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### Examination of the Relationship Between Professional Competence, Experiential Value and Behavioral Intention: A Research on Local Tourists Receiving Tourist Guidance Service<sup>\*,\*\*</sup>

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#### Abstract

This study aimed to reveal how the perceived professional competence level of tourist guides affects the experiential values of tourists during the tour and their behavioral intentions after the tour. It has also been tried to determine whether an experiential value has a mediating effect between perceived professional competence and behavioral intention. For this purpose, a quantitative research approach was adopted in the research and a questionnaire technique was used to collect primary data. A survey was conducted on the domestic tourists who participated in the package tours accompanied by tourist guides for the South Eastern Anatolian Region and the Eastern Anatolian Region. As a result of the research, it was determined that the perceived professional competence of tourist guides has a positive effect on the experiential values and behavioral intentions of the tourists during the tour. In addition, it has been observed that the experiential value of the tourists as a result of the guidance service they receive within the scope of the package tour has a positive effect on their behavioral intentions. When the mediating effect of experiential value between professional competence and behavioral intention is examined, it has been determined that experiential value has a full mediator effect.

**Keywords:** Tourist Guide, Professional Competence, Experiential Value, Behavioral Intention.

#### Mesleki Yeterlilik, Deneyimsel Değer ve Davranışsal Niyet Arasındaki Etkileşimin İncelenmesi: Turist Rehberliği Hizmeti Alan Yerli Turistler Üzerine Bir Araştırma

#### Öz

Bu çalışmada turist rehberlerine ilişkin algılanan mesleki yeterlilik düzeyinin, turistlerin tur süresince edindikleri deneyimsel değerlerini ve tur sonrası davranışsal niyetlerini nasıl etkilediğinin ortaya çıkarılması amaçlanmaktadır. Ayrıca deneyimsel değer, algılanan mesleki yeterlilik ile davranışsal niyet arasında aracılık etkisinin olup olmadığı da belirlenmeye çalışılmıştır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda, araştırmada nicel araştırma yaklaşımı benimsenmiş ve birincil veri toplamak amacıyla anket tekniği kullanılmıştır. Güney Doğu Anadolu Bölgesi ve Doğu Anadolu Bölgesi'ne yönelik turist rehberleri eşliğinde gerçekleştirilen paket turlara katılan yerli turistlere anket uygulaması gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırma sonucunda, turist rehberlerine ilişkin algılanan mesleki yeterliliğin, turistlerin tur süresince edindikleri deneyimsel değerleri ve davranışsal niyetleri üzerinde olumlu yönde bir etkisinin olduğu belirlenmiştir. Bunun yanı sıra turistlerin paket tur kapsamında almış oldukları rehberlik hizmeti sonucunda edindikleri deneyimsel değer, davranışsal niyetleri üzerinde olumlu yönde bir etkisinin olduğu gözlenmiştir. Deneyimsel değer, mesleki yeterlilik ve davranışsal niyet arasındaki aracı etkisine bakıldığında ise deneyimsel değer, tam aracı etkisinin olduğu tespit edilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Turist Rehberi, Mesleki Yeterlilik, Deneyimsel Değer, Davranışsal Niyet.

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## INTRODUCTION

Today tourism businesses, rather than offering distribution-centered products or services in order to maintain market power and gain a competitive advantage in an intensely competitive environment; desires to offer experience-based services that can meet the needs and expectations of their consumers, appeal to their emotions and have a place in their memories. (Deligöz & Ünal, 2017; Taşkıran & Kızılırmak, 2019). As postmodern tourists' needs and demands have changed and their service quality expectations have increased, tourism companies have had to develop new services to meet these demands. Thus, in the tourism sector, the focus is on creating customer experiences rather than the functional features of touristic products and services and their benefits to tourists. Tourism enterprises aim to create value for their customers through the powerful and positive experiences they have designed. Because the value/experiential value obtained as a result of the experiences experienced can affect the future behavior and decision-making patterns of tourists (Atay & Çeti, 2018). Positive consumption experiences experienced by tourists have also been proven to have positive consequences, such as loyalty, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. (Oh, Fiore & Jeong, 2007; Hosany & Witham, 2009) These results reveal that consumption is necessary not only for the fulfillment of compulsory needs but also for providing spiritual and emotional satisfaction.

Creating value and experiential value for consumers in service businesses is directly proportional to the service quality to be offered. In other words, experience is required for quality service, and excellent service is required for a unique experience (Baştuğ, 2018). The quality of the products or services that tourism enterprises provide to their customers depends on the knowledge, skills, talents, equipment, and high-performing employees of those enterprises. Especially in package tours prepared by travel agencies where experience-based services are preferred, the task of providing unique and unforgettable experiences to tourists is tourist guides' responsibility. The professional competence of tourist guides involved in the implementation of package tours plays a crucial role in ensuring the competitive advantage of travel agencies. Because the performance of tourist guides is the most important variable that affects the success or failure of a tour (Wang, Hsieh & Huan, 2000) and distinguishes the tour operator or travel agency from its competitors (Bowie & Chang, 2005). Professional equipment, a high level of knowledge and skill of tourist guides, and positive attitudes and behaviors towards tourist groups; affect the success of the guide in the tour performance. Therefore, this can make important contributions to the

development of positive behaviors such as providing a quality holiday experience, selling the next tour (Zhang & Chow, 2004), and ensuring that the tourist chooses the visited country again (Salazar, 2008). In other words, tourist guides with high professional competence meet the expectations of tourists, provide input to their experiences, turn their ordinary travels into an exciting and attractive experience, and enable them to return to their homes with pleasant memories after their travels (Çapar, 2020). Thus, it is known that tourists who are satisfied with the service they receive and have positive experiences will recommend the destination or country to the people around them and will want to revisit the same destination or country (Büyükkuru & Aslan, 2016).

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Professional Competence

The concept of professional competence refers to the professional standards that show the characteristics that individuals must have in order to successfully carry out a profession (Turan, 2013) and the minimum knowledge and skills that they must provide (Caner, 2008). It is crucial for individuals to have all the knowledge and abilities required by their field of work, in other words, to be able to reach the desired level of competence in their profession, to increase the efficiency of the profession and to ensure its continuity.

In the tourism industry, where direct contact with customers is intense, qualified personnel is essential for customer satisfaction and loyalty, leading to business success, so it is critical to hire professionals with high qualifications and professional competencies. It is significant for both tourism businesses and the country that tourist guides, who are one of the key components of the services of tour operators and travel agencies, fulfill their duties successfully. Because tourist guides, who are promotional tools and volunteer ambassadors of their countries, can compensate for the insufficient promotional activities in the field of tourism and the negative images of the country with its active efforts; and can solve the problems that arise during the travel of tourists without reflecting them on them (Ünal, 2015). The performance of tourist guides is the most important variable that affects the success or failure of a tour (Wang et al., 2000) and distinguishes the tour operator or travel agency from its competitors (Bowie & Chang, 2005). For this reason, tourist guides must be well-educated at a level to create the desired positive image and have received all the subtleties of their professional education.

## Experiential Value

The value that consumers derive from an experience is expressed as experiential value (Yuan & Wu, 2008). The basis of experiential value concept is based on the concept of value determined by Holbrook & Hirschman (1982) (Okazaki, 2008; Park, Lim & Kim, 2013). Holbrook (1994) defines experiential value as an interactive, relative experience of choice that expresses the value a subject obtains as a result of interaction with a product or service.

Tourism is an experience-intensive service (Çetin & Dinçer, 2014), and the final product of a touristic visit is the sum of the experiences gained (Goldsmith & Tsiotsou, 2012). Activities within the scope of the tourism sector, where different experiences are experienced at every moment, can easily take place in the memories of consumers (Konuk, 2014). Because for tourists, consumption is removed from being ordinary, and a value is added to the touristic experience. This creates an unusual environment and ambience perception for tourists (Güleç, 2016). Every individual working in the tourism sector, contributes to the sector doubtlessly. Among these, it is necessary to consider tourist guides as one of tourism employees, especially those who serve in package tours, which are important experiential products offered by the tourism industry, and provide suitable conditions and environments for tourists to have unique experiences (Çapar, 2020). Tourist guides contribute significantly to the provision of service quality within the scope of the tour experience, increasing the value of touristic products and services, and enriching holiday experiences (İşler & Güzel, 2014). Ap & Wong (2001) state that tourist guides have the ability to transform a tourist's visit from a tour into an experience with their knowledge and interpretation of a destination's attractions and culture, as well as their communication and service skills. After experiencing extraordinary events, Oh, Fiore & Jeoung (2007) state that tourists will feel relieved and temporarily get rid of their daily routines. The quality of service and the professional equipment of the guide have a substantial impact on the tourists' experience at this point.

## Behavioral Intention

The concept of behavioral intention includes the behaviors that consumers exhibit or plan to do in the light of their thoughts about the product or service (Bezircan, 2014) that emerge as feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction after their product or service experiences (Özdemir, 2020). At this point, behavioral intentions are defined as an individual's expected or planned behavior for the future (Huang, 2009); it appears as an output of the quality and satisfaction process (Kozak, Özel & Yüncü, 2014). It is seen that there are similar

thoughts in the literature that behavioral intentions are a useful variable for predicting the future behavior of consumers (Çamlıca, 2020). Because the stronger the intention of individuals' engagement in a behavior, the higher the probability of the realization of their behavior will be (Baş, 2018).

## RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

According to Ap & Wong (2001), tourist guides' knowledge, ability to interpret destination attractions and culture, ability to provide services, and communication skills affect and enrich tourists' experiences from the tour. Tourist guides transfer the visits of tourists from tour to experience with their knowledge, narrative ability, and guidance services they offer (Zhang & Chow 2004). Lin, Lin & Chen (2017) found that the professional qualifications of tourist guides have a significant impact on service quality and tourist satisfaction in their studies and that the service quality of tourist guides has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction. In the light of this information, the H1 hypothesis below has been developed.

**H1: The perception of tourists about the professional competence of the tourist guide has a positive effect on the experiential value they have acquired.**

Tempkin (2012) states that there is a linear relationship between customer experience and behavioral intention, and customers who feel satisfied with the experiential value they get from the product they consume reveal repeat purchases and recommend the business to others. It has also been proven in many studies that the positive consumption experiences of consumers have positive results such as loyalty, satisfaction, and behavioral intention (Mathwick, Malhotra & Rigdon, 2001; Oh, Fiore & Jeong, 2007; Varshneya & Das, 2017). In the light of this information, the following H2 hypothesis has been developed

**H2: The experiential value perceptions of tourists as a result of tourist guidance services have a positive effect on their behavioral intentions.**

Tour guides' performances, abilities, and skills during the tour affect tourists' perceptions of the tour, and their positive evaluations affect their feelings of satisfaction. Thus, tourists are more likely to repurchase the tour and recommend it to people in their close circle (Reisinger & Waryszak, 1994). The research results in the literature also support this information. In their study, Köroğlu & Merter (2012) state that travel agencies' recruitment of the right tour guide affects customers in repurchasing tours from the agency. Hwang & Lee (2019), on the other hand, revealed

that the professional skills and professional attitudes of tourist guides have a positive effect on their relations with tourists, which in turn positively affects satisfaction with the guide service, tour satisfaction and word of mouth communication. In the light of this information, the following H3 hypothesis has been developed.

**H3: The perception of tourists about the professional competence of the tourist guide has a positive effect on their behavioral intentions.**

It is seen in the literature that the basis of the positive behavioral intentions of tourists regarding package tours is based on the experiences and satisfaction of the tourist guides depending on their professional competence and performance. (Huang, Weiler & Assaker, 2014; Chan, Hsu & Baum, 2015; Hwang & Lee, 2019; Akgül, 2020). At this point, it is expected that experiential value may mediate the relationship between perceived professional competence and behavioral intention, and with this mediating effect, professional competence will have a stronger effect on behavioral intention. Because the tour experiences of tourists with professionally competent and equipped tourist guides are likely to increase customer loyalty by strengthening the development of positive behavioral intentions towards the tourist guide and travel agency. In the light of this information, the H4 hypothesis below has been developed.

**H4: Experiential value has a mediating effect on the relationship between perceived professional competence and behavioral intention.**

The theoretical model of the research, which is intended to be measured within the scope of the

literature review and, the purpose and hypotheses of the research, are presented in Figure 1.

## METHOD

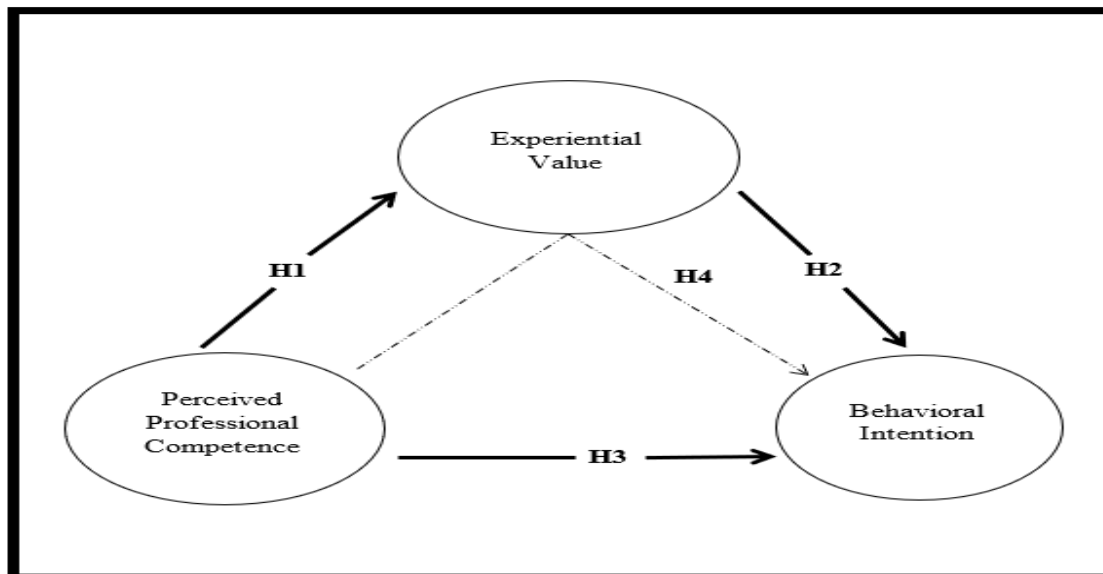
### Universe and Sample

The universe of the research consists of tourists participating in package tours accompanied by tourist guides in Turkey. However, since it is difficult to reach the whole universe, the sample group for the research is limited to domestic tourists who participate in package tours to the Southeastern Anatolia and Eastern Anatolia Regions. According to the Household Domestic Tourism Research data of the Turkish Statistical Institute, it was determined that 42 million 847 thousand people participated in domestic tourism activities in 2020 and 12 million 496 thousand 123 domestic tourists traveled for sightseeing, entertainment, and vacation (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2021). However, no statistical information could be obtained regarding the domestic tourists traveling with package tours to the Southeastern Anatolia Region and the Eastern Anatolia Region, which constitute the sample group of the research. For this reason, the sample size was calculated based on the unlimited universe calculation formulated for quantitative research, which is accepted in the literature, and it was calculated that the sample size should be at least 384 (Altunışık et al., 2012; Ural & Kılıç, 2013). 550 questionnaires were distributed. In total, 506 questionnaires were obtained during the research process.

### Data Collection Tools and Techniques

A quantitative research approach was adopted in the study and a questionnaire technique was used to collect primary data. A questionnaire form was developed

**Figure 1. Suggested Theoretical Research Model**





based on the theoretical information obtained as a result of the literature review. The questionnaire form used in the research consists of four parts. In the first part of the questionnaire, there is the Professional Competence scale, which was adapted from Huang, Hsu & Chan (2010), Professional Tourist Guide National Occupational Standard (2010), Trigger (2012), Lin, Lin & Chen (2017), Olcay et al. (2015), and Kara's (2019) studies in order to determine the perceived professional competence levels of tourist guides. The professional competence scale consists of 19 statements and was measured under three dimensions: professional knowledge, professional skills and professional attitude and behavior. In the second part of the questionnaire, there is the Experiential Value scale, which was adapted from the works of Mathwick, Malhotra & Rigdon (2001), Oh, Fiore & Jeoung (2007), Choi (2015), Radder & Han (2015), Park (2012), Jin, Line & Goh (2013), Oral & Orphan (2014), Song et al. (2015), Orphan (2015), Tan (2017), and Kim & Stepchenkova (2018), in order to determine the experiential value created by the tourist guides after the professional competence they exhibited during the tour. The experiential value scale consists of 35 statements and was analyzed under six dimensions: aesthetics, entertainment, education, escape, service excellence, and return on investment for the customer. In the third part of the survey, there is the Behavioral Intention scale, which was adapted from the studies of Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman (1996), Fullerton (2003), Konencnick & Gartner (2007), and Şimşek & Demirbağ (2017) in order to determine how the experiential value created by the tourist guides after the professional competence they have performed during the tour affects their behavioral intentions. This behavioral intention scale consists of 15 statements and was examined in four dimensions: repurchase intention, intention to pay more, intention to leave, and positive word-of-mouth communication intention. In the fourth part of the questionnaire, there are a total of 12 questions created to determine the socio-demographic characteristics of the tourists participating in the research. In order to determine the ethical suitability of the prepared questionnaire, "Ethics Committee Approval" was obtained at the meeting of Balıkesir University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee dated 03.09.2020 and numbered 2020/8.

#### Data Collection Process

The questionnaire form was developed within the scope of the research; after the necessary arrangements were made in line with the expert opinions, a pilot application was conducted before the study was applied to the sample group. The preliminary test of the research was carried out with the participation of 60 domestic tourists who participated in the package

tours to the South East Anatolia Region from Istanbul in August 2020. The questionnaire forms were distributed to tourists at the end of the tour at the tour bus return points following the package tour, and data were collected via face-to-face interviews. The dataset obtained from the pilot application was subjected to reliability analysis. After the pilot application, the questionnaire form, whose reliability and validity values were determined to be within acceptable limits, was approved for implementation and data collection. For the final application of the research, the questionnaires were prepared in print and hand-delivered to tourist groups at the return points of tour buses in three metropolitan cities (Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara) in August–November 2020.

During the analysis of the data, first of all, missing data, extreme values and extreme values in the data set were checked. The presence of outliers was determined by the Mahalanobis method, and multiple normality criteria were met. A Box-plot test was applied to 506 questionnaires, and 6 questionnaires, which were determined to be extreme values, were removed from the data set as a result of the analysis. The study continued with a total of 500 questionnaires. Afterwards, Reliability Analysis and Item Total Score Correlation were used to test the reliability of the scales used in the research, and Explanatory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were performed to test the construct validity. Finally, path analysis and mediation analysis were carried out in line with the established model.

#### FINDINGS

Within the scope of the research, first of all, the socio-demographic characteristics of domestic tourists were examined. It was determined that 50.4% of the participants were female and 49.6% were male, which showed a balanced distribution. It was observed that the majority of the participants were between the ages of 21-40 with a rate of 39.4%, and the age range of 25.2% was between the ages of 56–74. Considering the distribution by occupational groups, it was determined that the majority of them were private sector employees (29.2%) and students (25.2%). In addition, it was understood that almost half of the participants had not participated in a guided tour (45.4%) or a package tour (51%) before. The most important factors affecting their participation in package tours are the recommendation of friends/relatives (57%) and the information obtained from the internet (54.8%), and the most important factors affecting their participation in guided tours are getting accurate information about the places they visit (65.2%) and knowing Turkey's historical and touristic values (58.2%). Finally, it was

observed that the duration of tours participated was mostly 1-3 days (57.8%) and 4-6 days (32.8%).

### Validity and Reliability Analysis Results for Scales

As a result of the reliability analysis for the professional competence scale, Cronbach's alpha value was calculated as 0.96. Kayış (2010) and İslamoğlu & Alnıçık (2014) state that scales with the Cronbach's Alpha value of  $0.80 \leq \alpha < 1.00$  are highly reliable scales. Within the framework of this information, it has been determined that the professional competence scale is highly reliable. The total arithmetic mean of the scale was determined as 3.89, and the standard deviation was determined as 0.735. It was determined that the average level of participation of the participants in the propositions on the scale varied between 4.16 and 3.68. In line with this result, it is seen that the perception levels of the participants regarding the professional competence of tourist guides are high ( $\bar{x}=3.89$ ). The Cronbach's alpha value of the experiential value scale was calculated as 0.97. This result shows that the experiential value scale is highly reliable. The total arithmetic mean of the scale was calculated as 3.78, and the standard deviation was 0.714. It was determined that the level of participation of the participants in the propositions varied between 3.95 and 3.40. Accordingly, it is seen that the experiential value levels of the participants from the tour are high ( $\bar{x}=3.78$ ). The Cronbach's alpha value of the behavioral intention scale was calculated as 0.95. The behavioral intention scale was also found to be a highly reliable scale. The total arithmetic mean of the scale was calculated as 3.41, and the standard deviation was 0.894. It was determined that the level of participation of the participants in the propositions varied between 3.84 and 2.57. When the average of the scale is examined, it is seen that the level of behavioral intentions of the participants towards the same travel agency is high ( $\bar{x}=3.41$ ) as a result of the experiential value they gained from the tour carried out with the tourist guide.

### Explanatory Factor Analysis

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett sphericity tests were applied to the scales to analyze whether the sample size was suitable for factor analysis before EFA. The KMO value of the professional competence scale was determined to be 0.950 ( $\chi^2=7187,623$ ;  $df=136$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). After determining the suitability of the data obtained from the sample, exploratory factor analysis and rotated principal components analysis with Varimax methods were performed to ensure the construct validity of the scale and to determine the factor structure. In Varimax rotation, items with a factor load of 0.30 are generally

processed as the lower limit of factor loads (Dede & Yaman, 2008). According to Akdağ (2022), if an item gives a high load value in both factors, the difference is checked. The difference between the two high load values should be at least 0.10. If the difference is less than 0.10, this item is an overlap item, so it is discarded. After the EFA, 2 items were removed from the 19-item scale because they were overlapping. It was observed that the factor loading values of the scale were higher than 0.50 (between 0.630 and 0.866). After item removal, a total of 17 statements were collected under the dimensions of Professional Attitude/Behavior, Professional Skill, and Professional Knowledge. The total variance explanation rate of the three dimensions that make up the vocational competence scale was determined as 72,863%. The total Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was 0.958; it was determined that the arithmetic mean was 3.8951 and the standard deviation was 0.72930.

It was determined that the KMO value of the experiential value scale was 0.966 ( $\chi^2=11467,144$ ;  $df=325$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). After the EFA, 9 items were removed from the 35-item scale because they were overlapping. It was observed that the factor loading values of the scale were higher than 0.50 (between 0.531 and 0.800). After item removal, a total of 26 statements were collected under the dimensions of Service Excellence-Return on Investment for the Customer, Aesthetics-Entertainment, Education, and Escape (4 dimensions). The total variance explanation rate of the 4 dimensions constituting the experiential value scale was calculated as 71,424%. It was determined that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was 0.969, the arithmetic mean was 3.7763, and the standard deviation was 0.74211.

The KMO value of the behavioral intention scale was determined to be 0.929 ( $\chi^2=7871,705$ ;  $df=91$ ;  $p<0.05$ ). After the EFA, 1 item was removed from the 15-item scale because it was overlapping. It was observed that the factor loading values of the scale were higher than 0.50 (between 0.677 and 0.899). After item removal, a total of 14 statements were collected under the dimensions of Positive Word of Mouth Communication Intention, Intention to Repurchase, Intention to Leave the Business and Intention to Pay More (4 dimensions). The total variance explanation rate of the 4 dimensions that make up the behavioral intention scale was determined as 86,986%. It was determined that the total Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the scale was 0.951, the arithmetic mean was 3.4316, and the standard deviation was 0.88807.

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis was performed to test the factors that emerged as a result of the explanatory

factor analysis for the Vocational Competence, Experiential Value and Behavioral Intention scales used in the research to determine statistically how well they fit with the dimensions of the research model. There is no clear consensus on which fit indices should be used and reported when evaluating model effectiveness in confirmatory factor analysis (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Byrne, 2010). For this reason, it is recommended that researchers generally consider more than one fit index in model evaluation (Kline, 2011; Şekercioğlu & Güzeller, 2012). It was determined that the most used fit indices, which were found in the literature, were  $\chi^2/df$ , RMSEA, AGFI, GFI, CFI, NFI, TLI and SRMR. Perfect fit and acceptable value limits of commonly used fit values are presented in Table 1.

0.932; professional skill: 0.898; professional attitude and behavior: 0.941). In line with these values, it was determined that the variables were consistent with each other because the professional competence scale provided convergent validity and the ( $\alpha$ ) values were over 0.70 (professional knowledge: 0.929; professional skill: 0.898; professional attitude and behavior: 0.942). As a result of the second level CFA, it was determined that the validity and reliability values (AVE: 0.779; CR: 0.913) of the vocational competence scale were at an acceptable level.

Following the CFA for the experiential value scale, it was determined that the standardized regression coefficients of the scale ranged between  $b=0.580$  and

**Table 1.** Generally Accepted Fit Indices

Criterion	Perfect Fit	Acceptable Fit
CMIN/DF	$0 \leq \chi^2/df \leq 3$	$3 \leq \chi^2/df \leq 5$
RMSEA	$0 < RMSEA \leq 0,05$	$0,05 < RMSEA < 0,08$
AGFI	$0,90 \leq AGFI \leq 1,00$	$0,80 \leq AGFI < 0,90$
GFI	$0,90 \leq GFI \leq 1,00$	$0,85 \leq GFI < 0,90$
NFI	$0,90 < NFI \leq 1,00$	$0,85 \leq NFI < 0,90$
TLI	$0,95 \leq TLI < 1,00$	$0,85 \leq TLI < 0,90$
CFI	$0,95 < CFI < 1,00$	$0,90 < CFI < 0,95$
SRMR	$0,00 < SRMR < 0,05$	$0,05 \leq SRMR < 0,10$

**Source:** Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger & Müller, 2003; Meydan & Şeşen, 2015; Civelek, 2018; Mankin, Gürkan & Çetin, 2019.

As a result of the CFA of the professional competence scale, it was determined that the “standardized regression coefficients” of the scale were between  $b=0.695$  and  $b=0.937$  and the items belonging to the scale dimensions ( $p<0.001$ ) were statistically significant. Afterwards, first-level and second-level DFA model fit indices of the scale were examined, and it was determined that the RMSEA value was not within acceptable limits. Consequently, the model over measurement errors was improved and new covariances were created for residuals with high covariance. As a result of this process, it was determined that the goodness of fit values were acceptable. According to the CFA results, it was determined that the structural equation model values of the scale were significant at the  $p=0.000$  level and that the 17 items and 3 sub-dimensions constituting the scale were related to the scale structure. In the dimensions of professional knowledge, professional skills and professional attitude and behavior that make up the scale of professional competence, AVE values are higher than the minimum value of 0.50 (professional knowledge: 0.821; professional skill: 0.689; professional attitude and behavior: 0.617) and CR values are higher than the minimum value of 0.70 (professional knowledge:

$b=0.876$ , with statistical significance for items that belong to scale dimensions ( $p<0.001$ ). Afterwards, first-level and second-level DFA model fit indices of the scale were examined and it was determined that the RMSEA value was not within acceptable limits. Therefore, covariances were created between measurement errors. The goodness of fit values were determined to be acceptable after this process. According to the CFA results, it was determined that the structural equation model values of the scale were significant at the  $p=0.000$  level and that the 26 items and 4 sub dimensions forming the scale were related to the scale structure. The AVE values of the education, service excellence-return on investment to the customer, aesthetic entertainment and escape dimensions that make up the experiential value scale are higher than the minimum value of 0.50 (education: 0.690; service excellence-return on investment to the customer: 0.659; aesthetic-entertainment: 0.607; escape: 0.620), and CR values are higher than the minimum value of 0.70 (education: 0.898; service excellence-return on investment to the customer: 0.958; aesthetic-entertainment: 0.901; escape: 0.867). In line with these values, it was determined that the variables were consistent with each other because



the experiential value scale provided convergent validity and the ( $\alpha$ ) values are over 0.70 (education: 0.895; service excellence-return on investment for the customer: 0.959; aesthetics-entertainment: 0.896; escape: 0.863). As a result of the second level CFA, it was determined that the validity and reliability values (AVE: 0.775; CR: 0.932) of the experiential value scale were at an acceptable level.

acceptable limits. According to the CFA results, it was determined that the structural equation model values of the scale were significant at the  $p=0.000$  level and that the 14 items and 4 sub-dimensions forming the scale were related to the scale structure. The AVE values of the positive word-of-mouth intention, repurchase intention, intention to leave the business and intention

**Table 2.** SEM Analysis Results on the Effect of Professional Competence on Experiential Value

Effect	Standard Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	t	R <sup>2</sup>	p	Result
Professional Competence → Experiential Value	0,973	0,066	17,870	0,946	***	Accepted

**Fit Indexes:**  
**RMSEA:** 0,060, **χ<sup>2</sup>/df:** 2,820, **AGFI:** 0,805, **GFI:** 0,813, **CFI:** 0,923  
**NFI:** 0,885, **IFI:** 0,923, **TLI:** 0,917, **SRMR:** 0,041

The CFA of the behavioral intention scale showed that the standardized regression coefficients of the scale were between  $b=0.777$  and  $b=0.958$  and the items belonging to the scale dimensions ( $p<0.001$ )

to pay more dimensions that make up the behavioral intention scale are higher than the minimum value of 0.50 (positive word-of-mouth intention: 0.779; intention to repurchase: 0.868; intention to leave:

**Table 3.** SEM Analysis Results on the Effect of Experiential Value on Behavioral Intention

Effect	Standard Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	t	R <sup>2</sup>	p	Result
Experiential Value → Behavioral Intention	0,943	0,061	18,450	0,888	***	Accepted

**Fit Indexes:**  
**RMSEA: 0,063,  $\chi^2/\text{df}$ : 2,966, AGFI: 0,802, GFI: 0,810, CFI: 0,930**  
**NFI: 0,899, IFI: 0,931, TLI: 0,925, SRMR: 0,044**

were statistically significant. Afterwards, first-level and second-level DFA model fit indices related to the scale were examined, and it was determined that  $\chi^2/\text{df}$  and RMSEA values were not within acceptable limits. Therefore, covariances were created between measurement errors. After this process, it was determined that the goodness of fit values were within

0.814; intention to pay more: 0.805), and CR values are higher than the minimum value of 0.70 (positive word-of-mouth intention: 0.946; repurchase intention: 0.963; intention to leave the business: 0.929; intention to pay more: 0.892). In line with these values, it was determined that the variables were consistent with each other because the behavioral intention scale provided

**Table 4.** SEM Analysis Results on the Effect of Professional Competence on Behavioral Intention

Effect	Standard Regression Coefficient	Standard Error	t	R <sup>2</sup>	p	Result
Professional Competence → Behavioral Intention	0,893	0,067	16,562	,797	***	Accepted
Fit Indexes:						
RMSEA: 0,068, $\chi^2/\text{df}$ : 3,275, AGFI: 0,816, GFI: 0,842, CFI: 0,939						
NFI: 0,914, IFI: 0,939, TLI: 0,933, SRMR: 0,045						

convergent validity and the ( $\alpha$ ) values are over 0.70 (positive word-of-mouth intention: 0.938; intention to repurchase: 0.964; intention to leave: 0.929; intention to pay more: 0.891). As a result of the second level CFA, the validity and reliability values of the behavioral intention scale (AVE: 0.644; CR: 0.875) were found to be at an acceptable level.

been determined that professional competence has a statistically significant and positive effect on behavioral intention ( $\beta=0.893$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). While the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable was significant, it was examined whether the experiential value had a mediating role in this effect. According to the results of the model, the fact that the "Bootstrap

**Table 5.** Measurement Model Results on the Mediation Effect of Experiential Value Between Professional Competence and Behavioral Intention

Effect	$\beta$	S. E.	t	p	Result
Professional Competence $\rightarrow$ Behavioral Intention	0,893	0,067	16,562	***	Accepted
Direct Effect	$\beta$	S. E.	t	p	Result
Professional Competence $\rightarrow$ Experiential Value $\rightarrow$ Behavioral Intention	-0,306	0,232	-1,322	0,186	Not Accepted
Indirect Effect	$\beta$	Confidence Interval		Result	
Professional Competence $\rightarrow$ Experiential Value $\rightarrow$ Behavioral Intention	1,218	(0,766, 2,321)		Significant	

**Fit Indexes:**

RMSEA: 0.058,  $\chi^2/\text{df}$ : 2.680, AGFI: 0.813, GFI: 0.821, CFI: 0.913

NFI: 0.868, IFI: 0.913, TLI: 0.908, SRMR: 0.045

### Structural Equation Model Analysis Results

The measurement model values and goodness-of-fit indices obtained as a result of the SEM analysis for Hypothesis 1 in the theoretical model are presented in Table 2. Professional competence has a statistically significant and positive impact on experiential value, based on the results obtained ( $\beta=0,973$ ,  $p<0,01$ ). Based on this result, the H1 hypothesis was supported.

The measurement model values and goodness-of-fit indices obtained as a result of the SEM analysis for Hypothesis 2 are presented in Table 3. It was determined that the experiential value had a statistically significant and positive effect on behavioral intention ( $\beta=0,943$ ,  $p<0,01$ ). Based on this result, the H2 hypothesis was supported.

The measurement model values and goodness-of-fit indices obtained as a result of the SEM analysis for Hypothesis 3 are presented in Table 4. It is seen that professional competence has a statistically significant and positive effect on behavioral intention ( $\beta=0,893$ ,  $p<0,01$ ). Based on this result, the H3 hypothesis was supported.

A structural equation model was used to analyze the mediating effect of experiential value on professional competence and behavioral intention (Hypothesis 4). Before examining the mediating role in the created model, it was examined whether the independent variable had an effect on the dependent variable. It has

confidence interval test's lower and upper limit values do not include 0" reveals that the experiential value has a mediating role in the model (0.766, 2.321). After determining that the experiential value has a mediating role, it was examined whether the direct effect was significant in order to determine the type of this mediating role. As a result of the analysis, it was seen that the direct effect was not significant when there was a mediator, and it was determined that the experiential value was the full mediator ( $\beta=-0.306$ ,  $p=0,186$ ). In this case, the H4 hypothesis was supported.

### CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In the light of the findings obtained in the research, it was concluded that the perception levels of the tourists regarding the professional competence of the tourist guides are high and they see the tourist guides as sufficient in terms of professional knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors. This is an indication that tourist guides provide quality service during the tour. It is seen that this result is in parallel with the results of some studies conducted in the literature and contradicts with others. Müküs (2009), conducted a study to determine the proficiency of the tourist guides, and found that the tourists found the performance levels of the tour guides quite adequate. Olcay et al. (2015), on the other hand, conducted a study on domestic tourists, and found that the performance levels (knowledge, equipment, character, and talent) of tourist guides are

below the expectations of tourists. In the research, it was concluded that the experiential value levels of the tourists obtained from the tour were at a high level. In this context, it can be stated that tourist guides increase the value of touristic products and services with the quality of service they provide within the scope of the tour and contribute to enriching the holiday experiences of tourists. In addition, it was determined with this research that the behavioral intention levels of the tourists were positive. At this point, it is thought that it is highly likely that domestic tourists who show positive behavioral intentions as a result of their tour experience will become loyal customers.

In the study, it was determined that the tourists' perceptions of the professional competence of the tourist guide had a positive effect on the experiential values they acquired during the tour. This result shows that the professional knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes and behaviors of tourist guides are reflected in their performances during the tour. Therefore, it has been seen that the high performance and quality service that the tourist guides exhibit within the framework of their professional qualifications contributes to tourists having a rich experience during their travels and gaining value as a result of this experience. Similarly, Huang, Hsu & Chan (2010) found in their studies that the performance of tourist guides has a direct effect on the satisfaction of the tourist with the guidance service and an indirect effect on the satisfaction with the tour services and the tour experience. Büyükkuru & Aslan (2016) also concluded that the communication skills of tourist guides are effective for tourists' tour experiences. In addition, in the study, it was determined that communication skills had a greater effect on the sub-dimensions of tour experience, namely "learning" and "entertainment", compared to "aesthetics" and "escape" experiences.

Another important result of the research is that the experiential value perceptions of the tourists as a result of the tourist guide service have a positive effect on their behavioral intentions. This result shows that the high performance of the tourist guides during the tour in line with their professional competence creates experiential value for the tourists, and this value ensures that the tourists have positive behavioral intentions. It is seen that this result is in parallel with the results of some studies in the literature. Chien (2016) states that destination attractiveness has a significant positive effect on experiential value and experiential value has a significant positive effect on revisit intention. Akgül (2020), on the other hand, found that the perceived value, flow experience, and behavioral intentions of the domestic tourists participating in the tour accompanied by a tourist guide affect each other, that

the perceived values of the tourists' experience and their flow experiences are shaped, and that they exhibit positive behavioral intentions towards the experience as a result of a happy/positive experience.

As a result of the research, it was determined that tourists' perceptions of the professional competence of the tourist guide have a positive effect on their behavioral intentions. In this context, it can be stated that tourist guides show high performance and provide quality service with their professional knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors during the tour. Therefore, as the perceived professional competence levels of tourist guides increase, it is seen that tourists tend to show positive behavioral intentions. As a matter of fact, Hwang & Lee (2019) also found in their study that the professional skills and professional attitudes of tourist guides have a positive effect on their relations with tourists, which in turn positively affects satisfaction with the guide service, tour satisfaction, and word of-mouth communication. Similarly, Usullu (2019) states that the perceived service quality of tourist guides has a positive effect on behavioral intentions, while Syakier & Hanafiah (2021) states that the performances of tourist guides and tourist satisfaction have a positive effect on behavioral intentions. It is clear from this context that the research results are similar.

When the mediating effect of experiential value between professional competence and behavioral intention is examined, it has been determined that experiential value has a full mediator effect. No study has been found in the literature on the mediating effect of experiential value between professional competence and behavioral intention. However, in the studies in the literature, it is seen that the basis of the positive behavioral intentions of tourists regarding package tours is based on the experiences they have lived and the feeling of satisfaction depending on the professional competence and performance of tourist guides (Huang, Weiler & Assaker, 2014; Chan, Hsu & Baum, 2015; Hwang & Lee, 2019). In this direction, it can be stated that the result obtained in the research supports the literature.

### **Theoretical Contribution of the Research**

It is seen that the research provides an opportunity to determine the perceived professional competencies of tourist guides, to determine the value that tourists get from their experiences during the guidance service they receive, and to discover what their behavioral intentions will be for the future. In addition, no study has been found in the national and international literature that examines the perceived professional competence of tourist guides and deals with the experiential value and behavioral intention created by

this factor in tourists. In this regard, it is thought that the study will make a theoretical contribution to the field of tourist guidance. In addition, the professional competence and experiential value scales used in the research were prepared by adapting them to the field of tourist guidance. At this point, the study is also important in terms of the scales that have been brought to the literature.

### **Contribution of the Research to Practice**

It is thought that revealing the perceived professional competencies of tourist guides will shed light on the tourist guides and the institutions that train the tourist guide candidates on the point of taking the necessary precautions by determining the current professional knowledge and skills of the tourist guides. In addition, revealing the perceived professional competencies of tourist guides and analyzing how this factor affects the experiential value and behavioral intention of tourists will guide travel agencies in determining the tourist guide selection criteria. The analysis of the relations in the research will contribute to the tourism sector, which wants to increase tourist satisfaction in terms of determining and preventing service disruptions in package tours.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Researchers who want to conduct similar studies in the future can evaluate the professional competencies of tourist guides and the experiential value they create in their tours by considering the perceptions and expectations of travel agencies. In addition, it can be ensured that tourist guides evaluate their competencies in terms of professional equipment and experiential value creation, and at this point, deficiencies in educational institutions' curricula can be determined. In addition, variables such as work stress and professional motivation and the variable of professional competence; the effects or relationships between variables such as customer satisfaction and customer loyalty and the experiential value variable can be examined.



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