



DISCRIMINATION PROBLEMS AS PERCEIVED BY TURKISH TOURISTS ON THEIR VACATION EXPERIENCES

Taner Dalgın^{a,*} , Yasemin Koçak Bilgin^b

^a Mugla Sıtkı Koçman University (Mugla, Türkiye), Department of Tourism and Travel Services, Mugla Vocational School;
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7645-1989>; e-mail: tanerdalgin@mu.edu.tr

^b Independent researcher; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3393-709X>; e-mail: kocakysmn@gmail.com

* Corresponding author.

How to cite (APA style): Dalgın, T., & Koçak Bilgin, Y. (2026). Discrimination problems as perceived by Turkish tourists on their vacation experiences. *Turyzm/Tourism*, 36(2), 61–71. <https://doi.org/10.18778/0867-5856.2026.20>

ABSTRACT

Discriminatory approaches, which are a significant social problem, that have become widespread globally, reduce tourism and harm the quality of tourist experiences. Considering that discriminatory practices towards tourists can harm businesses in a destination too and reduce its attractiveness to tourists, it is important to determine the discriminatory practices towards a specific tourist group. Especially when its effect on the tourist experience is considered, it is seen that the discriminatory approach perceived by the tourist is more important than the discrimination itself. This research aims to identify the types of discriminatory attitudes perceived by Turkish tourists during their travels. For this purpose, the comments of tourists who voluntarily remarked on their tourist experiences using online platforms, were used as research data. Within the scope of the research, Turkish comments on the www.tripadvisor.com.tr website were filtered with the keyword “discrimination”. According to the research findings, the types perceived were customer, nationality, culture, religion and gender. Customer discrimination is divided into six different groups: economic, against tour companies, between local and foreign tourists, from celebrities and influencers, against customers with children and against repeat customers.

KEYWORDS

discrimination, cultural discrimination, customer discrimination, tourist experiences

ARTICLE INFORMATION DETAILS

Received:
3 February 2025
Accepted:
18 May 2026
Published:
2 October 2026

1. INTRODUCTION

During tourism activities, social relationships lead to cultural interaction between tourists and local people while using transportation services, staying at hotels, eating at restaurants, shopping and visiting tourist

sites (Reisenger, 1994). Depending on the scope of the tourism activity, this cultural interaction sometimes constitutes an important attractiveness dimension of the experience, and sometimes it can affect customer satisfaction as an element that emerges only from the purchase of tourist services (Poria et al., 2021).

© by the Author, licensee University of Lodz – Lodz University Press, Lodz, Poland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

Funding information: Mugla Sıtkı Koçman University; Independent researcher. **Conflicts of interests:** None. **Ethical considerations:** The Authors assure of no violations of publication ethics and take full responsibility for the content of the publication. **The percentage share of the Author in the preparation of the work is:** T.D. 50%, Y.K.B. 50%. **Declaration regarding the use of GAI tools:** Not used.

In addition, tourists are in fact happy to interact with local people during their travels (Ulinnuha, 2021). From this perspective, the problems that arise in every aspect of cultural interaction can negatively affect the quality of tourist experiences in the micro sense and international tourism movements in the macro sense. For example, discrimination experienced in a hotel may negatively affect the perceived image of that hotel (micro level), whereas discrimination encountered in interactions with local people may negatively influence overall perceptions of the destination (macro level). One of the important problems that arises in cultural interaction is discrimination based on distinction between me and 'the other', us and 'the others'.

Tourist experiences generally take place in a geographical and cultural environment where people are 'foreign'. Due to this feature, visitors who are described as 'foreign' by locals and those providing tourist services during tourist experiences (Tayfun, 2002) are more open to being psychologically affected by communication. While such experiences are often associated with international travel, similar dynamics may also occur in the context of domestic tourism. In this sense, interactions between local residents in tourist destinations and domestic visitors can also involve unequal treatment, and discrimination may arise based on perceived differences such as socio-cultural background, lifestyle or regional identity. Although discrimination incidents encountered are evaluated as negative social and cultural effects created by tourism, there are many factors that affect discrimination, such as cultural differences, language barriers and prejudice, and these factors also negatively affect the development of international tourism. It is widely acknowledged that discriminatory practices, as a pervasive global social issue, not only constrain tourism but also adversely affect the quality of the experience.

Collecting data directly from primary sources on discrimination is not easy due to the difficulty of identifying people who experience discrimination and the difficulty of creating a sample that can represent the research universe. Therefore, in this research, the comments of tourists who commented voluntarily on online platforms after their experience were used as data. The findings obtained from www.tripadvisor.com.tr website were to determine what kind of discrimination Turkish tourists encounter during their travels. It should be noted that the data reflects tourists' perceived experiences, which may not necessarily indicate intentional or systematic discriminatory practices. Considering that such practices towards tourists can harm businesses in the destination and reduce its attractiveness for tourists (Walsh, 2009), it is important to determine discriminatory practices towards a specific tourist group.

Despite the limited research addressing perceived discrimination in tourism, existing studies have generally focused on specific types such as ethnicity, nationality or religion, addressing these dimensions in isolation. This fragmented perspective limits a comprehensive understanding of how different forms of discrimination are simultaneously experienced and perceived within tourism contexts. Furthermore, there is a lack of research that examines discrimination from the perspective of tourists based on experience-based data derived from online platforms. In particular, studies focusing on Turkish tourists remain limited, despite their active participation in both domestic and international tourism. Therefore, this study aims to address these gaps by adopting a holistic perspective to perceived discrimination and by analyzing user-generated content to reveal how different forms of discrimination emerge and are interpreted in real tourism experiences. In line with this purpose, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ₁: What types of discrimination do Turkish tourists perceive during their tourism experiences?

RQ₂: In which countries do Turkish tourists perceive different types of discrimination more intensely?

RQ₃: How do perceptions of discrimination vary according to gender?

2. DISCRIMINATION AND ITS TYPES THAT TOURISTS MAY ENCOUNTER

Discrimination is defined by the United Nations as "any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin" (Sharaievska et al., 2010, p. 301). Discrimination is the insult, injustice, exclusion or violence against a person or group because they are different from others. Brüß (2008) defined discrimination as the differential treatment of any member of a socially defined group due to membership of that group. Discrimination is mainly based on group identity, status and social norms requiring the participation of both the discriminator and the victim, and depends on how certain individuals are treated compared to others (Zhou et al., 2022). Discriminatory approaches often arise from generalizing negative traits to a social group of which an individual is a member or is thought to be (Kloek et al., 2013, p. 407). When a social group is a potential target of discrimination, this group is considered disadvantaged (Walsh, 2009). Therefore, in discrimination, a perceptual reaction towards a disadvantaged group or community finds a concrete and actionable reflection against an individual. In the discrimination, the target is usually not the individual's

own personal values, but the values attributed to the social group of which s/he is a member.

Discrimination that may arise usually has the distinction between 'me and others'. The 'other' is one who is different from me/us, in other words, one who is not like us, so the less empathy and sympathy developed towards the 'other', the higher the probability for discrimination to emerge. When defining the 'other', many different characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, religion, skin colour, disability, social class and residential area can be used (Malone, 2002) and each can form the basis of a discrimination. Depending on which characteristic is targeted, the discrimination causes problems to emerge in a social sense (Karataş, 2002). Discrimination includes a two-way generalization in terms of those who discriminate and those who are discriminated against. Those who discriminate generalize the characteristics of the groups they define as an 'other' compared to the individual. As a result, individuals tend to attribute discriminatory treatment to their membership of a social group rather than to the actions of a specific individual (Crocker & Major, 1989). Particularly in relation to tourist experience, it is not merely the objective occurrence of discriminatory practices but rather how such practices are perceived by tourists that holds greater significance. Perceived discrimination shapes tourists' cognitive and emotional evaluations about tourism businesses or destinations. Consequently, tourists tend to interpret and generalize these experiences beyond the individual incident, attributing them to the broader service provider, or even the destination as a whole, which may ultimately influence their overall satisfaction and future behavioral intentions.

At this point, it is necessary to focus on perceived discrimination which can be expressed as the feeling of exclusion, restriction or difference based on a certain identity (Ulinuha, 2021). However, it is important to distinguish between discrimination as an objective practice and perceived discrimination as a subjective interpretation of an experience. Not every negative interaction or unfavorable treatment necessarily constitutes discrimination in an objective sense; rather, it may be interpreted as such by individuals based on their perceptions and prior experiences (Pager & Shepherd, 2008). Since inferences about discrimination are partly a perceptual process, it is possible that those who encounter similar discriminatory experiences do not perceive discrimination in the same way. Many studies show that not all individuals perceive discrimination equally, even if they are members of groups that are likely to be discriminated against (Ellemers & Barretto, 2008). It is generally seen that the perception of discrimination develops in connection with more clearly reflected characteristics such as ethnicity, nationality and gender (Kloek et al., 2016).

Being the target of discrimination during a particular tourist experience is unsettling and demoralizing for a tourist. The effect on satisfaction with the tourist experience will be affected by many different process components such as the personality traits of the tourist, the scope and level of discrimination, and the level of victimization resulting from it. Tourists may develop different reactions to the discrimination they encounter. A person who perceives that he/she is being discriminated against may either ignore the situation and accept it, may exhibit more reactive behaviors such as verbal protest, or make an official complaint (Kloek et al., 2013; Walsh, 2009). When considered in terms of the effect of the discrimination, it is more important how this negative experience will reflect on the tourist's customer satisfaction and future tourist preferences than how the tourist reacts to the discrimination.

Sometimes errors and disruptions that occur during service can be perceived as discrimination by tourists (Min & Joireman, 2021). Even if the faulty service is due to the staff's mistake or an unforeseen situation, the tourist perceives this experience as discrimination. This prejudice stems from the assumption that tourists may be subjected to discrimination based on their perceived membership in a particular social group.

Religious discrimination occurs when one person treats another less positively because they belong to (or think they belong to) a certain religious group (Brüß, 2008). A person's exposure to religious discrimination is related to having an external appearance that reflects their religious beliefs, and therefore women are seen to face religious discrimination more (Hodge et al., 2024). This can be explained by the visibility of religious identity through external markers, which facilitate social categorization. As women's religious affiliation is often more visibly expressed, they are more likely to be subjected to stereotyping and discrimination.

Gender discrimination is related to gender identity and roles and often manifests itself in the form of gender-based double standards and gender stigma (Terrizzi et al., 2013). It refers specifically to unequal treatment based on an individual's gender, most commonly affecting women (Ahuja & Lyons, 2019). Findings in the literature show that female tourists' service requests are ignored more often than male (Brown & Osman, 2017) strengthening the assumption that tourists experience gender discrimination during their holiday.

Discrimination based on race refers to that based on racial characteristics such as skin color and appearance (Zhou et al., 2022). Discrimination experienced by black individuals or by whites within a black society, and by those from the Far East can be given as examples based on racism.

Cultural discrimination is where a group of people consider their own culture superior to the culture of others, and try to oppress, belittle or ignore those

with different cultures, and express this through their behaviors (Halis Öztürk, 2021). Cultural discrimination can occur more in cases where tourists display their cultural characteristics especially if the local society and the characteristics of the visitors are in conflict with each other; then cultural discrimination is more likely to occur.

Market (customer) discrimination is another type of discrimination found in the literature. According to Crockett et al. (2003), it refers to an approach applied between customer groups perceived as important for the business and customer groups perceived as unimportant. Market discrimination occurs in the context of interpersonal interactions between customers and service providers. The tourism sector is a service-oriented and interaction-based sector and for this reason, customers are more likely to encounter discrimination. The basic criterion that distinguishes market discrimination from other types is that the reason for a business to apply it is mostly related to the prejudice that certain customer groups have low profitability or are problematic. Market discrimination is intertwined with other types because its target can be directed to a specific group such as nationality, social class, gender or ethnicity. In this research, discriminatory situations that arise due to uncertain or non-group-specific characteristics enacted by businesses, are considered as market discrimination, as firms may treat customers differently based on subjective perceptions rather than objective service or economic criteria (Amegashie, 2023).

There are few studies in the literature that address the issue of discrimination against tourists and they have not addressed the issue of discrimination in general but have focused on a specific type, related to religious belief (Brüß, 2008; Livengood & Stodolska, 2004; Peleman, 2003), ethnicity (Gobster, 2002; Woodard, 1988) or nationality (Lang, 2018). Zhou et al. (2022) reviewed research on discrimination in accommodation and tourism services through a literature review and determined that the main sources are sexism, racism, ethnocentrism and appearance. Yoncheva (2024) traces the development of a specific administrative and judicial proceeding initiated to establish the presence of discrimination against consumers in a tourist facility. It is thought that the present research will make a significant contribution to the literature because it addresses all types of discrimination obtained in a holistic manner.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this study, which was conducted to determine what kinds of discriminatory approaches Turkish tourists encounter during their travels, the netnography design

for qualitative research was used. The research data were obtained using a non-participatory (passive) netnography method, one of the digital ethnography approaches based on the analysis of online user-generated content. Netnography is defined as a research method that allows for the systematic examination of content produced by users in online environments (Kozinets, 2010). The primary reason for choosing it for this study is directly related to the four key distinctions between traditional face-to-face ethnography and internet-based netnography, as identified by Kozinets (2010). First, interactions occurring in online environments are shaped by technological media, which alters the nature of communication (transformation). Second, the internet allows users to express their identities more flexibly, enabling freer forms of expression through anonymity (authenticity and anonymity). Third, the participatory nature of the internet provides researchers with access to extensive data sources independent of geographical limitations (accessibility). Finally, the fact that interactions on online platforms are largely recorded creates a data archive, allowing for retrospective analysis of user content (archiving). The other reason for choosing a netnography design was to capture the cultural meanings reflected in spontaneously shared user experiences.

Furthermore, the netnography design was preferred due to its cost-effectiveness, as well as its ability to eliminate time and space constraints and provide rapid access to data through online environments. In line with the principles of netnographic research, this study adopted a non-participatory (passive) observational approach, in which researchers did not interact with users but instead analyzed online content. Unlike traditional active netnography, a non-participatory approach allows researchers to analyze digital traces and user-generated content without introducing researcher-induced bias. As Costello et al. (2017) argue, observational netnography is particularly advantageous when dealing with sensitive or emotionally charged topics like discrimination, as the unobtrusive nature of the research prevents the alteration of users' expressions and behaviors. Therefore, the researchers did not interact with the users but instead systematically archived and analyzed the publicly available reviews on the Tripadvisor platform (Kozinets & Gambetti, 2021).

Only Turkish comments were included in the research by using the keyword "discrimination" on the Tripadvisor website. The reason for limiting the comments is that the research only covers the problems as experienced by Turkish tourists. This limitation ensures that the study specifically captures the experiences of such tourists and avoids potential cultural or language-related differences in the perception and reporting of discriminatory practices.

The data collection process was conducted through the Tripadvisor platform which hosts user-generated reviews related to tourism experiences. The selection of Tripadvisor was based on its global recognition as a widely used tourism review website that hosts rich, experience-based user-generated content. Only publicly accessible data were included in the study, therefore, the research complies with ethical standards for internet-based research, ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of individuals. Each comment was treated as a separate unit of analysis. Due to the anonymized nature of the data, it was not possible to determine whether multiple comments were made by the same user. Therefore, the analysis is based on comments rather than individual users, and the findings should be interpreted accordingly.

In line with the research objective, a keyword-based search was performed using the term “discrimination”. Although relying solely on this as a selection criterion may have led to the exclusion of some relevant experiences not explicitly labelled as such, this approach was adopted to ensure a clear and consistent identification of perceived discrimination cases within the dataset. The search was limited to Turkish-language reviews in order to focus specifically on the experiences of Turkish tourists. While limiting the dataset to Turkish-language reviews may introduce language-related bias, this strategy was necessary to accurately capture the experiences of the target group. Relevant reviews were manually identified and compiled by the researchers. Given the explicit and highly specific inclusion criterion of using only this keyword, the resulting dataset of 39 reviews is positioned within an exploratory qualitative research design. Rather than attempting to capture the full spectrum of exclusionary practices in tourism, which are often expressed through implicit terminology, this exploratory approach aims to identify and categorize initial patterns in how Turkish tourists explicitly label and frame their experiences as “discrimination”.

The researchers systematically read through all the comments to assess their relevance, identifying instances where the term appeared but did not substantively pertain to experiences of discrimination. Only the sentences or segments that directly reflected discriminatory experiences were retained for analysis. During this process, duplicate entries, irrelevant comments and content not directly related to discriminatory experiences were excluded, resulting in a dataset consisting of 39 comments. Data collection continued until no new themes emerged and thematic saturation was achieved. Following this process, the selected comments were transferred into a text-based dataset and imported into MAXQDA 2022 qualitative data analysis software. Prior to coding, the data were reviewed to ensure consistency and relevance. An inductive coding approach was employed,

allowing themes to emerge directly from the data rather than being predetermined.

To enhance the reliability and trustworthiness of the analysis, the coding process was carried out through repeated and careful examination of the data. The dataset was reviewed multiple times during coding to ensure consistency in code assignment and theme development. Codes and themes were compared across different comments to maintain coherence and reduce possible subjective bias. In addition, direct quotations from user comments were included to increase transparency and to allow readers to observe the relationship between the data and the interpretations. These procedures contribute to the credibility and confirmability of the findings. It should be emphasized that the study does not aim to identify objectively verifiable acts of discrimination, but rather to analyze how certain situations are interpreted and constructed as discrimination by tourists. Therefore, the findings may reflect subjective perceptions, which do not correspond to actual discriminatory practices.

4. FINDINGS

Among the Tripadvisor comments, a total of 39 were obtained as a result of the filtering made with the keyword ‘discrimination’ which are seen to be divided into three different categories: accommodation, food and beverage, and other tourist activities. There are 19 people/comments stating that they experienced discrimination by accommodation, 16 for food and beverage and four in various other activities such as beaches, ports and tours. As a result of adding the comments to the MAXQDA 2022 program, 119 codes were generated. Following the coding process, hierarchical code–sub-code structures, overlapping codes and code proximity models were created using MaxMaps. The identified codes were then inductively grouped under broader themes. During this process, only themes supported by multiple codes derived from different comments and repeated across the dataset were retained, while those lacking sufficient recurrence or conceptual consistency were excluded. All five themes were identified across multiple comments, indicating that the findings reflect recurring patterns of perceived discrimination rather than isolated experiences. In this context, it is important to note that not all situations interpreted by tourists as discriminatory necessarily constitute discrimination in an objective sense. Some experiences may be shaped by service structures, business strategies or cultural norms, but are perceived and framed as discriminatory by individuals.

When the situations defined as discrimination were grouped, five types were perceived. As seen in Figure 1,

the types are customer, nationality, culture, religion and gender. Customer discrimination is divided into six different groups: economic, against tour companies, domestic-foreign tourist, celebrity-influencer, against customers with children and repeat customers.

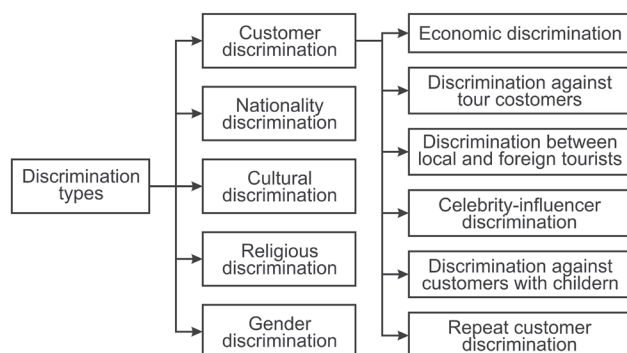


Figure 1. Hierarchical code-subcode model regarding discrimination incidents in comments
Source: authors based on MAXQDA

Although other types of perceived discrimination are included in the conceptual part of the study, the sub-dimensions of customer discrimination are not mentioned. Therefore, the sub-dimensions that emerged as a result of the analysis were created by the researchers according to content. Customer discrimination is when the service provided by a business discriminates among its customers. It divided into six sub-groups according to the type experienced when a business discriminates among its customers and provides a more privileged service to those who spend more and it can receive greater payment and/or tips. Discrimination against tour companies is that which arises especially from the negative service standards applied by accommodation businesses to customers coming with tour companies, for example, providing a breakfast service with lower facilities to such guests. Discrimination between local and foreign tourists is through the service provided by the business in the form of providing a better service to foreign tourists. Celebrity/phenomenon discrimination occurs when businesses provide more privileged service to those who are celebrities or social media phenomena, evaluated negatively by other guests. The better quality of dish being served is similar to giving a better hotel room. A type that occurs in a similar way is repeat customer discrimination. The fact that the business provides a better service to its repeat customers can be evaluated here. Another striking type of discrimination is that against customers with children/babies. Some attitudes towards these customers have caused them to think that they are experiencing discrimination.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the types of perceived discrimination across different destinations.

The numerical values (n) presented in the figure are based on the frequency of comments reflecting each type of perceived discrimination. The thickness of the arrows is used as a visual representation of these frequencies and thus the figure presents a frequency-based distribution of perceived discrimination types across destinations. It should be noted that the findings are not generalizable across countries, as the distribution of comments is not systematically controlled and does not equally represent each destination.

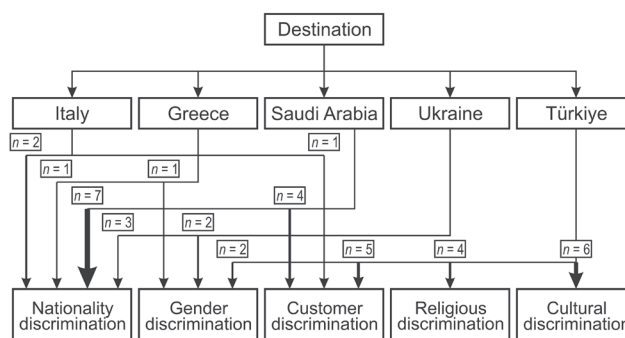


Figure 2. Distribution of perceived discrimination types across destinations
Source: author based on MAXQDA

As seen in Figure 2, the destination where participants most frequently reported perceiving discrimination based on their nationality was Saudi Arabia. Other countries include Ukraine, Sweden, England, Italy and Greece. It was observed that comments regarding gender-based discrimination were concentrated on experiences in Türkiye, Ukraine and Greece, while comments on religious discrimination and cultural discrimination were only reported in relation to touristic experiences in Türkiye. Racism was mentioned as follows:

Unfortunately, there is a situation like this in the hotels in Mecca. There is a thought that the customer is obliged to come to us anyway. Especially, their view of the Turks is unfortunately not very nice because of racism.

In the comment, the discrimination experienced in a hotel in Sweden was explained as follows:

A terrible hotel with discriminatory and negative attitudes. Your Middle Eastern appearance will lead to discriminatory attitudes, making you wait for hours for no reason, being told you have to wait even after learning that people who arrived after you checked in, not changing your inappropriate beds, etc.

Economic discrimination emerged as the most prevalent form of customer discrimination and was felt frequently in domestic tourism. Other countries where it occurs are Cyprus and Saudi Arabia. In the

comment, the following was stated for a Michelin star restaurant in Istanbul, Türkiye:

We did not experience any problems except for the discriminatory attitude of the waiters, who appeared to provide different levels of service based on customers' spending levels or perceived social status. A place that can be recommended for delicious food.

Discrimination against tour company customers is the negative attitude towards services especially in accommodation establishments. According to the comments, this situation was experienced the most in Italy but other countries were Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Situations considered as discrimination are the food service offered by the hotel to such customers being of lower quality and the negative attitude of the staff.

In the comment, the situation in Italy is expressed below:

Groups coming with travel agencies and guests coming personally have breakfast in separate halls. Although the main customer of the hotel is group tourists, groups are given second-class attention in terms of admission to the breakfast hall and the services provided. The employees walk around nervously and grumble while doing their jobs. It is unacceptable for hotels that can never give up on groups to behave in a disturbing and discriminatory manner towards group customers. We got the impression that the breakfast staff was very reluctant, sometimes served fruits that were not very fresh, but they were not very happy with even the consumption of these.

In the comment, the situation in Saudi Arabia is expressed as follows:

We were at the hotel for Umrah, we stayed in a suite, the rooms were up to 5 star standards, but when it came to the place to eat, it changed, I can't call it a restaurant, it was a boarding school cafeteria, the service was terrible, the food was terrible. It was due to the application applied to our tour company. The other restaurant was of very good quality, but we couldn't benefit from it. The reception was generally trying to help, but we also noticed the discriminatory approach of some of the staff.

Negative attitudes towards customers with children/babies are also grouped under customer discrimination. The negative comment regarding this discrimination is related to an experience in Türkiye.

Today, we wanted to sit at the rooftop bar of your hotel with my family and 18-month old daughter. Waitress, rudely dismissed us because we were 'with a baby'; as soon as we entered, she said 'we don't have any hot drinks'. She had my belongings removed from the empty table inside where I wanted to put my

daughter's belongings, saying 'I will use that table'. We wanted to drink soda and soft drinks. She said that she stopped serving us cold drinks even though they were served at the table next to us. She could only serve alcohol! In other words, she meant "you will only drink mineral water, I can't deal with customers with children, you will definitely not drink alcohol, go away". In addition, her attitude and way of speaking were quite condescending and rude. I have encountered mistreatment of customers with children before, but I have never seen such a rude and discriminatory attitude.

The situation of being more attentive to repeat customers may be evaluated negatively by other customers and perceived as discrimination. The code Y7 of 'repeat customer discrimination' has been created regarding this situation and those who received service in a food and beverage business in Greece stated that the business is more positive towards repeat customers and provides better service to them.

The food is nothing special, I am very sorry that we spent an evening here during our short vacation. The service was slow and problematic. The staff was fast and nice, but it seems that the owner forgot about the other tables while he was really interested in and serving the tables of his familiar customers. I have never seen such a rude and discriminatory manager in Dedeğaç and all of Greece. It is a place that is unaware of the Greek hospitality and hospitality that we always appreciate. We will definitely not go here again, while there are places that welcome you with pleasure and have great tastes, regardless of the customer.

Most of the comments about religious discrimination are related to tourist experiences in Türkiye, while the UK also emerges as another context where such discrimination is reported. Although Türkiye is a predominantly Muslim country, participants' accounts suggest that discrimination is not directed at religious identity itself, but rather at the visible expression of that identity, particularly through Islamic dress. In this sense, practices such as wearing a headscarf may function as a salient social marker that triggers differential treatment in certain tourism and service contexts, especially in spaces shaped by secular norms, aesthetic expectations or customer profiling. The common point among participants is their belief that they are exposed to discriminatory attitudes due to their Islamic clothing. In particular, women reported feeling unwelcome in some businesses because of their headscarves. The comment, reflecting religious discrimination experienced in Türkiye, is as follows:

Our babysitter took our baby (2.5 years old) to the pool after breakfast and they were swimming in the pool together. Our babysitter (Turkmen) swims at the pool and the sea with a *haşema* (full-body modest swimwear typically worn by Muslim women).

A resident who was uncomfortable with her complained to the site officer and said that she did not want people to swim in the pool with a "haşema" on. When this issue was conveyed to me by the site officer, I honestly did not take it seriously and said that the site owners could make this decision and closed the issue. The next day, the site assistant came again and warned, "She should not go into the pool in front of house, she should go into the other pool". There is nothing acceptable about this. Everyone should have equal rights, whether they are in haşema or swim trunks, Turkmen or from another nation, but this discrimination from the site owners was very annoying. I think this discrimination is a legal case in this century.

The comment which states that she experienced religious discrimination at the hotel she stayed at in the UK, is as follows:

The rooms and the treatment of the staff are terrible! We did not even want to deal with the racist and discriminatory receptionist for 6 days, especially because of our religious beliefs and appearance.

Although gender discrimination is widely reported in the literature as a form of discrimination more frequently experienced by women, the findings of this study suggest a different pattern, with men reporting higher levels. This perception is particularly evident in both food and beverage establishments and entertainment venues. In food and beverage businesses, male tourists especially those visiting alone often believe that they receive less favorable service or are treated differently based on their gender. Similarly, in entertainment venues such as nightlife establishments, a common practice in the Turkish context involves restricting entry for single or all-male groups in order to maintain a perceived gender balance and ensure security. While these practices are implemented as operational policies by businesses, male tourists tend to interpret them as systematic gender-based discrimination. A comment from Türkiye illustrates this perceived discrimination as follows:

This evening, two friends went to have a drink after a meeting. We saw an empty place and sat down. He said if there are two of us, let's take the table next to us. He took a couple to the place we left. He discriminated against us because we were male customers.

Again, in the comment in Türkiye, the negative experience in a food and beverage business was shared as follows:

I had guided a tourist group coming from abroad in May. After the group went to the hotel, my other guide friend and I were looking for a place to have coffee around 11 at night. When we wanted to enter a nightclub, a waiter said that they do not accept single male people. We were very surprised. As a guide who

has seen almost every part of the world in a tourist area, it is very interesting to experience such poor quality. There were many tables with single male people inside, as they stated. From that day to this, I definitely do not direct my own groups or all groups coming from other companies to this business after such a discriminatory attitude.

Another type perceived in the study is cultural discrimination, a type which has only been experienced in Türkiye. Cultural discrimination has manifested itself in ways such as causing problems for customers requesting alcohol during certain months for Muslims, causing problems for accommodation requests for unmarried couples, or not being accepted because of their clothing style.

In the comment, the situation that is perceived as cultural discrimination in Türkiye is expressed as follows:

We were loyal customers of this restaurant, my wife and I used to go there once every two weeks to make raki and fish. In June 2015, during Ramadan, we went again for raki and fish on a special night. The huge restaurant had separated a small, cramped and viewless area with partitions for those who drink alcohol. This is a restaurant with alcohol and makes money from those who drink alcohol 11 months a year. Thank God there are well-established restaurants in Çanakkale, where we went as soon as we left, and we saw how peacefully and harmoniously those who eat iftar and those who drink raki could sit together in a non-discriminatory restaurant. So if there were no people separating Muslims from non-Muslims, these two groups would get along very well. Definitely do not go to this restaurant, it is probably a business that makes money from those who drink alcohol but does not actually respect them, I do not recommend it.

Of the 39 comments in the study, 12 belong to male tourists and 11 to female, while gender was unspecified in the remaining responses. Although the fact that gender could not be specified in a significant portion makes it impossible to make very clear comments, it is possible to make certain inferences from users who stated their gender. When the discrimination cases experienced were evaluated, a striking grouping was formed as shown in Figure 3. Only female users stated that they experienced religious discrimination, while male users only commented on gender. The absence of gender discrimination in the comments of female users is another notable finding. This pattern suggests that certain forms of discrimination may become more salient depending on how social identities are visibly expressed. In particular, religious identity may be more immediately recognizable in the case of women due to Islamic dress practices such as the headscarf, which function as visible markers of group membership. Therefore, women may be more

exposed to religion-based discrimination not solely because of their religious affiliation, but because their gender makes this affiliation more publicly observable. This finding points to the intersection of gender and religion, indicating that these identities do not operate independently but rather shape the form and intensity of discriminatory experiences.

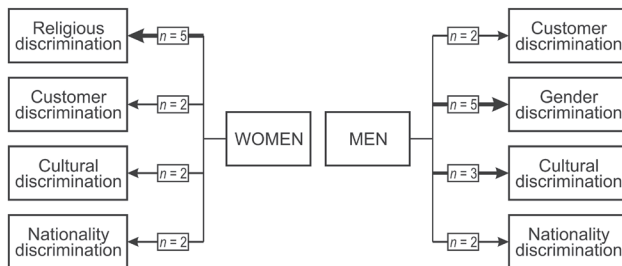


Figure 3. The prevalence of discrimination based on gender
Source: author based on MAXQDA

5. CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

Discrimination encountered by tourists is one of the negative social and cultural outcomes of tourism. Tourists may be exposed to different forms based on factors such as gender, nationality, religion, culture or economic status which can negatively affect both the quality of the tourist experience and their perceptions of destinations. In this context, identifying the types of discrimination perceived by tourists is important for understanding potential negative impacts on destination image and tourism sustainability. Due to the difficulty of reaching individuals who have experienced discrimination through traditional data collection methods, user-generated content on online platforms provides an important data source for identifying such experiences. Accordingly, in this study, comments containing the term “discrimination” on Tripadvisor were analyzed using MAXQDA software in line with the research objective.

One important limitation of this study is that the analysis was restricted to comments written exclusively in Turkish, which may introduce language-related bias and limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader, multilingual tourist population. Additionally, the use of the keyword “discrimination” as the sole selection criterion may have resulted in the exclusion of relevant experiences that were not explicitly labelled as such by users. This approach, while ensuring consistency in identifying perceived cases, may have constrained the comprehensiveness of the dataset and potentially overlooked more implicit forms of discriminatory experiences. In addition, the relatively small sample size and the qualitative nature of the data limit the possibility

of making statistical generalizations, and the findings should therefore be interpreted within their contextual and exploratory scope. Accordingly, consistent with the exploratory design of the study, no attempt was made to infer the prevalence or intensity of perceived discrimination; rather, the focus was on identifying how such experiences are explicitly articulated and framed by Turkish tourists.

According to the data obtained, Türkiye appears as the location where discrimination is most frequently reported. However, this pattern may plausibly be linked to the tendency of Turkish tourists to engage more frequently in domestic travel, potentially leading to a higher representation of Türkiye in the dataset. The most intense in Türkiye is customer discrimination which may, in some cases, be associated with consumer behavior and economic considerations, whereas discrimination based on gender, nationality or other inherent personal characteristics is widely recognized as unjust and is prohibited under legal frameworks. Six different types of this discrimination have been determined according to the ways it occurs: economic, against customers of tour companies, between local and foreign tourists, celebrities and influencers, against customers with children and against repeat customers.

In addition to customer discrimination, the most common types are based on nationality, culture and religion. Based on comments, it can be said that Turkish customers are more exposed to nationality discrimination, especially in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Ukraine, Sweden, the UK, Italy and Greece.

When the cases are evaluated according to gender, an interesting grouping is formed. Only female users stated that they experienced religious discrimination. However, based on the analyzed comments, it was said that single men who were subjected to gender discrimination, although this is the type that women are most exposed to according to the literature (Yang et al., 2018). But, according to this study, it was especially men who want to receive service from food and beverage establishments.

The findings indicate that religious discrimination is reported predominantly in tourist experiences in Türkiye, with additional cases identified in the UK. The evidence suggests that such discrimination is largely associated with visible expressions of Islamic identity, particularly clothing. In this context, women appear to be disproportionately affected, as religious markers such as the headscarf make their beliefs more immediately recognizable in social interactions. This finding is similar to that of Litchmore and Safdar (2015) that Muslim women perceive more discrimination than Muslim men. It can be said that this situation is related to Hofstede’s (1980) inference that local people generally develop their perception of tourists by looking at symbols such as clothing. The clothing of

visiting women (wearing a veil or headscarf) makes it possible to draw inferences about their religious beliefs (Litchmore, 2015) and they become a direct target of people's perception of others regarding religious beliefs (Kloek et al., 2013, p. 405). This situation can be seen as the main reason why discrimination regarding religious beliefs is directed more towards women.

Cultural discrimination has only been experienced in Türkiye, manifesting itself in ways such as causing problems for a customer requesting alcohol during Ramadan, an important month for Muslims, causing problems for an unmarried couple's accommodation request and not being accepted as customers because of their clothing. Cultural discrimination is more likely to occur between cultures that are more distant from each other. From this perspective, it is an interesting finding that Turkish customers stated they experienced cultural discrimination in Türkiye too.

The findings of this study largely support the existing literature on discrimination in tourism. The emergence of customer (market) discrimination, as well as nationality, religion and culture-based discrimination, is consistent with previous studies indicating that such discrimination in tourism settings is often shaped by interpersonal service interactions and group-based perceptions (Kloek et al., 2013; Walsh, 2009; Zhou et al., 2022). In particular, the prominence of economic discrimination and differential treatment based on customer characteristics aligns with the concept of marketplace discrimination, where service providers prioritize certain customer groups based on perceived profitability or desirability (Crockett et al., 2003; Walsh, 2009). Furthermore, the finding that religious discrimination is more visible among female tourists supports prior research suggesting that individuals with visible identity markers, such as religious clothing, are more likely to be exposed to discriminatory attitudes (Brüß, 2008; Litchmore & Safdar, 2015). However, the finding that gender discrimination is predominantly experienced by male tourists contradicts the dominant literature, which generally emphasizes that women are more frequently exposed to gender-based discrimination in tourism contexts (Ahuja & Lyons, 2019; Brown & Osman, 2017). Finally, the fact that discrimination is largely shaped by tourists' perceptions rather than solely objective conditions is in line with studies highlighting the central role of perceived discrimination in shaping tourist experiences, satisfaction and behavioral outcomes (Kloek et al., 2013; Min & Joireman, 2021). Overall, while the findings are largely consistent with the literature, they also offer context-specific and partially contradictory insights, particularly in relation to gender-based discrimination.

The findings also suggest that perceived discrimination in tourism is not solely shaped by objective conditions, but is also related to how social identities

are recognized and interpreted within specific service contexts. This indicates the importance of interactional dynamics and symbolic cues in shaping tourists' experiences and suggests that discrimination in tourism can be considered as a context-dependent and perception-based phenomenon.

This study contributes to the existing literature in several ways. First, it adopts a holistic approach by examining multiple types of perceived discrimination together, rather than focusing on a single dimension. In this way, it provides a more comprehensive understanding of discrimination in tourism contexts. Second, by using user-generated content, the study reflects how discrimination is perceived and interpreted in real-life tourism experiences. Finally, the findings reveal certain patterns particularly regarding gender-based discrimination that both support and differ from previous studies, indicating that in tourism it may vary depending on contextual and situational factors.

Tourists who encounter discrimination during their tourist experience will tend not to prefer the destination where they encounter this approach again and will share this negative experience with their own social circles. Therefore, it can be assumed that discrimination will have negative reflections on the destination image in the long term and evaluating it within the scope of the destination and developing solutions are of critical importance for its future success. Being aware of this will provide an understanding of why certain groups do not prefer certain destinations. It is also important to conduct detailed studies on the subject of discrimination in order to eliminate restrictive elements related to the tourist experiences of certain segments. In future studies, a contribution to the literature will be made by investigating which discrimination problems visitors experience and their reactions to such problems, especially in destinations that attract a high number of visitors. In addition, future research may explore how businesses that are subject to discrimination-related complaints respond to these issues, with particular attention to the strategies and practices they adopt to manage and mitigate such concerns.

REFERENCES

- Ahuja, R., & Lyons, R.C. (2019). The silent treatment: Discrimination against same-sex relations in the sharing economy. *Oxford Economic Papers*, 71(3), 564–576. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oepp/gpzz025>
- Amegashie, J.A. (2023). Market segregation in the presence of customer discrimination. *Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Economics*, 105, Article 102044. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socec.2023.102044>
- Brown, L., & Osman, H. (2017). The female tourist experience in Egypt as an Islamic destination. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 63, 12–22. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2016.12.005>

- Brüß, J. (2008). Experiences of discrimination reported by Turkish, Moroccan, and Bangladeshi Muslims in three European cities. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 34(6), 875–894. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830802211166>
- Costello, L., McDermott, M.-L., & Wallace, R. (2017). Netnography: Range of practices, misperceptions, and missed opportunities. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917700647>
- Crocker, J., & Major, B. (1989). Social stigma and self-esteem: The self-protective properties of stigma. *Psychological Review*, 96(4), 608–630. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.96.4.608>
- Crockett, D., Grier, S., & Williams, J.A. (2003). Coping with marketplace discrimination: an exploration of the experiences of black men. *Academy of Marketing Science Review*, 4(7), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.5840/iabsproc2003143>
- Ellemers, N., & Barreto, M. (2008). Putting your own down: How members of disadvantaged groups unwittingly perpetuate or exacerbate their disadvantage. In A.P. Brief (Ed.), *Diversity at work* (pp. 202–261). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511753725.009>
- Gobster, P.H. (2002). Managing urban parks for a racially and ethnically diverse clientele. *Leisure Sciences: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 24(2), 143–159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400252900121>
- Halis Öztürk, B. (2021). Türk çalışma kültürü ve kültürel ayrımcılık. In A. Duran & G. Cathi Ozen (Eds.), T. Rüstemhali (Foreword), *Türk kültürü araştırmaları serisi I* (pp. 357–381). Berikan Yayınevi.
- Hodge, D.R., Zidan, T., & Husain, A. (2024). Are females who wear the hijab more likely to experience discrimination? A national study of perceptions among American Muslim women. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 33(5), 301–312. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15313204.2023.2211786>
- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Sage.
- Karataş, K. (2002). Özürlülere yönelik ayrımcılık ve ayrımcılıkla savaşım. *Ufkun Ötesi Bilim Dergisi*, 2(1), 43–55.
- Kloek, M.E., Buijs, A.E., Boersema, J.J., & Schouten, M.G. (2016). Beyond ethnic stereotypes – identities and outdoor recreation among immigrants and nonimmigrants in the Netherlands. *Leisure Sciences: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 39(1), 59–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2016.1151843>
- Kloek, M.E., Peters, K., & Sijtsma, M. (2013). How Muslim women in The Netherlands negotiate discrimination during leisure activities. *Leisure Sciences: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 35(5), 405–421. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2013.831285>
- Kozinets, R.V. (2010). *Netnography: Doing ethnographic research online*. Sage.
- Kozinets, R.V., & Gambetti, R. (Eds.). (2020). *Netnography unlimited: Understanding technoculture using qualitative social media research*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003001430>
- Lang, R. (2018). *Complex equality and the Court of Justice of the European Union: Reconciling diversity and harmonization* (M. Bell, Foreword). Brill.
- Litchmore, R.V., & Safdar, S. (2015). Perceptions of discrimination as a marker of integration among Muslim-Canadians: The role of religiosity, ethnic identity, and gender. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 16(1), 187–204. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-014-0337-5>
- Livengood, J.S., & Stodolska, M. (2004). The effects of discrimination and constraints negotiation on leisure behavior of American Muslims in the Post-September 11 America. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 36(2), 183–208. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.2004.11950019>
- Malone, K. (2002). Street life: Youth, culture and competing uses of public space. *Environment and Urbanization*, 14(2), 157–168. <https://doi.org/10.1177/095624780201400213>
- Min, H.(K.), & Joireman, J. (2021). The influence of customer race on perceived discrimination, anger and coping strategies following subtle degradation of restaurant service. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 33(3), 994–1014. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-09-2020-0975>
- Pager, D., & Shepherd, H. (2008). The sociology of discrimination: Racial discrimination in employment, housing, credit, and consumer markets. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34, 181–209. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.33.040406.131740>
- Peleman, K. (2003). Power and territoriality: a study of Moroccan women in Antwerp. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 94(2), 151–163. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9663.00246>
- Poria, Y., Beal, J., & Shani, A. (2021). “I am so ashamed of my body”: Obese guests’ experiences in hotels. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 92, Article 102728. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2020.102728>
- Reisenger, Y. (1994). Social contact between tourist and hosts of different cultural backgrounds. In A.V. Seaton, C.L. Jenkins, R.C. Wood, P.U.C. Dieke, M.M. Bennett, L.R. MacLellan & R. Smith (Eds.), *Tourism: The state of the art* (pp. 743–754). John Wiley & Sons.
- Sharaievska, I., Stodolska, M., Shinew, K.J., & Kim, J. (2010). Perceived discrimination in leisure settings in Latino urban communities. *Leisure/Loisirs*, 34(3), 295–326. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14927713.2010.521319>
- Tayfun, A. (2002). Turist-yerli halk etkileşimi üzerine bir araştırma. *Gazi Üniversitesi Ticaret ve Turizm Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 1(1), 1–12. <https://search.trdizin.gov.tr/tr/yayin/detay/1969/turist-yerli-halk-etkilesimi-uzerine-bir-arastirma>
- Terrizzi, J.A., Jr., Shook, N.J., & McDaniel, M.A. (2013). The behavioral immune system and social conservatism: A meta-analysis. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 34(2), 99–108. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2012.10.003>
- Ulinnuha, H. (2021). We only smile: A study of perceived discrimination among Asian female Muslim tourists. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute Journal (BIRCI-Journal)*, 4(3), 5798–5810.
- Walsh, G. (2009). Disadvantaged consumers’ experiences of marketplace discrimination in customer services. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 25(1–2), 143–169. <https://doi.org/10.1362/026725709X410070>
- Woodard, M.D. (1988). Class, regionality, and leisure among urban Black Americans: The post-civil rights era. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 20(2), 87–105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00222216.1988.11969761>
- Yang, E.C.L., Khoo-Lattimore, C., & Arcodia, C. (2018). Power and empowerment: How Asian solo female travellers perceive and negotiate risks. *Tourism Management*, 68, 32–45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2018.02.017>
- Yoncheva, T. (2024). A tourist facility with a ban on children playing: The principle of non-discrimination and the statement of the Bulgarian court. *Turyzm/Tourism*, 34(1), 159–164. <https://doi.org/10.18778/0867-5856.34.1.11>
- Zhou, L., Liu, J., & Liu, D. (2022). How does discrimination occur in hospitality and tourism services, and what shall we do? A critical literature review. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 34(3), 1037–1061. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-07-2021-0849>