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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN THE PANDEMIC AND POST-PANDEMIC PERIOD REGARDING ONLINE SHOPPING FOR FASHION

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Abstract: This scientific article underlines some conclusions that have been taken after a marketing research, based on a questionnaire, collected in two stages, the first one in 2021 and the second one in 2022. The objective of the research has been to underline the potential changes that might appear during the post-pandemic period, in comparison to the pandemic one, with respect to the fashion consumers' behavior in the online environment.

Keywords: consumers' s behavior, fashion, online shopping, SPSS, pandemic/post-pandemic period

1 INTRODUCTION

"Online shopping is a form of electronic commerce which allows consumers to directly buy goods or services from a seller over the Internet using a web browser or a mobile app" [Online shopping]. In 2021, online shopping worldwide has had sales of 4.938 trillion dollars, in comparison to 1.336 in 2014, and it is estimated to reach 7.391 trillion dollars by 2025 [Chevalier, S., 2022].

Within a comparative research that has been accomplished in Romania in April 2020, respectively April 2021, during the Covid-a9 pandemic period, a research that has taken into account 5500 consumers, it has been noticed that the Romanian people have changed their way to buy clothing products [Paleologu, 2021].

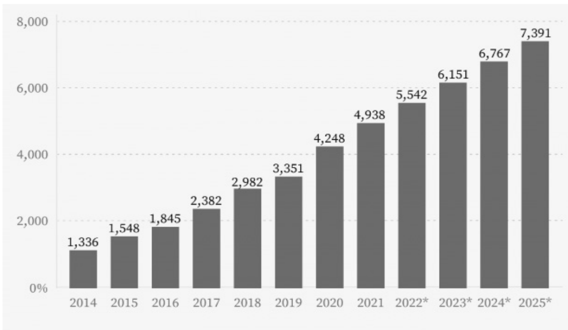

Figure.1. Online sales (billion $)

It can be noticed that 39% of the respondents have bought more clothes during the pandemics then they did before, and that online shopping determines you to buy more (30%).

A percentage of 44% of the consumers who bought less one year before had done this because they do not have any place to wear the clothing products and 40% of them have fewer available financial resources.

This article aims to present some of the conclusions that have been taken after a marketing research, based on a questionnaire, collected in two stages, the first one in 2021 and the second one in 2022. The objective of the research has been to underline the potential changes that might appear during the post-pandemic period, in comparison to the pandemic one, with respect to the fashion consumers' behavior in the online environment.

2 THE OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

As a result of this comparative research, some conclusions can be drawn with respect to the way the Romanian consumers of fashion choose their products, how easily do they use the available sites as well as their behavior, especially online, during the pandemics, as well as during after the pandemic period.

The general frame of the research is the acquisition of fashion products in online and the behavior of the Romanian consumers, thus studying if it is proper to reorient the business towards online selling, due to the growing digitalization post COVID-19.

3 METHODOLOGY

The research is based on a sample, the working instrument being the questionnaire, elaborated on Google Forms. The research is a cross-sectional study, transverse stud)

The questionnaire has been applied exclusively online through Google Forms and it has sampling limits, the number of respondents being low – 62, a disproportionate number of female respondents compared to male, respondents mainly from the age range 16-30, the research being relevant only at the level of the investigated sample. Thus, the results cannot be extrapolated to the general population.

The sample included people from 16 years old up to 60 years old, mainly between the ages of 16 to 25 (54 respondents between 16-25 years old, 3 between 26-30 years old, 1 between 31-35 years old, 2 between 36-40 years old and 1 for 41-50, respectively 51-60 years old.

There are also 45 females and 17 males.

The 2022 sample includes 67 respondents, out of which there are mainly consumers with ages between 16 and 25 years old.

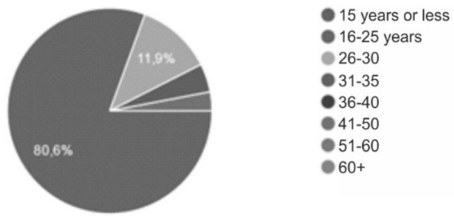

Figure 2. Distribution according to age

There are also 45 female respondents and 22 male ones.

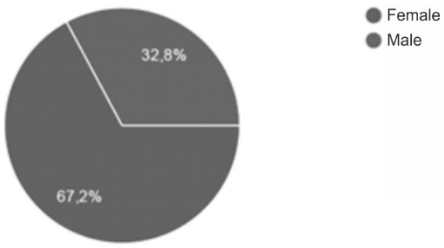

Figure 3. Distribution according to gender

The questionnaire includes 24 questions, out of which 20 items are closed, 3 items are opened and 1 has a hierarchical scale. The questions have all been elaborated based on the proposed purpose and objectives. The one that has been used in 2022 has only one item that has been added, with a hierarchical scale ("How much did the COVID-19 pandemic affected you?". The questionnaire is based on the principle of funnel, from general to specific questions. It has been pretested on 8 respondents, thus trying to improve its quality. The data has been collected between March the 30th, 2021 and April the 24th for the pandemic period, and May the 30th, 2022 until June the 26th, 2022 for the post-pandemic period.

The instruments that have been used for data analyses are "IBM Statistical Product and Service Solutions" (SPSS) and „Google Forms". The following analyses have been accomplished: frequency, histogram, descriptive, frequency to multiple answers, correlations, cote standard Z, t-test. In order for SPSS to be able to interpret the results, the data has been codified.

4 RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

There are presented as follows some of the results that have been obtained by comparing the two sets of data, using frequencies. Due to the fact that 7 variables have been noticed to be statistically different, the accent is focused on them. For the analyses of the variable q3marca_preferata_medium_high, there have been defined set variables for multiple answers (q3_multiple_2021 and q3_multiple_2022) and Table1 shows that in 2021, 61.5% of the respondents have chosen a brand within the average to high price range, while in 2022, there were 73.3% (Table 2).

Table 1. Frequency of multiple variable q3 in 2021

$q3_multiple_2021 Frequencies

		Responses	
		N	Percent
$q3_multiple_2021[a]	q3marca_preferata_vlow_low	15	28.8%
	q3marca_preferata_medium_high	32	61.5%
	q3marca_preferata_veryhigh	5	9.6%
Total		52	100.0%

Table 2. Frequency of multiple variable q3 in 2022

$q3_multiple_2022 Frequencies

		Responses	
		N	Percent
$q3_multiple_2022[a]	q3marca_preferata_vlow_low	12	20.0%
	q3marca_preferata_medium_high	44	73.3%
	q3marca_preferata_veryhigh	4	6.7%
Total		60	100.0%

For the variable q14zile_asteptare_transport_gratuit, it can be noticed that the 2022 respondents are not willing to wait for transportation more than they did in 2021, if the delivery is free of charge, just 37.3% wanting to wait for more than 4 days, in comparison to 54.4% in 2021.

Table 3. Frequency of variable q14 in 2022

q14zile_asteptare_transport_gratuit

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	< 2 zile	3	4.5	4.5	4.5
	2-3 zile	19	28.4	28.4	32.8
	3-4 zile	20	29.9	29.9	62.7
	4-5 zile	11	16.4	16.4	79.1
	5-7 zile	5	7.5	7.5	86.6
	Maxim 10 zile	9	13.4	13.4	100.0
	Total	67	100.0	100.0	

When analyzing the variable q17usurinta_achizitionare_vestimentie_online it can be concluded that during the post pandemic period, a higher number of respondents believe that they have a difficult experience (16.5%) in comparison to the pandemic period (6.2%) when buying online a clothing product.

Table 4. Frequency of variable q17 in 2022

q17usurinta_achizitionare_vestimentie_online

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	acord total	14	20.9	20.9	20.9
	acord	25	37.3	37.3	58.2
	nici acord, nici dezacord	17	25.4	25.4	83.6
	dezacord	6	9.0	9.0	92.5
	dezacord total	5	7.5	7.5	100.0
	Total	67	100.0	100.0	

For the analyses of variable q18_1temeri_cumparare_online_calitate (q18_1Fears_shopping_online_quality), there have been elaborated set variables for multiple answers (q18_multiple_2021 and q18_multiple_2022) and Table 5 shows that in 2021 12.3% of the respondents state that they fear quality of the products when shopping online, while in 2022 the percentage has been 29.2% (Table 6) .

Table 5. Frequency of multiple variable q18 in 2021

$q18_multiple_2021 Frequencies

		Responses N	Responses Percent	Percent of Cases
$q18_multiple_2021[a]	q18_0temeri_cumparare_online_aspect	7	10.6%	12.3%
	q18_1temeri_cumparare_online_calitate	7	10.6%	12.3%
	q18_3temeri_cumparare_online_marime	52	78.8%	91.2%
Total		66	100.0%	115.8%

Table 6. Frequency of multiple variable q18 in 2022

$q18_multiple_2022 Frequencies

		Responses N	Responses Percent	Percent of Cases
$q18_multiple_2022[a]	q18_0temeri_cumparare_online_aspect	10	11.6%	15.4%
	q18_1temeri_cumparare_online_calitate	19	22.1%	29.2%
	q18_3temeri_cumparare_online_marime	57	66.3%	87.7%
Total		86	100.0%	132.3%

When studying the variable q19achizitionare_online_producatori_straini (q19buying_online_foreign_producers) it can be noticed that the preferences of the respondents towards buying from foreign producers has decreased from 72.1% in 2021 to 31.8% in 2022.

Table 7. Frequency of variable q19 in 2022

q19achizitionare_online_producatori_straini

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	acord total	8	11.9	11.9	11.9
	acord	20	29.9	29.9	41.8
	nici acord, nici dezacord	24	35.8	35.8	77.6
	dezacord	8	11.9	11.9	89.6
	dezacord total	7	10.4	10.4	100.0
	Total	67	100.0	100.0	

For the variable 20achizitionare_online_producatori_romani (20buying_online_Romanian _producers), the preferences of the investigated consumers towards buying products from Romanian producers has decrease from 34.5% in 2021 to 7.5% in 2022.

Table 8. Frequency of variable q20 in 2022

q20achizitionare_online_producatori_romani

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	acord total	3	4.5	4.5	4.5
	acord	2	3.0	3.0	7.5
	nici acord, nici dezacord	34	50.7	50.7	58.2
	dezacord	21	31.3	31.3	89.6
	dezacord total	7	10.4	10.4	100.0
	Total	67	100.0	100.0	

The following two figures presents the incomes of the sample, being higher in the post pandemic research that the incomes of the pandemic sample.

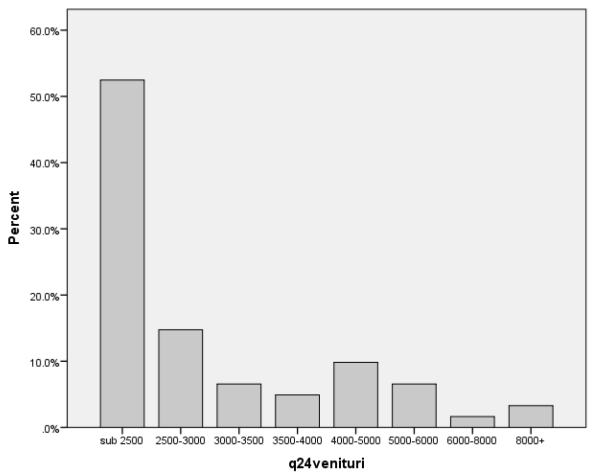

Figure 4. The incomes of the sample in 2022

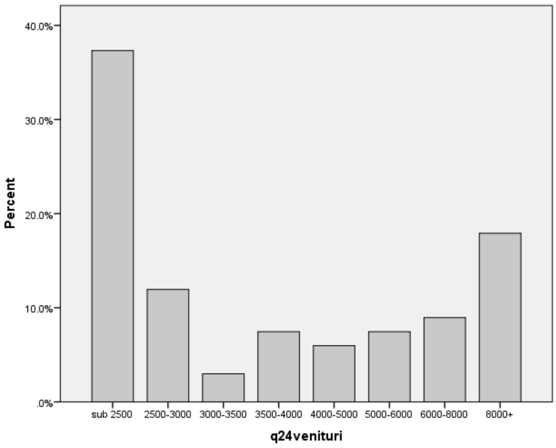

Figure 5. The incomes of the sample in 2021

Within the 2022 sample there are new correlations with respect to the motivation for buying, gender, expenses, preferred colors, or the impact of the pandemics. The following table presents a medium towards weak correlation, positive, between the gender of the respondents and the main reason for buying clothes (expanding the wardrobe). Women buy clothes in order to expand their wardrobe.

Table 9. Correlation between the respondents who prefer to buy clothes to expand their wardrobe and their gender

Correlations

		q1_3motive_cumparare_haine_imbogatire_garderoba	q22sex
q1_3motive_cumparare_haine_imbogatire_garderoba	Pearson Correlation	1	.315**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.009
	N	67	67
q22sex	Pearson Correlation	.315**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	
	N	67	67

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

The next table underlines an inverse average correlation between the monthly expenses on clothes and the main reason for buying them (to replace the used clothes). The respondents choose to buy clothes in order to replace the used ones spend less on clothing products per month.

Table 10. Correlation between the respondents who prefer to buy clothes to replace the used ones and the monthly expenses on clothing

Correlations

		q1_4motive_cumparare_haine__inlocuire_uzate	q10cheltuieli_luna_imbracaminte
q1_4motive_cumparare_haine__inlocuire_uzate	Pearson Correlation	1	-.400**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	67	67
q10cheltuieli_luna_imbracaminte	Pearson Correlation	-.400**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	67	67

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

5 CONCLUSIONS

The present research is relevant only with respect to the investigated sample, thus the results cannot be extrapolated to the general population, mainly since only 40%of respondents have repeated within the two questionnaires.

Some of the future directions for research could be the elimination of as many limitations as possible, such as a small sample, the disproportionality of the sample, accessibility, more varied age categories within the sample, more distribution channels for the questionnaire, the inclusion of some control questions and so on, in order to be able to extrapolate the results to the general population.

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