

Destination aesthetics: An empirical study of aesthetic judgment and aesthetic distance among tourists in Turkey

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Abstract

Aesthetics constitute a fundamental element of the tourist experience and contribute to tourists' behavioral intention. Yet, empirical research on destination aesthetics is very limited. This study explores whether destination aesthetics affects behavioral intention and whether there is a difference between tourists' aesthetic judgment and aesthetic distance. Destination aesthetics are determined by comparing the perceived difference between the home environment of the tourist and the destination. Gestalt theory has been adopted to understand the impact of destination aesthetic judgment and aesthetic distance on behavioral intention. Structural equation modeling was the main analytical tool used to assess the results. A t-test was also performed. In this research, the behavioral intention of tourists (word-of-mouth intention, willingness to pay, and revisit intention) is positive when tourists perceive environments of holiday locations to be better kept than their accommodations. It has been determined that aesthetic distance only significantly and negatively affects willingness to pay. Among tourists coming to Istanbul, the research found locale characteristics, scope, and perceived age to be important determining factors of destination aesthetics, whereas with tourists coming to Antalya, the research defined destination aesthetics in terms of scope, upkeep, accord, perceived age, and shape. This study shows how destination managers could leverage the aesthetic experiences of tourists.

Keywords: Destination aesthetics, aesthetic judgment, aesthetic distance, aesthetic experience, Antalya, Istanbul

Citation: Gulertekin Genc, S. and Temizkan, S.P. (2023). Destination aesthetics: An empirical study of aesthetic judgment and aesthetic distance among tourists in Turkey. *European Journal of Tourism Research* 33, 3308.



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1. Introduction

When tourists plan their trips, they are looking for a destination that will reveal their hedonic motivations in the hopes of a pleasant experience (Tasci and Ko, 2016). Aesthetics, which distinguish tourists in the act of travel as distinct from their daily and routine experiences, play a vital role in tourist behavior (Kirillova and Lehto, 2015; Kirillova *et al.*, 2014; Todd, 2009). Aesthetics involves the phenomenon of “beauty,” and aesthetic experience is the fundamental element of tourism (Genc and Akoglan Kozak, 2020). For anything to be considered beautiful, it must evoke emotional satisfaction (pleasure, liking, and enjoyment) in one’s perceptions. The aesthetic qualities of destinations represent an important component of tourist experiences (Zhang and Xu, 2020). Now that the physical environment of a location has more currency than ever as a primary component of tourism marketing (Kirillova *et al.*, 2014), aesthetic elements are part and parcel of destination image (Lu *et al.*, 2020), tourist satisfaction (Kirillova and Lehto, 2015), and tourist loyalty (Zhang and Xu, 2020). Over the past 40 years, elements of tourists’ experiences have been extensively researched in academia (Cohen, 1979; Quan and Wang, 2004; Ryan, 2010; Trauer and Ryan, 2005).

Tourists enjoy aesthetic pleasure through their senses, resulting in a subjective process through which people are exposed to attractive sensory stimuli while making cognitive judgments and experiencing aesthetically related emotions (Kirillova and Wassler, 2019). The senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch are all used to perceive this sensory input (Kirillova and Lehto, 2016). Tourists’ subjective and perceptual processing of the aesthetic quality of natural landscapes determines whether sensory stimulation can elicit aesthetic judgment (AJ) and emotion (Kirillova and Wassler, 2019). The characteristics and qualities of tourism aesthetics include an individual’s total immersion in an environment different from one’s daily living environment (Volo, 2009). Such an experience may render one more sensitive to external stimuli, triggering the senses and allowing for more complex human-environment interaction and change (Breiby, 2015). Relevant analyses have shown that aesthetic factors are among the primary experiences tourists seek (Genc and Gulertekin Genc, 2022). Interestingly, a literature review reveals that the role of aesthetic factors in the tourist experience has been largely ignored. Perceived aesthetic distance (AD) between the tourist’s place of residence and the aesthetic characteristics of the destination can make or break tourist experiences (Kirillova and Lehto, 2015). Quantitative research on aesthetic experiences (Kirillova *et al.*, 2014; Zhang and Xu, 2020) and aesthetic distance (Kirillova and Lehto, 2015) is very limited, indicating an intense lack of interest in the role of aesthetic experiences.

Tourism is one of the most important driving forces of the Turkish economy. The development of tourism encourages the destination’s employment, income, tourism companies, and government revenues (Tosun *et al.*, 2003). The destination’s visual features are one of the most important sources of such a pleasurable experience, and they are employed as image measurements in tourism research (Kirillova *et al.*, 2014). A total of 58,286 tourists visited in 2018, with Istanbul and Antalya being two of the top ten tourist-attracting destinations in the world: Istanbul attracted 13.4 million (8th place) and Antalya 12.41 million (10th place), leading to an influx of \$8.26 billion in Istanbul and \$7.65 billion in Antalya (GDCl, 2019). Although Istanbul and Antalya are important tourist centers, there is little information regarding the aesthetic factors of either destination. At the same time, the main attraction of Istanbul is cultural tourism, while Antalya is known for its sun, sea, and sand (3S) tourism. The present research will contribute empirically to the development of this field.

The research objectives of this study are as follows: (1) To determine the impact of aesthetic judgment among tourists, depending on their motivations (i.e., whether traveling to Istanbul and Antalya), on behavioral intent; (2) To find out how places where tourists live affect their behavioral intention (BI);

and (3) To determine whether Istanbul and Antalya have aesthetic elements by focusing on the relationship between aesthetic judgment and aesthetic distance. Based on Gestalt theory (Smith, 1988), this study uses a quantitative research method to investigate these objectives. The results will assist in our understanding of aesthetic factors that trigger tourist behavioral intention, revisit intention, willingness to pay, word of mouth, and aesthetic experiences. Understanding these aesthetic elements will be suitable for tourism destinations.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1. Theory and aesthetic experience

It is known that there are aesthetic elements among the experiences that tourists seek (Genc and Gulertekin Genc, 2022). Aesthetic experience reflects the shared evolutionary heritage of humans and is one of the cornerstones of natural and cultural heritage sites (Todd, 2009). Aesthetics, which separates tourists from their daily and routine experiences, plays an important role in tourist behavior (Kirillova and Lehto, 2015; Kirillova *et al.*, 2014). Although the entry of destination aesthetics into marketing literature dates back to the late 20th century (Kirillova and Lehto, 2015), opinions on aesthetics have existed since ancient times. Alexander G. Baumgarten (1750-1758) penned one of the first systematic appraisals of aesthetics in his *Aesthetica*.

At the turn of the 21st century, marketing strategies began focusing on consumer experience rather than selling any particular service (Kuo and Lin, 2007). Aesthetic experience is defined as “a sense of beauty derived from employees, products, services, events” (Todd, 2009: 164-165). Pine and Gilmore (1999) first proposed the experiential marketing concept in 1998. Here, the researchers identified four types of enjoyable experiences (escape, education, entertainment, and aesthetic experience), basing these on the environmental relationship between consumers and their level of participation in a given experience. However, it is crucial to address aesthetics in tourism because the shift to the experience economy has spurred a shift to natural settings and events where aesthetics play an increasingly important role. Tourists are enticed by images captured through photography, postcards, and films. These enable the image of a destination to be endlessly reproduced and recaptured (Urry, 2015). Hauser *et al.* (2022) investigated the aesthetic perception of destination photos published with the popular #beautifuldestinations hashtag on Instagram. They revealed that the content of the photos subconsciously affects the perceived aesthetic perception of the destinations. When tourists plan a trip for pleasure, they are looking to maximize their pleasant experiences (Lue *et al.*, 1993).

Tourists enjoy aesthetic pleasure through their senses, resulting in a subjective process in which people are stimulated by aesthetic sensory stimulation. As a result, aesthetic feelings and cognitive judgments are generated (Zhou *et al.*, 2021). Since the mid-1970s, aesthetic issues have been researched (Ulrich, 1977). The public aesthetic impression of a landscape is measured using two main paradigms. The first is the physical paradigm, which holds that the aesthetic quality of a landscape is determined by its physical qualities. According to the subjectivist paradigm, on the other hand, the quality of a landscape is determined by the “eyes of the audience” (Lothian, 1999). The subjectivist paradigm appears to be dominant in the research (Salim *et al.*, 2021). Kirillova and Wassler (2019) consider the perception of travel as a three-dimensional aesthetic experience. In the first dimension, the aesthetic features of the physical environment are emphasized. This dimension includes visual cues associated with aesthetically pleasing architectural sites. The second dimension encompasses multi-sensory atmospheric elements. It entails the process of authentically experiencing the environment through tactile, auditory, taste, and olfactory cues. Thus, a destination includes enjoying the beautiful weather, pleasant sounds, and smells. Experiencing a tourism destination in the last aesthetic dimension means interacting with the people living there. Therefore, it is relevant to the role of residents to convey the aesthetic value of the

destination. Gestalt theory examines the relationship between the environment and psychology, thus putting its own spin on the emotional expressions, motivations, behavioral patterns, and aesthetic judgments of individuals. This theory, developed by Christian von Ehrenfels in the early 20th century, explores the idea that each individual perceives and makes sense of the whole (Biehl-Missal and Fitzek, 2014). In other words, when a tourist travels to a destination, elements such as hotels, architectural structures, landscaping, and lighting are perceived as part of a whole rather than separately, and the trip is evaluated holistically. In this context, the aesthetic features of the destination are part of this whole and should, therefore, not be evaluated separately. This theory provides planners with a holistic perspective on the relationship between destination and aesthetics. Therefore, Gestalt theory offers an integrative perspective on the above paradigms. The aesthetic quality of a natural and cultural landscape derives from its silhouette, shape, and colors and, more importantly, from the harmony of its parts while forming a whole in which the concepts of unity and diversity are simultaneously integrated (Genc and Gulertekin Genc, 2022; Zhang and Hu, 2020; Hall, 2015).

2.2. Aesthetic judgment and aesthetic distance

Destination aesthetics can have distinct characteristics and qualities, as a destination's environment will be different from the tourist's daily surroundings (Volo, 2009). It can be said that this aesthetic experience causes the tourist to be more sensitive to external stimuli, triggering emotions and leading to more complex tourist-environment interaction. Thus, researchers can evaluate, using aesthetic distance, how and why a beautiful destination could be relevant or irrelevant for tourists (Maitland and Smith, 2009).

As the perceived distance between a tourist's home and the aesthetic features of the destination environment, aesthetic distance is an inseparable part of tourist experiences (Kirillova *et al.*, 2014). Tourism aesthetics expresses not only the relationships between tourists and their surroundings but also a multi-dimensional experience at play (Ittelson, 1978). Here, the "schema" of social psychology is appropriate. This concept, introduced in the 1970s, is defined as "beliefs and information that people adopt about other people, objects, events, [and] situations" (Atkinson *et al.*, 2010: 613). In the context of destination aesthetics, the tourist can rely on the aesthetic judgment he or she has previously coded when evaluating a destination. In other words, when a tourist evaluates a destination aesthetically, s/he incorporates the most consistent scheme into the process. This situation is known as "schematic processing" and is determined by the places the tourist knows best. From this point of view, the perception of distance between the place where one lives and the holiday environment likely contributes to a positive tourist experience. Aesthetic judgment and aesthetic distance are based on the gap theory (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985).

The Grönroos paradigm, which contrasts perceived and expected service, is based on disconfirmation. The disconfirmation model draws from the literature on product quality, which is the bedrock of service quality. Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) introduced a novel theory for measuring service quality based on the disconfirmation model by assessing the gap between perceived and expected service. They suggested a gap analysis for service quality, which involves determining the gap between expectations and actual performance. A similar analysis also measures aesthetic judgment and aesthetic distance. Reisinger and Turner (1998) state that cultural differences result in stress and tension. Moreover, Ng *et al.* (2007) found that cultural distance has a negative relationship with intentions of living in Australia versus visiting foreign destinations.

A building's design shapes and reflects the aesthetic needs of those interacting with it. Color excites the senses and has a significant impact on architectural aesthetic preferences. Furthermore, the shape and

appearance of a building, which might be symmetrical or asymmetrical, is the first thing that appears. People favor symmetry over asymmetry in this regard (Azemati *et al.*, 2020). Individuals are more inclined to favor familiar buildings over unfamiliar buildings when they are exposed to them. Individuals who are knowledgeable about a building's history or the century in which it was constructed will also judge it differently or more favorably. According to these findings, perceived aesthetic distance can disrupt rather than improve tourists' experiences. And yet, tourism studies on the comparative effects of the environment on tourist satisfaction remain insufficient.

Aesthetic judgment of a destination is expressed as a total of aesthetic impressions and ideas regarding a destination the tourist visited on his/her last vacation (Kirillova and Lehto, 2015). It would be inadequate for researchers focusing on aesthetic judgment to observe this factor alone (Hepburn, 1966). Such an approach assumes that individuals should play an active and participatory role in the environment, thus emphasizing experiences with all five senses (Myszkowski *et al.*, 2014). Due to its subjective nature, the aesthetic judgment of an environment may differ among individuals. Researchers have been primarily interested in what aesthetic judgment has shaped according to how aesthetically pleasing individuals consider a landscape to be.

Kirillova *et al.* (2014) explained the dimensions that make up aesthetic judgment and distance: namely, locale characteristics, scope, upkeep, accord, perceived age, and shape. As a result of empirical studies conducted by environmental psychologists, positive aesthetic judgment is generally found to be equal to aesthetic or environmental preference (Han, 2007). It values the intensity of color in a "matte – vivid/bright" destination and the density of people in a "not crowded – crowded" destination. "Tightly spaced – open spaced" indicates the number of visual signs in the environment. All of these constitute the locale characteristics of the destination. Scope represents the experiential dimensions of aesthetic qualities and evaluates an abundance of various visual cues ("nothing to see – lots of things of see," "all alike – diverse," "ordinary – unique," "without a view – scenic," "not charming – charming") (Kirillova *et al.*, 2014). Upkeep refers to the maintenance of perceived hygienic conditions and qualities ("run-down – well kept," "dirty – clean," "disorganized – organized") in a destination. The accord dimension indicates the degree of originality and balance of the destination's physical properties. Perceived age denotes the age of the destination. Environmental psychologists assume that people choose environments containing potential functional effects on a sensor (Van den Berg *et al.*, 2003). In other words, some tourists prefer old or historical destinations because they are more affected by historical places, while others prefer more modern destinations. Shape ("symmetric," "smooth," etc.) relates to the classic dimensions of aesthetic judgment.

3. Conceptual framework and hypotheses

3.1 Aesthetic judgment and behavioral intention

Although the Gestalt theory has been extensively studied, it has not been clarified in the context of tourist behavior and the aesthetic experience of a destination. Aesthetic judgment is a subjective cognitive component of the experiential process (Leder *et al.*, 2004). In their study, Zhang and Hu (2020) stated that a high aesthetic evaluation helps create positive aesthetic feelings. The importance of destination aesthetic elements in tourists' preference for a destination is mentioned elsewhere in the literature (Lee *et al.*, 2011; Todd, 2009; Baloglu *et al.*, 2004). Destination aesthetics are central to the image of a destination (Lu *et al.*, 2020; O'Leary and Deegan, 2003; Kirillova and Lehto, 2015) and can increase tourist loyalty by enhancing aesthetic quality (Oh *et al.*, 2007; Zhang and Hu, 2020). It has been determined that the aesthetic features of the destination affect satisfaction (Lee *et al.*, 2011; Breiby, 2015) and the loyalty tourists display toward the destination (Alegre and Garau, 2010; Kirillova and Lehto, 2015). Wu *et al.* (2022) found that aesthetics positively affects environmentally responsible behavior,

Genc and Gulertekin Genc (2022) found that tourists' aesthetic experience affects perceived authenticity, and Kastenholz *et al.* (2020) determined that a positive aesthetic experience in rural tourism strengthens place attachment for tourists. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H₁. *Aesthetic judgment positively affects behavioral intention.*

H_{1a}. *Aesthetic judgment positively affects revisit intention.*

H_{1b}. *Aesthetic judgment positively affects word-of-mouth intention.*

H_{1c}. *Aesthetic judgment positively affects willingness to pay.*

3.2. Aesthetic distance and behavioral intention

There are two components, organic and stimulated, of a destination image (Rajesh, 2013). The organic component concerns images closely related to individuals' past experiences of destinations. To a certain extent, the aesthetics of the destination are among the most important factors in tourists' choice of place to visit (Lu *et al.*, 2020).

When tourists evaluate their place of residence as original and aesthetically positive, they tend to see the destination as less beautiful (Ng *et al.*, 2007). It can be said that if a tourist sees the destination s/he visited on their last vacation as having more aesthetic qualities than the place where s/he lives, then there is a positive aesthetic distance; if less, then there is a negative aesthetic distance (Kirillova and Lehto, 2015). Kirillova and Lehto (2015) found that aesthetic distance directly affects tourist satisfaction.

H₂. *Aesthetic distance negatively affects behavioral intention.*

H_{2a}. *Aesthetic distance negatively affects revisit intention.*

H_{2b}. *Aesthetic distance negatively affects word-of-mouth intention.*

H_{2c}. *Aesthetic distance negatively affects willingness to pay.*

3.3. Aesthetic judgment and aesthetic distance

Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) proposed a new theory for service quality measurement by measuring the gap between perceived service and expected service. This theory is called the gap theory. The present research is situated within the framework of this theoretical background. The aesthetic interpretation of a destination is obtained from the similarities and contrasts between the place where the tourist lives and the holiday environment (Kirillova and Lehto, 2015). Reisinger and Turner (1998) found that cultural differences lead to dissatisfaction. In this context, it can be said that the difference between judgment and distance is significant when it comes to a destination's aesthetic qualities. Hence, our third hypothesis:

H₃: *There is a significant difference between the averages of tourists' aesthetic judgment dimensions and aesthetic distance dimensions.*

H_{3a}: *There is a significant difference between the averages of aesthetic judgment dimensions and aesthetic distance dimensions of tourists coming to Antalya.*

H_{3b}: *There is a significant difference between the averages of aesthetic judgment dimensions and aesthetic distance dimensions of tourists coming to Istanbul.*

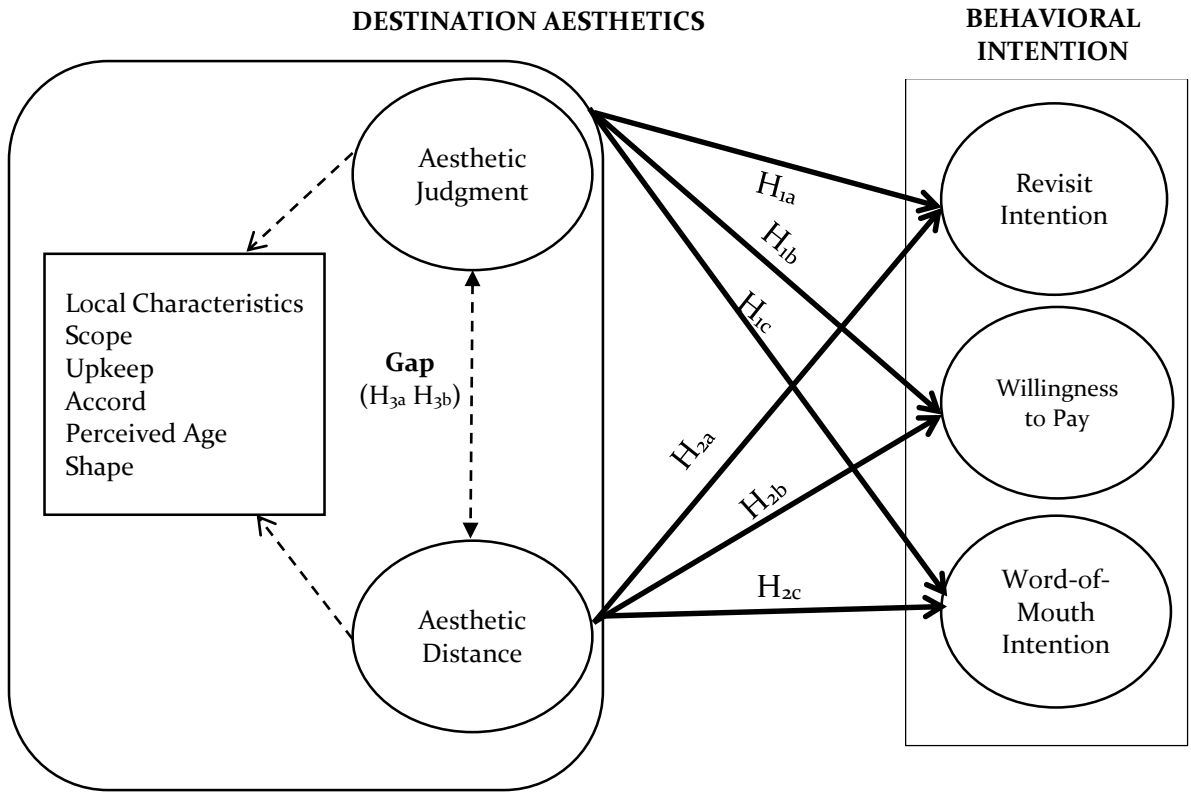


Figure 1. Research model

4. Methodology

4.1. Description of the case

The hypotheses of this study were tested on local and foreign tourists traveling to the Turkish destinations of Istanbul and Antalya. Istanbul and Antalya are among the top 10 destinations for 2018 international overnight visitors (GDCI, 2019). The presence of the sea in both destinations creates an added value for tourists in terms of scenery and attractiveness. Many geographical elements such as Düden, Kurşunlu and Manavgat Waterfalls, Alara River, Çıralı Yanartaş, Dim River, Göynük Canyon, Kekova Island, Köprülü and Saklıkent Canyon, Damлатаş, and Dim Cave offer a wealth of aesthetic environments in Antalya. Regarding Istanbul, there are places like Galata Tower, Bosphorus Bridges, Cihangir, Bebek, Mihrabat, Emirgan, Fatih Grove, Atatürk Arboretum, Belgrad Forest, Göksu River, Islands, Camlica Hill, Japanese Garden, Hidden Lake, Pierre Loti Hill, and Vialand. Many attractions such as Sillyon Ancient City and Aspendos Theater in Serik, Santa Claus Church and Myra Ancient City in Demre, Termessos Ancient City in Korkuteli, Oluk Bridge in Manavgat, Olympos Ancient City in Kumluca, Magydos Ancient City in Lara, Kaş Antique Theatre, Kaleiçi Yivli Minaret, Temple of Apollo in Side, Perge Ancient City in Aksu, and Red Tower and Castle in Alanya add to the aesthetic options. Istanbul also contains unique historical attractions for having once hosted the Roman and Ottoman Empires. Many artifacts such as Eminonu, Galata Tower, Rumeli and Anadolu Fortresses, Ciragan Palace, Grand Bazaar, Suleymaniye Mosque, Fener Babat Cibali, Kuzuncuk Houses, Hagia Sophia Museum, Blue Mosque, Basilica Cistern, Topkapi Palace, Dolmabahce Palace, Istiklal Street, Haydarpasa Train Station, and Maiden's Tower are aesthetic historical attractions for tourists.

In Antalya and Istanbul, it is possible to see modern/postmodern elements as well as many historical elements. Hotels, stadiums in Antalya, Bosphorus Bridges, airports, residences, and stadiums newly built for Istanbul are particularly noteworthy examples of postmodern architecture. Therefore, in the first hypothesis, the effect between the aesthetic perceptions of tourists coming to Antalya and Istanbul and their behavioral intention was determined. The second hypothesis tested the effect between the places they live and their behavioral intentions. The third and final hypothesis tested which dimensions of Istanbul and Antalya tourists find aesthetically pleasing.

4.2. Measurement scales

Three scales were used to create the questionnaire for data collection. The first two of these scales are known as aesthetic judgment and aesthetic distance, developed by Kirillova and Lehto (2015) to measure both natural and urban aesthetic judgment. Kirillova and Lehto (2015) developed six factors and 21 items. The same items were included twice and assessed by the respondents in different aspects of this scale (home environment vs. destination). The studies of Baloglu *et al.* (2004), Sahin and Baloglu (2011), Lee *et al.* (2011), Breiby (2015), and Breiby and Slatten (2017) were used for additional items. The “matte – vivid/bright” item was added to locale characteristics, “without a view – scenic” and “not charming – charming” to scope, “disorganized – organized” to upkeep, “not in harmony – in harmony” to accord, “traditional – contemporary” to perceived age, and “dispersed/messy – neat” to shape. The third scale used in the present research is related to behavioral intention and consists of three dimensions (revisit intention, word-of-mouth intention, and willingness to pay). The behavioral intention scale was created by drawing on studies conducted by Wang *et al.* (2018), Zhang *et al.* (2018), and Shin *et al.* (2017).

In the aesthetic judgment and aesthetic distance scales, a seven-point semantic differential scale was used. The behavioral intention scale takes the form of a seven-point Likert scale. Measurement items were first translated from English into Turkish, then back-translated into English to support their content validity. The survey concluded with questions regarding respondents’ socioeconomic backgrounds.

4.3. Data collection and descriptive analysis

The research data were collected by a team of fluent English-speaking interviewers between July 10 and September 15, 2018, via a self-administrated sample questionnaire survey. The original plan was to collect data primarily at airports by providing necessary training to the interviewers. However, because the necessary permissions could not be obtained from the Antalya and Istanbul State Airport Authorities, data were collected from hotels.

Our questionnaire was distributed to 1,200 potential respondents, and 917 respondents answered the questionnaire. After eliminating invalid samples, we were left with 816 survey forms: 412 from Istanbul and 404 from Antalya. Of the 404 participants who came to Antalya, 227 were domestic tourists and 177 were foreign tourists. It is seen that the majority of foreign tourists came from countries located in Europe and Asia (88.7%), while 194 out of 412 tourists coming to Istanbul were domestic tourists. Approximately 74% of foreign tourists came from Europe and Asia. More tourists came to Istanbul than Antalya (Istanbul 26%, Antalya 11%) except for the European and Asian continents. When the demographic characteristics of respondents were examined, it was observed that the majority were male, single, and had a bachelor’s or postgraduate degree. In addition, it was determined that the most common duration for tourists was four to seven days, for the first time, and alone (Table 1).

Table 1. *Sample description*

| | Antalya | | Istanbul | |
|---------------------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| | Frequency | Percentage % | Frequency | Percentage % |
| Gender | | | | |
| Female | 144 | 35.6 | 183 | 44.4 |
| Male | 256 | 63.4 | 228 | 55.3 |
| Total | 400 | 99.0 | 411 | 99.8 |
| <i>No answer</i> | 4 | 1.0 | 1 | 0.2 |
| Total | 404 | 100.0 | 412 | 100.0 |
| Marital Status | | | | |
| Single | 204 | 50.5 | 235 | 57.0 |
| Married | 193 | 47.8 | 176 | 42.7 |
| Total | 397 | 98.3 | 411 | 99.8 |
| <i>No answer</i> | 7 | 1.7 | 1 | 0.2 |
| Total | 404 | 100.0 | 412 | 100.0 |
| Visitor Status | | | | |
| Foreign visitors | 177 | 43.81 | 218 | 52.91 |
| Domestic visitors | 227 | 56.19 | 194 | 47.09 |
| Total | 404 | 100.0 | 412 | 100.0 |
| Education Level | | | | |
| Primary school | 18 | 4.5 | 29 | 7.0 |
| High school | 134 | 33.2 | 101 | 24.5 |
| Bachelor's | 206 | 50.9 | 177 | 42.9 |
| Postgraduate | 45 | 11.1 | 104 | 25.2 |
| Total | 403 | 99.8 | 411 | 99.8 |
| <i>No answer</i> | 1 | 0.2 | 1 | 0.2 |
| Total | 404 | 100.0 | 412 | 100.0 |
| Vacation Times | | | | |
| 1-3 days | 78 | 19.3 | 107 | 25.9 |
| 4-7 days | 129 | 31.9 | 124 | 30.1 |
| 8-14 days | 106 | 26.2 | 90 | 21.8 |
| More than 2 weeks | 91 | 22.5 | 89 | 21.6 |
| Total | 404 | 100.0 | 410 | 99.5 |
| <i>No answer</i> | - | - | 2 | 0.5 |
| Total | 404 | 100.0 | 412 | 100.0 |
| Travel Partner | | | | |
| Alone | 226 | 55.9 | 233 | 56.6 |
| Group (relatives/friends) | 158 | 39.1 | 129 | 31.3 |
| Tour group | 13 | 3.2 | 49 | 11.9 |
| Total | 397 | 98.3 | 411 | 99.8 |
| <i>No answer</i> | 7 | 1.7 | 1 | 0.2 |
| Total | 404 | 100.0 | 412 | 100.0 |
| Visit Times | | | | |
| 1st time | 138 | 34.2 | 150 | 36.4 |
| 2nd time | 114 | 28.2 | 116 | 28.2 |
| 3rd time | 56 | 13.9 | 42 | 10.2 |
| 4th time or higher | 96 | 23.8 | 104 | 25.2 |
| Total | 404 | 100.0 | 412 | 100.0 |

Of the tourists coming to Antalya, 277 were domestic tourists and 177 were foreign tourists. Of those coming to Istanbul, 194 were domestic and 218 were foreign. Considering the distribution of tourists coming to Antalya, it is seen that the majority came from countries located in Europe and Asia (88.7%). The situation is similar in Istanbul, where about 74% of tourists came from Europe and Asia. More tourists (Istanbul 26%, Antalya 11%) traveled from outside the European and Asian continents to Istanbul than Antalya.

To reduce the possibility of common method variance, the following procedural remedies were adopted from Podsakoff *et al.* (2003) and appended to the cover page: "Participation is voluntary but encouraged" and "There are no right or wrong responses to the items in the questionnaire." Anonymity and secrecy were guaranteed to all participants.

4.4. Data analysis

An expectation-maximization (EM) algorithm in SPSS 21.0 was used to fill missing values. To ensure the validity of the data, an EFA and CFA were performed to clarify the combined sample from both locations (Istanbul and Antalya). The data were randomly split in two, resulting in two sets: one for the EFA and one for the CFA (Hair *et al.*, 2010). SEM analysis was performed to confirm the relationship between aesthetic judgment, aesthetic distance, and behavioral intention. To determine destination aesthetics, the aesthetic distance between the participants' home environments and the vacation destination environments was calculated by subtracting the total score of the vacation destination environment factor from that of the home environment. The total average was used to calculate factor scores.

5. Results

5.1. EFA

To calibrate the size of aesthetic judgment and behavioral intention, an equamax rotation maximum likelihood estimation was performed on the sample ($n = 408$) using SPSS 21.0. As a result of EFA, aesthetic judgment was found to have a KMO value of 0.853, while the Bartlett's Sphericity Test χ^2 value was $p < 0.01$. If the KMO value is greater than 0.60 and the Bartlett's Sphericity Test χ^2 value is less than 0.05, it shows the suitability of the data for factor analysis (Field, 2009). As a result of the analysis performed, no cyclical effects in the items were observed. It was, therefore, determined that the total variance of the model and the internal consistency of factors were high. When the total correlation score was examined, however, the "tightly spaced – open spaced" and "matte – vivid/bright" items were shown to be low (2 and 8, respectively), thus lowering the reliability coefficient. "All alike – diverse" (10) was also removed from the scale because the standardized factor loading was less than 0.50, and factor analysis and reliability analysis were repeated. As a result, it was determined that the total variance of the model was 65.976% and that the total correlation score of the item was over 0.300.

As a result of the EFA performed on the behavioral intention data set, the KMO value was 0.902 and the Bartlett's Sphericity Test χ^2 value was $p < 0.01$. The KMO value was greater than 0.60 and the Bartlett's Sphericity Test χ^2 value less than $p < 0.05$, indicating suitability for factor analysis (Alpar, 2012). Next, the results of the reliability analysis of the dimensions were inspected and the Cronbach's alpha coefficients, ranging from 0.702 to 0.921, were determined.

Table 2. EFA results for aesthetic judgment and behavioral intention

| Model Factors and Expressions | Factor Loadings | | | | Item Total Correlation Score | | |
|--|-----------------------|--------|--------|--------|------------------------------|--------|--------|
| | Local Characteristics | Scope | Upkeep | Accord | Perceived Age | Shape | |
| Locale Characteristics | | | | | | | |
| 1. not crowded – crowded | 0.730 | | | | | 0.656 | |
| 2. tightly spaced – open-spaced* | 0.626 | | | | | -0.051 | |
| 3. peaceful – lively | 0.724 | | | | | 0.590 | |
| 4. nature-made – man-made | 0.789 | | | | | 0.672 | |
| 5. quiet – loud | 0.768 | | | | | 0.683 | |
| 6. presence of nature – presence of people | 0.832 | | | | | 0.718 | |
| 7. simplistic – sophisticated | 0.706 | | | | | 0.610 | |
| 8. matte – vivid/bright* | 0.694 | | | | | 0.235 | |
| Scope | | | | | | | |
| 9. nothing to see – lots of things to see | | 0.838 | | | | 0.502 | |
| 10. all alike – diverse* | | 0.448 | | | | 0.491 | |
| 11. ordinary – unique | | 0.674 | | | | 0.528 | |
| 12. without a view – scenic | | 0.661 | | | | 0.671 | |
| 13. not charming – charming | | 0.657 | | | | 0.627 | |
| Upkeep | | | | | | | |
| 14. run-down – well kept | | | 0.664 | | | 0.456 | |
| 15. dirty – clean | | | 0.715 | | | 0.402 | |
| 16. disorganized – organized | | | 0.648 | | | 0.596 | |
| Accord | | | | | | | |
| 17. artificial – authentic | | | | 0.743 | | 0.564 | |
| 18. disharmonious – harmonious | | | | 0.708 | | 0.676 | |
| 19. not in harmony – in harmony | | | | 0.693 | | 0.632 | |
| Perceived Age | | | | | | | |
| 20. historic – modern | | | | | 0.722 | 0.450 | |
| 21. old – young | | | | | 0.740 | 0.460 | |
| 22. traditional – contemporary | | | | | 0.625 | 0.445 | |
| Shape | | | | | | | |
| 23. rugged – smooth | | | | | 0.739 | 0.557 | |
| 24. asymmetric – symmetric | | | | | 0.835 | 0.660 | |
| 25. dispersed/messy – neat | | | | | 0.796 | 0.614 | |
| Explained variance | 16.032 | 12.914 | 10.537 | 9.664 | 8.735 | 8.094 | 65.976 |
| Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients | 0.862 | 0.773 | 0.702 | 0.784 | 0.713 | 0.774 | 0.833 |

* Expressions were removed from the scale since they did not meet the factor loading and/or item-total correlation coefficient requirements. Factor loadings, item-total correlation coefficients, percentages of variance explained, and Cronbach's alpha values were subtracted, recalculated, and subsequently added to the table.

Table 3. EFA results for aesthetic judgment and behavioral intention

| Model Factors and Expressions | Factor Loadings | | Item Total Correlation Score | |
|--|-------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|--------|
| | Revisit Intention | Word-of-Mouth Intention | Willingness to Pay | |
| Revisit Intention | | | | |
| 1. I tend to visit Antalya/Istanbul again. | 0.770 | | 0.853 | |
| 2. I would like to come back to Antalya/Istanbul again. | 0.683 | | 0.741 | |
| 3. I think I will come back to Antalya/Istanbul in the near future. | 0.613 | | 0.850 | |
| Word-of-Mouth Intention | | | | |
| 4. I will recommend Antalya/Istanbul to my acquaintances who will plan a holiday. | | 0.782 | 0.800 | |
| 5. I will speak positively about Antalya/Istanbul to my acquaintances. | | 0.863 | 0.838 | |
| 6. I will speak to others positively about Antalya/Istanbul. | | 0.825 | 0.824 | |
| 7. I am happy to recommend Antalya/Istanbul to others. | | 0.642 | 0.708 | |
| Willingness to Pay | | | | |
| 8. Even if hotel prices increase a little, I will continue to come to Antalya/Istanbul. | | | 0.725 | 0.738 |
| 9. Compared to other destinations, I am willing to pay a higher price for Antalya/Istanbul. | | | 0.861 | 0.852 |
| 10. I am willing to pay a higher price to see the aesthetic features of Antalya/Istanbul. | | | 0.918 | 0.872 |
| 11. I would be willing to pay a higher price to see the aesthetic features of any destination. | | | 0.873 | 0.813 |
| Explained variance | 14.502 | 33.005 | 28.005 | 75.754 |
| Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients | 0.907 | 0.908 | 0.921 | 0.907 |

* Expressions were removed from the scale since they did not meet the factor loading and/or item-total correlation coefficient requirements. Factor loadings, item-total correlation coefficients, percentages of variance explained, and Cronbach's alpha values were subtracted, recalculated, and subsequently added to the table.

5.2. CFA

As a result of the CFA, it was observed that the aesthetic judgment scale preserves its six-factor structure. All expressions in the sample group explained locale characteristics, scope, upkeep, accord, perceived age, and shape, which are latent variables, and t-values were significant at the level of $p < 0.01$ ($t > 2.983$). In addition, the error coefficients of all expressions less than 0.90, along with factor loadings greater than 0.50, ensured that no expression was removed from the scale. It was clear that the model fit well ($\chi^2 / df = 2.96$, CFI = 0.91, IFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.065, SRMR = 0.03).

It was clear that the behavioral intention scale also fit well with the model ($\chi^2 / df = 3.65$, CFI = 0.97, IFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.080, SRMR = 0.04). Fornell and Larcker's (1981) technique was used to evaluate discriminant validity. It was observed that the model fulfilled the criteria of discriminant validity for the dimensions of aesthetic judgment, along with the 11 dimensions of behavioral intention.

Table 4. Model measurement results

| Model Factors and Expressions | Standardized Factor Loadings | t-values | Error Coefficient | R ² | Composite Reliability | Explained Variance |
|---|------------------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Locale Characteristics | | | | | 0.86 | 0.50 |
| 1. not crowded – crowded | 0.624 | 12.261 | 0.61 | 0.39 | | |
| 3. peaceful – lively | 0.649 | 12.980 | 0.58 | 0.42 | | |
| 4. nature-made – man-made | 0.701 | 12.512 | 0.51 | 0.49 | | |
| 5. quiet – loud | 0.722 | 10.763 | 0.48 | 0.52 | | |
| 6. presence of nature – presence of people | 0.772 | 11.645 | 0.40 | 0.60 | | |
| 7. simplistic – sophisticated | 0.765 | 10.977 | 0.41 | 0.59 | | |
| Scope | | | | | 0.80 | 0.51 |
| 9. nothing to see – lots of things of see | 0.660 | 12.752 | 0.56 | 0.44 | | |
| 11. ordinary – unique | 0.640 | 12.766 | 0.59 | 0.41 | | |
| 12. without a view – scenic | 0.792 | 8.384 | 0.37 | 0.63 | | |
| 13. not charming – charming | 0.744 | 9.854 | 0.45 | 0.55 | | |
| Upkeep | | | | | 0.82 | 0.60 |
| 14. run-down – well kept | 0.739 | 12.743 | 0.45 | 0.55 | | |
| 15. dirty – clean | 0.761 | 13.655 | 0.42 | 0.58 | | |
| 16. disorganized – organized | 0.815 | 8.402 | 0.34 | 0.66 | | |
| Accord | | | | | 0.80 | 0.57 |
| 17. artificial – authentic | 0.649 | 12.817 | 0.58 | 0.42 | | |
| 18. disharmonious – harmonious | 0.780 | 10.225 | 0.39 | 0.61 | | |
| 19. not in harmony – in harmony | 0.819 | 8.941 | 0.33 | 0.67 | | |
| Perceived Age | | | | | 0.75 | 0.50 |
| 20. historic – modern | 0.741 | 13.040 | 0.45 | 0.55 | | |
| 21. old – young | 0.692 | 11.741 | 0.52 | 0.48 | | |
| 22. traditional – contemporary | 0.685 | 8.099 | 0.53 | 0.47 | | |
| Shape | | | | | 0.79 | 0.55 |
| 23. rugged – smooth | 0.762 | 9.618 | 0.42 | 0.58 | | |
| 24. asymmetric – symmetric | 0.759 | 9.703 | 0.42 | 0.58 | | |
| 25. dispersed/messy – neat | 0.707 | 10.958 | 0.50 | 0.50 | | |
| Revisit Intention | | | | | 0.89 | 0.72 |
| 1. I tend to visit Antalya/Istanbul again. | 0.881 | 10.850 | 0.22 | 0.78 | | |
| 2. I would like to come back to Antalya/Istanbul again. | 0.873 | 8.183 | 0.24 | 0.76 | | |
| 3. I think I will come back to Antalya/Istanbul in the near future. | 0.793 | 8.270 | 0.37 | 0.63 | | |
| Word-of-Mouth Intention | | | | | 0.90 | 0.69 |
| 4. I will recommend Antalya/Istanbul to my acquaintances who will make a holiday. | 0.890 | 13.274 | 0.20 | 0.79 | | |
| 5. I will speak positively about Antalya/Istanbul to my acquaintances. | 0.882 | 11.193 | 0.22 | 0.78 | | |
| 6. I will speak to others positively about Antalya/Istanbul. | 0.834 | 9.368 | 0.30 | 0.70 | | |
| 7. I am pleased to recommend Antalya/Istanbul to others. | 0.689 | 9.046 | 0.53 | 0.47 | | |

| Model Factors and Expressions | Standardized Factor Loadings | t-values | Error Coefficient | R ² | Composite Reliability | Explained Variance |
|---|------------------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Willingness to Pay | | | | | 0.89 | 0.68 |
| 8. Even if hotel prices increase a bit, I will continue to come to Antalya/Istanbul. | 0.693 | 9.540 | 0.52 | 0.48 | | |
| 9. Compared to other destinations, I am willing to pay a higher price for Antalya/Istanbul. | 0.830 | 4.799 | 0.31 | 0.69 | | |
| 10. I am willing to pay a higher price to see the aesthetic features in Antalya/Istanbul. | 0.867 | 11.655 | 0.25 | 0.75 | | |
| 11. I am willing to pay a higher price to see the aesthetic features of any destination. | 0.884 | 13.340 | 0.22 | 0.78 | | |

Table 5. Discriminant validity (aesthetic judgment and behavioral intention)

| | Revisit Intention | Word-of-Mouth Intention | Willingness to Pay |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Revisit Intention | 0.878^a | | |
| Word-of-Mouth Intention | 0.674 ^{**b} | 0.846 | |
| Willingness to Pay | 0.390 ^{**} | 0.254 ^{**} | 0.863 |

| | Local Characteristics | Scope | Upkeep | Accord | Perceived Age | Shape |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Locale Characteristics | 0.711^a | | | | | |
| Scope | 0.321 ^{**b} | 0.707 | | | | |
| Upkeep | 0.297 ^{**} | 0.362 ^{**} | 0.693 | | | |
| Accord | 0.295 ^{**} | 0.394 ^{**} | 0.656 ^{**} | 0.746 | | |
| Perceived Age | 0.292 ^{**} | 0.262 ^{**} | 0.348 ^{**} | 0.390 ^{**} | 0.701 | |
| Shape | 0.288 [*] | 0.158 [*] | 0.399 ^{**} | 0.342 ^{**} | 0.357 ^{**} | 0.733 |

Notes: ^aEntries on the diagonal are the square roots of the AVE; ^bcorrelations are below the diagonal; **correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

5.3. Hypothesis testing

The indices of fit of the first hypothesis are stated as follows: $\chi^2 = 1761.409$, $df = 484$, $\chi^2/df = 3.639$, RMSEA = 0.075, CFI = 0.90, IFI = 0.89, SRMR = 0.04. It was found that the aesthetic judgment of tourists affected behavioral intention, so H_{1a} , H_{1b} , and H_{1c} were accepted. Among the elements of aesthetic judgment, revisit intention ($\beta = 0.85$, $p < 0.05$, $t = 24.841$), word-of-mouth intention ($\beta = 0.84$, $p < 0.05$, $t = 23.040$), and willingness to pay ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.05$, $t = 9.785$) had positive effects on the behavioral intention of tourists (Figure 2 and Table 6).

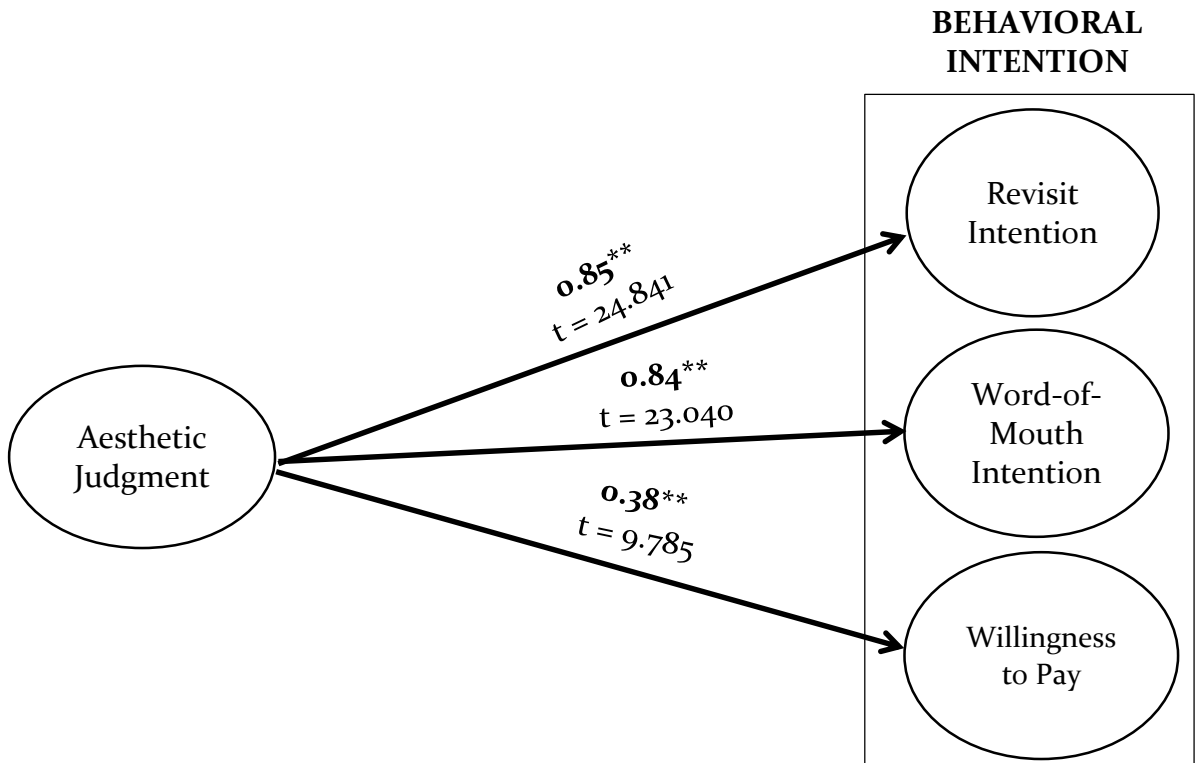


Figure 2. Results of aesthetic judgment path analysis

The indices of fit of the second hypothesis are stated as follows: $\chi^2 = 1747.613$, $df = 482$, $\chi^2/df = 3.626$, $RMSEA = 0.076$, $CFI = 0.90$, $IFI = 0.90$, $SRMR = 0.05$. In the second hypothesis, H_{2a} and H_{2b} were not supported, while H_{2c} was supported. The aesthetic distance of tourists did not have an effect on revisit intention ($\beta = -0.055$, $p > 0.05$, $t = -1.339$) or word-of-mouth intention ($\beta = -0.066$, $p > 0.05$, $t = -1.547$). The aesthetic distance of tourists negatively affected willingness to pay ($\beta = -0.220$, $p < 0.05$, $t = -2.912$), so H_{2c} was supported (Figure 3 and Table 6).

As a result of the t-test for the relevant sample conducted to state whether there is a difference between the aesthetic judgment dimensions and aesthetic distance (where they live) dimensions of tourists coming to Istanbul and Antalya, a significant difference was observed between the averages of scope ($t = 11.241$, $p < 0.01$), upkeep ($t = 6.173$, $p < 0.01$), accord ($t = 7.901$, $p < 0.01$), perceived age ($t = 9.390$, $p < 0.01$), and shape ($t = 3.073$, $p < 0.05$) but not locale characteristics ($t = 0.810$, $p > 0.05$) in Antalya. Thus, tourists who came to Antalya found it more aesthetically pleasing in terms of scope, upkeep, accord, perceived age, and shape than the places they live in. The effect size (Lakens, 2013) was calculated for scope ($d = 0.561$), upkeep ($d = 0.307$), accord ($d = 0.393$), perceived age ($d = 0.467$), and shape ($d = 0.153$). Therefore, H_{3a} was supported.

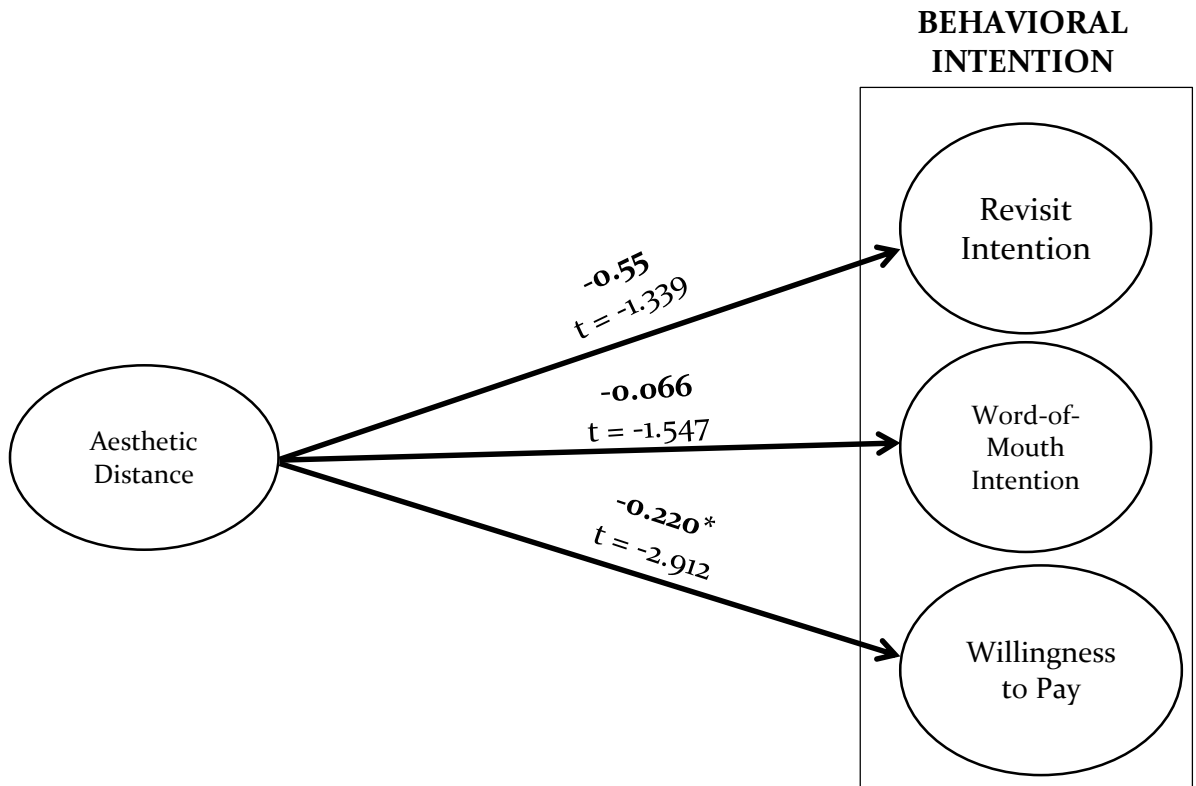


Figure 3. Results of aesthetic distance path analysis

Table 6. Differences between aesthetic judgment and aesthetic distance

| Antalya | N | \bar{X} | S | sd | t | p | Istanbul | N | \bar{X} | S | sd | t | p |
|-----------------------|-----|-----------|------|-----|--------|--------|-----------------------|-----|-----------|------|-----|--------|--------|
| LC (AJ ^a) | | 4.63 | 1.48 | | | | LC (AJ ^a) | 412 | 5.56 | 1.06 | 411 | 14.391 | 0.01** |
| LC (AD ^b) | 404 | 4.54 | 1.34 | 403 | 0.810 | 0.418 | LC (AD ^b) | | 4.06 | 1.57 | | | |
| Sc (AJ) | | 5.71 | 1.19 | | | | Sc (AJ) | 412 | 5.77 | 0.97 | 411 | 10.163 | 0.01** |
| Sc (AD) | 404 | 4.58 | 1.55 | 403 | 11.650 | 0.01** | Sc (AD) | | 4.92 | 1.41 | | | |
| U (AJ) | | 5.40 | 1.20 | | | | U (AJ) | 412 | 5.01 | 1.18 | 411 | -0.525 | 0.600 |
| U (AD) | 404 | 4.83 | 1.45 | 403 | 6.173 | 0.01** | U (AD) | | 5.05 | 1.49 | | | |
| A (AJ) | | 5.45 | 1.26 | | | | A (AJ) | 412 | 4.98 | 1.28 | 411 | 1.587 | 0.113 |
| A (AD) | 404 | 4.68 | 1.58 | 403 | 7.901 | 0.01** | A (AD) | | 4.84 | 1.46 | | | |
| PA (AJ) | | 5.25 | 1.22 | | | | PA (AJ) | 412 | 5.10 | 1.83 | 411 | 4.462 | 0.01** |
| PA (AD) | 404 | 4.41 | 1.43 | 403 | 9.390 | 0.01** | PA (AD) | | 4.75 | 1.28 | | | |
| Sh (AJ) | | 4.96 | 1.39 | | | | Sh (AJ) | 412 | 4.83 | 1.21 | 411 | -0.585 | 0.559 |
| Sh (AD) | 404 | 4.67 | 1.51 | 403 | 3.073 | * | Sh (AD) | | 4.88 | 1.27 | | | |

The difference between aesthetic judgment dimensions of Antalya and aesthetic distance dimensions (gain score) was also calculated. According to Table 7, the difference in points between aesthetic judgment dimensions of Antalya and aesthetic distance dimensions is positive and significant in other dimensions except for locale characteristics. Therefore, Antalya is evaluated within the framework of aesthetics by tourists as related to the scope, upkeep, accord, perceived age, and shape dimensions.

Table 7. *Aesthetic judgment and aesthetic distance gain score*

| Items | ANTALYA | | | ISTANBUL | | |
|--|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| | AJ | AD | Gain Score | AJ | AD | Gain Score |
| Locale Characteristics | 4.63 | 4.54 | 0.09 | 5.56 | 4.06 | 1.50* |
| 1. not crowded – crowded | 4.70 | 4.64 | 0.06 | 6.08 | 4.04 | 2.04 |
| 3. peaceful – lively | 4.81 | 4.46 | 0.35 | 5.35 | 4.17 | 1.18 |
| 4. nature-made – man-made | 4.66 | 4.58 | 0.08 | 5.54 | 4.06 | 1.48 |
| 5. quiet – loud | 4.75 | 4.68 | 0.07 | 5.50 | 3.98 | 1.52 |
| 6. presence of nature – presence of people | 4.21 | 4.61 | -0.40 | 5.56 | 3.97 | 1.59 |
| 7. simplistic – sophisticated | 4.63 | 4.34 | 0.29 | 5.44 | 4.17 | 1.27 |
| Scope | 5.71 | 4.58 | 1.13* | 5.77 | 4.92 | 0.85* |
| 9. nothing to see – lots of things of see | 5.84 | 4.59 | 1.25 | 5.70 | 4.79 | 0.91 |
| 11. ordinary – unique | 5.46 | 4.39 | 1.07 | 5.74 | 4.64 | 1.10 |
| 12. without a view – scenic | 5.79 | 4.62 | 1.17 | 5.83 | 5.16 | 0.67 |
| 13. not charming – charming | 5.76 | 4.71 | 1.05 | 5.82 | 5.10 | 0.72 |
| Upkeep | 5.40 | 4.83 | 0.57* | 5.01 | 5.05 | -0.04 |
| 14. run-down – well kept | 5.38 | 4.84 | 0.54 | 5.47 | 5.11 | 0.36 |
| 15. dirty – clean | 5.52 | 4.85 | 0.67 | 4.48 | 5.03 | -0.55 |
| 16. disorganized – organized | 5.31 | 4.81 | 0.50 | 5.06 | 5.01 | 0.05 |
| Accord | 5.45 | 4.68 | 0.77* | 4.98 | 4.84 | 0.14 |
| 17. artificial – authentic | 5.41 | 4.70 | 0.71 | 4.77 | 4.79 | -0.02 |
| 18. disharmonious – harmonious | 5.36 | 4.68 | 0.68 | 5.12 | 4.80 | 0.32 |
| 19. not in harmony – in harmony | 5.39 | 4.68 | 0.71 | 5.05 | 4.92 | 0.13 |
| Perceived Age | 5.25 | 4.41 | 0.84* | 5.10 | 4.75 | 0.35* |
| 20. historic – modern | 5.11 | 4.41 | 0.70 | 4.61 | 4.63 | -0.02 |
| 21. old - young | 5.26 | 4.50 | 0.76 | 5.22 | 4.79 | 0.43 |
| 22. traditional – contemporary | 5.37 | 4.32 | 1.05 | 5.47 | 4.82 | 0.65 |
| Shape | 4.96 | 4.67 | 0.29* | 4.83 | 4.87 | -0.04 |
| 23. rugged – smooth | 5.05 | 4.67 | 0.38 | 4.96 | 5.00 | -0.04 |
| 24. asymmetric – symmetric | 4.82 | 4.60 | 0.22 | 4.87 | 4.81 | 0.06 |
| 25. dispersed/messy – neat | 4.99 | 4.75 | 0.24 | 4.67 | 4.83 | -0.16 |

As a result of the t-test for Istanbul, significant differences were observed between locale characteristics ($t = 14.391$, $p < 0.01$), scope ($t = 10.163$, $p < 0.01$), and perceived age ($t = 4.462$, $p < 0.01$). There was no difference between averages in terms of upkeep ($t = -0.525$, $p > 0.05$), accord ($t = 1.587$, $p > 0.05$), and shape ($t = -0.585$, $p > 0.05$). Therefore, H_{3b} was supported. The effect size was calculated for locale characteristics = 0.709, scope = 0.489, and perceived age = 0.230, thus demonstrating a significant difference in scope and perceived age dimensions of tourists coming to Istanbul, but especially locale characteristics.

The difference in points between aesthetic judgment and aesthetic distance dimensions of Istanbul is positive and significant in terms of locale characteristics, scope, and perceived age. Thus, locale characteristics, scope, and perceived age dimensions of the tourists evaluated Istanbul under the framework of aesthetics (See Table 8).

Table 8. Summary of hypotheses

| Hypotheses | Testing Results |
|--|------------------|
| H1a Aesthetic Judgment → Revisit Intention | Supported |
| H1b Aesthetic Judgment → Willingness to Pay | Supported |
| H1c Aesthetic Judgment → Word-of-Mouth Intention | Supported |
| H2a Aesthetic Distance → Revisit Intention | Rejected (n.s.) |
| H2b Aesthetic Distance → Willingness to Pay | Supported |
| H2c Aesthetic Distance → Word-of-Mouth Intention | Rejected (n.s.) |
| H3a Aesthetic Judgment (Gap) Aesthetic Distance (Antalya) | Supported |
| H3b Aesthetic Judgment (Gap) Aesthetic Distance (İstanbul) | Supported |

6. Discussion and Conclusions

6.1. Conclusions

Aesthetics is important in tourism as tourists seek beauty. Therefore, tourism marketers can benefit from leveraging aesthetics to attract tourists to their destinations. The current study investigated whether destination aesthetics affects behavioral intention and whether there is a difference between aesthetic judgment and aesthetic distance among domestic and foreign tourists coming to Istanbul and Antalya. We used Gestalt theory to examine tourists' behavioral intentions, influenced by their aesthetic judgment and distance. The contribution of our current research is twofold: first, it determines and analyzes the holistic aesthetic judgments and aesthetic distances of tourists based on Gestalt theory; second, it emphasizes the role of aesthetic experience by determining which aspects of domestic and foreign tourists find Istanbul and Antalya aesthetic. While some of our hypotheses were supported by the data obtained from 404 tourists who came to Antalya and 412 tourists who came to Istanbul, some were rejected. We found that aesthetic judgment was a predictor of three dimensions of behavioral intention (revisit intention, word-of-mouth intention, and willingness to pay). At the same time, the aesthetic judgments of the tourists coming to Antalya and Istanbul were higher than the places they came from (aesthetic distance). The theoretical and practical implications for this finding are given below.

6.2. Theoretical Implications

This study expands the research on aesthetic experience by exploring the determinants of aesthetic judgment and aesthetic distance evoked by tourists in evaluating behavioral intentions. Previous studies (Kirillova *et al.*, 2014; Lu *et al.*, 2020; Genc and Gulertekin Genc, 2022; Zhang and Xu, 2020; Hauser *et al.*, 2022) have described the aesthetic experiences of tourists. Specifically, one of the most basic elements tourists expect from a destination is the aesthetic experience (Kirillova and Lehto, 2015). Aesthetic elements are more likely to be expected in places where the speed of social media has increased, where tourists are looking for an escape, and where tourists compete with each other to share the most beautiful photos of the places they visit (e.g., #beautifuldestinations Instagram) (Hauser *et al.*, 2022).

Through Gestalt theory, this study showed what behavioral intention factors affect tourists' aesthetic judgments and aesthetic distances. First, our study shows that destination aesthetic judgment has a positive and direct effect on tourists' revisit intention, word-of-mouth intention, and willingness to pay. The extraordinary physical characteristics of the destination (scope, upkeep, accord, perceived age, and shape) can positively affect the behavioral intention of tourists (Kirillova *et al.*, 2014; Kirillova and Lehto, 2015). Scope made the highest contribution to aesthetic judgment's influence on behavioral intention.

Scope was noted to be important for criteria such as visiting alternative places in the aesthetic evaluation of individuals (Rogge *et al.*, 2007; Galindo and Hidalgo, 2005), and certain aspects were supported in the previous literature. Yet, the present research reveals that this is not the only important factor. Perceived age, which deserves the detailed examination given here, was the second most prominent dimension of tourists' aesthetic judgment. It stands out for presenting both historical and postmodern elements in the two locations of interest. Moreover, although it is addressed in accord and upkeep, environmental psychology, and tourism-related research, it draws attention as an important dimension of tourism aesthetics. Shape and locale characteristics offer important experiential components such as environmental and place-related features, which are the classic dimensions of aesthetics.

This study found that aesthetic judgment and, to some extent, aesthetic distance affect the tourists' behavioral intention. From a different perspective, the aesthetic quality of the places in which tourists live can also generate behavioral intention by activating an assessment of a destination's beauty where tourists plan their holidays (Kirillova and Lehto, 2015). This is related to the aesthetic experience of tourists, and the result is coherent with Gestalt theory. It has been determined that aesthetic distance negatively affects willingness to pay, which is one of the behavioral intention dimensions. Although the effect is small, it negatively affects behavioral intention. When the effect of aesthetic distance on behavioral intention is examined, tourists pay particular attention to originality and harmony (Genc and Gulertekin Genc, 2022). The results show that the aesthetic contrast between the place where tourists live and their destination environment affects the aesthetic judgment and behavioral intention of tourists. When their place of residence is evaluated more positively in terms of aesthetic originality, tourists tend to consider a destination as less beautiful. If destination aesthetics are perceived to be superior to these dimensions, tourists will consider a more attractive destination (Kirillova and Lehto, 2015). The estimation of how aesthetic distance affects behavioral intention and aesthetic judgment depends on the direction of this comparison rather than the absolute distance between the two points of comparison. These results support previous studies about the value of innovation in tourism (Ng *et al.*, 2007; Lee and Crompton, 1992).

Results regarding whether Antalya and Istanbul are found to be aesthetically pleasing by tourists were also reached, determined by locating the difference between aesthetic judgment and aesthetic distance (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). According to this, aesthetic judgment averages in Antalya, as well as those of scope, upkeep, accord, perceived age, and shape, were higher than aesthetic distance averages. In other words, tourists found Antalya aesthetically pleasing in terms of scope, upkeep, accord, perceived age, and shape. When the effect size is examined, it is seen that the most effective dimension is scope. The fact that there are many places to compare beautiful views in Antalya is in and of itself considered an aesthetically positive attribute by tourists in the context of scope. Perceived age had the second-largest effect. The cultural heritage of Antalya occupies an essential place concerning this effect. At the same time, it is possible to see postmodern effects reflected in the architecture and landscape of Antalya. In this context, it does not seem surprising that scope and perceived age are high. In their study on foreign tourists in Antalya, Sahin and Guzel (2018) determined that the climate, weather, scenery, and ecological areas of Antalya are appreciated by tourists. In this respect, the study of Sahin and Guzel (2018) overlaps with the results of the present research. These results are also consistent with those of Kirillova and Lehto (2015).

In evaluating whether Istanbul is aesthetically pleasing to tourists, locale characteristics, scope, and perceived age were considered positive by tourists. Locale characteristics constituted the most effective dimension. The fact that almost every part of Istanbul is crowded, complex, and filled with noise

pollution in comparison to where tourists stay is perceived as aesthetically positive in this respect. When the effect sizes are examined, scope and perceived age follow in order after locale characteristics. When Sahin and Guzel (2018) studied the experience components of foreign tourists in Istanbul, they found that tourists preferred Istanbul due to its superstructural aesthetics and opportunity for innovation, consistent with the results in the present study. In terms of upkeep, it is possible to say that many attractions in Istanbul cannot be preserved and that the city is irregularly constructed. In terms of shape and accord, there is a distorted and disharmonious structure to Istanbul. Therefore, in these dimensions, Istanbul was not found to be aesthetically pleasing.

Contrasting with the point of view that aesthetic judgment and aesthetic distance are coproduced (Kirillova and Lehto, 2015), this study expands our understanding of the aesthetic process by confirming the significant positive impact of aesthetic judgment on behavioral intention. Naturally, it emphasizes the role of aesthetic judgment on tourists by showing that positive aesthetic judgment appears not only after the first experience of a place (Kirillova *et al.*, 2014) but also after a specific cognitive process (in this case, aesthetic distance).

This study aimed to contribute to the literature on aesthetic experiences. According to Tribe (2009), Kirillova *et al.* (2014), Kirillova and Lehto (2015), as well as Zhang and Hu (2020), further research is needed in this field. In response to this call, the present study focused on the process of aesthetic experience in tourism in 3S and cultural touristic destinations. Further, it analyzed the effects of aesthetic experiences on behavioral intention. This study confirmed that environmental factors in a tourist destination could influence the behavior of tourists, thus enriching the environmental psychology literature. Although there is no robust theoretical framework for current studies on tourist aesthetic experience, Gestalt theory in environmental psychology was introduced for aesthetic investigation of the critical mechanism of environmental factors in relation to tourists' behavioral intention. Kirillova and Lehto (2015) also confirm the destination process model.

This study further adds to the growing literature focusing on the gap and Gestalt theories in the context of aesthetic experience, bringing together two touristic destinations (Istanbul and Antalya) from different perspectives with their knowledge about aesthetic judgment, aesthetic distance, and behavioral intention. In this context, aesthetic judgment and aesthetic distance are the main factors affecting the aesthetic judgment of tourists.

6.3. Managerial Implications

First, a marketing process should be implemented by compiling the aesthetic source where aesthetic qualities can be classified into the locale characteristics, scope, upkeep, accord, perceived age, and shape dimensions. Antalya and Istanbul should strive to retain as many aesthetic features as possible from these dimensions within the scope of destination aesthetics.

Second, geographic segmentation of destination marketing organizations based on the type and quality of aesthetic features should be emphasized not only among geographical areas but also locally. For example, although every district of Istanbul is geographically located within the metropolitan area, each district has unique aesthetic qualities. Therefore, Istanbul's citizens do not form a homogeneous market segment. In this context, each district in Istanbul and Antalya needs to be treated as having its own destination characteristics and aesthetic qualities.

Third, it is suggested that destinations adapt to be compatible with local market segments to create a positive relationship between tourist aesthetic judgment and behavioral intention and correct tourist

typology. Therefore, destination management organizations should focus local individuals with an aesthetic distance for the optimal target market. Locale characteristics, which are not aesthetic for tourists in Antalya, should be enhanced in that demographic, while for Istanbul, the development of upkeep, accord, and shape is key.

Extraordinary experiences in tourist destinations should be facilitated to maximize aesthetic distance. These include intense positive experiences and “peak” or “flow” moments, distinct from daily life events. When combined with the physical environment of a destination, such experiences can be significant, contributing to the holistic assessment of tourists’ destination experiences. If a tourist’s aesthetic judgment is high, the “flow” experience will be higher. Considering destination marketing plans as a whole, destinations and tourists alike have a high potential to benefit from an adequately defined aesthetic distance.

Investigating the direct effect of destination aesthetics on behavioral intention, this study shows the role of physical aesthetics in increasing competitiveness. Destination stakeholders should protect the landscape from damage to its aesthetic qualities. In the context of tourism, this theme denotes the essence of the destination, which is expected to be in harmony with the destination’s aesthetic qualities. Destination stakeholders should make every effort to offer local features such as authentic and environmental compatibility. For example, elements that are not related to the topic must be reduced to design and deliver a satisfactory experience.

Moreover, positive suggestions that meet the theme need to be maximized. Destination qualities should also be attuned to the cultural and natural environments. Planners should avoid building a skyscraper near a historic building, lest the destination’s architectural integrity be compromised. It is necessary to maintain the authentic character of a place by implementing and institutionalizing zoning regulations. In places such as Istanbul and Antalya, where modern and postmodern elements coexist, great attention should be paid to such planning. For example, multi-story buildings that spoil the natural environment should not be allowed in destinations such as Beyoğlu and Sultanahmet, both in Istanbul.

The same holds true of Antalya. Structures that disrupt the textures of ancient cities should not be allowed. At the same time, it is recommended that government and destination managers adopt an uncompromising stance on issues that encourage individuals and disrupt aesthetics with changes, such as planning amnesties. Both Istanbul and Antalya have experienced a lot of destruction in the past. Therefore, it is crucial to define aesthetic distance, which emphasizes the importance of the place where one lives, as the behavioral intention of tourists and guides for destination marketers.

6.4. Limitations and future research orientations

Apart from its conceptual value, the present study has practical applications. How tourists evaluate aesthetic properties from holiday destinations has been quantitatively verified, thereby helping destination planners regarding aesthetic judgment in the aesthetic evaluation of destinations while providing an opportunity to influence tourists. These scales created for destination aesthetics can be further developed. Also, only a target destination where tourists come from could be chosen to develop appropriate marketing strategies for aesthetic distance.

This study confirmed the current research results concerning destination aesthetics (Kirillova *et al.*, 2014; Kirillova and Lehto, 2015; Lu *et al.*, 2020; Zhang and Xu, 2020); however, this issue is integral to, and justified only in, the context of Turkey. Information on the subject in other cultural contexts is limited, which is another justification for conducting such research in other countries in the future.

According to the results obtained from this research, destination aesthetic judgment varies in different contexts. For this purpose, destinations should create unique aesthetic identities and locate their target markets. In this context, researchers can also perform analyses using different intermediate variables. For example, aesthetic judgment and aesthetic distance differences could be examined in terms of age and nationality. Moreover, destination aesthetics could be handled more extensively by researchers from different disciplines.

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Received: 02/02/2021

Accepted: 04/08/2022

Coordinating editors: Basak Denizci Guillet and Stanislav Ivanov