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ONLINE REPUTATION OF TRAVEL AGENCIES: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON THE CZECH MARKET*

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Received 18 July 2024; accepted 10 November 2024; published 30 December 2024.

Abstract. The article aims to analyse the online reputation of six selected travel agencies in the Czech Republic and identify the crucial factors behind the commonly held opinions. The chosen agencies include Blue Style, Fischer, Exim Tours, Čedok, České kormidlo and Alexandria, using descriptive analysis, content analysis and analysis of variance. The reviews cover websites like Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz, RecenzieCestovnie.sk and Google reviews from 2019 through 2023, revealing dramatic changes in opinions in the event of Blue Style, Fischer, Čedok, České kormidlo and Alexandria through the monitored period. Our results are much appreciated by agency owners, offering a deep insight into customer requirements varying in time. The critical factors behind the reputation involve the services offered, transport, quality of couriers, customer service and staff, and vary in significance throughout the agencies. The analysis of variance unveiled differences in the average rating in various periods, i.e. before, during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. Exim Tours was the only exception, indicating a stable average rating. The study is limited by a potential bias in the customer reviews, possibly written by the employees or owners of the agencies. Our outcomes may contribute to strategic planning service improvement, deepening the understanding of the intrinsic factors affecting customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Keywords: tourism; online reputation; reviews; travel agencies; key factors

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Konečný, M., Kutová, K., Dušek, R., Chamrada, D. 2024. Online reputation of travel agencies: an empirical study on the Czech market. *Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Issues*, 12(2), 275-294. <http://doi.org/10.9770/r5543285992>

JEL Classifications: M14, M21, M31

1. Introduction

Consumer behaviour in travel agencies is subject to many factors, including evident and hidden biases relating to consumer ethnocentrism. Strong ethnocentrism may discourage customers from purchasing products from abroad (Kim & Hyun, 2024). COVID-19 pandemic and global armed conflicts dramatically altered consumer behaviour in tourism, emphasising safety, emotions, hospitality and the quality of services (Krupenna & Kokhan, 2022; Pollák et al., 2022; Markovič et al., 2022; Straková, Talíř & Váchal, 2022; Vochozka,

* This article is one of the partial outputs of the currently solved research project IVSUPS2305. This research was funded by the Institute of Technology and Business in České Budějovice, grant number IVSUPS2305

Neuschlová & Janíková, 2023; Vochozka, Novotná & Borovková, 2022; Bartoš, Vochozka & Šanderová, 2022; Pollák et al., 2021; Straková et al., 2021; Vochozka et al., 2021; Vochozka et al., 2020). The research on tourists' preferences in the market of travel agencies indicates that previous travel habits, a need for rest and a desire for unforgettable experiences are powerful stimuli (Gavurova et al. 2020). Good post-purchase communication, prompt responses and pleasing websites are imperative for enticing and keeping customers (Mazurek-Kusiak, 2022; Gavurova et al. 2021). Vacationers plan their holiday according to demographic and social variables, including age, marital status and financial circumstances in online and offline purchases (Dudek, Jaremen & Michalska-Dudek, 2023). Travel agencies should understand these determinants to keep customers satisfied and loyal. Our thesis analyses the online reputation of six selected travel agencies in the Czech Republic, including Blue Style, Fischer, Exim Tours, Čedok, České kormidlo and Alexandria. The study explores changes in their rating, expressed by the number of stars on multiple websites, while identifying the determining factors and unveiling whether the rating was subject to change through the periods. We formulated three research questions: What are the key factors behind the customers' preferences of individual travel agencies? Did customers change their opinion between January 2019 and December 2023? Is the average rating of the travel agencies variable before, during and after the Covid-19 pandemic?

2. Theoretical background

Travel agencies employ many marketing strategies to attract customers, promoting a positive image via consumer sentiment analyses (Isya', Suratno & Azzam, 2023; Dorčák, Markovič & Pollák, 2017). They also encourage word-of-mouth marketing when consumers discuss their products and services in daily dialogues (Roberts-Lombard & Steyn, 2022; Ivaniova et al., 2021), and use social networking sites to communicate and interact with customers (da Silva et al., 2021; Dorčák, Štrach & Pollák, 2015). Tourism relies heavily on marketing to promote services, raise customer awareness and offer generous discounts to win their loyalty (Ganatra et al., 2021; Gavurova et al., 2023). The strategies involve complete product packages, competitive prices, special offers and efficient usage of social media platforms in the local language to address a vast audience (Isya', Suratno & Azzam, 2023). The agencies run promotional campaigns on social networking sites and cooperate with influencers. They also engage in traditional marketing ventures, including radio advertisements and billboards, to gain exposure and entice customers (da Silva et al., 2021). The effective combination of these strategies may attract and poach customers from competitive markets. Positive reviews are vital to business success, influencing consumers' decisions (Kamble et al., 2020; Skare et al., 2023). Online reviews of travel agencies provide a clear picture of hotels, encouraging or disheartening readers based on the comments' volume, value and quality (Kamble et al., 2020). A sentiment analysis like DC-CBLA helps gather valuable information from reviews on travelling and better understand consumer emotions to improve services (Li et al., 2023). The effective management and interpretation of online comments are imperative to entice customers, acquire an unrivalled reputation and corner the market (Straková & Kostiuk, 2023; Ruschak et al., 2023). Anindita et al. (2023) argue that negative reviews may reveal grey areas that need improvement, including poor management, faulty refund systems and other errors. These findings help travel agencies improve their services and win customer loyalty. Li et al. (2023) suggest that sentiment analysis is essential for understanding consumer emotions. According to Rezvani & Rojas (2022), reacting to reviews also plays an important role in online reputation. Responding to the comments improves your customer rating. Hamdan et al. (2022) identified factors like the platform features and personal motivation contributing to the status. The active reactions to customer feedback and solving their problems may earn a good reputation, win customer loyalty, and give a competitive advantage. Travel agencies use many tools for receiving and analysing the feedback, including online surveys, social media like Twitter and advanced technologies like artificial intelligence and machine learning (Vasquez et al., 2023; Efthymiou & Orphanidou, 2022; Fardeen et al., 2023; Ramnarayan et al., 2022). Travel agencies may also employ sentiment analysis, assess consumer mindset, detect grey areas and tailor the services to customer needs (Fardeen et al., 2023). The tools for receiving feedback involve Net Promoter Score (NPS) and Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI), measuring customer loyalty and satisfaction, giving Mriya Resort & SPA as an example (Gurov, 2022). This complex approach allows travel agencies to promptly deal with problems and improve customer services, leading to intense customer loyalty and satisfaction. Travel agencies employ many methods for receiving customer feedback, including traditional channels like paper and electronic questionnaires, comment cards, oral feedback, suggestion boxes and telephonic surveys and modern platforms like e-mail and physical surveys, travel booking and travel rating

platforms (Efthymiou & Orphanidou, 2022). Some agencies use online travel agencies for data on customer satisfaction ratings via the SERVQUAL questionnaire, sentiment analysis and nonprobability sampling design and analyse them in Microsoft Excel (Vasquez et al., 2023).

On the other hand, airlines use social media like Twitter to assess consumer sentiment, identify grey areas and tailor the services to customer needs, applying sentiment analysis and classification like Support Vector Machine and Naïve Bayes (Fardeen et al., 2023). Agencies in Western Cape province try to establish close relationships with strategic contractors to improve customer satisfaction and stimulate the word-of-mouth environment (Roberts-Lombard & Steyn, 2022). Lastly, online travel agencies acquire their reputation via online services on their websites, mobile applications and social media, cleverly swaying customer booking intentions through many factors, including political instability (Chen, Kamalanon & Janupiboon, 2022).

3. Research objective and methodology

This thesis analyses the online reputation of six selected travel agencies in the Czech Republic, including Blue Style, Fischer, Exim Tours, Čedok, České kormidlo and Alexandria. Our study aims to identify key factors influencing their online reputation using descriptive analysis, content analysis and analysis of variance. The examined reviews involve Czech and foreign customers, gathering data from the following websites: Blue Style, Fischer, Exim Tours and Čedok from Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz and RecenzeCestoviek.sk; for České kormidlo from Mapy.cz and Recenze Cestoviek.sk; and for Alexandria from Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz and Google reviews. We apply content analysis to the first research question concerning critical factors affecting online reputation. The reviews observe the aspects identified as the key determinants for choosing the travel agency. The second question explores and examines the changes in customer opinions from January 2019 through December 2023. The average star rating goes to MS Excel, undergoing the calculation of averages for separate years displayed in a graph for each travel agency. The third research question compares the average rating of the agencies before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, including three separate periods: 2019 (before the pandemic), 2020-2021 (during the pandemic) and 2022-2023 (after the pandemic). MS Excel involves graphs and analysis of variance to assess the statistical significance of the differences between the periods at the level of importance of 5% using the ANOVA function, i.e. MS Excel factor containing an analysis of rating variability over individual periods.

4. Results

4.1. Blue Style Travel Agency

The first part of the thesis involved the content analysis of the Blue Style travel agency, including 224 reviews published from January 2019 through December 2023. As five reviews did not contain a verbal assessment, the total comprised 219 comments from the following sources: 100 reviews from Mapy.cz, 9 from Mahalo.cz and 115 from RecenteCestoviek.sk. Reviewers were the most prolific in June, July, August, September and October, providing eight critical factors: courier, transport, offer, customer service, staff, location, websites and price. The offer was the most discussed aspect, appearing in 73 reviews, followed by a courier (62 comments) and transport (60 comments). Staff appeared in 57, and customer service in 50 reviews. The office location was discussed in three comments, while websites appeared only once. Absolute frequency shifted to a relative frequency, expressed in per cent. The relative frequency of websites and prices was 0.32%, office location 0.98%, staff 18.57%, customer service 16.29%, courier 20.20% and transport 19.54%. The offer was the most frequent determinant, showing 23.78% relative frequency. 224 reviews contained 118 negative ones, indicating 53.88% of the total opinions. People mostly complained about accommodation, which did not match the expectations from the photos or poor service. Other issues concerned couriers' unwillingness to deal with customer complaints or being completely inaccessible. Clients also criticised customer service, namely handling customer complaints and, to a lesser extent, transport. Positive reviews equalled 46.12% of the total analysed opinions.

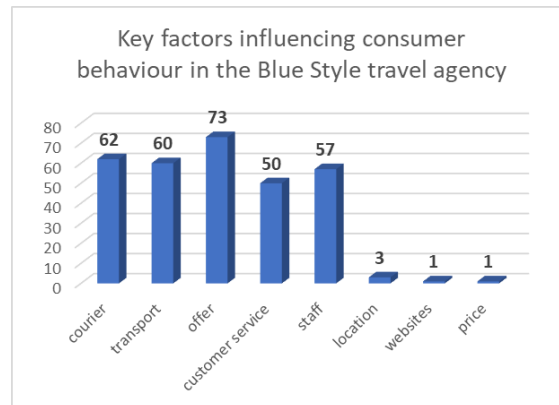


Figure 1. Key factors influencing consumer behaviour in the Blue Style travel agency

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz a RecenzeCestovek.cz.

The second part focuses on evaluating customers of the Blue Style travel agency. The analysis deals with developing the average number of stars from a total of 224 reviews awarded between 2019 and 2023. In 2019, the office received 8 reviews with an average rating of 3.3 stars. 13 reviews were added in 2020 with an average of 2.57 stars. In 2021, the average increased to 3.21 stars from 17 reviews, an increase of 0.64 stars. In 2022, the office received 75 reviews with an average rating of 2.83 stars. 2023 had the most reviews at 111 with an average rating of 2.71 stars. The overall average rating for Blue Style over the entire period under review is shown in red in Figure 2 and is 2.8 stars. This average is based on reviews on the websites Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz and RecenzeCestovek.cz for the years 2019 to 2023.

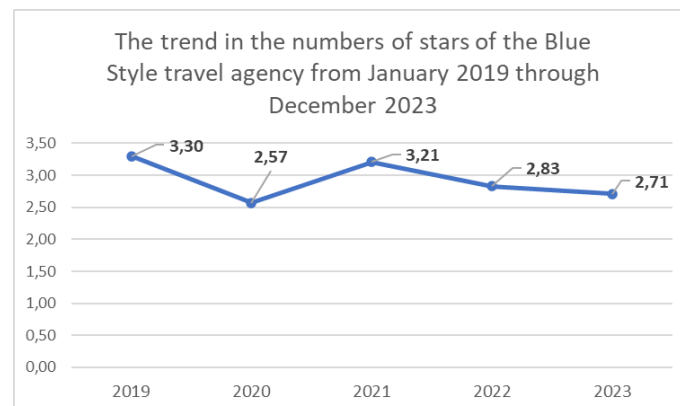


Figure 2. The trend in the numbers of stars of the Blue Style travel agency from January 2019 through December 2023

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz a RecenzeCestovek.cz.

The next part focuses on the overall average of stars received by the Blue Style travel agency in three different periods: before the pandemic (year 2019), during the COVID-19 pandemic (years 2020 and 2021) and now (years 2022 and 2023). 8 reviews were analysed for 2019, 30 reviews for the pandemic period and 186 reviews for the current period from the websites Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz and RecenzeCestovek.cz. As shown in Figure 3, the average rating gradually decreased during these periods. Before the pandemic, Blue Style had an average rating of 3.30 stars. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this average decreased by 0.37 stars to 2.93. Currently, in 2022 and 2023, the average rating has dropped to 2.76 stars, representing a decrease of 0.17 stars compared to the pandemic period.

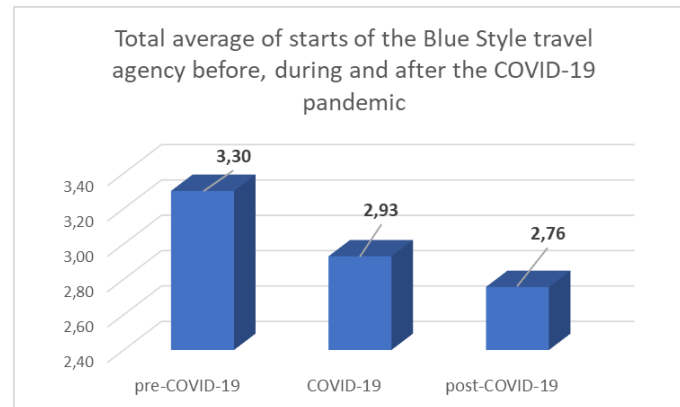


Figure 3. Total average of starts of the Blue Style travel agency before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz a RecenzeCestovek.cz.

In addition to comparing the average rating for individual periods, we conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA) from the reviews in the MS Excel program. The null hypothesis in this analysis states that the mean rating of Blue Style travel agency differs pre-pandemic, during the COVID-19 pandemic, and now. The alternative hypothesis assumes that the average rating does not differ between these periods. As shown in Table 1 below, the P value is 0.610214, corresponding to approximately 61.02%. Compared to the significance level, which is set at 5%, the P value is much higher. The null hypothesis is confirmed, and the average rating differs between periods. We reject the alternative hypothesis.

Table 1. Analysis of variance of the Blue Style travel agency

ANOVA						
Variability source	SS	Difference	MS	F	P value	F crit
Inter-selections	2.86	2	1.429782	0.495052	0.610214	3.03671
All selections	638.28	221	2.888146			
Total	641.14	223				

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz a RecenzeCestovek.cz.

4.2. Fischer Travel Agency

First, we conducted a content analysis of reviews of the Fischer travel agency, analysing 137 reviews published between January 2019 and December 2023, of which 11 did not contain any verbal rating. The resulting analysis focused on 126 customer reviews. Nine reviews were analysed from the Mahalo.sk website, 20 reviews from Mapy.sk and 108 reviews from RecenzeCestovek.sk. Most reviews were added in July, August and September. Based on customer reviews, seven key factors were identified: offer, courier, staff, customer service, transport, price and location. Customers mentioned transportation the most, which was mentioned 35 times, closely followed by courier, which was mentioned 33 times. The supply factor was mentioned 29 times. Other factors mentioned were customer service (17 times), staff (13 times), price (1 time) and location (1 time). These factors are also graphically represented in Figure 4. Conversion to relative frequency shows that transport had the largest share, 27.13%. The courier had a share of 25.58%, offer 22.48%, customer service 13.17%, staff 10.08% and price with location 0.78% each. Of the total of 137 reviews, 78 were negative, which represents 61.90%. Negative reviews often mentioned poor communication with customer service and disrespectful behaviour from couriers. Other problems included unrealistic expectations regarding hotels and, to a lesser extent, transportation. Positive reviews represented 38.10% of the analysed reviews on Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz and RecenzeCestovek.cz.

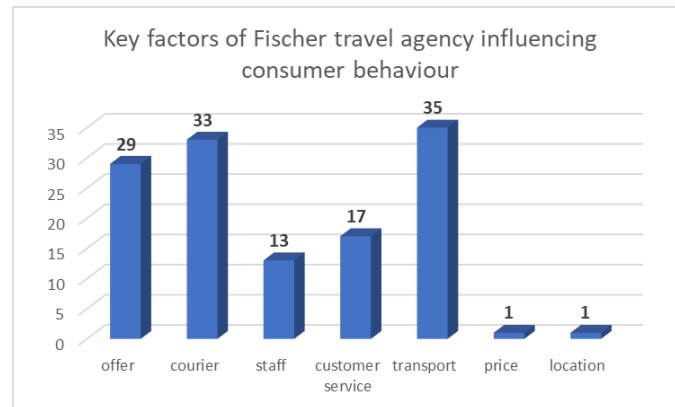


Figure 4. Key factors of Fischer travel agency influencing consumer behaviour

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz a RecenzeCestovek.cz.

The second part focuses on the evaluation of Fischer Travel Agency customers. Here is an analysis of the average number of stars from a total of 137 reviews awarded in the period 2019-2023. In 2019, the office received 23 reviews with an average rating of 2.89 stars. In 2020, six reviews were added, with an average of 1.98 stars. In 2021, the average rating increased to 2.38 stars from 17 reviews. In 2022, the travel agency received 53 reviews with an average rating of 2.10 stars. In 2023, it received 38 reviews with an average of 2.05 stars. Figure 5 shows the overall average rating of the Fischer travel agency, which was 2.25 stars for the entire period on the Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz and RecenzeCestovek.cz websites.

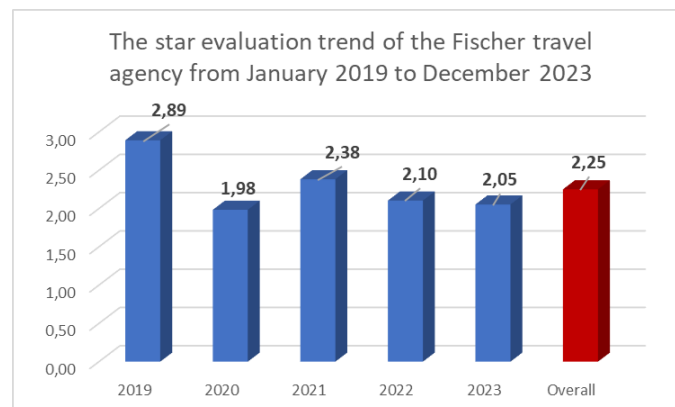


Figure 5. The star evaluation trend of the Fischer travel agency from January 2019 to December 2023

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz a RecenzeCestovek.cz.

The next part focuses on the average rating of the Fischer travel agency in three time periods: before the pandemic (year 2019), during the pandemic (years 2020 and 2021), and now (years 2022 and 2023). Twenty-three reviews were analysed for 2019, another 23 reviews for the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, and 91 reviews for the present from the sites Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz and RecenzeCestovek.cz. As Figure 6 shows, the average rating gradually decreased during these periods. In 2019, the Fischer travel agency had an average rating of 2.89 stars. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the average dropped by 0.61 stars to 2.28. In 2022 and 2023, which is now, the rating has fallen to 2.08 stars, a drop of 0.20 stars compared to the pandemic period.

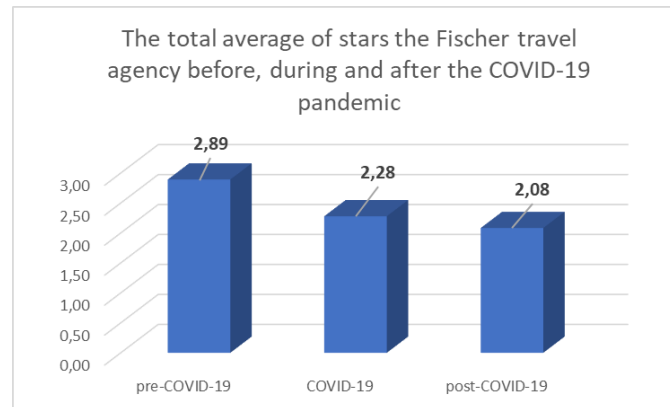


Figure 6. The total average of stars the Fischer travel agency before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz a RecenzeCestovek.cz.

In addition to comparing the overall average for individual periods, an analysis of variance, also known as ANOVA, was performed from the reviews in the MS Excel program. The null hypothesis states that the average rating of the Fischer travel agency differs in the period before the pandemic, during the pandemic and now. An alternative hypothesis states that the average rating of the Fischer Travel Agency does not differ in these periods. Table 2 shows that the P value is 0.0603549, which is approximately 6.04%. Compared to the significance level, which is set at 5%, the P value is higher. The null hypothesis is valid, indicating that the mean rating does differ between the pre-pandemic period, during the pandemic period, and now. The alternative hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Table 2. Analysis of variance of the Fischer travel agency

ANOVA						
Variability source	SS	Difference	MS	F	P value	F crit
Inter-selection	12.03	2	6.016538	2.867165	0.0603549	3.063715
All selections	281.19	134	2.098427			
Total	293.22	136				

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz a RecenzeCestovek.cz.

4.3. EXIM tours Travel Agency

First, we conducted a content analysis of the reviews of the travel agency Exim Tours. The total number of analysed reviews from January 2019 to December 2023 is 132, of which 16 reviews did not contain any verbal evaluation. Therefore, we examined only 116 reviews, including six reviews from Mahalo.cz websites, 49 reviews from Mapy.cz and 77 reviews from RecenzeCestovek.cz. Most reviews were added in August, September and October. The reviews observed five key factors: offer, courier, staff, customer service and transport. Exim Tours customers most often mentioned transportation, showing positive evaluation in 34 cases. Other significant factors were customer service (29 reviews) and courier (25 reviews), as shown in Figure 7. The range of tours to various destinations was appreciated by 24 customers and the quality of the staff by 20 reviews. Absolute frequencies were converted to relative values. The total number of mentions is 132. Transport has the highest representation with 25.76%, supply at 18.18%, personnel at 15.15%, customer service at 21.97% and courier at 18.94%. A total of 89 reviews out of 116 were negative, which is 76.72%. Customers complained the most about customer service, which did not respond to administrations and refund requests. There were also problems with couriers who were not present or had rude communication with customers and with the lengthy and uncomfortable transport. There were a smaller number of complaints about misleading hotel photos. Positive reviews made up 23.28%.

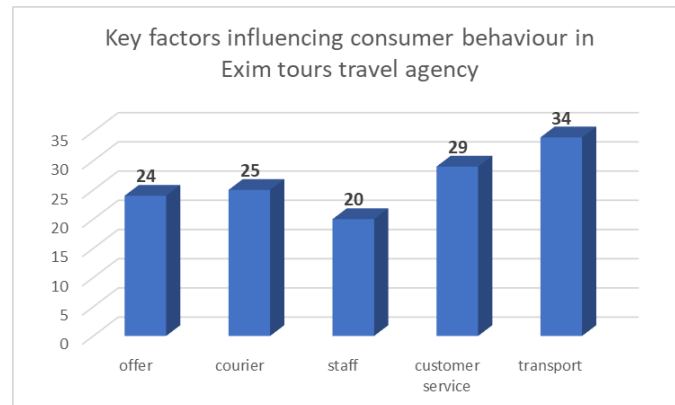


Figure 7. Key factors influencing consumer behaviour in Exim tours travel agency

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz a RecenzeCestovek.cz.

The next part focuses on customer ratings using the number of stars for the Exim Tours travel agency. The development of the average number of stars from the total number of 132 reviews awarded by customers in the years 2019-2023 is investigated. In 2019, the office received 12 reviews with an average rating of 3.90 stars. The following year, Exim Tours received four reviews with an average rating of 1.88 stars. In 2021, the average rating increased by 0.20 stars to 2.08 from 17 reviews. In 2022, the office received 2.32 stars from 62 reviews. In 2023, 37 reviewers gave an average of 2.28 stars. Figure 8 shows in red the overall average rating of the travel agency Exim Tours for 2019-2023, which is 2.41 stars on the websites Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz and RecenzeCestovek.cz.

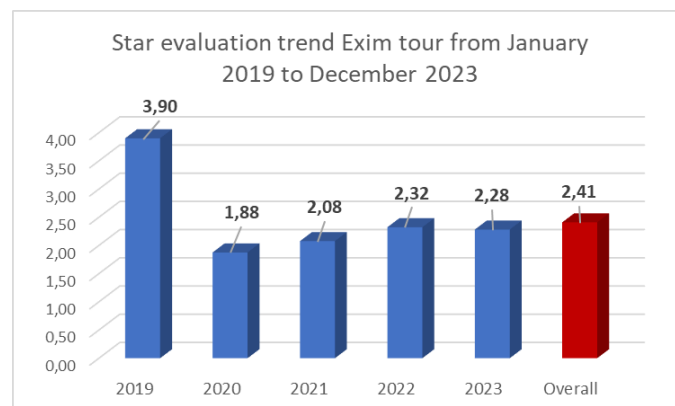


Figure 8. Star evaluation trend Exim tour from January 2019 to December 2023

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz a RecenzeCestovek.cz.

The third part deals with the average star rating of the Exim Tours travel agency in three periods: before the pandemic (year 2019), during the COVID-19 pandemic (years 2020 and 2021) and now (years 2022 and 2023). We analysed 12 reviews from 2019, including twenty-one customer reviews from the COVID-19 period and 99 post-pandemic reviews from Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz and RecenzeCestovek.cz were reviewed. Figure 9 shows that the average rating decreased in individual periods. Before the pandemic, Exim Tours had an average rating of 3.90 stars. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this average dropped by 1.86 stars to a rating of 2.04. In 2022 and 2023, the current period, the average rating rose to 2.31 stars, a slight increase of 0.27 stars from the pandemic period.

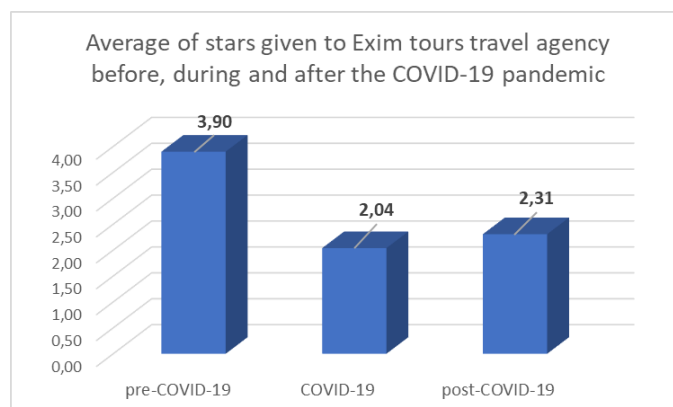


Figure 9. Average of stars given to Exim tours travel agency before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz a RecenzeCestovek.cz.

In addition to the overall average for individual periods, a variance analysis was made from the reviews in the MS Excel program. The null hypothesis states that the average rating of Exim Tours travel agency before, during the COVID-19 pandemic and nowadays is different. The alternative hypothesis assumes that the average rating does not differ in these periods. Table 3 shows the P value, indicating 0.0011144, or approximately 0.11%. Compared to 5% significance level, the P value is significantly lower. The results show that the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is that the average rating of the travel agency before, during, and after the pandemic does not differ.

Table 3. Analysis of variance of the Exim tours travel agency

ANOVA						
Variability source	SS	Difference	MS	F	P value	F crit
Inter-selections	30.59	2	15.29726	7.170731	0.0011144	3.066391
All selections	275.19	129	2.13329			
Total	305.79	131				

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz a RecenzeCestovek.cz.

4.4. Čedok travel agency

In the introductory part, we analysed the reviews of the Čedok travel agency, including 291 from January 2019 to December 2023. Twenty-two reviews did not contain verbal evaluation, subjecting only 269 reviews to a content analysis. We selected 94 reviews from Mapy.cz, seven from Mahalo.cz and 190 reviews were found on RecenzeCestovek.cz. Most online customer reviews appeared in July, August and September. The reviews observed five key factors: offer, courier, staff, transport and customer service. Customers of the Čedok travel agency most often mentioned the courier factor, which occurred 90 times. Other frequent factors included transport (71 times) and staff (60 times). The quality and wide range of tours appeared 49 times, and customer service occurred in 28 reviews, as shown in Figure 10. Factors such as location, price and website were completely absent. Absolute frequencies are converted to relative: courier (30.20%), transport (23.83%), offer (16.44%), staff (20.13%) and customer service (10.08%). Of the total number of 291 reviews, 169 were negative. Customers complained most about hotel accommodation and meals that did not match the photos and services offered, an unwilling or unavailable courier and customer service issues, particularly about claims and refunds for cancelled tours. They also cited problems with transportation. The total number of negative reviews is 169, which is 62.83% of the analysed reviews. The number of positive customer reviews is 37.17%.

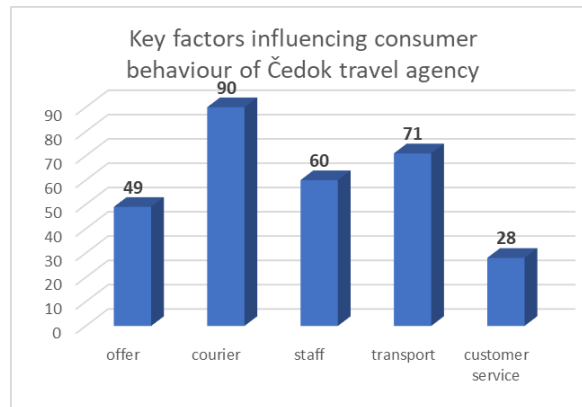


Figure 10. Key factors influencing consumer behaviour of Čedok travel agency

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz a RecenzeCestovek.cz.

The second part focuses on the customer opinions on the Čedok travel agency. Here is an analysis of the evolution of the average number of stars from the total number of 291 reviews given by customers in 2019–2023. In 2019, the travel agency received 25 reviews with an average rating of 2.93 stars. In the following year, 2020, Čedok received 10 reviews with an average rating of 1.77 stars. In 2021, the average rating increased to 2.66 stars from 38 reviews. In 2022, the travel agency received 104 reviews with an average rating of 2.83 stars. In 2023, Čedok received the highest number of reviews, 114, with an average rating of 2.57 stars. Figure 11 shows the overall average rating of the Čedok travel agency over 2019–2023, which is 2.68 stars from the websites Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz and RecenzeCestovek.cz.

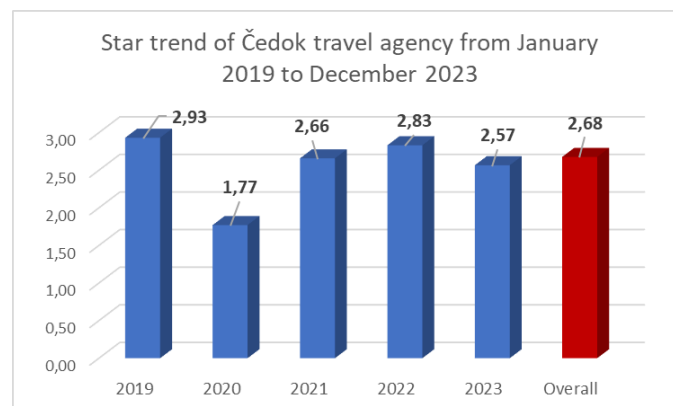


Figure 11. Star trend of Čedok travel agency from January 2019 to December 2023

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz a RecenzeCestovek.cz.

The next part focuses on the overall average of the stars of the Čedok travel agency in three periods: before the pandemic (2019), during COVID-19 (years 2020 and 2021) and now (years 2022 and 2023). We analysed 25 reviews for 2019, 48 for the COVID-19 pandemic, and 218 for the post-pandemic period from Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz and RecenzeCestovek.cz. Figure 12 shows that the average rating decreased in individual periods. In the period before the pandemic, Čedok had an overall average of 2.93 stars. During COVID-19, the average dropped by 0.46 stars to 2.47. In 2022 and 2023, the average rose to 2.69 stars, indicating an increase of 0.22 stars compared to the COVID-19 pandemic.

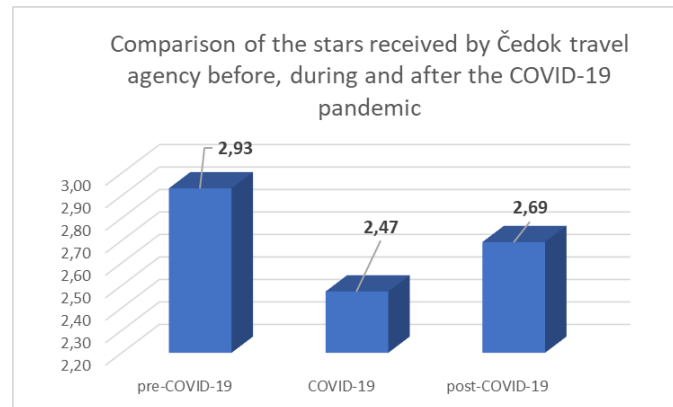


Figure 12. Comparison of the stars received by Čedok travel agency before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz a RecenzeCestovek.cz.

On top of comparing the overall average for individual periods, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the reviews of the Čedok travel agency was performed in the MS Excel program. The null hypothesis claims that the average ratings of Čedok in the period before the pandemic, during COVID-19 and now are different. On the other hand, the alternative hypothesis claims that the average ratings of Čedok in these periods are the same. Table 4 shows the P value of 0.5215341, indicating approximately 52.15%. This P value is significantly higher than the specified 5% significance level, indicating insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. It means that the average ratings of the Čedok travel agency before the pandemic, during COVID-19 and nowadays are similar, denying the alternative hypothesis.

Table 3. Analysis of variance of Čedok travel agency

ANOVA						
Variability source	SS	Difference	MS	F	P value	F crit
Inter-selections	3.68	2	1.839145	0.652454	0.521534	3.027111
All selections	811.82	288	2.818811			
Total	815.50	290				

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz a RecenzeCestovek.cz.

4.5. České kormidlo travel agency

In the first part, a content analysis of the reviews of the travel agency České kormidlo is carried out. The total number of reviewed reviews published from January 2019 to December 2023 is 117. Only 21 reviews did not contain verbal ratings, so 96 customer reviews were subject to content analysis. Ninety-one opinions involved the Mapy.cz website and 26 from the RecenzeCestovek.cz website. Most customer reviews came from June, July, August and September. The reviews reflected six key factors: offer, staff, transport, customer service, courier and price. The most frequently mentioned factor was the offer, mentioned in 38.84% of the reviews. Other factors concerned transportation (26.21%) and courier (23.30%). Negative reviews accounted for 50.55% of all analysed reviews, where customers most often criticised inadequate accommodation, the unavailability of a courier and the organisation of tour guides. On the contrary, positive reviews made up 49.45% of the total reviews.

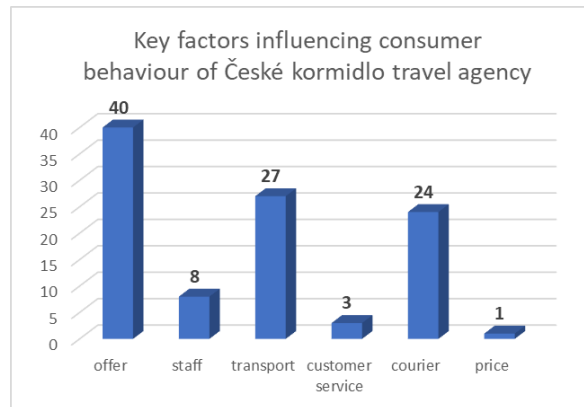


Figure 13. Key factors influencing consumer behaviour of České kormidlo travel agency

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz a RecenzeCestovek.cz.

The second part focuses on the customer evaluation of the České kormidlo travel agency. Here is an analysis of the evolution of the average number of stars from the total number of 117 reviews given by customers for the period 2019-2023. In 2019, ten reviews were added to the office with an average rating of 3.40 stars. A year later, there were six reviews with an average of 2.67 stars. In 2021, the average increased to 4.14 stars with 11 reviews. In 2022, the office received a rating of 2.42 stars out of 37 reviews. The year 2023 saw the highest number of reviews, 53, with an average rating of 3.01 stars. Figure 14 shows the overall average of the Česká kormidlo travel agency, which represented 2.94 stars on the Mapy.cz and RecenzeCestoviek.sk websites for 2019–2023.

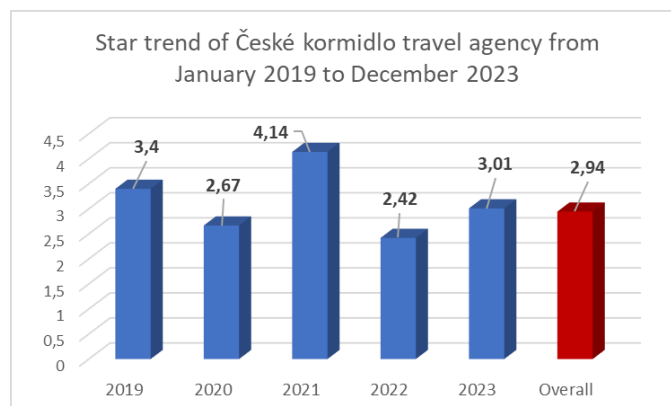


Figure 14. Star trend of České kormidlo travel agency from January 2019 to December 2023

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz a RecenzeCestovek.cz.

The last part analyses the overall average rating of the České kormidlo travel agency in three time periods: before the pandemic (year 2019), during the COVID-19 pandemic (years 2020 and 2021) and now (years 2022 and 2023). Ten reviews were considered from 2019, 17 reviews from the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, and currently 90 reviews from the websites Mapy.cz and Mahalo.cz. Figure 15 shows that the average rating decreased in individual periods. In the period before the COVID-19 pandemic, the overall average rating of the travel agency České kormidlo reached 3.40 stars. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this average increased by 0.22 stars to 3.62. In 2022 and 2023, the average rating dropped to 2.77 stars, a decrease of 0.85 stars from the COVID-19 pandemic period.

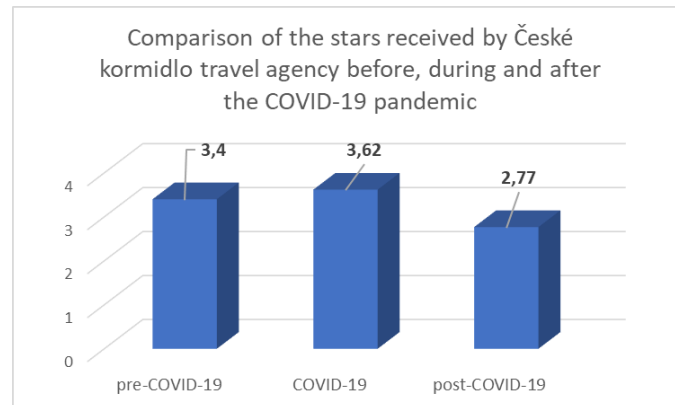


Figure 15. Comparison of the stars received by České kormidlo travel agency before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz a RecenzeCestovek.cz.

In addition to comparing the overall rating average for individual periods, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed based on the available reviews in the MS Excel program. The null hypothesis in this analysis claims that the average rating of the travel agency České kormidlo differs in the period before the pandemic, during the COVID-19 pandemic and now. The alternative hypothesis, on the other hand, claims that the average rating does not differ in these periods. Table 5 shows that the P value is 0.1584195, corresponding to approximately 15.84%. Compared to the significance level set at 5%, the P value is higher by 10.84%. Based on this, the null hypothesis is confirmed, which means that the average rating of the travel agency České kormidlo does not differ statistically significantly in individual periods, and the alternative hypothesis is rejected.

Table 3. Analysis of variance of Exim tours travel agency

ANOVA						
Variability source	SS	Difference	MS	F	P value	F crit
Inter-selections	12.62	2	6.312092	1.872611	0.1584195	3.075853
All selections	384.26	114	3.370743			
Total	396.89	116				

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz a RecenzeCestovek.cz.

4.6. Alexandria travel agency

In the first part, a content analysis of reviews of the travel agency Alexandria was carried out. The total number of published reviews for the observed period from January 2019 to December 2023 is 37, of which 19 did not contain any verbal evaluation. Therefore, only 18 customer reviews were examined through content analysis. Most reviews were published on Mapy.sk website (21 reviews), one review was from on Mahalo.cz, and 15 reviews were found on the Google review overview. Most reviews were added to individual websites in August, September and October. Based on these reviews, three main factors were identified: courier, offer and staff. Alexandria travel agency customers most often emphasised the staff, which appeared in 5 reviews. Other numerous mentions were recorded by the factors courier (2 reviews) and offer (4 reviews), shown in Figure 16. For a better idea, these absolute numbers were converted to relative numbers, expressed in percentages. The total number of frequencies is 11. The personnel factor has the highest share, representing 45.46%. The offer has a share of 36.36% and the courier 18.18%. Of the total number of 18 reviews, 11 were negative. Most often, customers complained about accommodation in a hotel that did not correspond to the photos and described services. Other complaints related to the unavailability of the courier and problems with the return of deposits. The total negative reviews represent 61.11% of the 18 analysed reviews. The share of positive customer reviews is 38.89%.

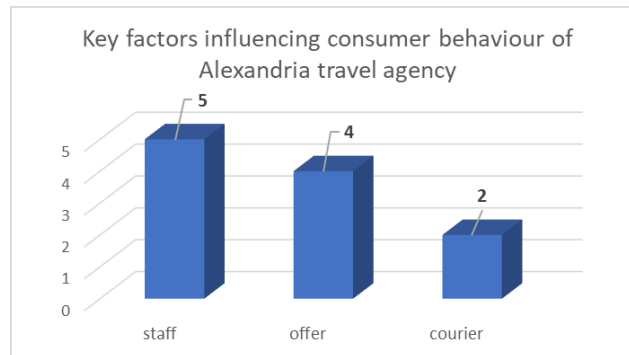


Figure 16. Key factors influencing consumer behaviour of Alexandria travel agency

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz and Google.cz

The second part focuses on the evaluation of Alexandria travel agency customers. Here is an analysis of the development of the average number of stars from the total number of 37 reviews given by customers of this agency for the period 2019-2023. In 2019, the number of reviews increased by two, and the average rating was five stars. The following year, Alexandria received six reviews with an average rating of 4.08 stars. In 2021, the average dropped by 1.33 stars to 2.75 when customers wrote four reviews. In 2022, the travel agency received 2.88 stars from 12 reviews. The highest number of reviews, 13, came in 2023, when the average number of stars was 3.18. Figure 17 shows the overall average of the Alexandria travel agency, which was 3.28 stars from Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz and Google reviews for 2019-2023.

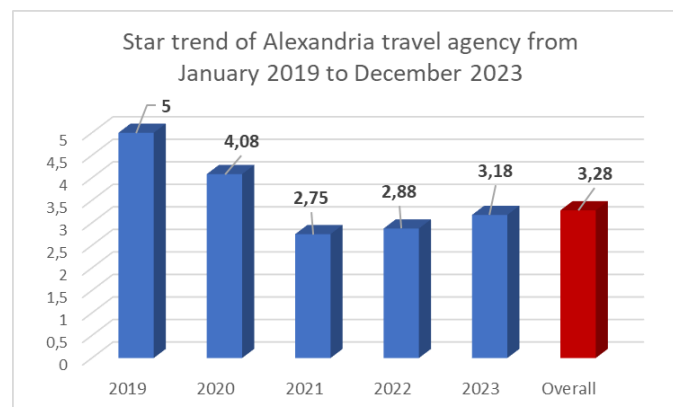


Figure 17. Star trend of Alexandria travel agency from January 2019 to December 2023

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz and Google.cz

The next part focuses on the overall average rating of the Alexandria travel agency in three time periods: before the pandemic (year 2019), during the COVID-19 pandemic (years 2020 and 2021) and now (years 2022 and 2023). 2 reviews from 2019, 10 reviews from the time of the covid-19 pandemic and currently 25 reviews from the websites Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz and from the Google review overview are examined. Figure 18 shows that the average rating decreased in individual periods. In the period before the COVID-19 pandemic, the travel agency averaged five stars. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this average dropped by 1.45 stars to 3.55. For 2022 and 2023, i.e. currently, the average number of stars dropped to 3.03, indicating a reduction of 0.52 stars compared to the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

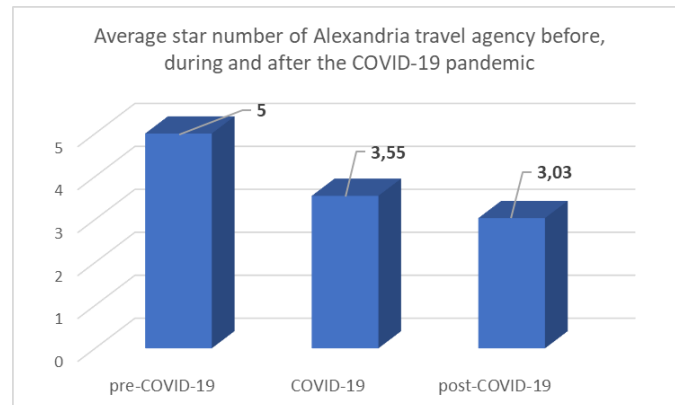


Figure 18. Average star number of Alexandria travel agency before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz and Google.cz

In addition to comparing the overall average for individual time periods, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed based on the provided reviews in the MS Excel program. The null hypothesis of this test stated that the average ratings of Alexandria travel agency differ between pre-pandemic, COVID-19 and now. The alternative hypothesis, on the other hand, claimed that these ratings do not differ. The results showed that the P value was 0.3178827, 31.79%. This P value was then compared to a predetermined significance level of 5%. The P value is higher by 26.79%, which means insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis, indicating that the average rating of Alexandria travel agency does not differ in different periods (before the pandemic, during the COVID-19 pandemic and now), and thus the alternative hypothesis was rejected.

Table 3. Analysis of variance of Alexandria travel agency

ANOVA						
Variability source	SS	Difference	MS	F	P value	F crit
Inter-selections	8.18	2	4.091651	1.185588	0.3178827	3.275898
All selections	117.34	34	3.451159			
Total	125.52	36				

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz and Google.cz

The overall averages of the ratings of selected travel agencies over 2019-2023 are compared, including Blue Style, Fischer, Exim Tours, Čedok, České kormidlo and Alexandria. Travel agency Alexandria achieved the highest average rating, namely 3.28 stars, with the participation of 37 customers. In second place was České kormidlo with an average of 2.94 stars. The total number of reviews was 117. Blue Style occupied the third place with 2.80 stars, representing a decrease of 0.14 stars. This rating reflected 224 customer reviews. Fourth place belongs to Čedok, averaging 2.68 stars from 291 reviews for 2019-2023. Exim Tours received an average rating of 2.41 stars, indicating 0.27 stars less than Čedok, with 132 customers participating. Fischer travel agency hit the trough with an average of 2.25 stars based on 137 reviews.

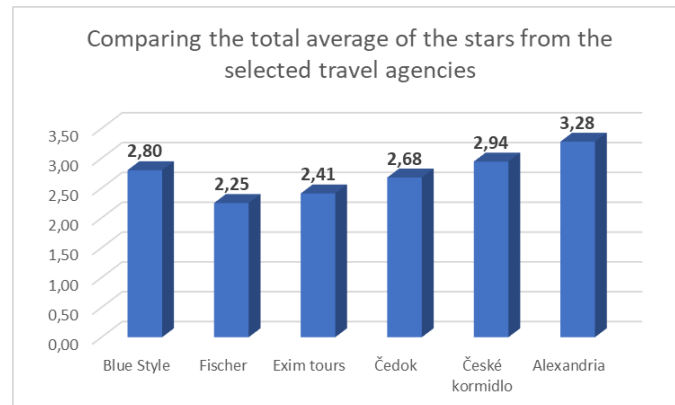


Figure 19. Comparing the total average of the stars from the selected travel agencies

Source: Author's elaboration from the following data sources Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz, Google.cz and recenzecestovek.cz

5. Discussion

Based on the results of this work, it is possible to answer all three research questions posed at the beginning of the research. The study focused on six travel agencies: Blue Style, Fischer, Exim tours, Čedok, České kormidlo and Alexandria.

Research Question No 1: What are the key factors that lead customers to purchase from selected travel agencies?

The information was obtained from the websites Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz, RecenzeCestovek.cz and from reviews on Google. Based on the content analysis of customer reviews, key purchase factors in individual travel agencies were identified:

- Offer: This factor implies that customers are interested in the variety and quality of available tours and services.
- Transport: Customers are concerned about the comfort and reliability of transport during travel.
- Courier: Customers value the quality of services and communication with the courier during the tour.
- Customer service: This factor suggests that customers appreciate the quality and care provided by the agency.
- Staff: This factor may include a friendly and professional approach from agency employees.

These factors vary depending on the specific travel agency:

- Blue Style: The most frequently mentioned factors are offer (73 times), transport (62 times) and courier (60 times).
- Fischer: The crucial factors are transport (35 times), courier (33 times) and offer (29 times).
- Exim tours: The most frequently mentioned factors are transport (34 times), customer service (29 times) and courier (25 times).
- Čedok: The most mentioned factors are the courier (90 times), transport (71 times) and staff (60 times).
- Czech Rudder: The decisive factors are offer (40 times), transport (27 times) and courier (24 times).
- Alexandria: The most mentioned factors are staff (5 times), offer (4 times) and courier (2 times).

A similar issue was addressed by Soifer, Choi & Lee (2021), who examined the star ratings of hotels and their ancillary services in online reviews. They found that five elements, such as free Wi-Fi, spa, pool, hotel membership, and restaurants, significantly affected users' ratings. However, the key factors for travel agents differed from the hotel sector, as elements such as swimming pool or spa are not common in travel agents, while factors such as delegates or transport are not important in hotels.

Research Question No. 2: Has customer opinion about selected travel agencies changed from January 2019 to December 2023?

The results show that travel agency ratings have changed over the years, reflecting changing customer opinions:

- Blue Style: Rating changed from 3.3 stars in 2019 to 2.71 stars in 2023.
- Fischer: Rating changed from 2.89 stars in 2019 to 2.05 stars in 2023.

- Exim tours: Ratings ranged from 3.90 stars in 2019 to 2.28 stars in 2023, with ratings not changing significantly.
- Čedok: Rating dropped from 2.93 stars in 2019 to 2.57 stars in 2023.
- Czech Helm: Rating changed from 3.4 stars in 2019 to 3.01 stars in 2023.
- Alexandria: Rating dropped from 5 stars in 2019 to 3.18 stars in 2023.

The online reputation of travel agencies is influenced by customer reviews, especially star ratings and verbal ratings. Positive reviews can significantly increase profits, while negative reviews lead to decreased revenue. Therefore, it is essential for travel agents to respond to reviews correctly. However, some reviews can be fake. False customer reviews may represent a limitation of this analysis, as it raises the question of whether all the reviews examined are from real customers or have been artificially created by travel agency staff. Most current methods detect these types of reviews offline, however, there are now efforts to detect fake reviews online as well. Wang & Chen (2020) proposed a novel online monitoring method that detects fraudulent product reviews and focuses on detecting fake reviews associated with reputation manipulation.

Research question No. 3: Does the average rating of the selected travel agencies differ before, during and after the pandemic?

The analysis showed that the average rating varies depending on the period for all travel agencies except Exim tours. For this office, the average rating did not change significantly in individual periods. The results are influenced by the star ratings given by customers to travel agents, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similar research was conducted by Rodríguez Pallas, Montoya Reyes & Lorenzo Pérez (2023), who investigated the impact of the pandemic on travel agents in La Coruña, Spain. They used in-depth interviews with experts and an analysis of variance to compare the impact of previous health crises on travel agencies. They found that the pandemic did not force businesses to adapt to government restrictions fully, but teleworking became a key factor in keeping the business running. When compared, it can be seen that Czech travel agencies faced similar impacts from the pandemic as Spanish ones. Our results can be useful for experts in the field of reputation management, owners and managers of travel agencies, and for potential customers considering the purchase of a tour. Further research could focus on the impact of reviews on customer purchasing behaviour and methods to detect fake reviews.

Conclusions

Our study aimed to assess the reputation of six selected travel agencies in the Czech Republic based on online reviews and to identify key factors influencing this reputation, analysing Travel agencies Blue Style, Fischer, Exim Tours, Čedok, České kormidlo and Alexandria from reviews from the websites Mapy.cz, Mahalo.cz, RecenzieCestoviek.sk and Google in the period 2019-2023. Content analysis identified the key factors of the purchase decision. For example, the travel agency Blue Style focuses predominantly on the offer, transport and couriers. A similar trend regarding key factors was found in other agencies. The study also analysed changes in customer sentiment over the years 2019-2023. It turned out that opinions varied, except for Exim Tours, where customer opinions did not differ. 2020 saw an overall downgrade, reflecting the unexpected response of travel agencies to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, most offices saw an improvement in their rating, which shows their ability to adapt to new market conditions. The Alexandria travel agency had the highest average rating of 3.28 stars, followed by Czech Helm with 2.94 stars and Blue Style with 2.80 stars. Finally, an analysis of variance was performed, which showed that the average rating varied among travel agencies across periods. The results indicate that reviews significantly shape the reputation of travel agencies and highlight the need for further research on the authenticity and impact of reviews on customer purchasing behaviour.

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Funding: This article is one of the partial outputs of the currently solved research project IVSUPS2305. This research was funded by the Institute of Technology and Business in České Budějovice, grant number IVSUPS2305.

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation: *Konečný*; methodology: *Kutová*; data analysis: *Kutová*; writing—original draft preparation: *Kutová*; writing, review and editing: *Konečný*; visualisation: *Dušek*, *Chamrada*. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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