

# INSIGHTS INTO PLATFORM TOURISM SERVICES: FUTURE DEMAND PERSPECTIVES IN SLOVAKIA

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**Abstract:** A model based on digital sharing has brought a new wind to the business world. Its growth was abruptly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. As anti-epidemiological measures have most significantly affected the tourism sector, this paper attempts to outline the development perspective of platform tourism services. The aim of the paper is to examine the plans of the Slovak population related to the use of platform tourism services after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the results of focus groups and questionnaire survey, the paper predicts, that the current crisis will not weaken the development of the tourism platform economy, while demand will be price-driven. As the economy of platform tourism services will be an integral part of our lives for many years to come, it is possible to assume a relentless interest not only of practice, but also of scholars. The research confirms that the accommodation and the transport are the most important paid platform tourism services. They are popular mainly because of the price, not because of the environmental friendliness which denote rather a positive externality of their use. Platform tourism services should be seen as a whole, not as fragments through the prism of selected platforms. The paper highlights information as a key segment and draws attention to the shortcomings of measuring platform services, especially transport ones. Platform tourism services will continue to transform the business. Therefore, it is necessary to better understand it and look for opportunities for its sustainable development. The uniqueness of the current study lies, among others, in the use of mixed methods which help to comprehensively understand the problem in depth and breadth.

**Keywords:** Collaborative economy, COVID-19 pandemic, demand, sharing economy, tourism platform services.

**JEL Classification:** L80, M31, Z32.

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## Introduction

The development and innovations of technology has paved the way for the expanding growth of an innovative form of commerce based on a principle of shared access of assets or resources rather than private ownership (Basukie et al., 2020). Although to date, there has been no agreement on the naming or definition of this socio-economic phenomenon (Martínez-González et al., 2021), it has

quickly changed consumers' preferences and inclinations. People around the world embark on digital interaction and temporarily exchange their under-utilized possessions, resources, time and skills, facilitated through internet platforms (Leoni & Parker, 2019).

According to the European Commission (2018), the size of this new economy relative to the total EU economy was estimated to be 26.5 billion EUR in 2016, offering about 394,000 jobs

across the EU. The available data therefore indicated that these new developments in Europe are only beginning to emerge, and that significant market potential remained untapped. As early as 2018, the European Commission requested a survey (Flash Eurobarometer 467, 2018) that showed an increase in the use of services offered via internet platforms (23% compared to 17% in 2016). Among respondents who have used services offered via collaborative platforms, over half have done so with accommodation (57%) and transport (51%). A third of these respondents (33%) have used collaborative platforms to access food-related services. Other services were considerably less used.

As this new economic model has been used extensively mainly in the tourism sector, from the start of 2020, COVID-19 and its associated measures have interrupted its growth. As stated by the OECD (2020), tourism was one of the first sectors to be deeply impacted by the pandemic and also risked being among the last to recover, with the ongoing travel restrictions and the global recession. According to estimations, international tourism fell by around 80% in 2020. As tourism is highly labour intensive, the crisis tapped millions of jobs, including jobs generated via digital platforms.

The aim of the paper is to examine the future demand for tourism platform services after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic and to outline the viability of the business model at the end of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

## 1. Theoretical Background

### 1.1 The New Business Paradigm Framework

Although giving other people access to temporarily available assets, finances, time and skills through online platforms is understood as the new economic model, its roots are in the distant past (Belk, 2014). As Pouri and Hilti (2021) states, since time immemorial, sharing has been a way of allocating resources within families and other small communities. New technologies are therefore only contributed to greater accessibility and countless spatial and temporal reach of sharing between individuals.

In the available scientific literature, this highly discussed phenomenon is labelled as collaborative consumption, collaborative economy, sharing economy, platform economy, gig (digitally-enabled) economy, peer-to-peer

economy, on-demand economy or access economy. As Sánchez-Pérez et al. (2021) mention, this absence of consensus most likely stems from the fact that this field has been undergoing a rapid proliferation of studies coming from a multiplicity of disciplines and a variety of industries.

The European Commission (2016) denotes the phenomenon as the collaborative economy. While, for example, in the field of fashion, the term 'collaborative consumption' is largely used and in connection with the labor market, the term 'gig' economy is mentioned in particular, in tourism, several designations are interchanged with the term 'sharing economy' being slightly predominant. Though, some authors (Belk, 2014; Cockayne, 2016; Geissinger et al., 2019) point out that this new business paradigm cannot be identified with the true meaning of 'sharing', since it refers to an unselfish, non-reciprocal behavior, nor to the 'collective consumption' as it related only with some compensation and does not include transaction without any reward, for example, what is typical for Couchsurfing (Belk, 2014). UNWTO (2017) also distinguishes between true sharing and commercial activities and claims that in tourism practice, most platforms offer both. Furthermore, according to a survey conducted on a major digital accommodation platform in China (Xie et al., 2019), customers prefer 'access' to services via internet, not real 'sharing' with another person.

In order to capture the true nature of this growing phenomenon, it is recommended to use the term 'platform economy' or 'gig' economy. Without internet platforms (web sites, applications), this economic model would never have acquired the dimension, weight and global interest it currently has. According to Sibbritt et al. (2019), platforms become a focal point of activity. They are frameworks that permit providers and users to undertake a range of actions, forming entire ecosystems for value creation and capture. They empower new entrepreneurial opportunities with respect to scale, convenience and costs. This is the reason, the UNWTO (2017) uses the term 'platform tourism services' (hereinafter referred to as the abbreviation PTSS) after in this context.

As Jorge-Vázquez (2019) suggests, the definition of the platform economy is not free of difficulties. First of all, the interest in the

study of platform economy is relatively recent, dating back only a few years. Further, a diverse set of terms is frequently used in literature as synonyms or approximate concepts. Ultimately, the literature on this issue is characterized by its significant fragmentation and interdisciplinary. All this means that there is no widely accepted definition of the platform economy (Martínez-González et al., 2021).

The European Commission (2016) defines the phenomenon as business models where activities are facilitated by collaborative platforms that create an open marketplace for the temporary usage of goods or services often provided by private individuals. It involves three categories of actors: (1) service providers who share assets, resources, time and/or skills, who can be private individuals offering services on an occasional basis (peers) or service providers acting in their professional capacity (professional services providers); (2) users; and (3) intermediaries that connect – via an online platform – providers with users and that facilitate transactions between them.

Basically, this new platform economic system can be defining as a mutually beneficial model of triadic exchange in which a digital intermediary enters between the supply and demand, replacing the traditional supply chain. Each of the participants in this triadic relationship has their own motives, is limited by given resources and capabilities, and is expected to perform some activities. There is no change in the ownership relations between supply and demand, but the granting of a temporary right of access to selected underused or unwanted commodities mediated by digital technologies, which rationalize individual consumption (Benoit et al., 2017).

The business model is characterized by social and environmental friendliness (Peña-Vinces et al., 2020; Serrano et al., 2020; Zhu & Liu, 2020), trust to members of platforms community (Belk, 2014), duality of concept that can be commercial or non-commercial (Klarin & Suseno, 2021), dichotomy of compensation – for free or for fee (Belk, 2014; Serrano et al., 2020), but also by so far unclear legislative boundaries (European Commission, 2016; Wong et al., 2020; Zhu, 2020; Chen et al., 2021). Although there are several challenges to be addressed, especially regulatory challenges concerning consumer protection, labour conditions, social equity (European Commission 2016; Wong et al., 2020), fair completion, and

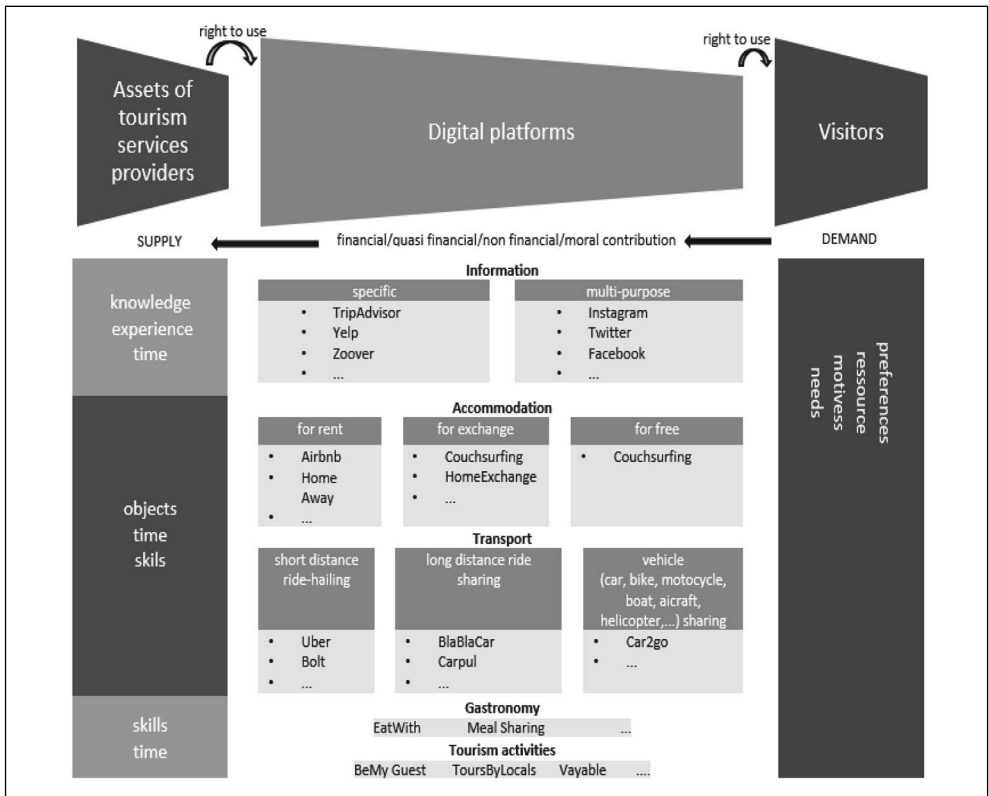
negative consequences on local communities (Serrano et al., 2020), the majority of studies and examples indicate positive impacts of the platform system outweighing their negative effects (UNWTO, 2017).

### 1.2 Tourism Platform Services in the Spotlight

The tourism sector has been one of the first to develop the new economy based on internet tourist platforms (Martínez-González et al., 2021). UNWTO (2017) defines PTSs as business models in which private individuals offer tourism goods or services to visitors through internet platforms. The offer is not always permanent, but often temporary, depending on the capacity and availability that private providers may have. Platforms aggregate offer, facilitate transactions, allow the sharing of reviews and feedback, provide suppliers with a channel for marketing and promotion, mediation in case of disputes, build confidence and trust between buyers and sellers alike (UNWTO, 2017).

The contents of the triadic exchange in tourism within platform economic system is heterogeneous (Fig. 1). UNWTO (2017) in this context differentiates five tourism segments – information (user-generated reviews, ratings and content for tourism related services), accommodation (short-term rentals of beds, rooms, apartments, homes, etc), transport (short-distance ride-hailing, long-distance ride-sharing, car vehicle-sharing services), gastronomy (home cooking and communal dining in a private environment) and other tourism activities (guided tours and excursions, attractions and similar activities). Nevertheless, the scientific literature focuses so far almost exclusively on platform accommodation and platform transport, while it does not perceive these segments as a whole but is mostly interested in a concrete internet platform (predominantly Airbnb and Uber), whether on the supply, intermediary or demand side. Subsequently, the scholars evaluate the impact and challenges of the platform's economy on tourism and society and raise the issue of regulating this innovative model in order to move towards sustainability. Thus, we have identified a gap in the available literature, which focuses predominantly on the partial demand of consumers for one type of platform goods or services, not on the aggregate demand for PTSs. Hence, this issue is crucial in the light

Fig. 1: The triadic exchange within the PTSSs



Source: own

of the pandemic threat, since the platform economy essentially depends on consumers' intention to participate (Martínez-González et al., 2021).

In literature examining the partial demand for PTSSs, the authors consider diverse factors or motives that lead individuals to choose this type of services. According to Lee (2020) and Li et al. (2021), they can be categorized as utilitarian, which help consumers maximize the utility, efficiency and economy of their purchase, and hedonic, connected to social and psychological benefits. Benoit et al. (2017) states that motivation is not just economic, social, and hedonic as it also included environmental and risk reducing motives. Zhang and Li (2020) stress that environmental concern, as a psychological factor, plays a critical role in some platform transport studies. Akarsu et al.

(2020) claim that experience and authenticity present also significant factors in PTSSs. Prior research points out, that economic motives play the most important role for customers when deciding to use PTSSs (Benoit, 2017; UNWTO, 2017; Lee, 2020). Participating in PTSSs is therefore mostly rational and economical and reflects utility maximization behavior whereby the consumer substitutes exclusive ownership of goods with lower-cost alternatives. PTSSs are also seen as cheaper alternatives to the traditional outlets (Lee, 2020).

While most studies have analyzed what drives consumers to choose PTSSs, a limited number of analyses have investigated when individuals avoid using them. According to Del Chiappa et al. (2021), these analyses have identified distrust, perceived risk and unfamiliarity as constraints on PTSSs.

### 1.3 Changes in Demand under the Influence of a Crisis

Since tourism tends to avoid risks, any crisis negativity influences tourists' security perception and could result into recession. It is because tourism is affected by numerous exterior influences. Stressful events initiate changes in consumption behaviours to moderate the stress (Zwanka & Buff, 2020). Several examples can be found in cases of terrorist attacks, natural disasters or threats associated with epidemics and pandemics, which has led to a reduction in tourism demand. Škare et al. (2021) found a loss of 57 million tourist arrivals during the epidemic outbreaks compared to data from 1980 to 2019, which means a 0.23% reduction of the world GDP.

Currently, the latest period of enormous tourism development has ended abruptly just as the impact of COVID-19 (Brouder, 2020). Health communication strategies and measures have halted global travel (Sigala, 2020) and brought the tourism sector to a near standstill (Wen et al., 2020). As Škare et al. (2021) claim, the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism industry will be incomparable to the consequence of the previous pandemic episodes. According to estimates ([www.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu)), tourism is suffering losses of around 1 billion EUR per month in the EU alone, affecting 13 million workers in the sector. In addition, the economic meltdown of the entire sector could have a domino effect on other sectors, which would be difficult to manage over the long term. Meanwhile, emerging vaccine-resistant virus mutations raise the question of the duration and long-term consequences of this unprecedented global situation. The question therefore arises as to how the current pandemic and economic crisis will affect future demand for PTSs.

## 2. Research Methodology

In order to examine future demand for tourism platform services, we focus on Slovakia. The reason for choosing this Central European country is its relatively small size (5.5 million residents), the living standards of the population being below average of the EU, a significant rate of use of PTSs (above the EU average), with marked growth in recent years (Flash Eurobarometer 467, 2018) and so far non-existent studies dealing with PTSs in this market.

The aim of the paper is to examine the future demand for tourism platform services after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic and to outline the viability of the business model at the end of the novel coronavirus pandemic

The research focused on the perspective use of PTSs, the preferences of individual types of PTSs, characteristics of upcoming users and the factors influencing the selection of PTSs after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. We realised the research in two steps with the same focus. We tested the assertion (Martínez-González et al., 2021) that PTSs are perspective even after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data were obtained through a combination of qualitative (first step of the research) and quantitative research (second step of the research). As Wisdom and Creswell (2013) claim, such integration permits a more complete and synergistic utilization of data. Mixed methods also give a better understanding of the problem and yield more complete evidence, thanks to which the researchers achieve both depth and breadth.

The research seeks answers to the following research questions:

*RQ1: After the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, will individuals want to use PTSs?*

*RQ2: What types of PTSs will they prefer?*

*RQ3: Is there connection between the intention of the Slovak population to use PTSs and their personal characteristics?*

*RQ4: Which factors will influence the choice of PTSs after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic?*

The qualitative data were acquired using the focus group method based on group discussion, moderated by the researcher. As Sutton and Arnold (2011) mention, one of the major challenges in researching emerging technology-driven phenomenon is the limited theoretical understanding and incomplete knowledge of how previous research apply. The purpose of using a focus group in research is to acquire as much information as possible from a group of experts on a given topic. Using focus groups allows the researcher to extract expertise and insights from the participants. Focus groups are particularly useful when access to data is limited and when the researcher is addressing unexplored and emerging phenomenon (Sutton & Arnold, 2011).

With regard to anti-pandemic measures, we have conducted online focus groups, i.e., group

video chats lasting 49 to 112 minutes. Despite the fact that, according to Lang and Hughes (2004), several academics believe that in this on-line form, the dynamics of the group is lost, and the quality of discussion is reduced, we are convinced that the ability to effectively lead the group is not limited by digital technology. Besides, on-line form is simpler in terms of logistics and much safer with respect to the spread of COVID-19.

In order to meet the aim, a series of four heterogeneous focus groups were conducted. The number and composition of the focus groups respects the recommendations of Krueger and Casey (2009). The participants were internet tourist platform providers (8), users of the services (12), academics dealing with the issue (7) and university students familiar with the issue (12) as representatives of the young 'digital' generation. Each focus group had 9 to 10 members (39 in total; 1st group: 10 members; 2nd group: 10 members; 3rd group: 10 members; 4th group: 9 members), representing all categories of participants. Each group received the same questions. Each group answered the questions in a free moderated discussion. The moderator asked the discussants if they think that after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, selected PTSs will be used. He was interested in the expected preferences in the context of the planned use of the services, characteristics of upcoming users and in the factors that will be dominant in the choice of these services. Each online focus group had been recorded, and then thoroughly transcribed to written text for further analysis. As Rosenthal (2016) encourages, the transcriptions was subsequently checked against the recordings to ensure accuracy. To

carry out the thick description the authors have independently read each of the transcripts to identify repetitive ideas and, as recommended by Rosenthal (2016), afterward came together to triangulate the findings and make decisions about the final themes to be presented and subjected to content analysis.

Based on the focus groups results, a questionnaire intended for the inhabitants of Slovakia was shaped. In line with the most important results of the qualitative research, the first part of the questionnaire survey focused on examining plans for the future use of PTSs. We have divided PTSs into tourism related information services, accommodation services, gastronomy services, transport services and guided tours and other tourism activities. The second part of the questionnaire research focused on the preferences of individual types of PTSs in the future. The third part of the questionnaire examined the characteristics of upcoming users and the fourth part of the questionnaire examined the factors that will be dominant in the selection and use of PTSs after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire was distributed mostly electronically via social media and emails; the target group of seniors were addressed also by phone by several interviewers. The convenience sampling was applied, which is quick and easy to deliver results. The sample size used in a study (829) was determined based on the time, costs and the need for it to offer sufficient statistical power. All age categories were involved in the survey (Tab. 1).

In the human society often resonate the stereotypes that older people use the PTSs to a lesser extent than younger ones. We find interesting the statement of Berde and Tókéš (2020)

**Tab. 1: Respondents by age**

Age groups	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
15–24	261	31.5	31.5
25–34	145	17.5	49.0
35–44	154	18.6	67.6
45–54	149	18.0	85.5
55–64	66	8.0	93.5
65+	54	6.5	100.0
Total	829	100.0	–

Source: own

that older people will increasingly use the services of a platform economy in the future. Martínez-González et al. (2021) explained the theory about the high participation of young people in PTSs. Nearly all teenagers have access to the Internet several times a day, we therefore considered it necessary to address them in the survey. Although they do not make money, they often decide to buy or significantly influence the purchase and use of products, including tourism services. The questionnaire was therefore also intended for people aged 15 and over. In order to confirm the theses of Berde and Tókéš (2020), and Martínez-González et al. (2021) we examine the correlation between the age and the use of PTSs.

Collected data were recoded and processed into a data matrix in Microsoft Excel. Consequently, data were analysed by selected mathematical-statistical methods in PASW SPSS software at the significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ . Descriptive statistic but also inductive reasoning was used with taking sample from a larger population and using that data to draw conclusions. Absolute and relative frequency were used, but also several non-parametric methods (Friedman test, Wilcoxon test, Spearman correlation coefficient, Eta coefficient), which are useful when data have a ranking but with no clear numerical interpretation, such as when assessing preferences.

### 3. Research Results

The plans of the Slovak population related to the use of PTSs are evaluated on the basis of the results of the focus groups and the questionnaire survey.

#### 3.1 The Perspectiveness of Internet Tourist Platform Services

The results of qualitative survey clearly showed that PTSs are promising in the future, despite measures that limit their use in times of pandemic. Focus group participants agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic would negatively affect their use only in the short term. In all series of focus groups resonated the idea, that the pandemic may, on the contrary, intensify the use of the PTSs, since visitors will place greater emphasis on social distance and health security and thus tend to use 'private services' provided by local people without deep interactions with other visitors. In the summer 2020, it was clearly observable that an enormous share of

domestic tourists turned away from big hotels in favour of small private accommodation located in the countryside. As Martínez-González et al. (2021) stress, the platform economy certainly has potential in tourism, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The younger age groups had a more optimistic view of the situation. Uncertain feelings were expressed especially by service providers who were afraid of their future livelihoods. On the contrary, users in particular have expressed confidence in a positive future, as they have in the past favoured PTSs over traditional ones, same as students, who believe that young people will still have the desire to travel, even during the crisis, while, from their point of view, the platform services better meet the requirements of 'digital' generation. Academics pointed out that just the economic crisis in 2008 started the rapid growth of platform services and this is currently a similar situation. Participants agreed that PTSs are generally perceived by customers as cheaper in comparison with traditional tourism services, which can be a key factor of choice in times of recession. Many traditional businesses, including tour operators and travel agents fear, that customers belonging to the mass tourism segment will focus even more on the comfortable contracting of services via internet bypassing traditional providers, due to their negative experience of postponing holidays in 2020.

Quantitative research has yielded similar results. As many as 81.30% of respondents did not exclude the use of PTSs including information. Using statistical induction, specifically the results in PASW SPSS, we can say that it is possible that after the end of the pandemic, the PTSs will be used by 79.47 to 83.13% of the population of Slovakia (with 95% confidence interval for mean, lower bound: 0.7947; upper bound 0.8313). Although we admit that there may be a difference between what people are saying and doing (lower validity of responses), we can say that there is scope for platform economy growth in the Slovak tourism market.

#### 3.2 Preferred Services

On the issue of preferred types of PTSs, the focus group agreed on the dominant position of information services. UNWTO (2017) also considers these services to be the most

important within the PTSs economy. Despite the fact that information from visitors with personal experience is not considered by the lay public to be part of this economy, it has been growing in strength for several years. They are perceived as considerably more credible than the commercial messages that service providers spread about themselves through various channels. As the cost of services grows, so does customer prudence. The visitors are more careful and make their purchase decision first after examining the available independent references. According to the participants of the focus groups, the reviews will be even more popular than in the past, also with regard to the effort of visitors to verify the safety and health aspects of the services provided. In this context, video call participants, in particular academics and students, also raised the question of the objectivity of internet reviews, which can be written under the influence of emotions, but also their validity, as fictitious evaluations of tourism services may be the result of an unfair commercial practice. For this reason, it is essential that individual platforms consistently verify reviews in order to ensure their objectivity and credibility, as is done, for example, by TripAdvisor. However, social networks, on which many visitors obtain and verify information, do not carry out similar activities.

In the case of the order of preferences of other types of PTSs, the answers of

the participants of the focus groups were ambiguous, across the whole spectrum of the categories of participants. The members of the focus groups could not agree on whether accommodation or transport services were more important. In particular, they discussed the fact that short-distance ride-hailing is used not only by visitors but also by locals. However, there are no statistics available to determine the share of visitors and the locals in the use of these services. The providers of platforms are not interested in the data, so they do not collect it in a targeted manner. There are also no relevant comparisons between the use of ride-hailing and long-distance ride-sharing or vehicle-sharing, which are assumed to be more used by visitors than by locals.

Regarding platform accommodation, the participants of the second focus group pointed out the fact that Airbnb in Slovakia is not as developed as in other European countries. However, Slovak inhabitants abundantly book private accommodation by Booking.com or Trivago, but also by several local platforms (for example *megaubytovanie.sk*, *ubytujsa.sk*), as well as by numerous discount portals.

According to results of quantitative survey, almost 32% of respondents plan to use PTSs related information with definite conviction, accommodation services 20% and short-distance ride-hailing nearly 17% while the probable use is declared by another significant part of the respondents (Tab. 2).

**Tab. 2: The attitude of the respondents to the use of PTSs after the end of the pandemic**

PTSs	The attitude of the respondents to the use of PTSs				
	Definitely yes	Probably yes	Indecisive attitude	Probably no	Definitely no
Tourism related information	31.84	20.02	22.2	9.41	16.53
Accommodation	20.26	18.46	21.71	12.79	26.78
Gastronomy	13.39	16.28	25.81	14.96	29.56
Transport					
▪ Short-distance ride-hailing	16.89	19.78	22.44	14.23	26.66
▪ Long-distance ride-sharing	9.77	10.37	19.66	17.85	42.34
▪ Car-sharing	6.39	7.84	19.42	18.46	47.89
▪ Bike-sharing	13.39	16.28	25.81	14.96	29.56
Guided tours and other tourism activities	13.99	17.25	23.64	17.85	27.26

Source: own



For comparison, according to Eurostat, in 2019, 21% of the population of Slovakia used platform accommodation, which is at the level of the EU average, but well above the average of neighbouring countries, while platform transport used 15%, which is almost to times more than EU average. Despite the fact that there are no relevant statistics on the level of use of other PTSs, we state that the interest of the Slovak population of PTSs will not have any substantial decrease due to the pandemic.

We found the respondents prefer certain types of PTSs. To generalize results for the Slovak population, Friedman test was used ( $\chi^2 = 808.766$ ; Asymp. sig. = 0.000). It compares the mean ranks between the related groups and indicates how the groups differed. As Friedman test does not express if there are statistical differences between the researched items (mean rank values), the Wilcoxon test were used to express this. The significance values produced by SPSS Statistics were manually compared. At 95% significance level, only five ranks were statistically significantly different. We can state that the inhabitants of Slovakia clearly prefer (1) information as most wanted and only purely unpaid PTSs followed by (2) a heterogeneous group of accommodation and short-distance transport services used within destinations (ride-hailing, bike-sharing), guided tours and others tourism activities. The results of the qualitative and quantitative survey therefore agree. Markedly, there is a less interest in (3) gastronomy, (4) long-distance ride-sharing or (5) car-sharing. The results confirmed Leoni and Parker's (2019) statement that internet users have moved from previously being only passive recipients of information to being active producers and consumers of information in social networks. The placement of information at the head of tourism platform services is not surprising (UNWTO, 2017), but it is neglected in the available literature.

### 3.3 Characteristics of Upcoming Users

In each series of video interviews, participants addressed primarily age of a person. As far as gender is concerned, they agreed that it does not significantly affect the use of services. While providers and academics emphasized the economic situation of the individual as a relevant factor, users also indicated a link to the individual lifestyle. In one series of focus groups also resonated the topic of personality,

which is reflected in thinking and ways in which a person responds to an environment (e.g., openness, friendliness). Participants unanimously agreed that younger age groups are generally more open to the digital world and experimentation, and therefore they more likely will use PTSs. Regarding other personal characteristics, the focus groups participants did not find a consensus. While some participants reasoned that lower income groups would be more interested in PTSs in the future, others argued that in times of economic crisis accompanying the pandemic, these residents would perceive participation in tourism in general as a luxury, so PTSs would be used more by middle class, who will be not significantly affected by the crisis.

The relationship between the intention to use PTSs and the age of individuals was also examined in a quantitative survey. The results of Spearman's rho confirmed a small indirect dependence, according to which the tendency of the Slovak population to use PTSs decreases slightly with age. This relationship is relatively strongest in the case of information, the smallest in the case of guided tours and other tourism activities (Tab. 3).

Penetrant results of qualitative and quantitative research, we note that after the COVID-19 pandemic, PTSs will be used mainly by young people. This is in line with Martínez-González et al.'s (2021) claim, that the interest and the intention to participate in the platform economy is most significant regarded by young consumers, who are driving its growth. This population segment has also an ideal characteristic because of their technological and digital nature, communicativeness, collaborativeness, worries about social and environmental problems and an identity based less on possessions and more on relationships.

### 3.4 Factors Influencing the Choice of PTSs

We considered crucial to find what factors will influence the choice of PTSs after the end of the pandemic. The results of the four series of focus groups are documented in Tab. 4.

Factors influencing the choice of services are generally divided into demand-side factors, supply-side factors, factors related to the links between demand and supply, and external factors (Pompurová, 2013). The focus groups participants concentrated firstly on supply-side

Tab. 3: Correlation between planned use of PTSs and age

PTSs	Statistics outcomes	
Information	Correlation coefficient	-0.280
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	829
Accommodation	Correlation coefficient	-0.243
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	829
Gastronomy	Correlation coefficient	-0.147
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	829
Short-distance ride-hailing	Correlation coefficient	-0.242
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	829
Long-distance ride-sharing	Correlation coefficient	-0.218
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	829
Car-sharing	Correlation coefficient	-0.136
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	829
Bike-sharing	Correlation coefficient	-0.190
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	N	829
Guided tours and other tourism activities	Correlation coefficient	-0.120
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001
	N	829

Source: IBM Statistics 25 output

factors, completely forgetting the relationship between demand and supply. According to the frequency of mentioned individual factors in four series of focus groups, the price of PTSs and the positive ratio of price and quality can be identified as fundamental factors. As Benoit et al. (2017) mentioned, thanks to the platform economy low-income consumers may have greater opportunities to participate in tourism. We also consider as relevant flexibility, that means the quality of being easily adapted (time of use, especially in case of transport services that are not linked to the timetables, or of offering many different options) and authenticity of services (the opportunity to meet locals and experience the original services

provided by them), the time savings compared with traditional (especially transport) services (faster service provisioning), environmental friendliness (without wasting resources) and the opportunity to meet interesting people (Tab. 4). As introduced Xie et al. (2019) especially in platform accommodation, tourists appreciate the unique interactions with local hosts, allowing them to engage in authentic activities and facilities that are otherwise generally not readily accessible to them. According to Akarsu et al. (2020), it has been acknowledged that experience and authenticity are becoming two important factors that travellers and tourists have started to seek.

Tab. 4: Factors influencing the choice of PTSs according to the focus groups

Influencing factors	Focus group 1	Focus group 2	Focus group 3	Focus group 4	Total
<i>Factors on the demand side</i>					
Needs			x		1
Health condition	x		x		2
Motives		x			1
Habits				x	1
Educational level				x	1
Previous experiences			x		1
Ownership of durable goods in households, in particular cars and other dwellings	x			x	2
<i>Factors on the supply side</i>					
Reasonable price of PTSs	x	x	x	x	4
Price of traditional tourism services		x	x		2
Quality – price ratio	x	x	x	x	4
Flexibility	x	x		x	3
Authenticity		x	x	x	3
Saving time	x	x	x		3
Environmental friendliness		x	x	x	3
Social interaction (opportunity to meet interesting people)	x	x		x	3
Service availability	x	x			2
<i>External factors</i>					
Health security	x			x	2
Legislative regulation of platform economy		x			1
Existing transport infrastructure	x				1
Development of information and communication technology			x		1
Social politic			x		1

Source: own

The factors mentioned at least in more than half (that means three) series of focus groups were subsequently offered to the respondents of the questionnaire survey (Tab. 5).

It is often argued that the growing demand for tourism services is primarily price-driven (Ding et al., 2020; OECD, 2020; Pouri & Hilty, 2021). After the end of the pandemic, most of the addressed individuals plan to choose PTSs primarily because of the price. Both the favourable quality-price ratio and the saving

of moneys are important for them. Flexibility of the services, time savings or environmental friendliness follow the price criterion with a significant break, which may be related to the living standards of the population of Slovakia, lower than the average of EU. Thus, it has been proved, that environmental factors are less important for customers in platform economy concept (Retamal, 2019). The idea that the authenticity of social interaction with residents in the tourist destination has

**Tab. 5: Factors influencing the choice of PTSs**

Influencing factors	Frequency	Percent
Reasonable price	195	28.93
Quality – price ratio	248	36.80
Saving time	46	6.82
Flexibility	84	12.46
Authenticity	31	4.60
Social interaction	32	4.75
Environmental friendliness	38	5.64
Total	674*	100.00

Source: own

Note: \* respondents who plan definitely or rather to use at least one of PTSs in future.

been a determining factor in the evolution of PTSs (Zhu, 2020; Martínez-González et al., 2021) was not confirmed in case of Slovak inhabitants. We state that even in the case of the Slovak population, the utilitarian drivers are predominant with emphasis on the economy of purchases (UNWTO, 2017; Benoit et al., 2017; Lee, 2020; Li et al., 2021). Therefore, participating in PTSs is really more rational, then emotional. We state that the use of PTSs is first and foremost price-driven and the environmental friendliness seems to be more like a positive externality than a selection factor.

We verified whether there is a statistically significant relationship between the dominant factor and the age of Slovak population. The Eta coefficient confirmed a weak dependence (Sig. = 0.002; Eta = 0.158). Saving money is the main factor of choice for the two oldest age groups of respondents and for the group of 25 to 34-year-olds, when individuals raise their families what binds reduction of income during maternity, respectively, parental leave. For the remaining age groups of individuals, a favorable quality-price ratio is fundamental.

### 3.5 Limitations

Regarding current study, some limitations should be noted. Firstly, the research addresses the local level without relevant comparisons since analogous aggregate demand studies from other countries do not exist. Available data from Eurostat relate only to the platform accommodation and platform transport services without their further specification and are published ex-post. Second,

the research refers to a particular territorial area, which is a central European country – Slovakia. Next, the research focuses on the intentions of the population, not on real consumption, which can be affected in the near future by many variables, including the rate of vaccination, the spread of new virus mutations or the economic exhaustion. Finally, the age structure of the respondents does not faithfully copy the structure of the population of Slovakia, which is due to the form of distribution of the questionnaire. However, at the time of the pandemic, any other form of questionnaire distribution would be difficult and overly expensive.

### 3.6 Contribution

Despite some limits, the research answers a key question about the future demand for PTSs and the importance of this renewed business model in post pandemic period. The paper points out to the inappropriate predominant naming of the model (so-called collaborative consumption or sharing economy) and given its nature, recommends rather to use the name of the platform economy. It highlights the information as a key, but neglected segment of PTSs and offers scholars to pay more attention to this topic in the future, whereas they have and will do so a key impact on the whole tourism business. In this context, we recommend examining, in particular, how appropriate review management can affect the performance of tourism businesses and destinations.

As UNWTO (2017) points out, governments, destinations and the private sector will need

to consider the development of these tourism services, explicitly through better measurement and further research. We see a serious shortcoming in the fact that within platform transport services, it is not distinguished whether the service is used by the visitor or by the local. The position of these services in the tourism development is therefore questionable and should be justified by an appropriate research. It will be interesting to see, for example, the scope of the platform transport uses (especially bike- and scooter-sharing) during staycation, which in the context of pandemic constraints experienced a significant recovery.

Although Slovakia is a country with a significant rate of use of PTSs with noticeable growth in recent years (Flash Eurobarometer 467, 2018), to date, there has been no relevant analysis in the scientific literature mapping this phenomenon. We believe that the current study has filled this gap and, furthermore, has provided inspiration for further international research with a focus on platform information and platform transport used by tourist destination visitors. The practical contribution lies in pointing out the possibility of using greatly wanted PTSs as additional business opportunity and employment tool in the post-pandemic period. The innovative business model can thus become a noteworthy tool for reviving tourism, not only in Slovakia, but also worldwide. We believe that this aspect should be addressed by both national and transnational policies. Primarily, it is essential to terminate the legislative framework, which would not disadvantage traditional service providers, and at the same time, support the prompt creation of new jobs in tourism to overcome the difficult post pandemic period.

## Conclusions

PTSs have proved to be more than a temporary innovative trend. It redefines traditional models and subverts the classic operational rules of economic sector (Serrano et al., 2020) and for several years is one of the much-debated dynamic and open phenomenon worldwide. In tourism, C2C platforms are ruling, changing the way that individuals offer and consumes, with a view to reducing resources and decreasing waste, which is essential for positive step towards climate change. Although some authors question the sustainability of this concept, according to Zhu and Liu (2020), most

are convinced of the environmental utility of the platform economy. However, environmental motives are only secondary for users of PTSs and will most likely remain ancillary, due to the pandemic crisis and its economic consequences. It can be also assumed, that demand for PTSs remain primarily price-driven, which is noticeably evident in the example of the country with a lower standard of living than the EU.

After the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, many feared, that the platform economy may be one of the sectors most affected by the crisis (Zhu & Liu, 2020). However, if we proceed from the thesis that the exponential growth of this model is a response to several factors including the loss of consumers' purchasing power after the 2008 economic crisis (UNWTO, 2017; Serrano et al., 2020) so it can be expected that the current crisis will not weaken its development. This also applies to the inhabitants of Slovakia, who, according to the results of a mixed survey, are interested in PTSs after the end of the pandemic. In terms of potential demand, young people are the most promising segment, especially digital Generation Z. Regarding the supply side, typically tourist related information in internet, platform accommodation and platform transport, are the most auspicious sectors, as they have already transformed the tourism business, and will continue to do so, despite the overwhelming power of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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