ORIGINAL PAPER A STATISTICAL STUDY ON THE ROLE OF OUTSOURCING ROMANIAN ACCOUNTING SERVICES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PANDEMIC CRISIS

VIOLETA STATE¹, DAN MARIUS COMAN¹,^{*}, LAURA MARCU¹, DOINA CONSTANTA MIHAI², LOREDANA CRISTINA TANASE¹, CRISTINA MARIA VOINEA¹

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Abstract. The organization and management of the financial accounting function can be done within the economic entity, either through a separate department or through outsourcing, by entrusting, based on a service contract, to professionals. In this context, we were faced with a double scientific challenge. On the one hand, we considered it appropriate to carry out a quantitative study on the perception of managers of economic entities on the importance of outsourcing accounting for business continuity and achieving expected performance, given that the negative effects of crises strongly influence the business environment, in general, and, in particular, the economic crisis caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. During the research, the second objective of our scientific approach was outlined, namely to highlight the existence or not of a relationship of dependence between the typologies of the respondents of the questionnaire and their perception of the importance and favorable effects of outsourcing accounting services, using the Chi-squared test, to determine the existence of a statistically significant difference between the expected frequencies and the observed frequencies for one or more variables.

Keywords: Chi-squared test for economics research; accounting services; outsourcing of accounting; going concern; pandemic crises.

1. INTRODUCTION

To achieve the performance objectives, the management of any economic entity must ensure both the functionality of the entity and the competitiveness through a permanent adaptation and improvement of the management system to the actual situation in the entity, the organizational culture, and the socio-economic context which the entity carries out its activities.

The sizing, structuring, and correlation of all management relations must consider the maximization of quantifiable and non-quantifiable economic and social effects to obtain high competitiveness. In this context, we can say that the financial accounting function has strategic importance in participating in general policy decisions, being a function of

¹ Valahia University of Targoviste, Faculty of Economics, 130004 Targoviste, Romania. E-mail: <u>viostate@yahoo.com</u>; <u>laura_marcu_uvt@yahoo.fr</u>; <u>loredanatanase80@yahoo.com</u>; <u>voinea_cristina_maria@yahoo.com</u>.

 ² Valahia University of Targoviste, Faculty of Sciences and Arts, 130004 Targoviste, Romania.
 E-mail: <u>mihaidoina2004@yahoo.com</u>

^{*} Corresponding author: <u>cmnmarius@yahoo.com</u>.

distribution and control of the resources of the economic entity [1]. The exercise of the accounting function is regulated in Romania by the Accounting Law no. 82/1991 updated. It stipulates that the organization and management of accounting can be done either through a separate organizational structure, led by an economic director/chief accountant/another authorized person, or by outsourcing it, based on "service contracts of services in accounting, concluded with natural or legal persons, authorized according to the law, members of the Body of Expert Accountants and Authorized Accountants from Romania" [2]. Outsourcing of accounting services is a favorable alternative for SMEs, which, in addition to the expertise they benefit from, also feel a reduction in costs in this segment [3].

The new coronavirus has shown us that the future is unpredictable. Adapting and finding new solutions on a defining basis other than those known and practiced before the pandemic is a challenge for humanity [4]. Starting from this factual situation, were in the situation of a double scientific challenge: on the one hand, the analysis of the perception of managers of economic entities on the importance of outsourcing accounting for business continuity and achieving the expected performance, given that the business environment is strongly influenced by the adverse effects of crises in general and the economic crisis in particular SARS-CoV-2 virus; on the other hand, the use of methods of data collection and statistical analysis, namely quantitative analysis based on a questionnaire, in a business survey and Chi-squared test as a method of determining the existence of a statistically significant difference between the expected frequencies and the frequencies observed in one or more categories of a crosstabulation incidence table.

In our approach to theoretical documentation, as a preliminary research stage, we identified a series of studies whose results highlight that the use of mathematical and statistical methods for analysis and interpretation of economic and social phenomena is appropriate, the study conclusions being relevant to scientific knowledge. Thus, in the field of social sciences, studies of analysis of economic phenomena use the tools of statistical analysis. The authors [5] use regression models to test the hypotheses for researching the link between human resources and financial performance. The application of the statistical analysis tool in the paper [6] illustrates the correlation between staff turnover and hidden costs. Also, in the field of exploitation of natural deposits, the study [7] showed that the mining activities through which various natural deposits are exploited and influenced by public policies to protect natural areas. All these studies have as common research points the formulation of hypotheses and their verification with the help of statistical tests available in the analysis application.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 MATERIALS

Regardless of the field, research is a complex, multidimensional, pertinent, and iterative process that integrates well-defined stages that must be perceived in their interconnection and not in a linear, singular way [8]. The success of a research project involves the ordering and structuring of thought and action, the intellectual construction of a path that formalizes the approach from idea to result [9]. For scientific research to achieve its goal of producing, developing, and deepening scientific knowledge, it is essential to formulate the issue in a relevant manner appropriate to the context studied. Given the context studied, mentioned in the introductory part, the issue addressed is, in a broad sense, the decision of the

management of economic entities on the exercise of the financial accounting function and, in a narrow sense, the perception of the impact of its outsourcing on the activity and the possibility to highlight correlations between various data collected, using the Chi-squared test [10].

In the context of the negative and unprecedented impact of the pandemic crisis on economic activity [11], manifested both in the short term, "the impact on legal persons in their capacity as employers, the social aspect of the measures being paramount in this case, the measures generally having a short -term impact" as well as on medium and long term, "the impact on legal persons, the main actors populating the business environment, in their capacity of taxpayers, with medium and long-term occurrence" are the two research questions to which we sought the answer through the conjuncture survey conducted in the middle of the pandemic period, May - June 2021, more precisely, one year after its onset, namely: (1)To what extent is the decision to outsource the financial accounting function decisive for the continuity of the entities' activity and the achievement of a high degree of achievement of the expected performances, given the particular conditions of the business environment under the influence of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic crisis? (2) There is a link between the different typologies that make up the research sample (managerial experience, size of the entity, field of activity, etc.) and the perception of the extent to which outsourcing of the accounting function and its advantages can provide a reasonable solution to ensure business continuity and achievement performance?

2.2 METHODS

The data were collected based on a questionnaire, applied to 121 subjects, decisionmakers in some economic entities in Dâmbovița County, whose specific accounting activities were entrusted to accounting service providers, professional accountants, members of the Body of Experts Accountants and Chartered Accountants in Romania. The elaboration and transmission of the questionnaire was done through the platform www.isondaje.ro, the link generated being distributed through social networks with the support of accounting firms, the respondents being their clients.

The data collected were processed using the SPSS and Microsoft Excel software. In order to be studied, the nominal or ordinal data must be organized in tables of incidence so that the Chi-square test can be applied as a statistical test that highlights whether there is any reciprocal influence between two factors [12]. According to the literature, through this test, it can be established, statistically speaking, whether the observed situations are accidental or not [13].

Thus, the purpose of our research was to study the existence or not of a significant dependence between the characteristics/typology of respondents and their perception of the outsourcing of accounting services and the advantages it provides for business continuity in crisis conditions.

The following objectives were set to demonstrate the appropriateness of using a mathematical model to explain economic phenomena: *Objective 1*. Determine the typologies of respondents according to several criteria, such as experience in the field of decision-makers, main field of activity, types of entities classified by the number of employees, and size of entities according to turnover; *Objective 2*. Determine the extent to which the outsourcing of accounting services is a determining factor for the continuity of the entities' activity, given the advantages of mitigating the adverse, indirect effects of the pandemic; *Objective 3*. Analyze the existence of dependencies between the respondents' typology and

the appreciation of the importance of outsourcing the accounting services and the advantages they ensure for the continuity of the activity in conditions of pandemic crisis.

Given the mentioned purpose and objectives, we have defined two research hypotheses whose validation/invalidation will allow us to formulate some conclusions in answer to the research questions: *Hypothesis 1*. Outsourcing of accounting services is an advantage for the management of economic entities, contributing significantly to reducing the negative impact on the entity's performance in conditions of economic crisis, respectively pandemic crisis caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus; *Hypothesis 2*. Between the typologies of the respondents and the perception of the importance and advantages of outsourcing accounting services, there are dependency relations, statistically determined with the help of the Chi-square test.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The empirical study is part of the scientific approach of exploratory research, given the number of respondents. To verify the consistency of the construction of the questionnaire, we applied the specific test for measuring the Alpha coefficient (Cronbach), obtaining the values from Table 1.

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.682	0.717	12

Table 1. Reliability statistics.

The Alpha (Cronbach) coefficient is used to study the internal consistency of the items in a questionnaire [13]. As a result of applying this test, the value of 0.717 was obtained, which is a good value compared to the evaluation grid used in the literature (coefficient < 0.5 - not accepted, coefficient between 0.5 and 0.6 poor consistency, coefficient between 0.6 and 0.7 - acceptable consistency, coefficient between 0.7 and 0.9 - good consistency, coefficient > 0.9 excellent consistency).

The sample underlying this research has several characteristics resulting from data processing using the SPSS statistical program. As can be seen from the typologies we refer to, the characteristics are the following: respondents' experience in the field of activity of entities, the field of activity of entities, type of entity depending on the number of employees, size of the entity depending on turnover recorded at the end year 2020.

Table 2 presents the structure of the sample on cross-correlation tables, type 2 x 2, having as variables the characteristics depending on which we applied Chi-square to validate/invalidate the research hypotheses. The analysis of the association table indicates that respondents with less than 15 years of experience have a higher share in all the analyzed areas than those with more than 15 years of experience. According to the authors, the distribution may be significant for the level of appreciation of the accounting outsourcing services and their benefits. Less experience in the field can be complemented by the professionalism and expertise of the accounting service provider.

As can be seen, small entities with a volume of activity measured through turnover share 69.42% of all entities, those associated with leaders with less than 15 years of experience with a share of 56.19%.

Experience in the	Type of activity for economic entities [*] (no. of entities)				
field (no. of persons)	sales	services	production	Total	
under 15 years	25	45	20	90	
over 15 years	5	16	10	31	
Total	30	61	30	121	
	Туре	pe of economic entity (no. of entities)			
	micro-entity (0-9 employees)	small entity (10-49 employees)	medium entity (50-249 employees)		
under 15 years	67	18	5	90	
over 15 years	20	8	3	31	
	87	26	8	121	
	Т	Turnover in 2020 (no. of entities)			
	under 100,000 RON	100,001 – 400,000 RON	400,001 – 700,000 RON		
under 15 years	68	10	12	90	
over 15 years	16	9	6	31	
	84	19	18	121	

1 able 2. The crosstabulation between the analyzed variable	Table 2. The	crosstabulation	between the	analyzed	variables
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*Note: The main field of activity for economic entities is established in accordance with the Claimisicare of Activities in the National Economy (CAEN) [14]

In the event of crises with a strong impact in the short term, the most vulnerable entities are the small ones, whose piloting possibilities are restricted by their dependence on other actors in the business environment (suppliers, customers, state, and human resources). Moreover, from this point of view, it is interesting to analyze the statistical correlations' results.

		Entity type			
Variable analyzed		micro-entity (0-9 employees)	small entity (10-49 employees)	medium entity (50-249 employees)	Total
	under 100,000 RON		9	0	84
Turnover in 2020	100,001 – 400,000 RON	10	8	1	19
(no. or entities)	400,001 – 700,000 RON	2	9	7	18
Total		87	26	8	121
Field of activity of	sales	24	5	1	30
economic entities	services	47	12	2	61
(no. of entities)	production	16	9	5	30
Total		87	26	8	121

Table 3. Distribution of the sample according to the type of economic entity.

Given the results presented to Table 3, we can say that *Objective 1* has been achieved, the main characteristics of the sample can be summarized as follows: 74.38% of the respondents have a total experience of less than 15 years, 74.44% of them leading microentities; the significant share of small entities is noticeable, micro-entities with less than 9 employees representing 71.90% of the total entities, 86.20% of them achieving a turnover of less than 100,000 RON, and 54.02% of them having as main object of activity the provision of services; the predominant field of activity is the provision of services, 50.41% of the total of 121 entities, the micro-entities that carry out such activities having a weight of 38.84% of the total entities and of 77.04% of the sub-total of 61 entities; the level of Turnover is mainly below 100,000 RON, 69.42% of the total of 121 entities, the micro-entities that achieved this level having a share of 61.98% of the total entities and 89.28% of the subtotal of 84 entities.

The extent to which respondents consider outsourcing accounting services to be a determinant of business continuity is presented in Table 4.

 Table 4. Outsourcing of accounting services is a determining factor of business continuity during the pandemic.

Experience in the field	Outsourcing of accounting services a determining factor for business continuity during the pandemic			Outsourcing of accounting services a determining factor for business continuity during the pandemic		Total
(no. of persons) not at all/small extent large extent/ve		large extent/very large extent				
under 15 years	14	76	90			
over 15 years	7	24	31			
Total	21	100	121			

At this stage of our scientific approach, we can conclude that *Objective 2* was reached based on the results obtained. *Hypothesis 1* of the 121 respondents, 82.64%, consider that the outsourcing of accounting services in the context in which the business environment is affected by the pandemic crisis is a determining factor of business continuity, contributing significantly to diminishing the negative impact on the entity's performance in the conditions of an economic crisis, triggered by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.

In order to achieve the third objective and, implicitly, the validation/invalidation of the second hypothesis, we proceeded to apply the Chi-square test for the factors illustrated in Table 5. The dependent variables thus defined represent the immediate, very short-term difficulties the business environment encountered in accessing the financial resources made available by the state during the state of emergency and alert.

Table 5. The situation	of the factors that ma	ke up the research	hvpothesis ver	ification model
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Factor	Variable type
Experience of the respondent in the field in which the economic entity operates (EXPD)	independent
Outsourcing of the accounting function is a determining factor for the continuity of the activity of the economic entity (EXTFC)	dependent
Fast pace of regulation, difficult to anticipate (ambiguities, lack of useful information, inconsistencies between information transmitted through different communication channels) (RAR)	dependent
Correct and complete preparation of documents in the format adapted to remote processing and transmission (on online platforms), a determining condition for the validity and validity of requests to state institutions for financial support (ICD)	dependent
Accessing online document submission platforms, as the only alternative for correspondence / communication with state institutions. (PLTON)	dependent
The need to comply with the deadlines for completing and submitting documents on online platforms, mandatory to be able to benefit from the support provided by the state, through its various institutions (TERM)	dependent

The model used in applying this statistical test is specific to non-parametric variables and involves defining the correlations to be studied [15]. The correlations are presented in Table 6.

No. crt.	Correlation			
1	C1: The assessment of the importance of outsourcing accounting services for business continuity depends on the type of respondents.	EXTFC & EXPD		
2	C2: The assessment of the extent to which, due to the outsourcing of economic entities, cope with the fast pace of regulations imposed by the pandemic, difficult to anticipate (ambiguities, lack of useful information, inconsistencies between information transmitted through different communication channels) is dependent on respondents.			
3	C3: Assessment of the extent to which outsourcing facilitates the correct and complete preparation of documents in the format adapted to remote processing and transmission (on online platforms), a determining condition for the validity and validity of requests to state institutions for financial support, is dependent on respondents.	ICD & EXPD		
4	C4: Assessment of the extent to which outsourcing facilitates access to and use of online document submission platforms, as the only alternative for correspondence/communication with state institutions, is dependent on the type of respondents.	PLTON & EXPD		
5	C5: The assessment of the extent to which outsourcing facilitates the deadline for completing and submitting documents on online platforms, which must be respected in order to benefit from the support provided by the state, through its various institutions, is dependent on the type of respondents	TERM & EXPD		

Table 6	Defining (the correlations	verified by	undertaken	study
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The statistical analysis of each correlation is performed in the following paragraphs.

C1: EXTFC & EXPD Assessment of the importance of outsourcing accounting services for business continuity depends on the type of respondents

According to the literature, the statistical test Chi-square is specific to the definition and verification of the null hypothesis H0 [16], according to which there is no significant difference between the analyzed groups. The value of X_c^2 is then calculated using the formula 1 found in the literature [17].

$$X_c^2 = \sum_{i=1}^r \sum_{j=1}^k \frac{(O_{ij} - A_{ij})^2}{A_{ij}}$$
(1)

where:

- r, k represents the number of rows and columns of the contingency table
- O_{ij} represents the frequency of row i and column j, resulting from the observation
- A_{ij} represents the frequency of row i and column j, which is expected to result under the null hypothesis

In the present case, it states that: The respondents' experience in the field does NOT influence the extent to which the outsourcing of accounting services is appreciated. The results of the analysis performed are presented in Tables 7 and 8.

Outsourcing of accounting services is a de	Experience in the field (no. of persons)		Total	
business continuity during the pandemic		under 15 years	over 15 years	Total
	Count	14.0	7.0	21.0
not at all/small extent	Expected Count	15.6	5.4	21.0
	Residual	-1.6	1.6	
	Count	76.0	24.0	100.0
large/very large extent	Expected Count	74.4	25.6	100.0
	Residual	1.6	-1.6	
Totol	Count	90.0	31.0	121.0
10181	Expected Count	90.0	31.0	121.0

Table 7. The crosstabulation between the analyzed variables (outsourcing of accounting services is a determining factor for business continuity during the pandemic AND experience in the field).

Table 8. Chi-square tests.

	Value	df	p-value	Results
Pearson Chi-square	0.793 ^a	1	0.373	Null hypothesis is validated

The Chi-square test result indicates that the null hypothesis is validated (p>0.05) respectively there is *no statistically significant interdependence between the two variables*. It corresponds to the fact that the orientation towards outsourcing the accounting function (dependent variable) is not significantly influenced by experience in the field (independent variable). The association table notes that the predominant response of both categories of respondents is similar to a large extent. Graphically, this result can be represented in a way we consider suggestive, according to Fig. 1.



Figure 1. Graphical representation of experience in the field.

C2: RAR & EXPD The assessment of the extent to which, due to the outsourcing of economic entities, cope with the fast pace of emergence of regulations imposed by the pandemic, difficult to anticipate (ambiguities, lack of useful information, inconsistencies between information transmitted through different communication channels) is dependent on the typology of respondents.

Hypothesis H0: There is no difference between the two categories of respondents regarding the decisive role of outsourcing accounting services in ensuring compliance, in

form and substance, with the regulations adopted by the state for the benefit of economic entities. The result of the analysis performed is presented in Tables 9 and 10.

Table 9. The crosstabulation between the analyzed variables (outsourcing has a positive impact on how to
deal with the fast pace of regulations, difficult to anticipate AND experiece in the field).

Outsourcing has a positive impact on how to	Experiece in (no. of pe	Total		
or regulations, unreduction anticipate		under 15 years	over 15 years	
	Count	10.0	1.0	11.0
not at all/small extent	Expected Count	8.2	2.8	11.0
Residual		1.8	-1.8	
	Count	80.0	30.0	110.0
large/very large extent	Expected Count	81.8	28.2	110.0
	Residual	-1.8	1.8	
T-1-1	Count	90.0	31.0	121.0
i otal	Expected Count	90.0	31.0	121.0

Table 10. Chi-square tests.

	Value	df	p-value	Results
Pearson Chi-square	1.735 ^a	1	0.188	Null hypothesis is validated

The test result is not statistically significant (p>0.05), which indicates that regardless of the respondents' experience in the field, outsourcing is considered a solution for adapting to the rapid pace of regulation.

C3: IDC & EXPD The assessment of the extent to which outsourcing facilitates the correct and complete preparation of documents in the format adapted to remote processing and transmission (on online platforms), a condition determined for the validity and validity of the typology of the respondents.

Hypothesis H0: Experience in the field does not influence the perception of the advantage of outsourcing accounting services when it comes to the need to prepare correctly and completely the required documents to obtain financial support from the state in a format adapted to remote processing and transmission. The result of the analysis performed is presented in Tables 11 and 12.

 Table 11. The crosstabulation between the analyzed variables (outsourcing has a positive impact in the process of correct and complete preparation of documents AND Experiece in the field).

Outsourcing has a positive impact in the proc	Experiece in the field (no. of persons)		Total	
processing and transmission	under 15 years	over 15 years	Total	
	Count	13.0	1.0	14.0
not at all/small extent	Expected Count	10.4	3.6	14.0
	Residual	2.6	-2.6	

Outsourcing has a positive impact in the proce	Experiece (no. of	Total		
processing and transmission	under 15 years	over 15 years	Total	
large/very large extent	Count	77.0	30.0	107.0
	Expected Count	79.6	27.4	107.0
	Residual	-2.6	2.6	
Tatal	Count	90.0	31.0	121.0
rotai	Expected Count	90.0	31.0	121.0

Table 12. Chi-square Tests

	Value	df	p-value	Results
Pearson Chi-square	2.836 ^a	1	0.092	Null hypothesis is validated

A statistically insignificant result is obtained (p>0.05), which means that the null hypothesis is validated. In other words, the advantage of outsourcing by facilitating the correct and complete preparation of documents in the format corresponding to remote transmission is not dependent on the professional experience of the respondent.

C4: PLTON & EXPD The extent to which outsourcing facilitates access to and use online document submission platforms as the only alternative for correspondence/communication with state institutions depends on the type of respondents.

Hypothesis H0: Experience in the field does not influence how respondents appreciate the positive impact of outsourcing on the way of efficient communication, exclusively online, between the economic entity and state institutions. The result of the analysis performed is presented in Tables 13 and 14.

Outsourcing has a positive impact on the development of correspondence, exclusively online, with state institutions		Experiece in the field (no. of persons)		Total
		under 15 years	over 15 years	
	Count	16.0	4.0	20.0
not at all/small extent	Expected Count	14.9	5.1	20.0
	Residual	1.1	-1.1	
	Count	74.0	27.0	101.0
large/very large extent	Expected Count	75.1	25.9	101.0
	Residual	-1.1	1.1	
Tatal	Count	90.0	31.0	121.0
Total	Expected Count	90.0	31.0	121.0

 Table 13. The crosstabulation between the analyzed variables (outsourcing has a positive impact on the development of correspondence AND Experiece in the field)

Tabel 14. Chi-square Tests

	Value	df	p-value	Results
Pearson Chi-square	0.397 ^a	1	0.529	Null hypothesis is validated

The result of applying the Chi-square test maintains the validity of the null hypothesis. It indicates that outsourcing the accounting function is considered a facility of access to online document filing platforms, both by people with less experience and those who have been practicing for a long time.

C5: TERM & EXPD The extent to which outsourcing facilitates compliance with the deadlines for completing and submitting documents on online platforms, which must be respected to benefit from state support through its various institutions, depends on the type of respondents.

Hypothesis H0: The experience in the field of the respondents does not influence the extent of appreciating the mentioned advantage of outsourcing accounting services. The result of the analysis performed is presented in Tables 15 and 16.

Outsourcing has a positive impact on the ch	Experiece in the field (no. of persons)		Total	
the need to meet the deadlines imposed by the state		under 15 years	over 15 years	10141
	Count	14.0	1.0	15.0
not at all/small extent	Expected Count	11.2	3.8	15.0
	Residual	2.8	-2.8	
	Count	76.0	30.0	106.0
large/very large extent	Expected Count	78.8	27.2	106.0
	Residual	-2.8	2.8	
Total	Count	90.0	31.0	121.0
Totai	Expected Count	90.0	31.0	121.0

Table 15. The crosstabulation between the analyzed variables (outsourcing has a positive impact on the challenge AND experiece in the field)

Table 16. Chi-square Tests

	Value	df	p-value	Results
Pearson Chi-square	3.228 ^a	1	0.072	Null hypothesis is validated

For this last correlation, the Chi-square test results validate the null hypothesis so that we can consider that the outsourcing of the accounting function is a guarantee of compliance with the specific terms imposed by the online data collection platforms. By performing these statistical tests, *Objective 3* of the research was achieved. Also, the obtained results lead us to conclude that *Hypothesis 2 is invalidated*, the respondents' assessments of the outsourcing of accounting services and the advantages of this managerial decision being independent of the typology of which they are part.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The outsourcing of accounting services has strategic importance for the functioning of economic entities. Given that it provides the necessary information for business management, practically reflecting in monetary terms how they have performed in the entity the other functions (supply, production, sales). The obtained results give the contribution of this research to the enrichment of scientific knowledge: (1) The evaluation of the role and

195

advantages of the outsourcing of accounting services by the decision-makers of the economic entities was made in the context of the pandemic crisis, which gives the study a novelty and topicality; (2) The decision to outsource the accounting function is a determining factor for business continuity in a business environment affected by the pandemic crisis (82.64% of respondents), significantly contributing to mitigating its unfavorable consequences. The Chisquare test revealed no statistically significant interdependence between this assessment and the typology of respondents; (3) The advantages of outsourcing accounting services in relation to the obligations that economic entities have towards the state and its bodies are enhanced by the manifestation of the pandemic crisis due to the high degree of uncertainty and the need for a high speed of reaction from decision-makers.

Given that respondents come from a small geographical area (economic entities from Dâmbovița County), our study may represent an opportunity for further research by expanding the number of respondents and their spatial and temporal distribution. The pandemic crisis has effects both present and future, in the medium and long term.

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