

ANALYSIS OF CAPPADOCIA ROCK-CARVED HOTEL EXPERIENCE IN TERMS OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Sibel Özdemir* & Ebru Güneren**

Abstract

The locations within the Cappadocia Region, some of which were used by past civilizations, have been preserved to the present day and converted into distinctive accommodation facilities following a series of renovation projects. These facilities, designated as rock-carved hotels, are intended to prevent the trivialization of experiences and facilitate tourists' access to distinctive geographical, historical, cultural and architectural experiences. The objective of this study is to ascertain whether the experiences of domestic and foreign tourists staying in rock-carved hotels in the Cappadocia Region differ by their demographic characteristics. A total of 465 domestic and foreign tourists were surveyed for this study using the judgmental sampling method. The data obtained from the study were analyzed using the statistical software package SPSS. The T-test and ANOVA were employed to determine whether experiential value differed by demographic characteristics. The analysis indicated that tourists' experiences of rock-carved hotels are influenced by their demographic characteristics. The findings align with and contribute to the broader literature on experiential Tourism, particularly this study also highlights areas where experiential value theory can be further refined. The findings reinforce the importance of customization in service delivery.

Keywords: Experiential Value; Cave Hotels; Cappadocia; Demographic Characteristic.

ANÁLISE DA EXPERIÊNCIA EM HOTÉIS ESCULPIDOS NA ROCHA DA CAPADÓCIA EM TERMOS DE VARIÁVEIS DEMOGRÁFICAS

Resumo

Os locais na região da Capadócia, alguns dos quais foram utilizados por civilizações passadas, foram preservados até hoje e passaram a funcionar, após uma série de projetos de renovação, como instalações de alojamento distintas, sendo designadas como hotéis esculpidos em rochas, visam evitar a banalização das experiências e facilitar o acesso dos turistas a experiências geográficas, históricas, culturais e arquitetônicas únicas. O objetivo deste estudo é determinar se as experiências de turistas nacionais e estrangeiros que se hospedam em hotéis esculpidos na rocha na região da Capadócia diferem conforme suas características demográficas. No estudo, um total de 465 turistas, nacionais e estrangeiros, foi pesquisado por meio do método de amostragem por julgamento. Os dados obtidos foram submetidos à análise no software estatístico SPSS. O teste t e o ANOVA foram empregados para verificar se havia diferenças no valor experiencial em função das características demográficas. Os resultados demonstraram que as experiências dos turistas nos hotéis esculpidos na rocha variam conforme suas características demográficas. Os achados alinham-se à literatura mais ampla sobre turismo experiencial e contribuem para ela, especialmente ao destacar áreas em que a teoria do valor experiencial pode ser ainda mais refinada. Os resultados reforçam a importância da customização na prestação de serviços.

Palavras-chave: Valor Experiencial; Hotéis em Cavernas; Capadócia; Características Demográficas.

ANÁLISIS DE LA EXPERIENCIA EN HOTELES EXCAVADOS EN ROCA DE CAPADOCIA EN TÉRMINOS DE VARIABLES DEMOGRÁFICAS

Resumen

Las ubicaciones dentro de la región de Capadocia, algunas de las cuales fueron utilizadas por civilizaciones pasadas, se han preservado hasta la actualidad y han comenzado a funcionar, tras una serie de proyectos de renovación, como alojamientos distintivos, designadas como hoteles excavados en roca, siendo destinadas a prevenir la trivialización de las experiencias y facilitar el acceso de los turistas a experiencias geográficas, históricas, culturales y arquitectónicas únicas. El objetivo de este estudio es determinar si las experiencias de los turistas nacionales y extranjeros alojados en hoteles excavados en roca en la región de Capadocia difieren según sus características demográficas. En el estudio se encuestó a un total de 465 turistas, nacionales y extranjeros, mediante el método de muestreo por juicio. Los datos obtenidos en el estudio fueron analizados con el software estadístico SPSS. Se emplearon la prueba t y la ANOVA para determinar si existían diferencias en el valor experiencial según las características demográficas. Los resultados del análisis demostraron que las experiencias de los turistas en los hoteles excavados en roca varían según sus características demográficas. Los hallazgos se alinean con la literatura más amplia sobre el turismo experiencial y contribuyen a ella, especialmente al destacar áreas en las que la teoría del valor experiencial puede perfeccionarse aún más. Los resultados refuerzan la importancia de la personalización en la prestación de servicios.

Palabras clave: Valor Experiencial; Hoteles en Cavernas; Capadocia; Características Demográficas.

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* (Corresponding author). Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University, Türkiye. PhD in Tourism Management from Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University (2022). Master's degree in Tourism Management from Necmettin Erbakan University (2016) and Bachelor's degree in Tourism and Hotel Management from Selçuk University (2014). Currently serving as a Lecturer at Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University, Devrek Vocational School, Department of Hotel, Restaurant and Catering Services. Previously worked as a Lecturer at Yozgat Bozok University (2017-2024). Her doctoral dissertation focused on "Determining the relationships between experiential value, satisfaction and behavioral intention: The case of Cappadocia Rock Hotels." Her research interests include Tourism Marketing, Gastronomy, and Culinary Arts. Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University, Devrek Vocational School, Department of Hotel, Restaurant and Catering Services, Tourism and Hotel Management Program. Devrek, Zonguldak, Türkiye. Cv: <https://dvys.beun.edu.tr/pbs/sibel.ozdemir?lang=tr>, OCIRD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0700-0823>, E-posta: sibel.ozdemir@beun.edu.tr

** She graduated from Hacettepe University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Department of Business Administration (1991). She received her master's degree from Hacettepe University, Department of Business Administration (1996) and her doctorate degree from Hacettepe University, Department of Business Administration (2004). She started working as a Lecturer at Başkent University (1996-2002). Later, she worked as a Lecturer at the Cyprus International University (2004-2007). Subsequently, she worked as an Assistant Professor at the same university (2007-2013). She then continued her professional life as an Assistant Professor at Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University (2013). She received her Associate Professorship in the field of marketing (2016). Currently, she teaches undergraduate courses at the Faculty of Tourism and graduate courses at the Institute of Tourism Research at Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University. Her main areas of research are tourism marketing, entrepreneurship, and consumer behavior. Cv: <https://biz.nevsehir.edu.tr/eburguneren/en>, OCIRD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2669-4402>, E-posta: eburguneren@nevsehir.edu.tr

1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism demand has undergone significant shifts, largely driven by demographic and sociological changes in the global population. While the postmodernist perspective has traditionally emphasized the symbolic and experiential dimensions of consumption, contemporary studies stress the integration of digital advancements and sustainability in tourism (Gretzel et al., 2015). These evolving paradigms challenge traditional frameworks by exploring how technology and environmental consciousness reshape tourists' experiences and priorities. Although earlier works by Pine and Gilmore (1999) and Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) provided foundational insights into experiential value, recent research calls for critical engagement with the dynamic and multifaceted nature of modern tourism.

This study focuses on Cappadocia's rock-carved hotels, recognized as niche tourism products that blend cultural authenticity with modern luxury. While these accommodations offer unique experiential value, prior studies have often reiterated established themes without critically examining demographic-specific insights. To address this gap, the current study investigates whether perceptions of experiential value differ between domestic and international tourists, based on demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and nationality. By linking demographic diversity to experiential value, the research advances theoretical understanding and offers actionable strategies for targeted marketing.

Recent advancements in tourism research have underscored the importance of context-specific analysis. For instance, rock-carved hotels in Cappadocia provide an exceptional opportunity to examine experiential value in a setting characterized by unique architecture, rich history, and immersive cultural elements (Doğaner, 2013). However, the influence of demographic factors on experiential perceptions remains underexplored. Emerging literature suggests that younger generations, influenced by digital interactivity, and older demographics, prioritizing authenticity, may perceive value differently (Sigala, 2020). This study extends these findings by situating Cappadocia within a global framework and exploring its alignment with similar destinations such as Petra in Jordan and Matera in Italy.

While the statement that "tourists prioritize the experiential value they derive from tourism products" (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) remains relevant, this generalized notion overlooks the nuanced differences shaped by demographic variables. This research addresses this gap by posing the central question: "Do experiential value perceptions in Cappadocia's rock-carved hotels vary based on demographic factors?" The study also seeks to theorize how these variations inform global tourism strategies, moving beyond descriptive replication to offer critical insights into the operational and marketing implications of experiential tourism.

By incorporating recent theoretical advancements and emphasizing the role of demographic diversity, this study bridges gaps in the literature and provides a forward-looking perspective. It aims to contribute to the broader discourse on experiential tourism by highlighting how niche products, such

as Cappadocia's rock-carved hotels, can adapt to evolving market demands while maintaining their cultural and historical integrity. This dual focus on theory and practice ensures the research remains both contextually grounded and globally relevant.

2 THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1 The Experience Economy

Today, when consumers purchase a product, they are not only satisfied with functional benefits but also want unique and unforgettable experiences (Yuan & Wu, 2008). Increasing competition, especially among businesses operating in the service sector, changes in consumer demands and the integration of communication and entertainment have further increased the importance of experience (Knutson et al., 2006; Schmitt, 1999).

The concept of experience was first introduced into the consumer behaviour literature by Holbrook and Hirschmann (1982), and it has come to the fore as an important element in understanding consumer behaviour (Morgan, 2009). Pine and Gilmore (1999) define experiences as the fourth economic presentation of services, which is as different from services as services are different from goods.

Consumers' desire to engage in active consumption experiences and create unique value has been called the paradox of the 21st century, and this has contributed significantly to the development of the experience economy (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2000). Although the experience economy was initially introduced in select sectors in 1998, it has since proliferated across numerous domains, including tourism (Leighton, 2007), marketing (Grewal et al., 2009; Verhoef et al., 2009), and urban planning (Same and Larimo, 2012).

The experience economy has been applied to several other fields, including architecture, sports, branding (Brakus et al., 2009; Gentile et al., 2007), entertainment and the arts (Petkus, 2004) and urban planning (Same and Larimo, 2012). The concept of the experience economy was first subjected to comprehensive analysis in the literature by Pine and Gilmore (1998; 1999).

Pine and Gilmore (1999) posited that the experience economy serves as a framework that shapes customer purchasing behaviour in the contemporary era. The authors posit that it is no longer sufficient to offer merely high-quality coffee or a well-crafted shirt. To attract, appeal to, and offer a range of experiences, it must support re-attracting good customers, range, and services.

Consequently, a business not only provides goods or services, but also strives to offer customers an unforgettable experience. The experience economy can be explained using a two-dimensional model based on the level of consumer involvement (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). Pine and Gilmore (1999) divide the dimensions of experience into two groups, horizontal and vertical. On the horizontal axis, there are passive and active participation, where the consumer takes part in the experience as a spectator or as an active participant.

While passive participation defines the consumer as a spectator or observer, active participation positions the consumer as an active participant in the experience itself. For example, a visitor who goes to a museum and examines the artifacts on display demonstrates passive participation. In contrast, a visitor who participates in a paragliding activity organized in Fethiye Babadağ demonstrates active participation (Akbulut et al., 2024).

On the vertical axis, there are the dimensions of immersion and absorption. While immersion allows the consumer to experience and interact with the experience directly, absorption refers to mentally perceiving and internalizing it. For example, a consumer who watches a travel programme about Venice, Italy, imagines themselves on a gondola tour and experiences it mentally, within the absorption dimension.

On the other hand, a consumer who actually goes to Venice, rides a gondola, wanders the streets, and feeds the seagulls in Piazza San Marco becomes part of the experience and is enveloped by it (Güney, 2015). This model is an important tool for understanding consumer experiences and shaping marketing strategies from the perspective of the experience economy.

In the experiential value dimensions proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1998), the experience dimensions along the horizontal and vertical axes form four distinct experience types.

The term "entertainment" refers to a wide range of activities that are not essential to an individual's basic functioning. These activities are typically passive and not directly related to fulfilling basic human needs. The term "entertainment experiences" refers to experiences in which individuals passively absorb sensory input, such as watching shows, listening to music, or reading books.

Situations in which tourists observe events or other performances occurring in a destination often constitute entertainment experiences (e.g. listening to music or reading a book) (Oh et al., 2007). While some tourist experiences, such as pilgrimages, do not include entertainment offerings, many destinations have developed a range of entertainment options that enhance tourists' experiences (Benek, 2022).

-Escape: An escape experience enables the individual to become wholly immersed in the experience to the extent that they lose their sense of self and become enmeshed in the experience (Benek, 2022). As Mehmetoğlu and Engen (2011) observe, escape experiences are typically perceived as exciting and enjoyable. As Çelik (2013) asserts, escape experiences afford individuals the opportunity to immerse themselves in an alternative environment, allowing them to focus their attention on an activity or product that aligns with their interests. This process enables the individual to temporarily disengage from their usual environment, thereby increasing their motivation (Benek, 2022). Theme parks, casinos, internet chat rooms, and virtual playgrounds are examples of settings where escape experiences occur (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

The term "aesthetics" is used to describe the sensory experience of beauty and the appreciation of art. An aesthetic experience can be defined as an individual's perception and interpretation of the physical environment that surrounds them. In such experiences, tourists derive pleasure from the

environment a destination offers without causing any alteration or damage to it.

Regardless of a destination's level of authenticity, tourists typically engage in passive enjoyment or are affected by the environment in ways that align with how it appeals to their senses. Such experiences enable tourists to engage with the environment simply by being in the destination's physical setting (Benek, 2022). Experiences such as standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon, visiting an art gallery or museum, taking a space tour, and walking among fairy chimneys in Cappadocia can be given as examples of aesthetic experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

-Education: In the educational experience, the individual actively participates in the activity while assimilating the activity presented to them. It is known that educational activities require mental or physical participation to increase individuals' knowledge or skills (Pine & Gilmore, 2012).

During educational experiences, tourists actively participate through mind-and-body interaction while simultaneously gaining a deeper understanding of events occurring at the destination (Oh et al., 2007). In this context, tourists who participate in an educational experience often increase their knowledge or improve their skills (Benek, 2022). For example, a local food experience allows tourists to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of the culture of a destination

The fundamental concepts identified in the literature can be expressed as entertainment, aesthetics, escapism, and service excellence. Entertainment includes activities that tourists can enjoy, while the aesthetic dimension encompasses the visual and sensory characteristics of a destination (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Escapism reflects tourists' desire to disconnect from their daily lives (Oh et al., 2007), whereas service excellence is crucial to ensuring service quality and customer satisfaction (Chen et al., 2020).

While working with these concepts, the impact of each dimension on tourist experiences was analyzed. For instance, the visual aesthetics and architectural uniqueness of Cappadocia's rock-carved hotels had a significant impact on tourists. The escapism dimension was supported by the region's serene and authentic environment (Atay & Çeti, 2018). Entertainment elements were strengthened through activities such as balloon tours, while service excellence was achieved through the hotels' high service standards (Özen, 2009).

2.2 Experiential Value-Based Tourism

In the tourism sector, businesses aim to offer distinctive experiences by reshaping their extended service marketing mix with a focus on customer experience. Elements such as product, price, distribution, promotion, people, physical evidence, and process management are approached with an experiential perspective. Employees in tourism enterprises are often likened to theatre actors because of the high-intensity nature of the service and the immediate consumption of the product. In this context, hotels, restaurants, museums, entertainment businesses, theme

parks, and destinations can be seen as "theatre stages" (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). This perspective frames tourism experiences not only as places but also as environments where intense interactions and experiences occur.

Today's travelling consumers perceive accommodation establishments not merely as places to stay but as venues that offer unique and unforgettable experiences. This demand has necessitated moving beyond ordinary services in the tourism sector to deliver innovative solutions (Yetiş, 2015). The search for innovation among consumers has also influenced the architectural style of the accommodation sector, leading to the emergence of unique structures, such as rock-carved hotels, that cater to travellers' diverse needs (Özen, 2009).

When examining the literature, it becomes apparent that the concept of experience is generally addressed in the context of tourist, travel, and consumer experiences related to specific attractions or products. Some studies also focus on tourists' emotional and past experiences. The most frequently measured areas of experiential value include accommodation facilities, festivals themed around coffee, music, and local products, rural and wildlife tourism areas enabling eco-tourism activities, cultural heritage parks, museums, art galleries, restaurants offering gastronomic experiences, and wine tourism routes (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Kara & Çiçek, 2015; Harman & Akgündüz, 2014; Gentile et al., 2007; Çeltek, 2010; Bassi & Guido, 2006).

However, there is a notable lack of analysis specific to Cappadocia's rock-carved hotels. Despite meeting the high standards of five-star hotels, these establishments differ significantly from traditional hotels in their unique architectural styles.

Ali, Ryu, and Hussain (2016) highlighted the effects of creative tourism experiences on memory, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions in resort hotels. Similarly, Hung (2015) found that integrating religious themes such as Buddhism into hotel environments enhances tourists' experiences and satisfaction. Rather (2020) emphasized that returning customers derive greater experiential value, a finding supported by Chen et al. (2020), who demonstrated that experiential value reduces perceived risk in capsule-themed hotels. Atay and Çeti (2018) found that landscape and design elements significantly impact tourists' perceptions in ship-themed hotels.

Pezzi and Vianna (2015) analyzed memorable travel experiences in Brazil, emphasizing the importance of safety, aesthetics, and hospitality. Meacci & Liberatore (2018) explored the central role of sensory engagement in tourism, demonstrating how sensory activation creates impactful experiences. Carvalho and Nunes (2021) examined rural leisure tourism in Brazil, revealing its potential to preserve cultural values and foster social cohesion. Henche (2016) investigated the transformation of traditional food markets in Madrid into experiential tourism hubs, while Saporit (2024) highlighted innovative uses of astrotourism in the Canary Islands. Rivera Mateos (2013) emphasized how intercultural and historical elements enrich experiential tourism and promote sustainability.

Our model differentiates itself from previous studies by combining Cappadocia's unique architectural and cultural

context with experiential marketing theories. Unlike traditional experiential marketing models, this research analyzes how the region's cultural and historical heritage shapes tourist experiences (Pezzi & Vianna, 2015).

In addition to previous studies, this research comprehensively examines the impact of demographic variables (such as age, gender, and nationality) on experiential value. For instance, as highlighted by Chen et al. (2020), the effect of perceived risk on experiential value is a significant finding; however, this relationship has rarely been examined in conjunction with demographic variables. Thus, this study provides a new perspective both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it contributes to the experiential marketing literature by situating these concepts within a unique destination such as Cappadocia. Practically, it offers valuable insights for destination management and marketing strategies.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Significance of the Research

With the impact of globalization, business competitiveness has become increasingly intense. The removal of borders between countries, the increase in product and service diversity, and easier accessibility have forced businesses to adopt innovative strategies to sustain their market presence. Modern consumers no longer seek merely to fulfill their needs; they also desire emotional satisfaction, such as entertainment and pleasure.

Experiential marketing is a strategy that prioritizes creating consumer experiences over traditional product-focused approaches (Schmitt, 1999). In this context, the concept of experiential value plays a crucial role in strategic business planning. This research aims to explore how this value varies across demographic characteristics, providing both theoretical and practical contributions.

3.2 Purpose of the Research

The primary purpose of this research is to determine whether the experiential values of tourists staying in Cappadocia's rock-carved hotels differ according to gender, age, education level, marital status, occupation, and nationality. The following questions are addressed within the scope of this study:

- *Do tourists' experiential values differ significantly by gender?*
- *Do tourists' experiential values differ significantly by age?*
- *Do tourists' experiential values differ significantly by education level?*
- *Do tourists' experiential values differ significantly by marital status?*
- *Do tourists' experiential values differ significantly by occupation?*
- *Do tourists' experiential values differ significantly by nationality?*

3.3 Sample and Data Collection Tool

A judgmental sampling method was employed in this study due to the difficulty of reaching the entire population. Surveys were conducted both online and face-to-face with tourists who had stayed at least once in Cappadocia's rock-carved hotels. The online survey method was preferred due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and a total of 465 participants were reached. After excluding incomplete or incorrect responses, 389 valid responses were analyzed. According to Sekaran (2000), a sample size of 389 is sufficient to represent a population exceeding 100,000 at a 0.05 significance level, with a specified sampling error.

The survey consisted of a personal information form to collect demographic data and the Experiential Value Scale developed by Pine and Gilmore (1999), Mathwick et al. (2001), and Zhang (2008). This 17-item, 5-point Likert scale covers four dimensions: service excellence, aesthetics, entertainment, and escapism.

3.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using statistical software. Measures of central tendency, such as frequency, percentage distribution, and mean, were employed alongside significance tests like the t-test and ANOVA. The t-test was used to compare two groups, while ANOVA was used to compare three or more groups. The selection of these tests was guided by an examination of the data's normality.

The reliability of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, yielding an overall reliability of 0.883 for the experiential value scale. Sub-dimension scores were as follows: 0.895 for service excellence and aesthetics, 0.877 for entertainment, and 0.785 for escapism. These values indicate that the scale and its sub-dimensions are highly reliable. However, the limitations of these methods must also be noted. For instance, while the results of the t-test and ANOVA are valid, the judgmental sampling method may limit the generalizability of the findings, an important limitation of this study.

3.5 Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study should be interpreted with certain limitations in mind. First, due to geographical

limitations, the research focuses exclusively on rock-carved hotels in the Cappadocia region. The region's unique cultural, architectural, and natural characteristics may limit the generalizability of the findings to similar hotels in other destinations. For instance, the expectations and perceptions of tourists in other tourist regions may differ significantly from those in Cappadocia.

Secondly, due to sampling limitations, the study was conducted only with tourists who stayed in rock-carved hotels in Cappadocia. The majority of participants may belong to a specific demographic group or cultural background, making it difficult to generalize the findings to groups with different demographic characteristics.

Lastly, due to temporal constraints, the research was conducted within a specific timeframe. Tourist experiences can vary with seasonal changes and the intensity of tourism in the region. For example, tourists' expectations and experiences in summer and winter may differ significantly. However, such factors were not addressed in this study.

These limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the study's findings. Future research can address these constraints by examining broader geographical regions, incorporating more diverse samples, and considering seasonal variations in tourist experiences.

4 RESULTS ANALYSIS

The demographic characteristics of the tourists participating in the research are presented in Table 3. Accordingly, 54,5% of the tourists are female, 45,5% are male, 42,2% are between 26 and 35 years old, 53,5% are single, 41,4% are bachelor's degree graduates. When evaluated by occupation, most tourists are civil servants (19,8%), and 50,6% are of Turkish nationality.

4.1 Difference Tests

To determine whether tourists' rock-carving hotel experiences differ by certain demographic characteristics, t-tests and a one-way ANOVA were conducted. The findings obtained are given below.

The T-test of the sub-dimensions of the rock-carved hotel experience for tourists participating in the research, by gender, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Independent t-test Results of Tourists' Cave Hotel Experience Sub-dimensions by Gender.

Sub-dimension	Female Mean.	Std. Deviation	Male Mean	Std. Deviation	t	p-value
<i>Service Excellence</i>	4,31	,501	4,13	,554	1,201	,001*
<i>Aesthetic</i>	4,35	,495	4,16	,578	4,262	,000*
<i>Entertainment</i>	3,96	,591	3,90	,558	,027	,345
<i>Escapism</i>	4,00	,672	3,84	,655	,051	,023*

Source: own elaboration.

According to Table 1, significant differences were observed between female and male tourists in certain experiential value dimensions. Female tourists rated service excellence higher than males, indicating a stronger emphasis on service quality ($p < 0.001$). Similarly, women scored higher on the aesthetic dimension ($p < 0.000$),

suggesting that visual and sensory elements are more important to them, especially in a destination like Cappadocia, with its unique architecture. In contrast, the entertainment dimension showed no significant difference between genders ($p > 0.05$), suggesting similar perceptions for this aspect.

However, escapism was rated higher by female tourists ($p < 0.05$), reflecting their stronger desire to disconnect from daily life and immerse themselves in a unique environment. These results underline the

importance of considering gender differences when designing tourism services and marketing strategies. The ANOVA results for the sub-dimensions of participants' rock-carving hotel experience are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. ANOVA Test Results of Cave Hotel Experience Sub-dimensions Based on Participants' Age

Sub-dimensions	18-25	Mean	Std. Deviation	26-35	Mean	Std. Deviation	36-45	Mean	Std. Deviation	46 and over	Mean	Std. Deviation	F-value	p-value
Service Excellence	4.25	0.505	4.11	0.530	4.23	0.552	4.21	0.537	6.067	0.000*	4.537	6.067	,000*	,537
Aesthetic	4.19	0.583	4.21	0.564	4.33	0.526	4.08	0.490	4.248	0.583	4.28	,490	,248	4,28
Entertainment	3.86	0.598	4.17	0.658	3.95	0.574	3.88	0.525	7.308	0.020*	7.525	7,308	,020*	,525
Escapism	3.84	0.662	3.84	0.687	3.98	0.623	3.75	0.690	2.653	0.048*	2.690	2,653	,048*	,690

Source: own elaboration.

According to Table 2, significant differences are observed in the service excellence, entertainment, and escapism dimensions by participants' age, whereas the aesthetic dimension shows no significant variation ($p < 0.05$). The service excellence mean is highest in the 18-25 age group ($\bar{x} = 4.25$), while the aesthetic dimension peaks among 36-45-year-olds ($\bar{x} = 4.33$). The entertainment dimension is most favoured by the 26-35 age group ($\bar{x} = 4.17$), and escapism is highest in the 36-45 age group ($\bar{x} = 3.98$).

These results align with literature emphasizing age-based differences in experiential preferences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Oh et al., 2007) but require deeper analysis to explore contextual and cultural influences specific to Cappadocia. The results of the ANOVA test, used to examine differences in rock carving hotel experiences by participants' educational status, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. ANOVA Test Results of Cave Hotel Experience Subdimensions Based on Tourists' Education Level.

Sub-dimensions	Primary School Mean	Std. Deviation	High School Ort.	Std. Deviation	Associate Degree Mean	Std. Deviation	Bachelor's Degree Mean	Std. Deviation	Graduate Mean.	Std. Deviation	F-value	p-value
Service Excellence	4,20	,510	4,18	,555	4,18	,529	4,24	,542	4,23	,543	,265	,901
Aesthetic	4,27	,492	4,29	,567	4,19	,504	4,29	,564	4,15	,550	1,040	,386
Entertainment	3,81	,689	3,97	,621	3,93	,569	3,94	,565	4,15	,550	,487	,745
Escapism	4,25	,487	3,95	,607	3,76	,771	4,00	,629	3,76	,666	3,418	,009*

Source: own elaboration.

According to Table 3, no significant differences are observed in the service excellence, aesthetics, and entertainment dimensions across participants' educational levels, whereas a significant difference is found in the escapism dimension ($p = 0.009 < 0.05$). This indicates that participants' ability to disconnect from daily life during their experiences varies by education level.

in tourism experiences (Oh et al., 2007). However, the results highlight the need for deeper exploration of how education interacts with other experiential dimensions in unique contexts such as Cappadocia. The results of the T-test conducted to determine whether the values attributed by participants to the sub-dimensions of rock carving hotel experiences differ by marital status are presented in Table 4.

These findings align with prior studies suggesting that educational background can influence perceptions of escape

Table 4. T-Test Results for Cave Hotel Experience Sub-Dimensions Based on Marital Status of Participants

Sub-Dimensions	Married Mean	Std. Dev.	Single Mean	Std. Dev.	T	P
Service Excellence	4.17	0.586	4.25	0.489	-1.390	0.165
Aesthetics	4.20	0.569	4.29	0.531	-1.460	0.145
Entertainment	3.90	0.544	3.95	0.598	-0.824	0.411
Escape	3.83	0.696	3.98	0.633	-2.199	0.029*

Source: own elaboration.

According to Table 4, a significant difference exists only in the escape dimension of the experiential value scale based on marital status ($p=0.029<0.05$). Single participants ($\bar{x}=3.98$) reported a higher mean on the escape dimension than married participants ($\bar{x}=3.83$). This finding aligns with literature suggesting that single individuals often seek more

adventurous and immersive experiences to escape daily routines (Oh et al., 2007). The ANOVA test was applied to reveal differences in tourists' rock-carved hotel experiences by occupation, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. ANOVA Test Results for Cave Hotel Experience Sub-Dimensions Based on Tourists' Occupations

Occupation	Service Excellence Mean	Std. Dev.	Aesthetics Mean	Std. Dev.	Entertainment Mean	Std. Dev.	Escapism Mean	Std. Dev.	Overall Mean
Student	4.27	0.499	4.28	0.527	4.10	0.521	4.40	0.571	4.26
Worker	4.06	0.446	4.21	0.482	3.78	0.515	3.79	0.610	3.96
Civil Servant	4.17	0.575	4.12	0.581	3.74	0.632	3.89	0.658	4.03
Teacher	4.20	0.527	4.11	0.670	3.94	0.545	3.79	0.630	4.01
Retired	4.16	0.608	4.13	0.611	3.82	0.623	3.66	0.508	4.00
Businessperson	4.46	0.453	4.32	0.319	4.12	0.492	4.12	0.520	4.26
Lawyer	4.38	0.645	4.52	0.523	4.52	0.394	4.40	0.562	4.45
Engineer	3.95	0.458	4.38	0.447	3.95	0.510	4.01	0.579	4.07
Doctor	4.66	0.288	4.40	0.346	3.91	0.877	4.00	0.866	4.24
Unemployed	4.28	0.565	4.37	0.361	4.05	0.391	3.90	0.763	4.15
Other	4.25	0.538	4.30	0.536	3.98	0.563	3.90	0.763	4.13
F	1,867		2,158		3,232		2,262		
p	,048*		,020*		,001*		,014*		

Source: own elaboration.

According to the statements in Table 5, there is a statistically significant difference among the occupational groups in the service excellence sub-dimension score ($p<0.05$). Accordingly, the mean scores for the service excellence sub-dimension ($\bar{x} = 4,46$; $\bar{x} = 4,38$) for those whose occupations are business people and doctors are higher than those of other occupational groups. There is a statistically significant difference among occupational groups in aesthetic sub-dimension scores ($p<0.05$).

Accordingly, the mean score on the aesthetic sub-dimension for those whose profession is a lawyer ($\bar{x} = 4,52$) is higher than that of the other occupational groups. There is a statistically significant difference among occupational groups in the entertainment sub-dimension score ($p<0.05$). Accordingly, the mean entertainment sub-dimension score

for lawyers ($\bar{x} = 4,52$) is higher than that of other occupational groups. There is a statistically significant difference among occupational groups in the escape sub-dimension score ($p<0.05$). According to this, the average sub-dimension score for those whose occupation is student ($\bar{x} = 4,40$) is higher than that of other occupational groups.

These results align with prior literature emphasizing that occupational roles can influence perceptions of experiential value, particularly regarding escapism and aesthetics, where personal and professional preferences play a defining role (Oh et al., 2007; Chen et al., 2020). The ANOVA test was applied to reveal differences in tourists' rock-carved hotel experiences by nationality, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. ANOVA Test Results for Cave Hotel Experience Sub-Dimensions Based on Tourists' Nationalities

Nationality	Service Excellence Mean	Std. Dev.	Aesthetics Mean	Std. Dev.	Entertainment Mean	Std. Dev.	Escapism Mean	Std. Dev.
Turkish	4.15	0.547	4.19	0.567	3.92	0.534	3.88	0.654
Thai	4.50	0.418	4.26	0.531	4.29	0.872	4.20	0.781
Russian	4.20	0.497	4.22	0.528	3.88	0.597	3.79	0.701
English	4.29	0.400	4.50	0.413	3.68	0.475	3.86	0.323
American	4.23	0.714	4.38	0.516	3.94	0.621	4.12	0.685
Brazilian	4.50	0.235	4.54	0.365	3.80	0.654	4.07	0.514
Danish	4.32	0.486	4.60	0.516	4.55	0.574	4.70	0.387
Bulgarian	4.16	0.584	3.80	0.704	3.41	0.769	3.54	0.579
Australian	3.92	0.553	4.34	0.585	3.64	0.497	3.78	0.602
Armenian	4.53	0.393	3.91	0.157	4.10	0.283	4.03	0.713
Other	4.20	0.372	4.32	0.578	3.98	0.510	3.78	0.600
F- value	1,257		1,736		1,696		1,937	
p- value	,186		,017*		,021*		,005*	

Source: own elaboration.

According to the statements in Table 6, there is no statistically significant difference between the groups in participants' nationality regarding the service excellence sub-dimension score ($p<0.05$). However, there are significant

differences in the aesthetic, entertainment, and escape dimension scores. As a result, while there is no difference in the service excellence dimension by tourists' nationality,

there are differences in the aesthetic, entertainment, and escape dimensions.

The highest perception, as indicated by the average total score for experiential value, is for Danes ($\bar{x} = 4,54$). This finding suggests that cultural background and nationality influence specific aspects of experiential value, particularly in dimensions related to sensory appeal, enjoyment, and escapism. Previous studies, such as those by Oh et al. (2007) and Meacci & Liberatore (2018), highlight that cultural and national differences play a critical role in shaping aesthetic appreciation and leisure preferences, which may explain these variations. These results underscore the importance of tailoring tourism experiences to accommodate cultural expectations, particularly for segments that prioritize escapism and entertainment in their travel preferences.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore how experiential value varies by the demographic characteristics of domestic and foreign tourists in Cappadocia's rock-carved hotels. The unique characteristics of these hotels, such as their mystical ambiance and distinctive architectural features, present a significant opportunity to assess how different demographic groups perceive their stay.

The survey, with 389 responses, revealed several key findings. Firstly, perceptions of experiential value differ significantly by gender. Female tourists generally perceived the experiential value of rock-carved hotels more positively than males, particularly in the dimensions of service excellence, aesthetics, and escape. These results are consistent with prior research (Güven, 2019), suggesting that women are more sensitive to the experiential aspects of service environments. Jin et al. (2013) also observed that gender plays a crucial role in the perception of service experiences, particularly in shaping loyalty and customer satisfaction.

From an age perspective, younger tourists –especially those in the 26-35 age group – showed greater appreciation

for the experiential value of rock-carved hotels, particularly in entertainment and escape. This mirrors findings by Pine and Gilmore (1999), who argue that younger generations, more familiar with experiential consumption, are drawn to environments that offer novelty and a break from routine. Kınıklı (2019) also noted that younger tourists place significant importance on unique experiences that enable them to escape daily pressures, and this age group's preference for rock-carved hotels supports this view.

Educational status also played a role in shaping tourists' perceptions. Those with a bachelor's degree or higher reported greater experiential value, particularly in the entertainment dimension, aligning with the findings of Bitner et al. (1994) and Cemalcılar (1994), which showed that educated individuals tend to appreciate cultural, educational, and entertainment experiences more deeply. These results suggest that rock-carved hotels are more attractive to tourists with higher levels of education, likely because the region's cultural and historical significance resonates with a more intellectually curious demographic.

In terms of marital status, single tourists displayed higher levels of experiential value perception, particularly in the escape dimension. This supports earlier findings by Zhang (2008) and Chiu (2010), who argued that single travellers often seek out more adventurous and immersive experiences. The fact that no significant difference was found in the service excellence or aesthetics dimensions between married and single tourists suggests that these elements are universally appreciated, regardless of personal life stage.

When examining occupational groups, significant differences were found across all dimensions of experiential value. Lawyers, for example, reported the highest levels of satisfaction in service excellence, aesthetics, and entertainment. This may reflect a higher expectation for premium services and attention to detail, as supported by Jin et al. (2013), who noted that professionals often seek higher quality and uniqueness in their travel experiences.

Table 7: Systematic Summary of Research Findings by Demographic Variables

Research Question	Result	Key Finding / Group with Highest Perception
Q1: Do tourists' experiential values differ significantly by gender?	Supported	Female tourists scored higher in aesthetics and service.
Q2: Do tourists' experiential values differ significantly by age?	Supported	Younger tourists (26-35) prioritize entertainment and escape.
Q3: Do tourists' experiential values differ significantly by education level ?	Supported	Higher education levels correlate with cultural curiosity.
Q4: Do tourists' experiential values differ significantly by marital status?	Supported	Single tourists seek more immersive escape experiences.
Q5: Do tourists' experiential values differ significantly by occupation?	Supported	Professionals (e.g., Lawyers) expect premium service quality.
Q6: Do tourists' experiential values differ significantly by nationality?	Supported	Danish tourists reported the highest overall experiential value.

Source: own elaboration.

5.1 Expanded Theoretical Contributions

These findings align with and contribute to the broader literature on experiential tourism. Experiential value, as defined by Pine and Gilmore (1999), is increasingly seen as central to the tourism industry, where customers no longer seek just products or services but transformative

experiences. In this context, rock-carved hotels offer an immersive, distinctive atmosphere that appeals to various demographic groups, especially women, younger tourists, and more educated travellers. This is consistent with Kim and Perdue's (2013) study, which found that memorable experiences, rather than standard service offerings, drive customer loyalty and satisfaction in the tourism sector.

This study also expands on Pine and Gilmore's (1999) theoretical framework by demonstrating how unique cultural and architectural contexts—such as Cappadocia's rock-carved hotels—shape experiential value differently across demographic groups. Unlike prior studies that focus on generalized hospitality settings, this research integrates historical and cultural heritage into the experiential value framework, offering a more nuanced understanding of how regional factors influence tourist experiences. Furthermore, the findings contribute to discussions on the role of demographics in shaping experiential value, supporting Zhang (2008) in their emphasis on the importance of cultural and demographic nuances in tourism research.

However, this study also highlights areas where experiential value theory can be further refined. For instance, while the existing literature often emphasizes the escape and entertainment dimensions, the findings underscore the equally critical role of service excellence and aesthetics in niche tourism markets such as Cappadocia. This suggests a need to recalibrate existing models to better capture the unique dynamics of culturally and architecturally distinctive destinations.

5.2 Practical Implications

The findings reinforce the importance of customization in service delivery. As suggested by Bitner et al. (1994), personalizing the service environment to reflect the diverse needs of customers—based on gender, age, occupation, and nationality—can significantly enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. Zhang (2008) also emphasize that in a globalized tourism market, understanding the cultural and demographic nuances of international tourists is critical for maintaining a competitive advantage.

The findings regarding nationality underscore the importance of cultural considerations in the design and marketing of tourism services. Northern European tourists may place greater value on historical and aesthetic elements of rock-carved hotels, which aligns with previous research on regional preferences (Hjalager, 2010). This is consistent with Hofstede's (2001) argument that cultural dimensions strongly influence customer expectations and experiences in service settings.

5.3 Recommendations

Several recommendations can be made to help Cappadocia's rock-carved hotels enhance their offerings and strengthen their competitive position both domestically and internationally:

- **Tailored Marketing Strategies:** Marketing campaigns should be customized based on demographic characteristics. Social media and digital platforms should be leveraged to target younger tourists, while traditional media and personal contact methods can be more effective for older tourists (Kim & Perdue, 2013). Differentiated messages highlighting aesthetic beauty, escape, and cultural experiences should

be developed for specific segments such as women, singles, and younger travellers.

- **Personalized Services:** Hotels should continuously monitor customer preferences and adjust their service offerings accordingly. Personalized services, such as custom meal menus, special events, and dedicated personal assistants, can significantly enhance customer experience and build loyalty (Bitner et al., 1994). The introduction of digital innovations, such as virtual reality tours and mobile concierge services, can further enrich the customer experience (Kim & Perdue, 2013).
- **Invest in Technology:** To remain competitive, rock-carved hotels must keep pace with technological innovations. Smart room systems, mobile applications, and digital services can not only enhance customer convenience but also add a modern twist to the unique historical and aesthetic experience offered by rock-carved hotels (Jin et al., 2013).
- **Customer Loyalty Programs:** Establishing loyalty programs that offer personalized rewards and recognition can help build deeper customer relationships. Recognizing guests by name, remembering their preferences, and celebrating special occasions can foster loyalty and encourage repeat visits (Jin et al., 2013; Kim & Perdue, 2013).
- **International Competitiveness:** To compete internationally, Cappadocia's rock-carved hotels should regularly conduct competitor analyses and participate in global tourism platforms and fairs. Building strong partnerships with international tourism agencies and promoting unique hotel experiences through these channels will help raise the region's profile on the global stage.
- **Demographic-Focused Service Standards:** The demographic differences observed in this study suggest that service standards should be tailored to reflect the specific needs of different groups. Regular customer feedback should be incorporated into service design to ensure that hotels offer a high level of service that resonates with all customer segments (Bitner et al., 1994).

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CRediT author statement

Term	Definition	Author 1	A2
Conceptualization	Ideas; formulation or evolution of overarching research goals and aims	x	X
Methodology	Development or design of methodology; creation of models	x	x
Software	Programming, software development; designing computer programs; implementation of the computer code and supporting algorithms; testing of existing code components	x	x
Validation	Verification, whether as a part of the activity or separate, of the overall replication/ reproducibility of results/experiments and other research outputs	x	x
Formal analysis	Application of statistical, mathematical, computational, or other formal techniques to analyze or synthesize study data	x	
Investigation	Conducting a research and investigation process, specifically performing the experiments, or data/evidence collection	x	x
Resources	Provision of study materials, reagents, materials, patients, laboratory samples, animals, instrumentation, computing resources, or other analysis tools	x	x
Data Curation	Management activities to annotate (produce metadata), scrub data and maintain research data (including software code, where it is necessary for interpreting the data itself) for initial use and later reuse	x	
Writing - Original Draft	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically writing the initial draft (including substantive translation)	x	x
Writing - Review & Editing	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work by those from the original research group, specifically critical review, commentary or revision – including pre- or post-publication stages		x
Visualization	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically visualization/ data presentation	x	x
Supervision	Oversight and leadership responsibility for the research activity planning and execution, including mentorship external to the core team	x	x
Project administration	Management and coordination responsibility for the research activity planning and execution		x
Funding acquisition	Acquisition of the financial support for the project leading to this publication	x	x

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