

Study on Leisure Behaviour and its Influencing Factors

Cristina GHERMAN

Babeş – Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, ROMANIA

cristina.gherman@ubbcluj.ro

Abstract: *The social, personal and cultural changes, respectively those regarding demographic structure and reference groups have led to new approaches to the concept of leisure, being no longer defined only from a temporal perspective (as time spent outside the work place and for other activities such as housekeeping or personal hygiene), but also from a psychological point of view (as a mental state), being also associated with the notion of recreation. The analysis of the behavior of individuals in the current conditions of the coronavirus pandemic highlights significant changes in the structure of preferences regarding the modalities and duration of leisure activities. In this context, this paper aims to outline a profile of individuals regarding spending leisure time, as well as the measures required in the recreational and entertainment services industry, in order to adapt the offer to the new individual and collective requirements, the study being based on the results of a qualitative marketing research, as well as on secondary data taken from comparative studies (with the same topic) conducted in several states.*

Keywords: *leisure time, the behavior of individuals, qualitative marketing research*

Introduction

According to studies conducted so far, Romanians prefer to spend their free time navigating on Internet, watching TV shows and listening to music, participating in cultural activities (live theatre performances, film projections, visits to museums and art galleries) and physical indoors (sports played at home or in sports centres/clubs) and outdoors activities, visiting various tourist attractions. In the context of the social distance measures and the restrictions on population mobility, imposed since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, Romanians sought new forms of entertainment within their household, opting especially for spending time watching TV shows/online broadcasts, using social networks and game consoles.

As a result of these significant changes in leisure behavior, the recreation and entertainment services sector registered a decline of 60% in the first nine months of 2020, which will increase in the next six months to 75-80% if the recovery measures are delayed, the most important ones consisting in:

- facilitating the access of the companies to different sources of financing;
- applying a 12-month tax payment plan, but also the exemption from taxation, especially of the companies of hospitality industry;
- easing of population movement restrictions;
- creating and applying new protocols to ensure the protection of the health of travelers.

Taking in consideration the aspects mentioned above, this paper has been structured in three sections. The first section refers to the conceptual approach of leisure. Sections 2 and 3 include the methodological aspects of designing the qualitative marketing research, respectively a synthesis of its results. The main purpose of the research is to highlight the ways in which Romanians spend their free time and their behavioral changes in the current context of the coronavirus pandemic, which have direct implications on the recreation and entertainment services industry and thus generate the need of taking certain measures that could help companies to adapt their activity and implicitly their strategies to the new market conditions.

1. Conceptual Aspects regarding Leisure

Although it seems relatively easy to define free time, this concept has multiple and distinct approaches in the sociological literature, *most definitions in some way referring to the absence of work, and many definitions including some kind of free choice, i.e. activities that individual engages in through their own free will* [1].

Free time is also considered as being *a recreational period of discretionary use for satisfying personal needs and pursues rest, amusement, creative labors or subject development.* [2, 63]

The different definitions of the concept can be grouped into *three categories* [3, 93], according to which free time is:

- *“time-off” after routine workplace and domestic chores, together with other unavoidable obligations such as personal hygiene or commuting, have been completed;*
- *associated with the idea of recreations (activities which recreate through relaxation, and challenge or foster social, cultural, intellectual or creative development); these activities are voluntary, having an element of choice on the part of those who participate and, therefore, represent active use of free-time within an individual’s lifestyle;*
- *perceived as a state of mind – wherein individuals “feel” that they are “at leisure” in any particular set of circumstances.*

While participation in various leisure activities is determined by lifestyle and individual characteristics, *the types of activities and the method and period of participation are affected by numerous factors such as race, social and personal characteristics, age and gender, family and the cultural understanding.* [4, p. 2213-2214]

Most data sets regarding how individuals spend their free time are large and complex enough to generate representative results for the researched population, *but the accuracy of these estimates varies significantly from country to country. Differences in survey features, number of diary days sampled, and categorization of activities used may affect the cross-country comparability of results.* [5]

2. Methodological Considerations Regarding the Marketing Research

Taking in consideration the current economic and social context determined by the coronavirus pandemic, as well as the forecasts regarding the evolution in 2021 of the recreational and entertainment services sector, in September-October 2020, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted among 16 managers. of companies that offer on the Romanian market services designed to meet the leisure needs of the population (tourism, live shows and events, theaters, museums, media entertainment, sports centers/clubs, amusement parks).

The selection of respondents was based on a **questionnaire**, which included a series of questions on both methodological issues (for example, the inclusion in the sample of managers who have not participated in the last six months in studies on topics similar to this research), as well as aspects relevant to the purpose of this study.

The semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted on the basis of an **interview guide**, which consisted of a list of themes and sub-themes formulated in close connection with the research objectives, namely:

- analysis of the leisure behavior of individuals;
- the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the ways of spending free time and implicitly on the consumption of recreation and entertainment services;

The answers obtained were processed through the method of vertical analysis, being evaluated each interview separately, and also through the method of horizontal analysis, thus highlighting the way in which the interviewed managers approached each theme and sub-theme.

3. Summary of Research Results

The analysis of the results obtained highlighted the following aspects relevant to the two objectives of the research mentioned above:

The leisure behavior of individuals

According to the interviewed managers, Romanians generally prefer to spend their free time outside the home, actively and not passively. On a typical working day, more than half of Romanians spend at most 1-2 hours for recreation and entertainment activities, generally watching TV shows and navigating on the Internet. On days off, 4 out of 10 Romanians spend 8-10 hours outside the home, getting involved in activities such as:

- outdoor walks (in parks, gardens etc.);
- hiking outside the place of residence;
- practicing outdoor sports;
- visiting relatives, friends etc.;
- participation at shows /concerts.

Among the main factors that influence the way Romanians spend their free time, the managers indicated:

- *the profession*, the number of hours spent at work, but also the income obtained having a special impact on the duration and type of recreation and entertainment activities for which they opt;
- *the educational level* and *the social status*, these determining both the typology and the way of participating in the recreational activities; thus, people with higher education generally opt for cultural activities (participation at theatre performances, at concerts/shows, art exhibitions etc.) and educational activities (further studies in certain domains, participation in training courses etc.);
- *the age*, which also determines the forms of leisure; for example, young people want a balance between work and leisure time, allocating free time for hobbies, meetings with friends and co-workers, navigating on the Internet and using various social networks, and participating at concerts/shows;
- *the gender*, there being significant differences in the way men and women spend their free time; thus, men preferring the activities carried out inside the house, and women spending their free time outside it;
- *the environment of residence*, in the urban environment being able to carry out multiple recreation and entertainment activities, unlike the rural environment where there is a small number of possibilities for spending free time.

In addition to the factors listed above, the following ones may also be mentioned:

- *the marital status*; the studies conducted so far highlight the fact that married people and those who have children no longer spend time playing a sport and they significantly reduce their time spent traveling outside their country of residence;
- *the reference groups*, the most important being the family; more than half of Romanians prefer to spend their free time with their families and visiting their relatives, especially at the end of the week.

Evaluating the monthly budget allocated to leisure activities, it was found that two thirds of Romanians spend at most 125 euros for these activities, while 1 of 10 Romanians spend more than 250 euros.

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the ways of spending free time and implicitly on the consumption of recreation and entertainment services

In the context of the measures taken since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, the basic needs of individuals have become a priority. Thus, according to the interviewed managers, personal health has become the main priority, this being followed by the health of family and friends, respectively by food and medical safety (access to medicines, medical services). Due to restrictions on population mobility,

but also on social distancing measures imposed by the authorities, the level of participation of individuals in recreational and entertainment activities has been significantly reduced, this aspect being highlighted by a study conducted in April 2020 by Accenture, a multinational company which provide professional technology, business and management consulting services – figure no. 1.

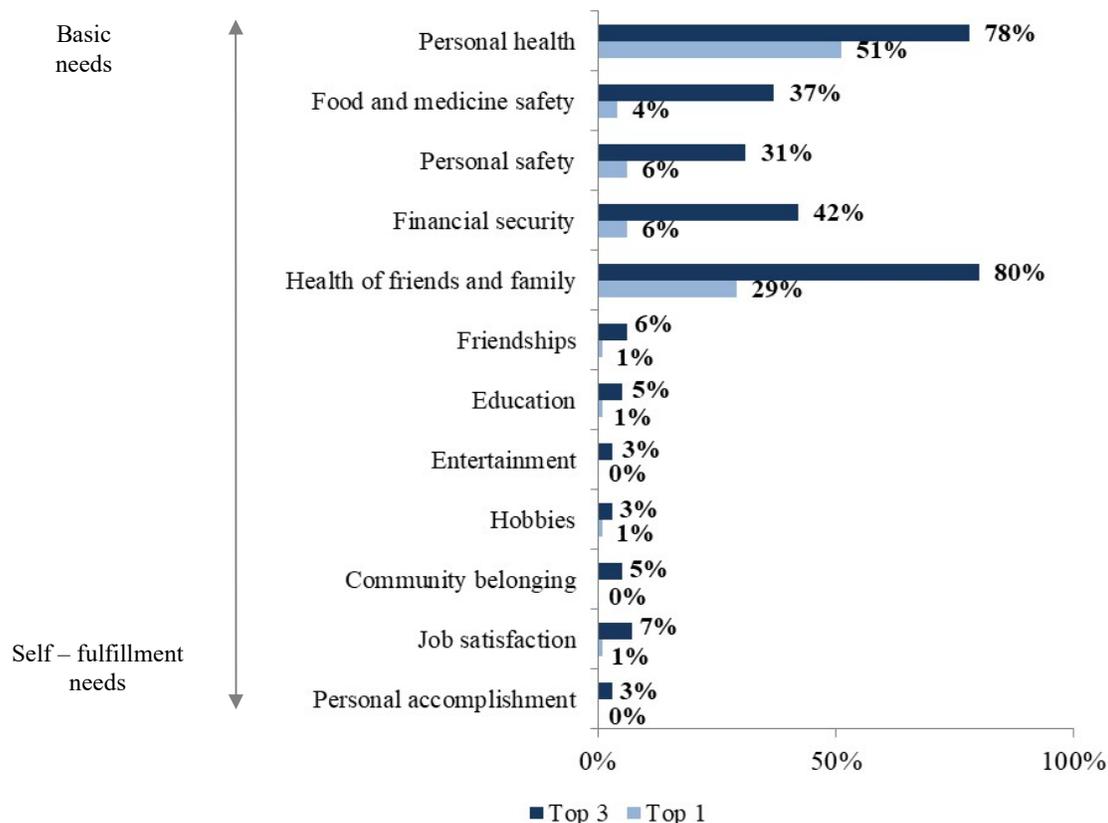


Figure no. 1. Prioritization of needs in the context of coronavirus pandemic [6]

Regarding the leisure activities in the context of current restrictions, according to the results of researches conducted by the interviewed managers among their clients, it was found that Romanians prefer to watch TV shows/online broadcasts on non-working days, to navigate on the Internet using in particular the social networks and to use electronic devices (computer, tablet, telephone) to download and watch movies, to listen to music etc. The use of game consoles is another way in which Romanians spend their free time. On the last places in the hierarchy of preferences are sports activities, various hobbies and volunteering (table no. 1).

Table no. 1. The hierarchy of Romanians' preferences regarding spending their free time on days off, in the current context of the coronavirus pandemic

| No. crt. | Leisure activities |
|----------|---|
| 1. | Watching TV shows/online broadcasts |
| 2. | Internet browsing |
| 3. | Predominant use of social networks |
| 4. | Using computers, tablets, phones (for games, movies etc.) |
| 5. | Using game consoles |
| 6. | Listening to music |
| 7. | Outdoor walks (in parks, gardens etc.) |
| 8. | Passive rest (sleep) |
| 9. | Participation at barbeque & grill events |
| 10. | Visiting friends, neighbors etc. |
| 11. | Religious activities |
| 12. | Reading by pleasure |

| No. crt. | Leisure activities |
|----------|---|
| 13. | Hiking outside the place of residence |
| 14. | Education (university studies etc.) |
| 15. | Professional development (participation at training and further training courses) |
| 16. | Participating at certain events such as weddings, baptisms etc. |
| 17. | Practicing indoor sports |
| 18. | Practicing outdoor sports |
| 19. | Riding the bike |
| 20. | Hobbies (tailoring, drawing, making handmade objects etc.) |
| 21. | Volunteering |

Another aspect highlighted by the managers interviewed was the fact that currently Romanians give more importance to spending their free time with family, respectively they are more involved in the life of the community they belong to. Thus, according to the results of the studies conducted by the managers, as well as by their collaborators, 7 out of 10 Romanians prefer to participate in recreation and entertainment activities with their family. At the same time, the number of those who became members of online support groups created both before and after the onset of the coronavirus pandemic increased significantly (figure no. 2).

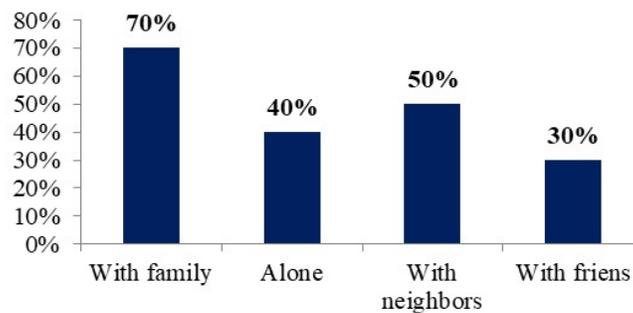


Figure no. 2. Who do Romanians spend their free time with nowadays? (In the context of the coronavirus pandemic)

When asked about the satisfaction level of Romanians regarding their available free time, the managers indicated (based on the results of their marketing researches) a low level in the case of a working day, respectively a high level in the situation of a non-working day (figure no. 3).

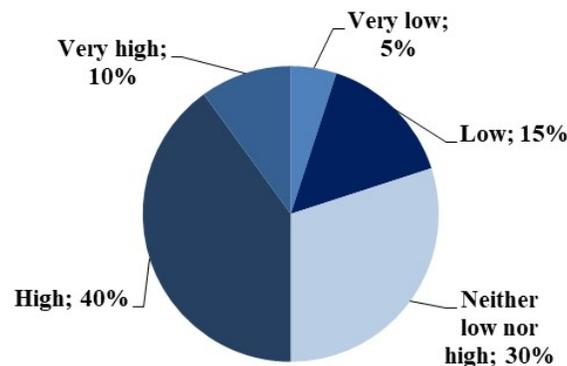


Figure no. 3. The satisfaction level of Romanians regarding their free time in a non-working day (in the context of the coronavirus pandemic)

It is also important mentioning the special impact that the development of technology has on the ways of spending free time, registering a significant increase in the number of users of social networks,

video-audio communication platforms and various entertainment applications, but also in the duration of Internet browsing for activities other than those carried out at work.

Conclusions

Compared to the period before the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, there is a significant change in the hierarchy of the main activities carried out in the free time, Romanians opting for passive activities, to the detriment of those that need their active involvement (playing a sport, walking, hiking, participating at various events etc.). In addition to the restrictions on population mobility and the social distance measures, a key factor that has contributed to changing the way of spending the free time is the technology. Thus, it generated the increase of:

- the duration of online conversations, regardless of the application or social network used;
- the number of those who use (on the phone or tablet) entertainment applications;
- the time spent using online games;
- the number and duration of connections on video-audio communication platforms (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, Google Classroom etc.).

Considering the changes in the way the Romanians spend their free time, the interviewed managers highlighted the need to take measures to ensure the continuity of their activity. In this regard, they mentioned two main objectives, namely: the customer loyalty, being needed to create personalized service packages, and expanding their business in the online environment to attract and retain new customers, this approach being possible by adapting the offer to the new requirements, opting for:

- online ordering system (restaurants, pubs etc.);
- using social networks, depending on the target consumer segments;
- live broadcasts of sports events, of certain shows and concerts, respectively of art exhibitions, book launches etc.;
- developing their own applications through which customers can benefit from the services offered (for example, the development of physical fitness apps by the sports centers/clubs etc.);
- the optimization of customer relations services (online and by phone).

Although it has certain limitations, such as the low number of interviews and the impossibility of extrapolating the results obtained, this qualitative marketing research has generated important information on the profile of Romanians regarding the way in which they spend their free time and the changes in their behavior in the current context of the coronavirus pandemic, this data could be used in designing future research.

References

- [1] Fredriksson Ingela, (2016), *Leisure-time youth-center as health-promotion settings*, Publisher: Orebro University, p. 21
- [2] Rodríguez Suárez & Agulló Tomás, (1999) in Gajewska Paulina & Piskrzynska Katarzyna, (2017), *Leisure time management*, Forum Scientiae Oeconomia, volume 5 (2017), no. 1, pp. 57-69, available at: <https://wsb.edu.pl/container/Wydawnictwo/Forum%20vol%205%20no%201/5.pdf> [accessed 10 November 2020]
- [3] Venkatesh Umashankar, (2006), *Leisure – Meaning and Impact on Leisure Travel Behavior*, Journal of Services Research, volume 6, special issue (July, 2006), pp. 87-108, available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1615363 [accessed 12 November 2020]
- [4] Eratay Emine & Aydoğan Yasemin, (2015), *Study of the Relationship between Leisure Time Activities and Assertiveness Levels of Students of Abant İzzet Baysal University*, Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 191 (2015), pp. 2213 – 2218, available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042815027925> [accessed 12 November 2020]
- [5] OECD, (2009), *Special focus: Measuring Leisure in OECD countries*, Society at a glance 2009: OECD social indicators, p. 44, available at: <https://www.oecd.org/berlin/42675407.pdf> [accessed 14 November 2020]
- [6] Accenture, (2020), *How COVID-19 will permanently change consumer behavior*, April 2020, p. 12, available at: https://www.accenture.com/_acnmedia/PDF-123/Accenture-COVID19-Pulse-Survey-Research-PoV.pdf [accessed 4 November 2020]