vol. 4, pp. 8-18.
- Klein, S., Loebbecke, C. (1999) *Signaling and Segmentation on Electronic Markets: Innovative Pricing Strategies for Improved Resource Allocation*, In Proceedings of the 6th Research Symposium on Emerging Electronic Markets, pp. 127—142.

- Kolb, B. (2012) *Marketing Research, Sage Research Methods*, SAGE Publications, Inc. available at <http://srmo.sagepub.com/view/marketing-research/SAGE.xml>
- Krueger, R. A. (2002) *Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews*, available at <http://www.eiu.edu/~ihec/Krueger-FocusGroupInterviews.pdf>
- Lee, Julie Anne, Geoffrey Soutar and Timothy Daly (2007) *Tourist's search for different types of information: A cross-national study*, *Journal of Information Technology and Tourism*, vol. 9 (3/4), pp. 165-176.
- Martin, C.A., Bush, A.J. (2000) *Do Role Models Influence Teenagers' Purchase Intentions And Behavior?*, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, vol. 17, no. 5, pp. 441-453.
- Middleton, V., (1994) *Marketing for travel and tourism*. Butterworth-Heinemann, Second Edition, Oxford.
- Ness, N., Gorton, M., Kuznesof, S. (2002) *The Student Food Shopper*, *British Food Journal*, vol. 104, no. 7, pp. 506-525.
- Pini, B. (2002) *Focus groups, feminist research and farm women: opportunities for empowerment in rural social research*, *Journal of Rural Studies*, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 339-351.
- Poulenez-Donovan, Craig Jesus, Cy Ulberg (1994) *Seeing the Trees and Missing the Forest: Qualitative Versus Quantitative Research Findings in a Model Transportation Demand Management Program Evaluation*, *Transportation Research Record*, no. 1459, pp.1-6.
- Prasarnphanich, P., Gillenson, M. L., (2003) *The Hybrid Clicks and Bricks Business Model*, *Communications of the ACM*, vol. 46, no. 12, pp. 178-185.
- Ritchie, J. Lewis. J. (eds.). (2003) *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*, Sage Publications, London.
- Sheth, J. (1970) *Are There Differences in Dissonance Reduction Behavior Between Students and Housewives?*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 243-245.
- Shukla, P. (2009) *Impact of Contextual Factors, Brand Loyalty and Brand Switching on Purchase Decisions*, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, vol. 26, no. 5, pp. 348–357.
- Stewart, J. (2005) *Travel Agencies Say they are a Better Choice than Internet*, *The Frederick News-Post*, Frederick, available at <http://www.fredericknewspost.com/>

- Taylor, S.A, Hunter, G.L, Melton, H., Goodwin, S.A (2011) *Student Engagement and Marketing Classes*, Journal of Marketing Education, vol. 33, no. 1, p. 73 –92
- Taylor-Powell, E., Renner, M. (2003) *Analyzing Qualitative Data, Program Development and Evaluation*, University of Wisconsin-Extension, Madison, Wisconsin, pp. 1-12
- Turban, E., Lee, J., King, D., Chung, H.M (2000) *Electronic Commerce: A Managerial Perspective*, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey.
- Weber, K.; Roehm, W.S (1999) *Profiling people searching for and purchasing travel products on the World Wide Web*, Journal of Travel Research, vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 291-298.
- Zins, A. H. (2007) *Exploring travel information search behavior beyond common frontiers* - Information Technology & Tourism.
- Richards, Greg, Wilson, Julie *New Horizons in Independent Youth and Student Travel* (2002) Summary Report A Report for the International Student Travel Confederation (ISTC) and the Association of Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS), available at http://www.atlas-euro.org/pages/pdf/FINAL_Industry_Report.pdf
- The power of Youth Travel* The World Youth Student and Educational Travel Confederation (WYSE) Travel Confederation and The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), available at http://dtxtq4w60xqpw.cloudfront.net/sites/all/files/pdf/the_power_of_youth_travel.pdf
- Information and Purchasing Habits of Spanish Travellers* (2009-2010) Phocuswright Report
- <http://www.ifitt.org/>
- <http://www.trrworld.org/>
- <http://www2.unwto.org/>
- <http://www.tnooz.com>
- <http://www.atlas-euro.org>
- <http://www.fredericknewspost.com/>
- <http://www.eiu.edu>