Response to Reviewer 3 Comments (Round 2)

We are most grateful to the Reviewer for re-reviewing our manuscript and further valuable and helpful remarks supporting us to improve our article. Taking into account all the comments included in review report, we make an attempt to revise the paper and introduce appropriate corrections. In response to the Reviewer, we present below the answer to the consecutive comments detailing our changes (answers are marked in blue and changes are marked in red).

Comment 1.

Introduction: Statement like "Before COVID-19 crisis researchers have noticed a growing share of Internet channels in making decisions about the purchase of tourist packages. They also observed ROPO (Research online Purchase Offline) phenomenon, which means a certain part of buyers mixed online and offline channels during decision making. Buyers looked for information about tourist packages on the Internet whereas bought them in traditional (bricks and mortar) travel agencies." really need using citations to support.

As suggested, we completed text using adequate citations.

"Before COVID-19 crisis researchers have noticed a growing share of Internet channels in making decisions about the purchase of tourist packages [17, 18, 19]. They also observed ROPO (Research online Purchase Offline) phenomenon, which means a certain part of buyers mixed online and offline channels during decision making [20-26]. Buyers looked for information about tourist packages on the Internet whereas bought them in traditional (bricks and mortar) travel agencies".

Comment 2.

Decision of package holidays purchase: some paragraphs are very short while others too long. Authors should properly organize their contents to clearly show their ideas. Meanwhile, what is the function of this section? Should it be combined with section 3 to form the literature review section? I feel there is no need to have these two sections separated.

According to remark, we revised section 2 and 3. First, we combined these two sections. This join also required a slight adjustment to the title of the new section. Secondly, we have made efforts to standardize the length of the paragraphs in this section. Thirdly, for clearly show our ideas and function of this new combined section, at its beginning and further in text we added two paragraphs explained our intentions and organization of this part of article. Fourthly, the consequence of these corrections was the need to change the order of paragraphs in the merged section. Finally, in other parts of this section we have changed some words and introduced short sentences to explain authors idea.

"2. COVID-19 and decision of package holidays purchase – literature review

„The literature review conducted for the purposes of the presented research was divided into two parts. In the first one, based on the so-called traditional review, taking into account the most important scientific studies, two categories appearing in the research problem were briefly explained, namely the concept of a tourist package and the concept of the decision-making process of its purchase. Recognizing the essence of these two categories allowed for a better understanding of the studied problem and the subject of the analysis. In the second part, using a more rigorous approach, the existing research on the tourist decision-making process in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic was reviewed. As a result, a research gap was identified, which allowed justifying the need for conducting the presented research."

(…)

„As already mentioned, the task of this review is to identify previous studies dedicated to the issue of the impact of the pandemic on the decision-making processes of buyers of tourist packages".

(…)

"Package holidays belong to the complex products family and require higher engagement of the customers in decision making processes [32] (p. 155). For this reason, package buyers report high demand for information. In general, during the decision making in buying of package holidays, motivated by needs, tourists search for information about the available products, assess them in the perspective of their preferences and possibilities and finalize the purchase [33, 34]. In literature, five compulsory sequential stages of the decision-making process are often listed: (1) need recognition, (2) search for information (which is assumed to be very important), (3) evaluation of alternatives (the consumer evaluates attributes and products), (4) purchase, (5) outcomes (post-purchase evaluation) [35] (p. 23)."

(…)

"Coronavirus, which affected tourism more than other large sector of the economy, has generated enormous interest in the scientific community. As a result, hundreds of articles are published presenting research results on various aspects of the impact of COVID-19 on tourism and tourism, as confirmed by the literature review carried out for this study. As already mentioned, the task of this review is to identify previous studies dedicated to the issue of the impact of the pandemic on the decision-making processes of buyers of tourist packages."

(…)

"The brief literature review presented above confirms the wide spectrum of problems raised in the previous studies related to the pandemic impact on the behavior of tourists, their intentions, preferences and perception of travelling in the conditions of COVID-19. Literature review identified simultaneously a research gap in the study of the decision-making behaviour of holiday package buyers. To the best of our knowledge, merely a few of the analysed studies addressed the issue of the impact of COVID-19 on the perception of the packages by tourists. Pan et al.'s [48] and Xu, Youn and Lee's [11] studies were devoted to the impact of the pandemic on intention to use the sea travel packages (cruising) and Ren's [49] research concerned tourists' changing behaviour in package tourism but only from tour operators' perspective. ~~Few publications have also addressed the problem of planning a trip and searching for information in connection with it [42].~~"

Comment 3.

Materials and methods: in this statement "The research covering purchasers of package holidays and focusing on the problems of travelling during the COVID-19 pandemic (N = 1502) was carried out to answer research question.", what does N mean? The expression is very ambiguous. Actually, it is not needed to put the sample size here.

As suggested in the review, in "Materials and methods" point on p. 6, the statement "N=1502" has been removed, and the following description has been added to the article's abstract (p. 1):

„The study was based on the analysis of the results of a computer-assisted Internet interview using the CAWI method, conducted among 1,502 Poles using the classification tree method (R statistical package and rpart library)."

Comment 4.

Authors should focus on displaying their contribution under the context of COVID or their study will be quite normal without innovation.

Agreeing with the comment of the reviewer, the authors of the article reinforced the context of COVID-19 as well as a research originality and innovativeness with additional sentences and phrases introduced in sections 5 and 6.

In section 5:

„The presented study analyzed the purchasing patterns of tourist package buyers in two periods: before the COVID-19 pandemic and during the pandemic. Significant differences were identified in buyers' use of information and purchasing channels in the decision-making process. Previous studies of other researchers, although not on package purchase decisions, but on tourist behaviour in general, also noted a radical change caused pandemic [53-55] and an increase in complexity of tourist behaviour [13].

The results of this research indicate the presence of four patterns of decision-making when buying tourist packages during the pandemic, depending on the used combination of the channels online and offline on the stages: research and the finalization/completion of the purchase. These are: (1) Research Online, Purchase Online Behaviour, (2) Research Offline, Purchase Offline Behaviour, (3) Research Online, Purchase Offline Behaviour (ROPO) and (4) Research Offline, Purchase Online Behaviour (reversed-ROPO, r-ROPO). These four buying strategies were used during and before pandemic [23-26]. The difference, however, lies in the proportion of individual combinations of information and purchasing channels. In the case of period during COVID-19 (data from 2020), the first scheme (online/online) concerned 29.5% of respondents, the second (offline/offline) – 7.9%, the third (ROPO) – 30.7%, and the fourth (r-ROPO) – 31.9%. Concerning the period before the pandemic, (i.e., 2019) the share of behaviors (1) was 63.4%, (2) – 4.3%, ROPO – 10.7% and r-ROPO – 21.4%. The figures provided here prove that COVID-19 has significantly changed the purchasing strategies used by buyers of tourist packages. In the conditions of the pandemic, a much smaller number of tourist packages buyers based their decisions on online channels only (29.5% of the respondents comparing to 63.4% of the respondents who in 2019 completed the entire decision-making process online). During the pandemic, however, the percentage of people who visited a brick-and-mortar travel agency at least at one stage of making purchasing decisions (i.e. searching for information and/or finalizing the purchase) increased significantly. More than 1/3 of the respondents in uncertain times sought personal contact with a travel agent."

(…)

"The obtained results confirm the development of omnichannel distribution of products on the tourist market. The ROPO behaviour segment, which is the most numerous groups of package holidays buyers during the COVID-19 pandemic (31.89%), can be described as tourists who, on the one hand, are willing to take advantage of new solutions in the online distribution, but on the other hand, they have to check everything personally to ensure that they make the right and correct decision. This is

particularly important when the decision to purchase a organized trip was made during a pandemic, and any doubts regarding the applicable rules, restrictions or procedures at the destination of travel required consultation with a travel agency.

In the case of the "ROPO behaviour" segment, out of the examined socio-demographic factors, only three should be considered significant in profiling buyer segments – age, number of children under 18 in the household and marital status play an important role in this case. However, such factors as education, number of people in the household, place of residence or assessment of one's own financial situation were not significant.

Buyers who looked for information about trips on the Internet, but bought it in a stationary travel agency, are people under 46 years of age, with minor children (one, three, four or five) in their household, married or divorced. A family client understood in this way, in times of a pandemic threat and many months of remote learning or working, had to provide his family members, including underage children, with a safe and secure rest during an organized trip."

In section 6:

„The presented study is both original and innovative for several reasons:

1. Firstly, it examines the real situation, which means that the respondents described their actual experiences (completed processes) related to making decisions of purchasing tourist packages before and during the pandemic, and not, as in the case of many other studies, which referred only to purchasing intentions in the future.

2. Secondly, the data for both periods (before and during COVID-19) were obtained from the same panel of respondents. Such a research solution has not been identified while reviewing the previous research addressing the pandemic impact on buyers' behaviors.

3. Thirdly, the research findings based on the data collected from the same panel of respondents allowed comparing the purchasing patterns in the period before and during the pandemic, while strengthening the reliability and credibility of the comparisons.

Fourthly, the ROPO phenomenon in purchasing tourist packages is generally neither a problem noticed nor covered by researchers, despite the fact that it occurs relatively frequently in practice and its analysis can turn out highly useful for travel agents."

Comment: "English language and style are fine/minor spell check required".

According to the remark about quality of English language, our manuscript underwent a professional language proofreading.