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PhD DISSERTATION

Tourist Offer Adjustment to Stereotypical Behaviour of Foreign Customers

ABSTRACT

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INTRODUCTION

To travel is to discover that everyone is wrong about other countries.

Aldous Huxley

Whithin the last years, one could notice a strongly manifest wish among tourists to experiment new things during their stay, from exotic foods to spending their time in novel ways, by visiting tourist sights as different as possible.

The chosen title for this paper, *Tourist Offer Adjustment to Stereotypical Behaviour of Foreign Customers*, reflects best what one wants to study by means of this PhD research, that is a meeting of interculturality and tourism. This represents a topic of actuality, the number of research studies undertaken regarding this subject being quite scarce and mainly limited to the analysis of consumers' behaviour in general. At the same time, very few papers tackle tourists' behaviour from a stereotypical point of view, fact that represents a strong point for this research.

The motivation of this research resides in the passion for travelling, tourism, the interaction with people of other cultures, but also in the wish to continue the tourist studies undertaken during the undergraduate and master years.

The research utility is represented by the contribution that this paper can have to the literature field, tackling seldom studied aspects (such as the example of the limited studies on the touristic stereotypes). At the same time, this research may be taken as a landmark by the touristic firms which could attract more types of clients by creating and promoting touristic offers adapted to the customers' specific needs.

The main issue of this research consists in the fact that the foreign tourists who choose Bucovina as touristic destination are presented with an undifferentiated touristic offer, not customized according to their stereotypical behaviour.

The purpose of this research is to find features by means of which the touristic offer in Bucovina may be customized according to the foreign tourists' stereotypical behaviour, after identifying the tourists' profile (their nationality and their subprofiles generated by the following variables: age, sex, level of education, family status, annual income).

The overall aim of the research focuses on identifying the profile of the foreign tourists who choose Bucovina as touristic destination.

The specific aims refer to:

A₁: studying the field literature regarding the chosen research topic;

A₂: identifying the type of tourism practiced by the foreign tourists who come to Bucovina;

A₃: establishing the feed-back given by the foreign tourists after their stay in Bucovina, regarding the image they have formed consequently to this visit;

A₄: identifying the satisfaction level of the foreign tourists who have visited Bucovina by means of their perception regarding: local hospitality, information received during the stay, events taking place in Bucovina, souvenirs purchasing, diversity of touristic sights, natural scenery, landscape, diversity of lodging and food-serving structures, local gastronomy;

A₅: identifying the image the foreign tourists have formed after their visit to Bucovina by means of their perception regarding the: different environment and culture, natural attractions, cultural events, communication with the inhabitants/employees from the varied touristic housing structures, as well as the intention of revisiting this destination;

A₆: identifying the profile of the foreign tourists who choose Bucovina as touristic destination in relation to their behavioural stereotype.

The fundamental hypothesis of this research study refers to the fact that there is a relation between the behavioural stereotype and the cultural origin of the foreign tourists on one hand, and the need of customizing the touristic offer in Bucovina according to these very behaviours, on the other.

The five *research hypotheses* proposed for this research study are the following:

H₁: There is a direct connection between the foreign tourists' nationality and their level of satisfaction regarding the tourist offer in Bucovina.

H₂: There is a direct connection between the tourists' nationality and the image of Bucovina as tourist destination.

H₃: There is a direct connection between the tourists' nationality and the way the travelling trip to Bucovina is organised.

H₄: There is a direct connection between the impression the tourists have on a touristic destination and its recommendation within their circle of friends/acquaintances.

H₅: There is a direct connection between the touristic offer in Bucovina and the foreign tourists' intention to return to this area.

Regarding the *research methodology*, the complexity of the chosen topic determined the use of *triangulation*, through performing a qualitative research (where the foreign tourists' opinions concerning their stay in Bucovina were analyzed by means of certain sites of touristic interest), as well as a quantitative one (using the survey as a research method and the questionnaire as a research instrument).

For the qualitative research there were analyzed the views of 202 foreign tourists who had visited Bucovina. The respective views have been synthesized according to nationality and introduced into MaxQDA, a program designed for analyzing qualitative data. After processing and encoding the data according to certain specific attributes (accommodation, food and drink, visited touristic landmarks, traditions and customs etc.), pieces of information have been synthesized regarding each nationality separately. Thus, we have highlighted the existence of several tourists' stereotypes according to nationality.

For the quantitative research we have used the survey method, based on questionnaires as instrument. We have created a questionnaire with specific items referring to Bucovina as touristic destination, and we have launched it online as well as on the field.

The respective questionnaire has been translated into English, French, Italian, Spanish and German, because the result of the qualitative research was that most of the foreign tourists who visit Bucovina spoke these languages.

The questionnaire was launched online by means of the facilities provided by Google Forms. On-site, the questionnaire was applied to the foreign tourists who visited the Voroneț Monastery and the surroundings of the Voroneț village.

PHD DISSERTATION STRUCTURE

The present paper comprises two parts: one for theoretical research in the concerned field and one for the practical research we have conducted.

The first Part of this paper, entitled “**The Knowledge Stage within the Research Focus Area**”, comprises four theoretical chapters conceived in close connection with the information highlighted by the practical research.

Thus, **Chapter I – “Tourism: Offer and Forms”** presents aspects concerning the touristic offer (notion, components, characteristics) and gives details about the main forms of tourism (cultural, urban, rural, agrotourism, gastronomic and oenological, ancestral, sports tourism, “black” tourism).

Chapter II, entitled “**The Touristic Destination: Image and Brand**” highlights elements related both to the image of a touristic destination (conceptual delimitations, components, importance), and to a tourist destination brand as an extremely important factor contributing to the tourists’ choice of a certain place/area/country for holiday spending.

Chapter III, entitled “**Tourism Consumers Partitioning and Tourist Behaviour**” tackles the main tourist classifying criteria. Within the same chapter we have also analysed the tourism consumers’ behaviour, underlining the factors that contribute to the making of decisions in tourism and the factors influencing tourists’ behaviour (personal, social, situational/conjectural). At the same time, we have also considered useful to approach the new tendencies that are now manifesting among tourists, involuntarily influencing their behaviour.

Chapter IV, entitled “**Culture and Stereotype. Conceptual Approach**” focuses on culture (as a differentiating factor of tourists) and on stereotype (tackling this notion from a cultural and touristic point of view and analyzing the implications it may have within the intercultural communication). The stereotypical factors have also been analyzed in tourism, being extremely important for understanding tourists’ behaviour.

The second Part of the present paper is dedicated to the applied research performed on the Bucovina touristic destination. The complexity of the study and the topicality of the subject approached determined us to use the triangulation to conduct the research, as it has been previously described:

- Within a first stage (**qualitative research**) there have been analyzed the opinions of 202 foreign tourists who had visited Bucovina, the respective views being found on certain tourism sites (www.tripadvisor.com and www.rolandia.eu);

- In the second stage (**quantitative research**) we have realized a questionnaire-based survey; the questionnaire has been translated into English, French, Spanish, Italian and German and it was applied both online and on-site, directly in Bucovina. The entire sample for this stage was composed of 316 foreign tourists.

The **results** obtained after the conducted research showed the fact that each tourist nationality manifests in a certain way, having distinctive travelling habits. The performed analyses underline the fact that we can find a stereotypical behaviour for each nationality considered.

In conclusion, the travelling agencies promoting Bucovina as touristic destination must design touristic offers as diversified as possible, that would comprise not only the touristic sights this area is already famous for (the painted churches), but also other sights of touristic interest or activities that may arouse foreign tourists’ interest.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research on Bucovina as Touristic Destination

The purpose of the qualitative research lies in identifying the main elements that characterize the tourism practiced by the foreign tourists from different countries (accommodation, food and beverage, natural setting/landscapes, the image of Bucovina as a touristic destination, opinions about inhabitants/employees of the reception structures, visited touristic sights, possibilities for relaxation, entertainment and sport, traditions and customs).

Epistemological Option

For this qualitative research we have used a mediated technique for collecting data, using the analysis of foreign tourists' opinions after visiting Bucovina, expressed on certain touristic sites. The instrument used for the mediated data collecting is the registration table.

Sampling and Collection of Data

The sampling type chosen is the rational one, since the selection criteria of the observed units have been deliberately set, the respective sample being built on several characteristic elements important for this study. We have analyzed a representative sample of **202 opinions** from foreign tourists who visited Bucovina. Thus, we have created a data base in which we included the foreign tourists' opinions regarding the touristic destination Bucovina that were presented on the sites www.tripadvisor.com and www.rolandia.eu.

The time span for which we have considered the foreign tourists' opinions ranges between **2010-2015**.

According to the studies conducted by Stephenkova and Morrison (2006), adapted to the proposed research topic, in order to obtain pertinent information one must study the opinions of **at least five tourists pertaining to the same nationality**.

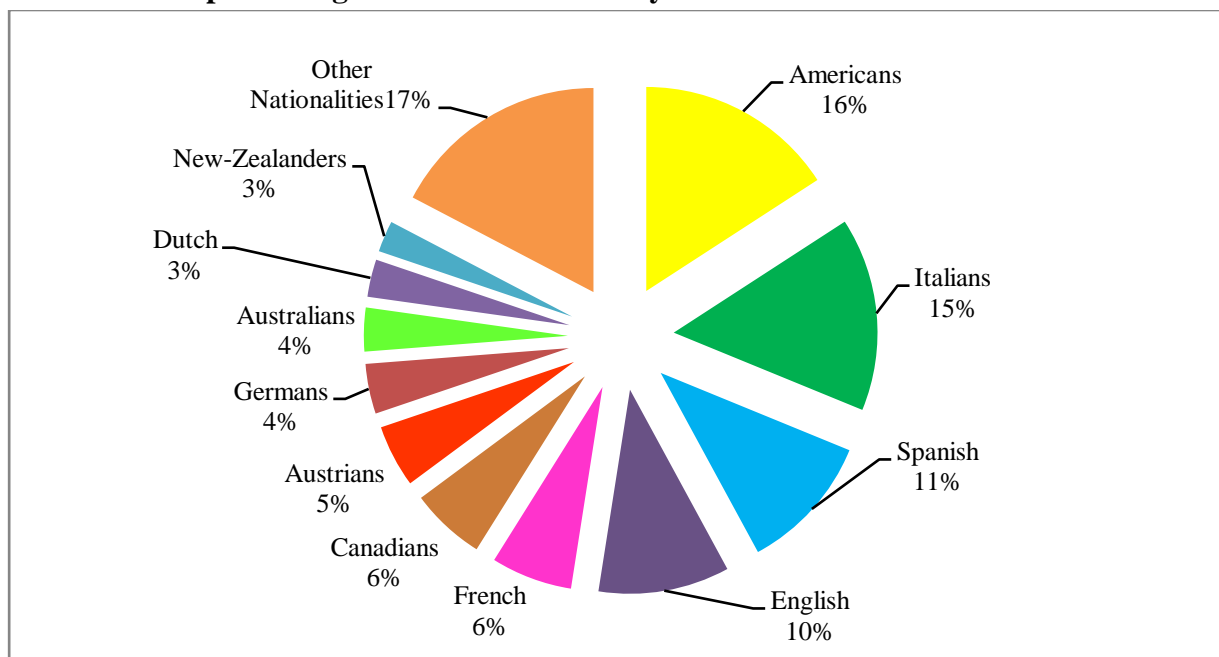


Figure no. 1 - Foreign tourists distribution according to nationalities

Data Processing and Analysis

Following the data collecting and synthesizing stage, we get to the stage where the foreign tourists' views on Bucovina as tourist destination are processed and analyzed. Since it is about nominal data, we shall use a program destined to the qualitative analysis of data. After the testing of several programs we chose the **MaxQDA (qualitative data analysis)**, version 11.

After this stage we performed the “**data encoding**” - or what is known as “Code System” - in the MaxQDA program. This operation is the assignment of codes for different key-words considered in this research, as it can be seen in the image below.

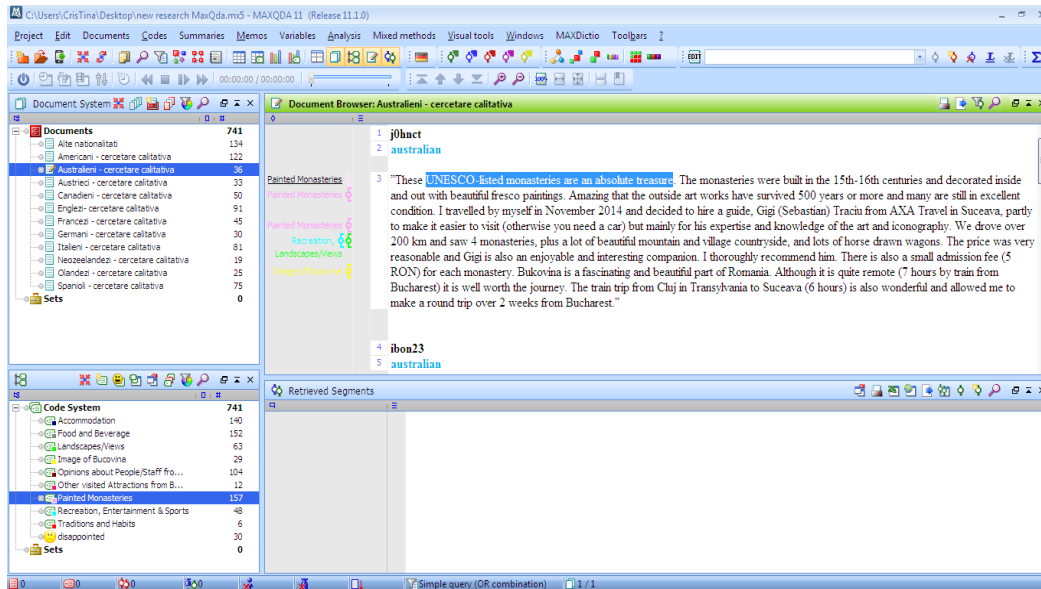


Figure no. 2 – Encoding example for the category “Bisericile Pictate/Painted Monasteries”

After studying the 202 reviews we found that most tourists referred to specific items when they expressed their opinion regarding the stay in Bucovina. These elements were transformed into codes, after the complete analysis of the reviews resulting a total of 10 codes. We have also found that tourists often express dissatisfaction regarding various problems encountered during their stay in Bucovina and thus we have considered useful to create an “icon” specific to the **feeling of disappointment, dissatisfaction** (“☹️”).

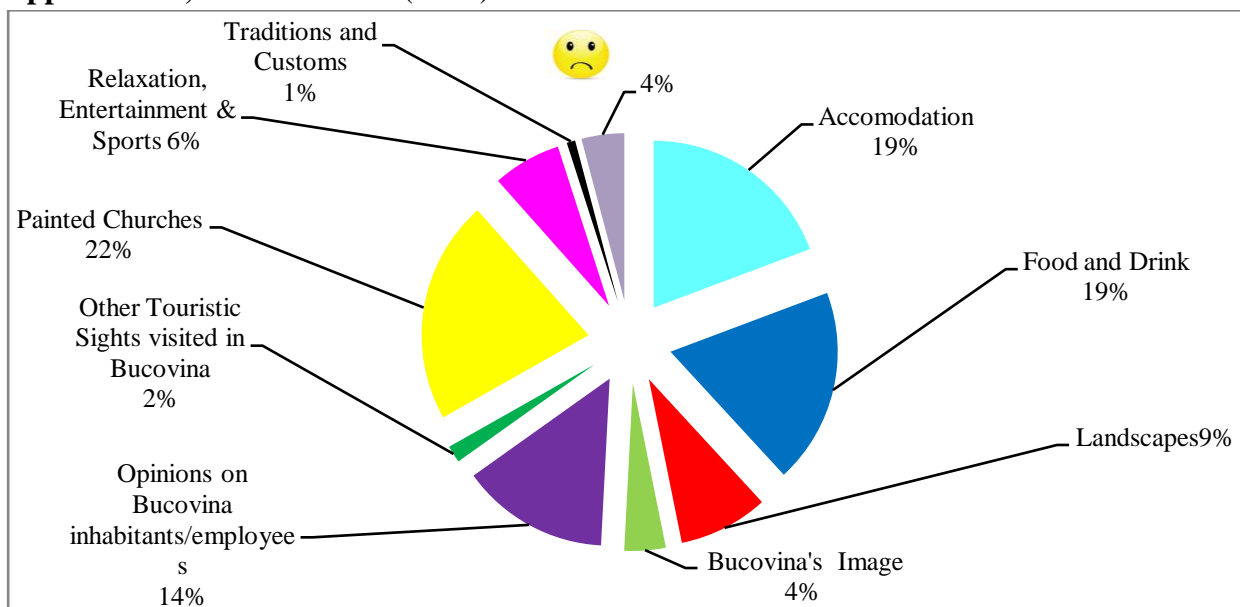


Figure no. 3 – Encoding system used to analyze foreign tourists' opinions by means of MaxQDA program

For each tourist nationality we can also realize a “**portrait**”. Each code having been allotted a distinct color, the “portrait” of each nationality reveals, on a color-basis, to which code the tourists attribute more attention.

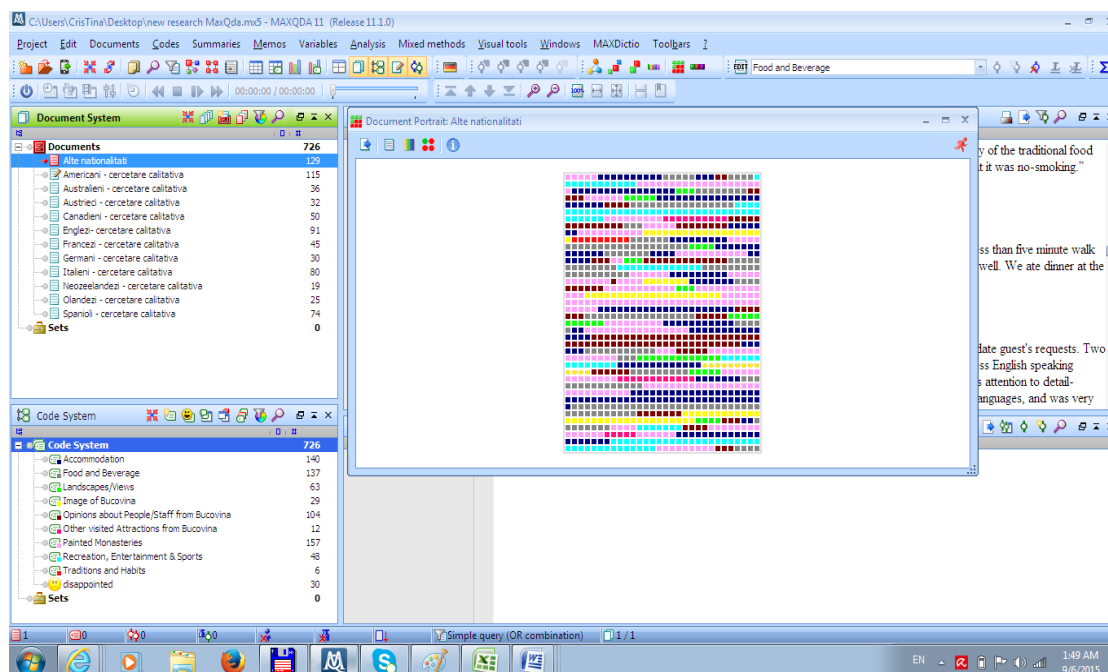


Figure no. 4 – „Portrait” example of the document for the “other nationalities” section

Thus, we observe specific elements of each separate nationality, fact that makes us consider the existence of stereotypes.

Quantitative Research on Bucovina as a Touristic Destination

To acquire a wider coverage area, we have decided to deepen the qualitative research through a quantitative one that would be a lot more complex this time, and with the purpose of identifying the profile of the foreign tourists who visit Bucovina. At the same time, we would also like to underline the main elements that characterize the tourism practiced by foreign tourists.

Epistemological Option

The research method used for the quantitative research is the **survey**. As instrument of research we have used the **questionnaire**. The qualitative research we have conducted has revealed the fact that most of the foreign tourists who have visited Bucovina are speakers of the following languages: English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. Consequently, the questionnaire designed was translated into these very languages.

Sampling and Collection of Data

The sampling is simple and random as far as both types of research are concerned (online and on-site), being chosen for analysis foreign tourists who have visited Bucovina. The data collection technique employed is a direct one, using the questionnaire as instrument of research. The respective questionnaire was applied to a number of **316 foreign tourists** who had visited Bucovina.

First, we have decided the **launching** of the questionnaire **online** in six languages (Romanian, English, French, Italian, Spanish and German).

The time range for which there have been considered the answers of the online questionnaire is 15-25 August 2015.

Figure no. 5 – English online questionnaire

Between 20-25 august 2015 we applied the questionnaires to the foreign tourists visiting the Voroneț Monastery or the surroundings of the Voroneț village.

Data Processing and Analysis

The data collection stage comes up with the following results:

- 110 answers resulting from the **online** questionnaires;
- 206 answers resulting from the **on-site** questionnaires.

As a result of synthesizing the obtained data following the quantitative research, we have elaborated the chart below, presenting the ranking of the first 13 countries after the foreign tourists number.

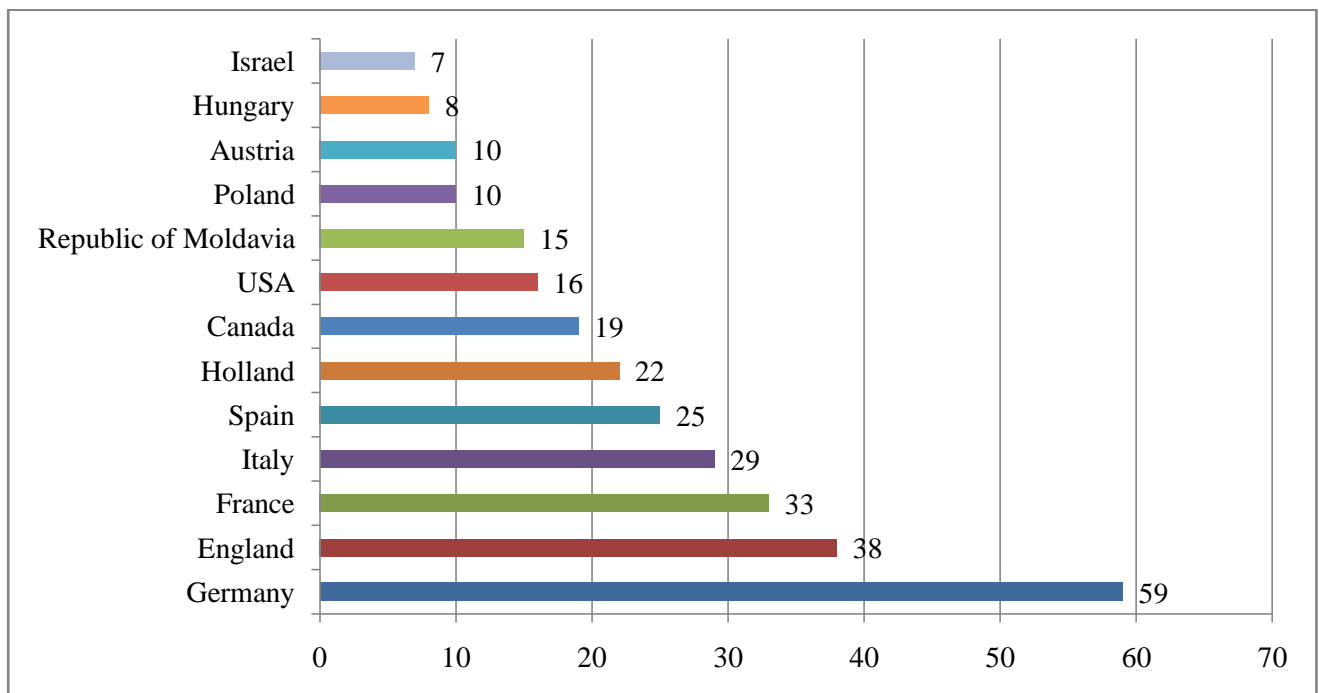







Figure no. 6 – Ranking of the first 13 countries after foreign tourists number

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES TESTING

To synthesize the results obtained following the testing of the five research hypotheses, we have drawn the table below:

Table no. 1 – Results obtained after the research hypotheses testing

Hypothesis	Test/ procedure	Acceptance /rejection
H₁ : There is a direct connection between <i>tourists' nationality</i> and <i>their level of satisfaction regarding the touristic offer in Bucovina</i> .	Chi-square test	
H₂ : There is a direct connection between <i>foreign tourists' nationality</i> and <i>Bucovina's image as a touristic destination</i> .	Chi-square test	
H₃ : There is a direct connection between <i>tourists' nationality</i> and <i>the way of organizing the trip to Bucovina</i> .	Chi-square test	
H₄ : There is a direct connection between the impression tourists have on the <i>image of a touristic destination</i> and the <i>latter's recommendation</i> within the circle of friends/acquaintances.	Chi-square test	
H₅ : There is a direct connection between <i>the touristic offer in Bucovina</i> and <i>the foreign tourists' intention of returning</i> to this area.	Pearson's Correlation Coefficient	

The conducted research demonstrated the following aspects that have never been studied before in relation to Bucovina as a touristic destination:

- There is a direct connection between foreign tourists' nationality and their level of satisfaction regarding the touristic offer in Bucovina, in general;
- There is a direct correlation between the foreign tourists' nationality and the way of organizing the trip to Bucovina;
- There is a direct connection between the impression foreign tourists have on the image of Bucovina as a touristic destination and the its recommendation within the circle of friends/acquaintances.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF ACTION

We consider that a further qualitative research on a larger sample (1000 tourists) would help us draw a clearer profile of the foreign tourists and discover more information regarding their touristic consumer behaviour.

A second direction of action would be to conduct this research by means of another research method, namely the interview. This method has the advantage of a personal interaction with the tourist, revealing the exact particularities he/she is most interested in during the stay in Bucovina.

Another direction of action refers to expanding the field research, taking into consideration all the touristic landmarks of the analyzed area.

A future research might analyze comparatively the profile of the foreign tourists who visited Bucovina and the profile of those who decided to go to another place in Romania, following to compare the obtained data for the two areas for each separate nationality.

CONCLUSIONS AND PERSONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Tourists' behaviour is influenced by the culture they belong to. People of different cultures have different cultural values, distinct rules of social behaviour that influence their life and work style, the way they spend their leisure time, as well as their behaviour and consumer patterns.

Following the qualitative research we can underline the **existence of several stereotypes for each separate nationality**, these being valid for the analyzed tourists sample:

- **Americans** focus on the painted churches of Bucovina.
- **Australians** are interested in the quality of accommodation, the interaction with the inhabitants/employees of the reception structures, and in the painted churches.
- **Austrians** focus on food dishes, lodging, and the painted churches as touristic landmarks.
- **Canadians** focus on elements related to food dishes and the image of Bucovina.
- **The English** are interested in accommodation, food dishes and the painted churches and tend to express their dissatisfaction regarding the problems that happen to come up during their stay in Bucovina.
- **The French** are not pretentious but they care very much about one's keeping one's word.
- **Germans** focus on the freshness of the food dishes but also on the way they can communicate with the inhabitants of the area; they don't focus on luxury, but on quality, cleanness and diversity.
- **Italians** focus on the food dishes and traditional beverages of the area, but also on visiting the painted churches.
- **New Zealanders** manifest a special interest in the culinary dishes and beverages, visiting the painted churches and the way they can communicate with the inhabitants/employees of the reception structures, whom they sometimes consider ignorants.
- **The Dutch** manifest a special interest in the traditional food dishes and beverages of Bucovina, but also in the way they are treated by the employees of the reception structures.
- **The Spanish** show interest in the traditional food dishes and beverages of Bucovina. They are pretentious and tend to express their discontent clearly and directly.
- For **other nationalities** the painted churches represent the main point of interest when travelling to Bucovina and the focus is on the wide range of possibilities for leisure and fun.

For the **quantitative research** we have used the **survey** as a research method and the **questionnaire** as research instrument. This time the sampling is random and simple for both of the research types chosen (online and on-site), being analyzed the tourists who have visited Bucovina.

After conducting the quantitative research we may formulate the following **conclusions regarding the foreign tourists profile**:

- The German tourists top the ranking of this research
- Regarding the gender of the foreign tourists from the analyzed sample, there are 179 females and 137 males.
- The majority of the foreign tourists (23.1%) pertaining to the analyzed sample, fall in the age group between 51-60 years old.
- Most of the individuals visiting Bucovina have a degree in higher education (225 people);
- Most of the individuals visiting Bucovina are married, with children (218 people).
- Most of the foreign tourists are employed (199 of 316 people).
- In terms of foreign tourists' income, 173 people monthly incomes over 1500 €;

- The most important element contributing to the touristic destination promotion is the opinion given by the friends /acquaintances who have already been to Bucovina (141 people).
- The means of transportation mainly used by the foreign tourists is the aeroplane (preferred by 148 of 316 people).
- Most of the foreign tourists turn to travel agencies for organizing the trip to Bucovina (186 people of 316 tourists).
- The purpose of the trip for the majority of the tourists from the analyzed sample is to visit the painted monasteries (127 tourists).
- Most of the foreign tourists prefer to make this trip accompanied by their life partner (140 of 316 people).
- Being a destination popular for its special natural setting, the tourists have particularly turned to rural lodging, choosing rural touristic pensions (131 tourists) and for agropensions (64 tourists).
- The painted churches reflect best the image of this touristic destination following the trip to Bucovina (174 tourists).
- The great majority of foreign tourists visiting Bucovina have preferred to spend their stay in Gura Humorului (181 people).
- The majority of foreign tourists spend in Bucovina between 2 and 3 days (137 people).
- At the same time, 96.5% of the tourists are at their first visit to Bucovina.
- The special natural setting is one of the main reasons the tourists have chosen Bucovina as a touristic destination.

Bucovina's strong points regarding the foreign tourists' level of satisfaction in relation to the elements of the **touristic offer** of the area are the following:

- the natural setting; local hospitality; diversified accommodation structures;
- the possibility to make trips to various touristic sights;
- local gastronomy.

For the foreign tourists, the **touristic image of Bucovina** is mainly represented by the churches and monasteries of the area. Synthetically, **the connection between the touristic offer and the behavioural stereotype of the foreign tourists** is represented in the following figure:

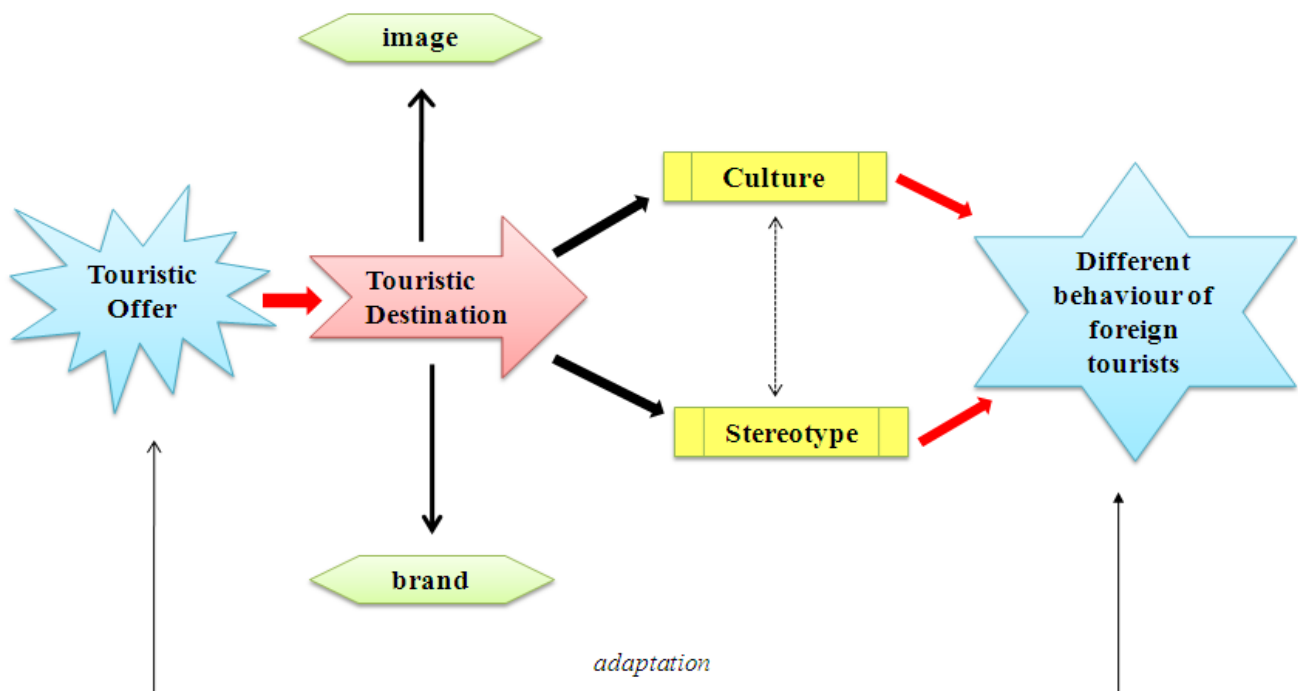


Figure no. 7 – Relation between touristic offer and behavioural stereotype of foreign tourists

Therefore, the firms that create touristic offers for the foreign tourists must take into account the particularities of each nationality, in order to present their clients with individualized services, based on the tourists' preferences or interests regarding a certain destination.

In conclusion, we may practically speak about a **customization of the touristic services** offered to foreign tourists who visit Bucovina according to their nationality profile and the stereotypical behaviour they manifest during the stay.

Personal Contributions

The present paper represents a sustained effort over the three years of doctoral studies, following the advice of the scientific coordinator, as well as that of the guidance commission.

The chosen theme is topical, the studies conducted so far having not tackled in a direct manner the tourists' behavior in terms of stereotypes.

Regarding the qualitative research, we used the **MaxQDA** program since there were no tourism studies or researches focusing on this program, nor any that would analyze the opinions of foreign tourists who had visited Bucovina.

We have also made "**portraits**" of every tourists' nationality taken into consideration in the analyzed sample, by interpreting them according to the dominant colors.

We generated **reports for each nationality of foreign tourists**, according to the coding made directly on their views.

On the other hand, in the quantitative research there was designed a questionnaire that was applied both **online** and **on-site**. The questionnaire was translated into English, French, Italian, Spanish, German.

Therefore, a strong point of the conducted research refers to the **qualitative and quantitative approaches of the chosen topic**, since within the tourism field this procedure has only rarely been met by now, the great majority of the previous studies focusing on just one of the two methods

Another novelty of this paper is represented by the fact that so far there has been no study on the touristic destination Bucovina to focus on **shaping the profile of foreign tourists** visiting this area and on the **discovery of a stereotypical behavior** among every separate nationality.

The present paper demonstrates by means of applied research the fact that there are behavioural stereotypes manifesting in relation to the nationality of the foreign tourists who visit Bucovina, a topic that has not been tackled before.