



EXPLORING THE ROLE OF CULTURAL VALUES, TRUST AND EMPATHY ON SATISFACTION: RESEARCH ON HOTEL CUSTOMERS

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ABSTRACT

Hotels that serve customers having different cultural values should improve their service capabilities to achieve customer satisfaction. This study researches how empathy, trust and cultural values affect hotel customer satisfaction and looks at the combinations of these components that lead to high customer satisfaction. The current literature on Hofstede's five-dimensional cultural values, cognitive and affective dimensions of empathy, trust and customer satisfaction were used to develop the research model and present recommendations. To ensure cultural diversity, a face-to-face survey was administered to 553 tourists from six countries. The data obtained were evaluated using partial least squares structural equation modelling and fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA). According to the results, the effects of hotel customers' empathy levels on their satisfaction occur through their trust in the business. The fsQCA revealed combinations of cultural values, empathy and trust that would generate high levels of satisfaction. The present study contributes to the relevant literature by addressing the relatively under-emphasized components that ensure that hotel customers are highly satisfied.

KEYWORDS

customer satisfaction, customer empathy, cultural values, trust, fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis, fsQCA

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1. INTRODUCTION

Customer satisfaction is the most valuable element for all businesses (Čuka & Gregorová, 2020) because it affects customer loyalty and the financial performance of hotels (Suhartanto et al., 2020). It is difficult to please tourists with different cultural values simultaneously,

therefore previous studies have investigated the satisfaction of tourists (Jia, 2020) and the antecedents that provide such satisfaction (Xu & Li, 2016). With the spread of international tourism, understanding tourists with different cultural values has become vital (Wei et al., 2023). Although it has been proven that cultural values affect tourist satisfaction (Gallarza-Granizo et al., 2020;

Zhang et al., 2020), the antecedents, together with cultural values, have not been sufficiently taken into account. In our study, we considered two important premises influenced by cultural values, empathy and trust, which are determinants of satisfaction (Kumra & Sharma, 2022).

Researchers have overlooked customer empathy by focusing on the empathy levels of hotel employees (Ngo et al., 2020). In this study, we consider customer empathy (referred to simply as empathy), although employee skills have improved, the low empathy skills of the tourists may negatively affect satisfaction. The mediating role of trust in this relationship between empathy and satisfaction should also be taken into account. Customer satisfaction is complex, and the impact of these antecedents, along with cultural values, on satisfaction remains unclear. In this study, we argue that empathy and trust levels differ according to cultural values and that this has an impact on customer satisfaction.

Hofstede's cultural values model helps classify consumers according to such values and leads to developing marketing strategies (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2011). In his research that comprised more than 60,000 participants, Hofstede (2001) demonstrated a five-dimensional system of cultural values: masculinity (MAS), power distance (PD), uncertainty avoidance (UA), collectivism (CLV) and long-term orientation (LTO). Hofstede's work facilitates the formulation of hypotheses (Soares et al., 2007) and establishes norms for international marketing studies (Leonavičienė & Burinskienė, 2022). Cultural values are related to the self, identity, image (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2011), attitudes and behaviors (Latif et al., 2019), and values (Luna & Forquer Gupta, 2001). Therefore, we believe that cultural values may also be related to such factors as trust and empathy. For instance, Chien et al. (2016) state that cultural values affect consumer trust and, as a result, consumer behavior. Collectivist consumers do not express negative emotions, therefore, they do not share their dissatisfaction (Liu & McClure, 2001). Despite these studies, cultural value dimensions have not yet been evaluated within trust and empathy frameworks. This study expands the perspective of customer satisfaction in the tourism sector in terms of cultural values, empathy and trust. In summary, we sought to answer two research questions:

RQ₁: How do cultural values, trust and empathy affect hotel customers' satisfaction levels?

RQ₂: Which combinations of these factors cause an increase in satisfaction levels?

In our study, we adopted the fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) method to understand which combinations provide higher customer satisfaction which provides the opportunity to identify configurations that guarantee high performance under

outcome conditions (Kraus et al., 2018). It differs from previous studies in terms of its contributions: first, to the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to examine the relationship between each dimension of cultural values and empathy (cognitive and emotional) and trust; second, we fill a gap in the relevant literature by presenting configurations that allow hotels to achieve high customer satisfaction in terms of these dimensions; third, our findings reveal the impact of cultural values on empathy. Thus, we provide hotel managers with a different perspective to increase customer satisfaction, with applicable suggestions for tourists to improve their empathy skills. These recommendations increase the ability of hotels to act according to different customer profiles. Finally, we expand the relevant literature by considering calls for more studies on empathy, trust and cultural values (Kumra & Sharma, 2022; Yaghoubi Jami et al., 2024).

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. The second section discusses the theoretical background and relevant literature; the third develops hypotheses; the fourth explains the methodology and the fifth examines the findings. The sixth part discusses the findings and the theoretical and managerial implications. Afterwards the limitations of the study are emphasized, and recommendations are made for future studies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. CULTURAL VALUES

Culture is defined as a cognitive system that encompasses beliefs, norms and human behaviours distinguishing one group of people from others (Geertz, 2000). Cultural values shaping beliefs and attitudes differ from country to country and can be explained as follows (Huang & Crotts, 2019; Yoo et al., 2011):

1. Masculinity (MAS): societies in which men are at the forefront in the distribution of roles between women and men; success, and being strong and fast, are important in masculine societies.
2. Power distance (PD): this refers to the degree to which class differences in the distribution of power in society are accepted.
3. Uncertainty avoidance (UA): this expresses the level of tolerance for risk and uncertainty.
4. Collectivism (CLV): refers to the level of group members' sense of belonging and the prioritization of group interests. Individualism is the opposite of CLV.
5. Long-term orientation (LTO): indicates perspectives on business life and relationships. In long-term orientation, values such as modesty, dedication, hard work and savings are important.

Studies conducted indicate that Hofstede's model classifies the cultural values of customers according to countries (Hwang & Lee, 2012). There are a limited number of studies in the literature examining the effects of cultural values on customer attitudes and purchasing behaviour in tourism (Weber et al., 2017). Tourists from different cultures have different values, and these consumers may be satisfied at different levels with the hotels they receive. It should be noted that intercultural management differs between chains and independent hotels. Indeed, studies show that individual hotels offer different standards of service (Siguaw et al., 2000) and that management styles differ according to cultural values (Beydilli & Kurt, 2020). While chain hotels aim to increase efficiency by adopting globalized strategies (Whitla et al., 2007), independent hotels have the advantage of offering differentiated services because they can be autonomous in decision-making processes (Moreno-Perdigón et al., 2021). Hotels have implemented strategies that cater to the diverse preferences of their target audience as customers exhibit varying tastes (Bonhard et al., 2006). For example, even in Western Europe, there are differences between Spanish and Dutch hotels (Moro et al., 2020). Therefore, acting in accordance with differences in cultural values is an effective strategy for providing personalized services.

2.2. EMPATHY

Conceptually, empathy has been defined as an understanding of the emotions and feelings of another person in the situation they are in, or as putting oneself in another person's shoes (Lee & Cheng, 2018). Empathy is a two-dimensional structure: cognitive and affective. Cognitive empathy (CE) is an understanding of how others think, while affective empathy (AE) is an understanding of how they feel (Umasuthan et al., 2017).

Empathy is associated with customer satisfaction (Arun Kumar et al., 2010) and is used to overcome the problems that customers encounter while benefiting from a service, or as feedback on services provided to customers (Manola & Papagrigoriou, 2019). Empathy plays an important role in achieving healthy intercultural communication and satisfying customers in tourism (Ülker et al., 2021). Wieseke et al. (2012) stated that empathic customers were more likely to forgive when they encountered unsatisfactory service, while customer empathy decreased the negative effects on customer dissatisfaction and loyalty.

2.3. TRUST

Trust is defined as the belief that businesses that provide long-term products, goods and services to customers can protect their interests (Crosby et al., 1990). Trust is particularly important in the service sector and is

a fundamental dimension for evaluating service quality. For example, hotel customers purchase services when they trust a business (Wu et al., 2019) and service quality positively affects satisfaction (Gu, 2023). Distrust occurs when customers take risks and this affects purchase intention negatively (Rehman et al., 2020). Customers make hotel reservations specifically by reducing service uncertainty and collecting more information (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015). One reason for this is to gain a sense of trust before purchasing a service. Trust positively affects satisfaction in the tourism sector (Mao & Lyu, 2017). Shin et al. (2021) considered trust as a driving factor affecting satisfaction and loyalty. It should also be considered that trust can negatively affect satisfaction and there can be two reasons for this. First, consumers with high expectations may be more sceptical about the service provider or its businesses, and the feeling of trust may negatively affect satisfaction as expectations increase. Pre-consumption expectations are effective for service purchases. Second, when service performance is below expectations, quality is perceived as low (Lai et al., 2018), and satisfaction decreases.

2.4. CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Customer satisfaction is the evaluation resulting after customers use a service and is important for long-term profitability in terms of business (Ribbink et al., 2004). Customers who leave a business with satisfaction spend more than other customers and effectively promote the service they have received (Le et al., 2020). After an increase in customer satisfaction, customers may establish closer relations with the business (Kelley & Davis, 1994). Evaluation of customer satisfaction in hotels starts after providing a service and with communication between the customer and business.

Customer satisfaction results from service quality (Ahrholdt et al., 2017) which is evaluated by comparing consumer expectations of the service with its perceived performance. Customer satisfaction is directly affected by service quality (Tan et al., 2014) and quality is vital in the service sector (Ansari et al., 2023). However, evaluating service quality is difficult due to its tangible and individual features (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Therefore, various service dimensions should be considered when standardizing service quality assessments. Different approaches have been used to evaluate service quality (Ladhari, 2012) and the most commonly accepted approach is the SERVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988). In this model, service quality includes responsiveness, assurance, tangibles, reliability and empathy.

In line with the relevant literature, the effects of trust, empathy and cultural value antecedents on customer satisfaction should be considered. This study aims to fill the gap in the literature by (a) examining the effects

of each dimension of cultural values on empathy and trust, (b) determining which combinations of these components provide the highest customer satisfaction, and (c) evaluating the effects of cultural values on empathy in terms of the empathy skills of customers, not service employees.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Theoretically this study has been shaped by five cultural value factors (Yoo et al., 2011), basic empathy skills (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006) and trust in the quality of the relationship (Crosby et al., 1990). Cultural values are widely used to understand different cultures and find marketing strategies for them (Johnston et al., 2023; de Mooij & Hofstede, 2011). Basic empathy has two dimensions, cognitive and affective, and they are used to explain different consumer behaviours (Ngo et al., 2020; Wieseke et al., 2012). Trust is a dimension of relationship quality and measures trust in service personnel (Crosby et al., 1990) and these factors serve to provide customized service. As mentioned earlier, cognitive and affective empathy and cultural values are important reasons affecting consumer behaviour and they may help in explaining consumer satisfaction. The research model shown in Figure 1 was developed in these terms.

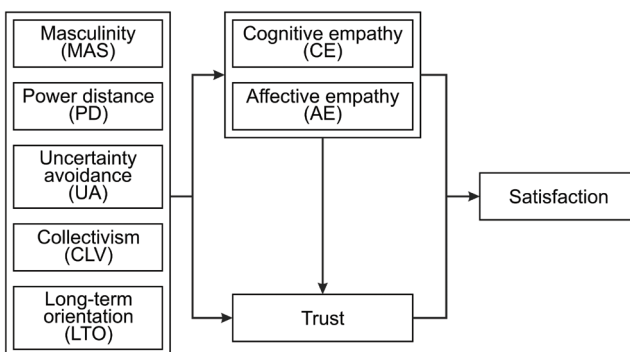


Figure 1. Research model
Source: authors

The hypotheses of this study were formulated based on the components of trust and empathy in terms of cultural values and customer satisfaction, as explained below.

3.1. EMPATHY IN TERMS OF CULTURAL VALUES

Empathy is affected by culture and its related values (Yaghoubi Jami et al., 2024). Customers whose expectations are not met in countries where the MAS dimension is weak are more flexible (Qi et al., 2023).

Those with high femininity place more importance on the opinions of others (Kim, 2019). For the PD dimension Xu et al. (2021) reported that consumers with a low power distance view businesses more empathetically when transgressing occurs. Customers with high UA attach more importance to service quality and satisfaction and do not want to encounter undesirable results (Hanzaee & Dehkordi, 2012). Another dimension, collectivism, affects empathy positively (Yaghoubi Jami et al., 2019) as in collectivist societies, consumers depend on society and indirect communication is dominant. For example, the Turks have idioms about expressing themselves through their implications. An original version of one idiom is *Kızım sana söylüyorum, gelinim sen anla* which can be translated into English: "Girl, I am telling you, my bride, you understand". This idiom explains that the message to be conveyed is not said directly to the target person, but to another who will convey this message to that person. In conclusion the indirect expression has come to the fore in Turkish society, where collectivist culture predominates. Therefore, CLV encourages consumers to be more empathetic in understanding indirect communication. Finally, studies have shown that high LTO increases ethical values (Tsui & Windsor, 2001) and the likelihood of investing in interpersonal relationships (Guo et al., 2018). Therefore, we argue that these consumers have higher empathy levels. Consequently, we hypothesize that:

H_1 : The cultural values of customers will affect their basic empathy levels.

- H_{1a} : An increase in MAS will affect CE negatively.
- H_{1b} : An increase in MAS will affect AE negatively.
- H_{1c} : An increase in PD will affect CE positively.
- H_{1d} : An increase in PD will affect AE positively.
- H_{1e} : An increase in UA will affect CE positively.
- H_{1f} : An increase in UA will affect AE negatively.
- H_{1g} : An increase in CLV will affect CE positively.
- H_{1h} : An increase in CLV will affect AE positively.
- H_{1i} : An increase in LTO will affect CE positively.
- H_{1j} : An increase in LTO will affect AE positively.

3.2. TRUST IN TERMS OF CULTURAL VALUES

In the tourism sector, trust is an effective tool for reducing the complexity of human behavior in uncertain situations, and comparisons of trust worldwide show heterogeneity among countries (Hashemi & Hanser, 2018). In the relationship between cultural value dimensions and trust, it has been determined that masculine consumers have higher feelings of trust (Sıgır & Tıgılı, 2006). Regarding the PD dimension, egalitarianism is dominant in societies with low PD, and individuals use other individuals as references (Roosmand et al., 2011). Therefore, as PD increases, trust weakens (Furrer et al., 2000). Societies with high LTO focus on permanent relationships and trust is

extremely valuable to them (Oly Ndubisi, 2004). Since consumers with a high level of UA are loyal to sources of information, businesses should be more reliable (Oly Ndubisi, 2004). According to Hwang and Lee (2012), individuals with low UA level tolerate risks and they do not need this trust. In individualistic cultures, consumers focus on sales process results, whereas collectivist consumers primarily want to establish relationships and trust (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2011). Individualistic consumers anticipate higher quality and believe that businesses should be more empathetic and trustworthy (Donthu & Yoo, 1998) while in-group trust is more intense in collectivist societies for reasons like sharing the same fate (Yamagishi et al., 1998). Based on the above arguments, we hypothesize:

H_2 : Cultural values of customers will affect their trust.

- H_{2a} : An increase in MAS will affect trust negatively.
- H_{2b} : An increase in PD will affect trust negatively.
- H_{2c} : An increase in UA will affect trust positively.
- H_{2d} : An increase in CLV will affect trust positively.
- H_{2e} : An increase in LTO will affect trust positively.

3.3. EMPATHY AND TRUST IN CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

In the present study, we argue that empathy has a two-dimensional structure: cognitive and affective (Jolliffe and Farrington, 2006). Cognitive empathy (CE), which constitutes basic empathy, includes a social skill that enables consumers to predict the next move of others, in other words their cognitive process, to understand when they are lying and provide foresight in intercultural functionality. Whereas AE entails understanding the feelings of others, thinking of others more than oneself, and being emotionally sensitive (Smith, 2006). This study discusses the empathy skills of customers, their skills in understanding the feelings, thoughts and behaviours of the personnel and giving appropriate responses (Delpechitre et al., 2019). As a matter of fact, empathic customers can forgive the negativities they encounter (Wieseke et al., 2012), focus on the good things and have a positive perspective (Pera et al., 2019), and they tend to be more satisfied with the service they receive. In other studies on customer empathy, it was found that consumers with high levels of empathy were more controlled even towards robots they received service from (Paiva et al., 2017), they were less angry and complained less (Konstam et al., 2001). Thus, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

H_3 : Basic empathy levels of customers will positively affect their satisfaction with the hotel where they stay.

H_{3a} : CE levels of customers will positively affect their satisfaction with the hotel where they stay.

H_{3b} : AE levels of customers will positively affect their satisfaction with the hotel where they stay.

Empathy contributes to individuals' trust in others (Aggarwal et al., 2005). Cognitive and affective empathy have been proven to have a strong emotional effect on trust (Weißhaar & Huber, 2016). Cognitive and affective empathy have an impact on the intention to maintain relationships with businesses, and trust plays a mediating role in this effect (Kumra & Sharma, 2022). We propose the following:

H_4 : The effect of customers' empathy levels on their satisfaction with the hotel where they stay will occur through their trust with the hotel.

H_5 : Basic empathy levels of customers will positively affect their trust in the hotel where they stay.

H_{5a} : CE levels of customers will positively affect their trust in the hotel where they stay.

H_{5b} : AE levels of customers will positively affect their trust in the hotel where they stay.

Customers' need for trust is much higher in accommodation and in this study trust is discussed as trust in business personnel (Crosby et al., 1990). We aim to benefit from the advantages of being short, simple and generalizable by discussing trust in service personnel as one-dimensional (Gefen, 2000). Trust reduces anxiety and uncertainty (Pavlou et al., 2007), increases the desire to maintain a relationship with the business (Luo & Zhang, 2016), and ensures customer loyalty (Reichheld & Schefer, 2000). In addition, trust plays a mediating role in the effect of satisfaction on the intention to purchase again (Liang et al., 2018) and has a positive effect on satisfaction (Namasivayam & Guchait, 2013). Thus, it is anticipated that:

H_6 : The trust customers have in the hotel where they stay will have a positive effect on customer satisfaction.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. SURVEY ADMINISTRATION AND DATA COLLECTION

Data collection was carried out with the face-to-face survey method. All the scales used for the survey were taken from previous studies, the validity and reliability of which had been proven. Our study used the same customer satisfaction scale as that of Jin et al. (2015) while statements on the cultural values scale were derived from Yoo et al.'s (2011) scale. The trust dimension of relationship quality consists of expressions used in the research conducted by Crosby et al. (1990). The basic empathy scale comprises statements used by Jolliffe and Farrington (2006) in their research. The last part of the survey includes demographic questions about the participants' age, gender, educational status and nationality. The study was conducted with Danish, English, Japanese, Turkish, Dutch and Italian tourists, selected for cultural variations according to the results

of work by Hofstede (2001) and whose 1984 research is the most comprehensive (Kirkman et al., 2006). Many subsequent studies support the theoretical relevance of his work (Soares et al., 2007) and these cultural values are the norm in international marketing research (Sivakumar & Nakata, 2001). According to Hofstede, these countries have distinct cultural values and by choosing them, the aim was to reach participants with different cultural values and to provide diversity.

The survey statements were translated into the official languages of the participants with the help of language experts, and then translated again by a linguist who knew both the translated official language and English. Thus, the translations were compatible with the survey statements.

Pilot application was completed with 53 (29 males and 24 females) customers of two different hotels accommodating individuals from different nationalities – 14 of these were Japanese, 11 were English, 11 Italian, 10 Dutch and 7 Danish. As a result of the pilot application, we found that the participants responded to surveys without any problems. We found that the validity and reliability scores of the data obtained with pilot test were acceptable (Hair et al., 2016).

All participants were told that they would be giving informed consent when they started to fill in the surveys. The items in the scale are 5-Likert type responses and the study was carried out between January and April 2023. The surveys were administered in İstanbul, Ankara, Antalya, Muğla, Aydın, Mardin and Nevşehir, the cities receiving the highest number of tourist visits in Turkey. These are also where many international tourists stay because of natural beauty, cultural and historical value. Participants were not limited to their demographic characteristics because excessive limitations may limit the development of a generalizable theory (Litvin et al., 2004). For a similar purpose, no distinction was made between the types of hotel in which participants stayed so both chain and independent hotels were included in the evaluation. However, tourists residing outside the countries covered by the sample were not included. The reasons for choosing these countries were as follows (Hofstede, 2001): with the exception of collectivism, Danish consumers scored low on all dimensions; the English are among the countries with the lowest collectivism scores; Japanese consumers score high on long-term orientation and uncertainty avoidance; Dutch consumers had one of the lowest masculinity scores; Turkish consumers were among those with the highest power distance and collectivism; Italian consumers were among the most masculine countries. By choosing these countries, the aim was to reach participants with different cultural values and provide diversity.

Tourist guides and intern students in these cities were contacted and the questionnaires were sent to them.

They carried out surveys voluntarily and were not paid. The surveys were completed by 586 participants, and it was found that 18 of them did not complete the survey and 15 left unanswered items. For this reason, the surveys of 553 participants were evaluated.

When the population of research is between 1 million and 100 million, a sample size of 384 with a sampling error of 0.05, $p = 0.05$ and confidence interval of $q = 0.05$, is sufficient (Gill et al., 2010). Non-random sampling in which the sample group to be selected from the main population is determined by the judgments of the researcher, is called convenience sampling (Taherdoost, 2016). Fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) can be used where there are more than 50 cases (Fainshmidt et al., 2020). For these reasons, it was determined that the 553 participants reached were sufficient. Table 1 shows the descriptive information of the participants.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics ($n = 553$)

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Age	Between 18 and 28	88	15.9
	Between 29 and 39	132	23.9
	Between 40 and 50	181	32.7
	51 and older	152	27.5
Gender	Male	261	47.2
	Female	292	52.8
Educational status	Primary	53	9.6
	Undergraduate	283	51.2
	Postgraduate	76	13.7
	High school	141	25.5
Nationality	Denmark	76	13.7
	Netherlands	97	17.5
	England	83	15.0
	Italy	92	16.6
	Japan	82	14.8
	Turkey	123	22.2

Source: authors.

4.2. DATA ANALYSIS

Two different models were used in the data analysis part of this study and the purpose of choosing two is to give a more comprehensive examination of the relationship between variables (Küçükergin et al., 2021). One of these models is partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) (Hair et al., 2016). When there are more than one dependent and independent variable, this method provides a quantitative and

reliable evaluation of the causal relationships between them (Chen et al., 2021). It evaluates whether the measurement structures of the model are reliable and valid and also that of the structural model in which the hypothesis tests are conducted (Bawack et al., 2021).

After it was found with PLS-SEM that the data were valid and reliable, fsQCA was used in the second stage. PLS-SEM was chosen for the definition of clear effects and to define the asymmetric models (Küçükergin et al., 2021). Fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) is a method of analysing set relationships that can be used to examine complex configurational conceptual models (Ragin, 2009) and is used in the field of marketing to explore the complex structure and different factors for consumer behaviour (Fang et al., 2016), therefore, it allows two or more antecedents to be examined together (Woodside, 2015). Unlike qualitative methods that focus on in-depth analysis of a limited number of cases, this method enables cross-case comparisons (Finn, 2022). In complex systems such as tourism, interdependence between conditions is more common than the influence of an independent variable (Çizel et al., 2021). For this reason, fsQCA is a suitable method for evaluating a complex structure with more than one antecedent such as customer satisfaction in the tourism sector.

In the analysis stage, data calibration is made first; in other words, all variables are turned into fuzzy sets, groups that represent the degree of membership in a given condition (Woodside & Zhang, 2013). In fuzzy sets that allow for different degrees of membership, the value of 1 means full membership of a state in a particular category, the value 0 means complete non-membership and the value 0.5 means neither membership nor non-membership (Woodside, 2015). Cut-off points were determined through fsQCA software including 0.05 for cut-off full non-membership threshold;

0.50 (median) for maximum membership uncertainty transition point and the 0.95 percentile for the full membership threshold (Ragin et al., 2008). A three-step analysis is performed after the calibration of fuzzy sets (Çizel et al., 2021): verification table, needs analysis and capability analysis. A needs analysis is performed to determine whether the antecedents are required for the result. With the obtained calibration, a verification table is created by using the fuzzy set algorithm (Ragin et al., 2008). Capability analysis is performed with the results of verification table. As a result of the analysis, it was found that the level of cases that can represent to what extent the antecedent configurations explains the highest level of customer satisfaction was reached (Ragin et al., 2008). In this study, the cut-off consistency value reached 80%; if the consistency value in a model is above 70%, the solution can be said to be informative (Ragin et al., 2008).

5. RESULTS

5.1. MEASUREMENT MODEL ANALYSIS

For internal consistency reliability, Cronbach's alpha value should be ≥ 0.60 , and composite reliability (CR) coefficients should be ≥ 0.70 . When Cronbach's alpha and CR coefficients are examined for internal consistency reliability, Cronbach's alpha value for the sub-dimensions is between 0.734 and 0.975, and the CR value was found to be between 0.734 and 0.975. According to these coefficients, internal consistency reliability was provided.

The results regarding the differential validity of the measurement model (Fornell-Larcker) are as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Differential validity of the measurement model (Fornell-Larcker criterion)

Variable	UA	CE	AE	MAS	Trust	PD	CLV	Satisfaction	LTO
UA	0.898	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
CE	–0.412	0.723	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
AE	–0.521	0.521	0.883	–	–	–	–	–	–
MAS	0.615	0.118	–0.117	0.857	–	–	–	–	–
Trust	–0.006	0.076	0.235	0.174	0.673	–	–	–	–
PD	0.522	0.231	0.029	0.850	0.152	0.852	–	–	–
CLV	0.577	0.153	–0.020	0.838	0.197	0.848	0.860	–	–
Satisfaction	–0.033	0.186	0.187	0.194	0.348	0.211	0.235	0.710	–
LTO	–0.149	0.492	–0.009	0.185	–0.031	0.300	0.141	0.037	0.802

Note: UA – uncertainty avoidance, CE – cognitive empathy, AE – affective empathy, MAS – masculinity, PD – power distance, CLV – collectivism, LTO – long-term orientation.

Source: authors.

Table 3. Differential validity of the measurement model (heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlation [HTMT])

Variable	UA	CE	AE	MAS	Trust	PD	CLV	Satisfaction	LTO
UA	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
CE	0.410	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
AE	0.518	0.534	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
MAS	0.647	0.145	0.142	–	–	–	–	–	–
Trust	0.169	0.149	0.246	0.170	–	–	–	–	–
PD	0.524	0.231	0.047	0.860	0.130	–	–	–	–
CLV	0.584	0.168	0.050	0.862	0.186	0.857	–	–	–
Satisfaction	0.087	0.183	0.184	0.189	0.366	0.213	0.243	–	–
LTO	0.166	0.482	0.038	0.187	0.114	0.314	0.164	0.095	–

Note: UA – uncertainty avoidance, CE – cognitive empathy, AE – affective empathy, MAS – masculinity, PD – power distance, CLV – collectivism, LTO – long-term orientation.

Source: authors.

As shown in Table 2, since the square root coefficients of AVE obtained were higher than the correlation coefficients in their own row and column, discriminant validity was ensured. Heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlation (HTMT) results are shown in Table 3.

Heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlation coefficients are another criterion developed for discriminant validity. As shown in Table 3, in order to ensure

discriminant validity, HTMT coefficients should be below 0.90. Since all of the HTMT coefficients obtained were below 0.90, discriminant validity was ensured.

The third items of LTO (3, 4, 5) were excluded from PD. Items 1, 4, 5 were excluded from CLV. Thus, the discriminant and convergent validity of the measurement model was ensured.

Table 4. PLS-SEM results and hypothesis testing

Hypotheses	Hypothesized paths	Standardized beta (β)	Standard deviation	Test statistics	p-value	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Decision
H _{1a}	MAS → CE	0.131	0.138	0.949	0.343	0.516	0.512	Not supported
H _{1b}	MAS → AE	-0.185	0.119	1.552	0.121	0.479	0.474	Not supported
H _{1c}	PD → CE	0.185	0.116	1.592	0.111	0.516	0.512	Not supported
H _{1d}	PD → AE	0.529	0.142	3.723	<0.001	0.479	0.474	Supported
H _{1e}	UA → CE	-0.712	0.064	11.183	<0.001	0.516	0.512	Supported
H _{1f}	UA → AE	-0.849	0.060	14.064	<0.001	0.479	0.474	Supported
H _{1g}	CLV → CE	0.252	0.111	2.273	0.023	0.516	0.512	Supported
H _{1h}	CLV → AE	0.232	0.116	2.002	0.045	0.479	0.474	Supported
H _{1i}	LTO → CE	0.264	0.046	5.791	<0.001	0.516	0.512	Supported
H _{1j}	LTO → AE	-0.286	0.046	6.172	<0.001	0.479	0.474	Not supported
H _{2a}	MAS → trust	0.226	0.165	1.367	0.172	0.118	0.106	Not supported
H _{2b}	PD → trust	-0.153	0.181	0.841	0.400	0.118	0.106	Not supported
H _{2c}	UA → trust	-0.126	0.135	0.933	0.351	0.118	0.106	Not supported
H _{2d}	CLV → trust	0.230	0.161	1.425	0.154	0.118	0.106	Not supported
H _{2e}	LTO → trust	-0.003	0.075	0.045	0.964	0.118	0.106	Not supported
H _{3a}	CE → satisfaction	0.135	0.058	2.307	0.021	0.141	0.137	Supported
H _{3b}	AE → satisfaction	0.022	0.057	0.384	0.701	0.141	0.137	Not supported
H _{3a}	CE → trust	-0.144	0.100	1.436	0.151	0.118	0.106	Not supported
H _{3b}	AE → trust	0.294	0.081	3.643	<0.001	0.118	0.106	Supported
H ₆	Trust → satisfaction	0.329	0.060	5.500	<0.001	0.141	0.137	Supported

Note: UA – uncertainty avoidance, CE – cognitive empathy, AE – affective empathy, MAS – masculinity, PD – power distance, CLV – collectivism, LTO – long-term orientation; R² – corrected goodness-of-fit.

Source: authors.

5.2. STRUCTURAL MODEL

The structural model results present the findings of the analyses conducted to test our research hypotheses. The results revealed whether the hypotheses were supported. Structural model results are as shown in Table 4:

1. MAS had no effect on CE (H_{1a}) and AE (H_{1b}).
2. PD has no effect on CE (H_{1c}), but has a positive effect on AE (H_{1d}).
3. UA had a negative effect on CE (H_{1e}) and AE (H_{1f}).
4. CLV had a positive effect on CE (H_{1g}) and AE (H_{1h}).
5. LTO had a positive effect on CE (H_{1i}).
6. LTO had a negative effect on AE (H_{1j}).
7. Cultural values had no effect on trust (H_{2a} – H_{2c}).

8. CE had a positive effect on satisfaction (H_{3a}), but AE had no effect (H_{3b}).
9. CE had no effect on trust (H_{3a}), whereas AE had a positive effect (H_{3b}).
10. Trust had a positive effect on satisfaction (H_6).

The mediator model results for testing H_4 are presented in Table 5. As shown in Table 5, the indirect effect of AE on trust through satisfaction was found to be statistically significant ($p = 0.003$). Therefore, H_4 was confirmed. Further, indirect relation was significant and positive; thus, the mediation type was complementary partial mediation for the examined relations.

The path coefficients of the structural model are shown in Figure 2.

Table 5. Results of the mediation analysis

Variable	Indirect effect	Standard deviation	Test statistics	p-value
CE → trust → satisfaction	-0.047	0.036	1.317	0.188
AE → trust → satisfaction	0.097	0.033	2.934	0.003*

Note: CE – cognitive empathy, AE – affective empathy; * $p < 0.001$.

Source: authors.

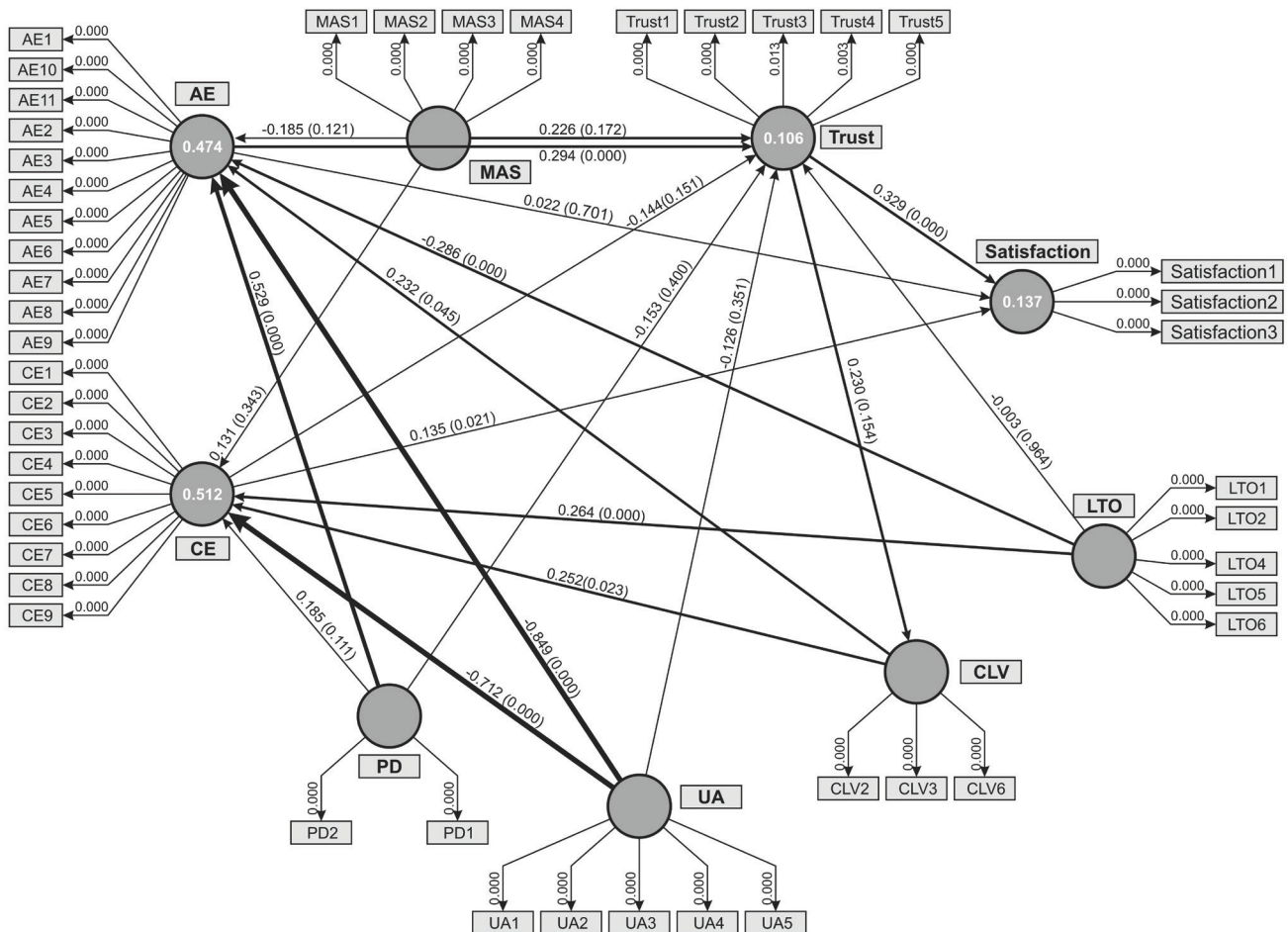


Figure 2. Path coefficients of the structural model

Source: authors

The predictive power results of the model are presented in Table 6. As shown in Table 6, Q^2 values higher than 0 indicate that the model has predictive power for the dependent variables and that the obtained values are significant. The predictive power of the models created for the dependent variables of cognitive and AE was obtained as a medium. The predictive power of the model created for the dependent variables of trust and satisfaction was low.

Table 6. Predictive power results

Variable	Q^2
Cognitive empathy (CE)	0.245
Affective empathy (AE)	0.319
Trust	0.045
Satisfaction	0.061

Note: Q^2 – predictive relevance.
Source: authors.

5.3. RESULTS OF FUZZY SET ANALYSIS

Configurations explaining customer satisfaction were calculated separately for citizens of each country. Each table (Table 7–12) shows their coverage and consistency. Plus signs indicate the presence of the variable, while minus signs indicate that the specific variable was not considered in the solution.

Table 7. Main configuration for high satisfaction: Turkey

Configuration	Solutions		
	1	2	3
Power distance (PD)	+	+	+
Uncertainty avoidance (UA)	+	+	+
Collectivism (CLV)	+	+	+
Long-term orientation (LTO)	-	-	-
Masculinity (MAS)	+	+	+
Affective empathy (AE)	+	-	+
Cognitive empathy (CE)	-	+	+
Trust	+	+	+
Consistency	0.577	0.945	0.946
Raw coverage	0.711	0.628	0.625

Source: authors.

Table 8. Main configuration for high satisfaction: Denmark

Configuration	Solutions		
	1	2	3
Power distance (PD)	-	-	+
Uncertainty avoidance (UA)	-	-	+
Collectivism (CLV)	-	-	+

Long-term orientation (LTO)	-	-	+
Masculinity (MAS)	-	-	+
Affective empathy (AE)	+	+	+
Cognitive empathy (CE)	+	+	+
Trust	+	-	+
Consistency	0.908	0.881	0.986
Raw coverage	0.675	0.780	0.377

Source: authors.

Table 9. Main configuration for high satisfaction: England

Configuration	Solutions		
	1	2	3
Power distance (PD)	-	-	-
Uncertainty avoidance (UA)	+	+	+
Collectivism (CLV)	-	-	-
Long-term orientation (LTO)	-	-	-
Masculinity (MAS)	-	-	+
Affective empathy (AE)	+	-	-
Cognitive empathy (CE)	+	+	+
Trust	+	-	+
Consistency	0.864	0.771	0.759
Raw coverage	0.707	0.550	0.764

Source: authors.

Table 10. Main configuration for high satisfaction: Italy

Configuration	Solutions			
	1	2	3	4
Power distance (PD)	+	+	+	+
Uncertainty avoidance (UA)	-	-	+	+
Collectivism (CLV)	-	+	-	+
Long-term orientation (LTO)	+	+	+	+
Masculinity (MAS)	+	+	+	+
Affective empathy (AE)	+	+	+	+
Cognitive empathy (CE)	+	+	+	+
Trust	+	+	+	+
Consistency	0.944	0.941	0.954	0.955
Raw coverage	0.635	0.576	0.574	0.539

Source: authors.

Table 11. Main configuration for high satisfaction: Japan

Configuration	Solutions		
	1	2	3
Power distance (PD)	+	+	+
Uncertainty avoidance (UA)	+	+	+
Collectivism (CLV)	+	+	+
Long-term orientation (LTO)	+	+	+
Masculinity (MAS)	+	+	+
Affective empathy (AE)	-	+	+
Cognitive empathy (CE)	+	+	+
Trust	+	-	+
Consistency	0.915	0.909	0.937
Raw coverage	0.694	0.755	0.650

Source: authors.

Table 12. Main configuration for high satisfaction: Netherlands

Configuration	Solutions
	1
Power distance (PD)	-
Uncertainty avoidance (UA)	-
Collectivism (CLV)	-
Long-term orientation (LTO)	+
Masculinity (MAS)	-
Affective empathy (AE)	+
Cognitive empathy (CE)	+
Trust	+
Consistency	0.899
Raw coverage	0.760

Source: authors.

The results show a high level of solution coverage and consistency for participants from each country. For Turkish participants, solution 3 explained this high level of consistency (0.946) and coverage (0.625) (Table 7) showing that the best solution is to create a high level of customer satisfaction is the existence of all cultural values except LTO. For Danish participants, the highest consistency is in solution 3 with (0.986) and a significant rate of coverage (0.377) (Table 8). This shows that all cultural values, empathy factors and feelings of trust explain the high satisfaction. In the results of the English participants, the highest consistency (0.864) and highest coverage (0.707) were in solution 1 (Table 9). This shows that the UA factor of cultural values, dimensions

of empathy and trust provide high satisfaction. For Italian participants, the highest consistency (0.955) and significant coverage (0.539) were observed in solution 4 (Table 10). Similar to Danish participants, this means that all cultural values and dimensions of empathy and trust, have created high customer satisfaction. A similar result can be seen for Japanese participants: consistency (0.937) and coverage (0.650), providing the highest customer satisfaction, were in solution 3 (Table 11). Finally, the solutions for Dutch participants were high consistency (0.899) and coverage (0.760) (Table 12), showing that for LTO, dimensions of empathy and trust provided high satisfaction.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to determine how the dimensions of cultural values, trust and empathy affect customer satisfaction, and to explore which combinations of these factors that lead to the highest level of satisfaction. According to the findings:

1. SEM-PLS and fsQCA analyses show that each variable increased customer satisfaction and additionally trust in an enterprise played a mediating role in the effect of empathy. These results are consistent with the relevant literature. Geebren et al. (2021) and Pop et al. (2022) found that trust has a positive effect while Elbaz et al. (2023) stated that trust has a moderating role in the relationship between satisfaction and destination loyalty. In the cultural value dimension, Hanzaee and Dehkordi (2012) found that cultural values (UA, LTO) are related while in the empathy dimension, Wieseke et al. (2012) and Davis et al. (2017) stated that customer empathy has positive effects. Although the current study supports the findings of these studies, to our knowledge, no other study in the tourism sector has comprehensively addressed the effects of the components of customer empathy, trust and cultural value on customer satisfaction.
2. The dimensions that make up cultural values do not affect trust. This result shows that, although the feeling of trust affects customer satisfaction, it does not change according to cultural values. In the relevant literature, different results were obtained to those from the current study. Yuki et al. (2005) found that cultural values affect trust in interpersonal relationships more in Eastern societies. Thanetsunthorn (2022) reported that consumers with high PD and UA cultural values tend to trust others less, whereas consumers with low CLV and high LTO cultural values are likely to trust others more.
3. Cultural values have been found to have an impact on empathy and some studies have shown similar evaluations (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010). To

communicate sensitively to cultural diversity and understand customer profiles, it is necessary to have an idea about the empathy skills of hotel customers.

4. First of all, it should be noted that the participants in the current study do not represent the population of a country as these findings represent only the participants included in the study. According to the fsQCA analysis, solutions that create high customer satisfaction are also noteworthy. These results suggest that cultural values, empathy and trust affect customer satisfaction although the increase varied according to different cultural values. According to Hofstede's (2001) scoring system, Japan and Italy had the highest cultural values for MAS. Turkey and Japan had the highest for PD and CLV, while LTO was high in Japan and the Netherlands. Studies conducted in subsequent years have yielded similar results to those of Hofstede (Moonen, 2017; Woodside et al., 2016) and this study obtained similar results. According to the results with the highest consistency in fsQCA, high scores increased satisfaction for Turkish participants for all cultural values except for LTO. For Danish, Italian and Japanese participants, high scores for all cultural values resulted in satisfaction. For Dutch participants, LTO did and for English participants, a high UA score indicated satisfaction. Although the participants were of different nationalities, high values for MAS, PD, UA, LTO and CLV increased their satisfaction. However, as observed in the fsQCA results for the participants of these countries, the cultural values that increase satisfaction vary. These results are similar to those obtained using SEM-PLS.

This study explored how cultural values, empathy and trust influence hotel customers' satisfaction and the combinations that lead to high levels. Tourism has a structure that brings together different cultures and it is difficult for businesses to create common satisfaction among customers. This study revealed that PD, UA, MAS, CLV and LTO can provide high satisfaction while empathy and trust are the factors that increase it. In addition, cultural values affect empathy (except MAS). As a result, this study offers solutions that will create satisfaction in customers whose effects of cultural values on empathy skills have been determined. Cultural values had no effect on trust, but they positively affected customer satisfaction. The importance of trust, independent of cultural values, was proven in this study. We hope that the contributions will encourage hotels to provide better services to their customers with different cultural values, improve customer experience and encourage researchers to examine customer satisfaction from different perspectives.

Our study yielded important theoretical and practical results which are summarized below.

6.1. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Our work has made various contributions to the literature on tourism and accommodation. First, it responds to calls for increased research on trust and empathy in service marketing in the digital world where the sharing of emotions is objectified (Kumra & Sharma, 2022).

Second, by considering cultural values within the customer satisfaction framework, a comparative study was conducted, and an attempt was made to fill the gap in the relevant literature. Although comparisons have been made regarding cultural values (Qi et al., 2023), such a comprehensive evaluation has not been made in recent years. This limits the ability of multinational accommodation businesses to act according to different consumer profiles.

Third, empathy in the service sector is generally considered from the perspective of service personnel (Iglesias et al., 2019). In this work, we discussed the empathy of customers, revealed the importance of empathy, and enriched the literature by contributing to the limited number of studies.

Fourth, we identified the most effective components for achieving customer satisfaction by demonstrating the effects of cultural values on customer satisfaction. To our knowledge, no study has ever focused on cultural values or customer satisfaction using this method. By demonstrating that certain cultural values create greater satisfaction, this study significantly contributes to the literature.

6.2. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

In line with the results above, the following recommendations were developed for businesses.

First, customers' empathy levels can be determined using a short empathy scale administered during check-ins or reservation. To be economically viable, it would be appropriate to design this scale as a short-answer, fun digital game and provide instant results to hotel managers. We believe that it will be easier to provide customized services to customers whose empathy levels have been determined. For example, various privileges, such as food and drinks, can be offered to customers with low empathy levels during their stay. Considering that it is more difficult to satisfy customers with such low levels, we believe that the privileges offered to them will be helpful.

Second, hotel personnel responding appropriately to customers' emotions can facilitate the development of empathy. Praising customers' empathetic behavior can also increase their own empathy.

Third, accommodation can include creative drama activities in their services to help increase customers' empathy levels. Creative drama is a learning method

through play suitable for individuals of all ages. Studies have shown that creative drama is important for effective communication, empathy and tolerance (Ulubey & Gözütok, 2015), and many are entertaining and awareness-raising enough to be added to the hotels' animation shows.

Finally, considering the result that cultural values affect satisfaction; hotels whose leaders are strong and decisive, whose rules are defined, whose promises are clear, whose male role models are at the forefront, who act with the "we" spirit, who are hard-working, self-sacrificing and economical, will gain higher satisfaction.

6.3. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Causal relationships were discussed in this study, but the associations between variables were not. Future studies should investigate the associations between these variables. Managers' cultural values, empathy and trust levels may be discussed, as well as how these variables affect personnel and their relationships with customers.

This study was conducted on customers who stayed at a hotel, however, this cannot be generalized to the entire service sector. Therefore, the results of these variables in different sectors should be evaluated. Online services are distant; therefore, algorithms regarding empathy can be developed from consumers' digital footprints. Our study emphasized only the dimensions of trust and empathy related to consumer satisfaction. Studies that include other service quality dimensions can provide a more comprehensive perspective.

The data used in this study was limited to 553 hotel customers which can be expanded in future with a larger number of participants. Although this work attempted to reach consumers with as many different cultural values as possible, there is a need for more extensive studies that include other cultures. It is also thought that addressing the demographic variables of participants will be effective for the customization of service delivery.

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