-RESEARCH ARTICLE-

EXPLORING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN SERVICE PERCEPTIONS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MICHELIN-STARRED RESTAURANTS IN TÜRKİYE AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

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Abstract

This study aims to explore how customer perceptions of service quality are shaped by cultural context by comparatively analyzing Tripadvisor reviews of Michelin-starred restaurants in Türkiye and the United Kingdom. All reviews were subjected to sentiment analysis and labelled as positive or negative. The labelled comments were then classified according to the five SERVQUAL dimensions of reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness. Each review was assigned to the dimension whose keywords it matched most closely, and the proportional distribution of these dimensions was calculated. The findings show that, for restaurants in Türkiye, the "tangibles" dimension accounts for the highest proportion of both positive and negative reviews by the customers. This indicates that customers in Türkiye, a high-power distance culture, place greater emphasis on the tangibles as the physical evidences may be associated with elitism, power, status, prestige, and rank, a common aspiration in high-power distance cultures. By contrast, reviews of restaurants in the United Kingdom are dominated by the "responsiveness" dimension. This suggests that in a relatively low power-distance culture customers may place greater emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness of the service staff, i.e., prompt service, interaction, and helpfulness are given higher priority. Overall, the study demonstrates that the relative salience of SERVQUAL dimensions or the importance attached to each dimension may vary depending on the cultural characteristics of the county. The study has important implications for the Michelin-starred restaurants operating in different cultures.

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MICHELIN RESTORANLARINDA KÜLTÜREL FARKLILIKLAR: TÜRKİYE VE İNGİLTERE ÖRNEĞİ [2]

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı hizmet kalitesine yönelik müşteri algılarının kültürel bağlamla nasıl şekillendiğini ortaya koymak amacıyla, Türkiye ve Birleşik Krallık'ta bulunan Michelin yıldızlı restoranlara ilişkin Tripadvisor'da çevrimiçi platformunda yapılan müşteri yorumlarını karşılaştırmalı olarak analiz etmektedir. Yorumlar, duygu analizinden geçirilerek olumlu ve olumsuz olarak etiketlenmiştir. Etiketlenen yorumlar ardından, SERVQUAL modelinin beş boyutu (Güvenilirlik, Güven, Fiziksel Varlıklar, Empati, Heveslilik) doğrultusunda sınıflandırılmıştır. Her bir yorum, içerdiği anahtar kelimelere göre en çok eşleştiği boyuta atanmış ve bu boyutların yorumlar içindeki dağılımı oransal olarak hesaplanmıştır.Elde edilen bulgular, Türkiye'deki restoranlar için yapılan yorumlarda "Fiziksel Varlıklar" boyutunun hem olumlu hem de olumsuz değerlendirmelerde en yüksek orana sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu durum, yüksek güç mesafesi puanına (PDI: 66) sahip Türkiye'de müşterilerin hizmet kalitesini daha çok fiziksel göstergeler (ambiyans, sunum, estetik gibi) üzerinden değerlendirdiklerini ortaya koymaktadır. Birleşik Krallık'taki restoranlar için yapılan yorumlarda "Heveslilik (Responsiveness)" boyutunun baskın olduğu görülmüştür. Bu durum düşük güç mesafesi eğilimine sahip kültürlerde (PDI: 35) hizmetin hızla sunulması, etkileşim ve yardımseverlik gibi unsurların daha öncelikli değerlendirildiğini göstermektedir. Çalışma, hizmet kalitesi boyutlarının kültürlerarası bağlamda farklı şekillerde algılandığını ve hizmet sunum stratejilerinin kültürel beklentilere duyarlı biçimde yapılandırılması gerektiğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *SERVQUAL, Güç Mesafesi, Metin Madenciliği, Duygu Analiz.*

JEL Kodları: *L86, M31, C55.*

"Bu çalışma Araştırma ve Yayın Etiğine uygun olarak hazırlanmıştır."

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[2] Genişletilmiş Türkçe Özet, makalenin sonunda yer almaktadır.

1. INTRODUCTION

The food and beverages are so important in tourism that they enable tourists to transform from being mere sightseers to active participants in their holidays (Koç, 2013a). Food consumed by customers may allow them to reach their goals relating to relaxation, excitement, escapism, status, education, and lifestyle (Hausman, 2012). Gastronomy tourism, which reflects the cultural identity of the destinations, has become a multidimensional field that not only offers a taste experience, but also includes factors such as the quality of the service provided and customer satisfaction. Service quality, customer experience and expectations have been influential in shaping tourist preferences, ranging from the choice of a destination to details of the itineraries related issues in a destination. The quality of the service offered by restaurants and customer satisfaction are directly related not only to the quality of the food and beverages, but also to how they are presented, interaction, communication and the overall hospitality experience relating to a restaurant service. This multidimensional structure of the restaurant service directly shapes the perceptions and reactions of customers to the service, in short, the overall customer experience.

Customer experience is the indirect or direct reaction of customers to the business they receive service from. Customer experience is one of the most important factors affecting customers' choices, purchase and repurchase intentions (Yazıcı Ayyıldız, and Kuday, 2023: 55). Hence, customers may often find it difficult to make decisions regarding the choice of restaurants. For this reason, customers often resort to the comments/reviews or evaluations that have been made by customers who have gone through the same service experience. Additionally, other factors such as children's menus and facilities offered for children, cleanliness and hygiene factors, working hours, the service atmosphere, quality of goods and services, the speed the service, the variety of the food items and dishes offered in the menu, quality of food and beverages, nutritional and health related aspects of food and beverages, the business image of the restaurant, and the surrounding environment of the restaurant are all among the factors influencing the choice of restaurants by the customers (Koç, 2006; Albayrak, 2014).

Restaurant customers may also place a greater emphasis of some of the category labels of restaurants, such as Michelin-starred restaurants, to ease their decision-making process and somehow guarantee positive outcomes, i.e., satisfaction. The Michelin Guide, which awards labels to restaurants to surpass the standards identified, relating to a wide variety of the aspects of restaurant service. Customers who experience Michelin-starred restaurants also write and share reviews, both positive and negative in various platforms. Based on the above, this study analyzes customer reviews shared about Michelin one-star restaurants in Turkey and the UK on TripAdvisor covering the period from January 2022 to December 2024. The purpose of the study is to analyze the comments from a cross-cultural perspective to see whether customers' reviews emphasize different aspects of service and service quality. To this end, Turkey, a relatively high-power distance culture (Hofstede et al., 2010), and the UK (United Kingdom), a relatively low power distance, are compared in terms of the

reviews made by the customers. The study particularly focuses on the SERVQUAL, service quality, dimensions, to see whether power distance, as a cultural characteristic, influences the reviews made by the customers in these two different cultures

1.1. Literature Review

1.1.1. Michelin-Starred Restaurants

Although the Michelin Guide, the world's leading restaurant rating system, has standardized a set of criteria to evaluate and inspect restaurants, has become a status symbol for restaurant businesses, directly influencing the ability of the competitiveness of a restaurant, the prices it may charge and the types of customers it may target (Bertan and Alkaya, 2013: 106). The Michelin brothers, Andre and Edouard, French tire manufacturers, published the first Michelin Guide in 1900 to encourage car usage in France and hence to increase their tire sales. The first edition included information such as road maps, gas stations, accommodation and dining places. Initially distributed free of charge, the guide became paid from 1920 onwards and gained its current prestigious reputation by adding restaurant reviews. The guide, which gained an international dimension over time, became widespread in Europe and North Africa and became an important reference source in the world of gastronomy (Yazıcı Ayyıldız and Kuday, 2023; Sands, 2025).

The Michelin Guide's star rating system started with a single star in 1926 and turned into a three-tier system in 1931. In this system (Bertan and Alkaya, 2013; Demir, 2025) the starts represent the following:

- 1 Star: Superior quality restaurant in its category in its region
- 2 Stars: "Worth the detour" restaurant with excellent culinary presentation
- 3 Stars: Outstanding culinary experience "worth traveling just for this meal"

In 1929, a survey was introduced to systematize customer feedback, and today, thousands of electronic/postal reviews from readers are meticulously analyzed by the Michelin team (Yazıcı Ayyıldız and Kuday, 2023; Sands, 2025). Michelin star assessments are made by anonymous professional inspectors according to five basic criteria (Olaru, 2023: 425):

- Product quality
- Chef's technical skill and creativity
- Mastery of cooking techniques
- Flavor harmony and balance
- Menu-price ratio

Although there are many advantages to obtaining a Michelin Star for the first time, the maintaining or keeping of the or stars earned are equally important. The loss of a star in the Michelin star system may have multidimensional negative influences on the restaurant businesses. For restaurants and their chefs, gaining or losing a star can

increase or decrease profits by up to 50% respectively (Lau et al., 2025). 2-star restaurants increase the number of attributes corresponding to exceptional customer service and plate presentation as ways to improve the restaurant's performance to compensate for the lack of appeal of their 3-star counterparts, while 3-star restaurants can capitalize on their international reputation to diversify in ways that 3-star restaurants cannot (Daries et al., 2021).

The stars awarded to Michelin Guide candidate restaurants are given to the restaurants, not to the chefs. However, in Michelin-starred restaurants, the achievements and the awarding of stars are due to the outstanding talents and work of the chefs. When chefs leave a Michelin-starred restaurant, the restaurant's star is suspended until the next inspection by Michelin inspectors. Restaurants that are candidates to be included in the Michelin Guide need to continue to apply the same standards of preparation and presentation of innovative and creative food products, which are the main elements of being awarded a star (Uğuzluoğlu, 2021: 13).

1.1.2. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory

Although there is no consensus on the definition of culture, researchers accept culture as a set of perceptions shared by members of a social group (Bedur Doğruöz and Erbaş, 2021: 721). Culture, which can be defined as the spiritual and emotional identity of society, has an important determinant on society. Cultural values, which build the network of relations within the society, also have a binding feature in every society (Dikici, 2022: 81). Today, culture has become richer with the impact of globalization, and this interaction has enabled individuals to develop the ability to understand different perspectives. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory provides a scientific analysis of this process and emphasizes the importance of cultural elements in communication and interaction between people. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory provides a pioneering framework that explains how human behavior, ways of thinking and social interactions are affected by a variety of cultural diversity. Geert Hofstede identified six basic dimensions to understand cultural differences because of his extensive research in the 1970s (Yüksel and Bolat, 2016: 721).

Figure 1. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Individualism-collectivism relates to the extent to which individuals in a society tend to be integrated into groups. In individualistic societies, ties between individuals are loose and autonomy and personal goals are emphasized. In collectivist societies, individuals are unquestioningly integrated into strong and cohesive in-groups (usually extended families) from birth (Hofstede, 2011: 11).

Uncertainty avoidance is a cultural dimension that expresses the level of discomfort individuals feel in the face of uncertain, unpredictable or unstructured situations. In societies where this dimension is high, individuals are more cautious, anxious and rule-bound against uncertainty, while in societies where it is low, individuals tend to prioritize flexibility and adaptive capacity by accepting uncertainty as a more natural situation (Yüksel and Bolat, 2016: 179).

Masculinity and its opposite, femininity, express the distribution of values between the sexes, not as an individual characteristic but as a social characteristic. In his study, he found that women's value judgments differ less between societies than men's, while men's values vary significantly between countries (Hofstede, 2011: 11).

The dimension of indulgence versus restraint reflects societies' approaches to basic human desires. As a characteristic of an indulgent culture, individuals are supported in their freedom to enjoy life and have fun, and the free expression of basic human desires is allowed. In a restrained culture, however, the satisfaction of needs and desires is controlled by social norms. In this culture, hedonistic behaviors are restricted or suppressed (Bedur Doğruöz and Erbaş, 2021: 725).

The short-term versus long-term orientation dimension is an important dimension that reflects societies' perspectives on time and their values. Cultures with a long-term orientation can demonstrate flexibility depending on circumstances, adapt traditions to current situations, and are open to change. In such cultures, individuals act patiently to achieve long-term goals, prioritize hard work, saving, and investing, and do not see loss of face during the process as a primary concern. In short-term oriented cultures,

however, personal stability and social reputation are of great importance, and achieving quick and definite results is a priority. The tendency to invest is lower, and adherence to traditions and social norms is stronger (Sarıtaş and Öztürk, 2018: 132).

Power distance, a concept expressing the extent to which power is unequally distributed in a society and how much this inequality is accepted by individuals, refers, according to Hofstede, to the degree to which individuals with less power accept the hierarchical structure and the unequal distribution of power within organizations. In this context, inequality in societies is shaped not only by leaders but also by individuals who adopt this structure. In cultures with a high power distance, respect for authority is more dominant, and an authoritarian structure is observed in employer-employee, parent-child, and teacher-student relationships (Türker and Karadağ, 2020: 276). The power balances and attitudes towards authority observed in social relations also shape individuals' expectations and perceptions regarding service experiences. The SERVQUAL model, developed to systematically understand these expectations, offers an appropriate analytical framework for examining service quality together with cultural differences.

Developed by Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry in 1985 for the non-medical sector, the SERVQUAL model was designed based on standard parameters to evaluate service quality across five fundamental dimensions (Jonkisz et al., 2021: 2). The SERVQUAL model, developed by Parasuraman and Berry to assess service quality, is one of the most widely used measurement frameworks that evaluate service quality across five basic dimensions. These dimensions—Reliability, Assurance, Tangibles, Empathy, and Responsiveness—are structured to encompass both quantitative and qualitative components of service quality.

Reliability: This dimension reflects customers' trust in the company's policies, employees' competence and accuracy, the consistent delivery of service, and the overall capabilities of the business (Ertuğrul and Sarı, 2019: 25).

Empathy: According to Parasuraman and colleagues (1988), empathy concerns the sensitivity of service providers to customers' emotions, expectations, and personal preferences. In summary, it refers to the careful and individualized attention that the company shows to its customers.

Assurance: This dimension of service quality involves service providers conveying a sense of trust to customers through their knowledge and courtesy, thereby enabling customers to feel safe and comfortable (Özdemir, 2022: 3).

Responsiveness: This dimension indicates the level at which service providers respond to customer requests quickly, effectively, and willingly. The prompt and timely delivery of service plays a critical role in the perception of service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

Tangibles: In evaluating service quality, the physical elements of the service provider, the tools and equipment used, and the physical appearance of the service personnel have a direct impact (Bayraktar and Vatansever, 2021: 26).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Purpose of the Research

The main purpose of this study is to comparatively analyze the concepts of power distance, service failure and compensation from the perspective of cultural and management information systems by examining the reviews on Tripadvisor of restaurant establishments awarded with 1 star by the Michelin Guide, which has an important place in gastronomy tourism in Turkey and the UK. Within the framework of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory, it is aimed to understand how the perception of service quality between the high-power distance culture of Turkey and the more egalitarian cultural structure of UK is reflected in customer expectations, service perception and compensation processes.

By scraping Tripadvisor data and using artificial intelligence and natural language processing (NLP) techniques, sentiment analysis and topic modeling of customer feedback in the gastronomy sector will be performed to evaluate the effects on customer satisfaction. This study will make an important contribution to understanding the impact of cultural differences on service quality and customer satisfaction and to develop strategic recommendations for restaurant businesses.

2.2. Importance of the Research

The gastronomy sector is one of the most competitive areas in terms of customer satisfaction and service quality. Although Michelin-starred restaurants stand out with their high service standards, customer experiences are significantly affected by cultural factors. This study analyzes Tripadvisor reviews of Michelin-starred restaurants in Türkiye and the UK, compares customer perceptions of service quality between two countries with different cultural dynamics, and examines the impact of power distance, service failures and compensation mechanisms on customer satisfaction. Systematic analysis of Tripadvisor reviews using Artificial Intelligence (AI), Natural Language Processing (NLP), and Big Data techniques from a Management Information Systems perspective offers an innovative methodological approach to extract meaningful insights from large datasets. The findings of the study will guide restaurant managers to better understand customer expectations, improve service quality, and develop more effective crisis management and compensation strategies that take into account cultural differences.

2.3. Scope and Limitations of the Research

This study examines the relationship between power distance, service failures and compensation strategies by analyzing customer reviews of 1 Michelin star restaurants in Türkiye and the UK. The analysis is limited to online customer reviews of restaurants with 1 Michelin star on the Tripadvisor platform. Since only online customer reviews are analyzed, factors such as face-to-face customer experiences, employee perspectives, or internal processes of restaurants are outside the scope of the research.

In the study, all 1 Michelin star restaurants in both countries were included and all customer reviews on the restaurant platform were analyzed. Customer reviews were collected from Tripadvisor by scraping method and include only customer feedback on this platform. User-generated content such as Tripadvisor reviews can be subjective and sometimes inconsistent. This can create some difficulties in data analysis. Other online platforms or direct customer interviews are not included.

In the research, all customer reviews accessible on Tripadvisor were analyzed without time limitation. In this way, it was possible to make an assessment from a broader perspective and to take into account long-term trends. In addition, only the cultural dimension of power distance was taken into consideration in the study; Hofstede's other cultural dimensions (e.g. individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, etc.) were excluded from the scope of this research.

2.4. Method of the Research

In this study, qualitative content analysis method was used. In the first stage, the current lists of restaurants with 1 Michelin star in Türkiye and the United Kingdom were obtained from the official website of the Michelin Guide. For each of these restaurants, the URL information on the Tripadvisor platform was manually identified and then digitized by scraping method. The collected reviews were classified separately by country and two different data sets were created. In this way, it was ensured that the customer experiences of each country could be analyzed comparatively.

For the comments in the data sets, sentiment analysis was performed separately by country with the software developed on the COLAB platform with Python code and the "cardiffnlp/twitter-xlm-roberta-base-sentiment" model. Comments were classified as positive, negative and neutral. The positive and negative comments obtained on a country basis were coded using NVivo 14 software based on predefined thematic keywords according to the SERVQUAL model, which includes five dimensions of service quality. As a result of coding, content percentages for each service quality dimension were calculated and the reflection of cultural differences between countries on the comments was evaluated on the axis of power distance.

3. RESULTS

In this study, the comments made on Tripadvisor, an online platform for restaurants with 1 Michelin star, were analyzed using qualitative content analysis method. A rich data set for the restaurants on the Tripadvisor platform from the day they first entered the system to the present day was used. The data obtained were evaluated within the framework of the SERVQUAL model to analyze the dimensional components of service quality. Turkish and English customer reviews, which were pre-classified through sentiment analysis, were coded under the five basic SERVQUAL dimensions of Reliability, Trust, Physical Presence, Empathy and Eagerness. The coding process was based on frequency-based analysis of representative keywords in the content of each review. Each comment was assigned to the SERVQUAL dimension with the highest match score and the frequency of this dimension in the total was calculated. In line with this approach, the proportional distribution of the comments according to the service quality dimensions was obtained and it was statistically revealed in which areas the positive and negative evaluations are concentrated and how they differ in cultural-linguistic context.

The percentage distributions obtained because of this analysis reveal the relative weight of each SERVQUAL dimension within positive and negative comments. In the table below, it is presented comparatively which SERVQUAL dimensions the comments are concentrated around in terms of language (Turkish/English) and mood (positive/negative). In addition to systematically revealing how service experiences are perceived by customers, this table also provides the first clues of cultural and contextual differences.

Table 1. Percentage distribution of positive and negative comments in Turkish and English according to their dimensions

	TR - Positive Comments (%)	TR- Negative Comments (%)	EN - Positive Comments (%)	EN - Negative Comments (%)
Tangibles	39.89	40.23	12.78	19.91
Reliability	17.84	25.29	16.47	23.23
Responsiveness	15.87	14.94	42.27	36.72
Empathy	14.04	14.94	15.02	19.41
Assurance	12.36	4.60	13.46	9.73

According to Table 1, it was found that the Tangibles dimension had higher rates in both positive and negative samples of Turkish comments compared to other SERVQUAL dimensions. This finding shows that tangibles dimension, such as the aesthetic quality of the service environment, spatial arrangements, ambiance, cleanliness and presentation style are a determining factor in the perception of service quality for Turkish customers. This situation can be associated with power distance, one of Hofstede's cultural dimensions. According to Hofstede, societies with high power distance can accept social status differences more easily and attach more importance to symbols that can express this difference. Türkiye's power distance score (PDI: 66) can culturally explain the more dominant role of physical assets in service quality perception.

In the analysis of positive and negative comments in English in Table 1, the most prominent SERVQUAL dimension is Responsiveness. The responsiveness dimension includes elements such as fast service delivery, helpful and solution-oriented employees. The lower percentage of the comments relating to the tangibles dimension, which is 12.78% in English positive comments and 19.91% in negative comments, shows that service quality is associated more with interactional and dynamic aspects. This differentiation makes sense in the context of Hofstede's power distance dimension. The UK's low power distance score (PDI: 35) indicates a cultural structure in which equality and interaction between individuals are valued more. In societies with low power distance, qualities such as sincerity, mutual understanding and speed of the relationship between service providers and service recipients become the main determinants of service quality. The prominence of the Ease dimension in English comments can be considered as a reflection of a cultural structure with low power distance on customer perception.

How the same service experience is perceived in different cultural contexts depends not only on the quality of the service provided but also on the mental schemas used to evaluate the service. The prominence of tangibles dimension related comments in Turkish reviews of Michelin 1-star restaurants in Turkey reveals that the high-power distance tendency is directly reflected in customer perception. The increased importance given to speed, solution orientation and interaction in English reviews of Michelin 1-star restaurants in the UK shows that service quality is evaluated through different dynamics in low power distance cultures where more horizontal relationships are the norm. In this context, SERVQUAL dimensions provide a powerful analytical framework for understanding not only the quantitative elements of service, but also how cultural background shapes the service experience.

4. DISCUSSION

It is observed that customers in high-power distance cultures value the tangibles dimension, i.e., the physical elements in tourism and hospitality much more (Donthu and Yoo, 1998; Koç, 2013; Hsieh and Tsai, 2009; Bhattacharyya and Borhart, 2018). According to Furrer et al. (2000), cultures with high power distance (e.g., Turkey - power distance score: 66) emphasize the importance of physical objects because physical objects represent splendor, being elite, being superior, the extent to which one is respected and one's status in the hierarchy. Cho (2001) and Nath et al. (2016) explain the emphasis on physical elements as signaling high status, privilege and elitism (Koç, 2025). On the other hand, since the splendor of physical elements may not be very important for customers in high status, low power distance cultures (e.g., United Kingdom - power distance score: 35), they may attach less importance to the tangibles dimension of service quality (Koç, 2021). The findings of this study support this cultural construct. In Turkish customer reviews written for restaurants in Turkey, the "physical Assets" dimension has the highest rate among both positive (39.89%) and negative (40.23%) reviews. This shows that elements such as spatial qualities, visual richness, organization and presentation are decisive in the perception of service.

This finding is in line with Türkiye's high power distance cultural structure. Physical spaces are not only considered as functional, but also as symbols that carry a status meaning, making social status and elitism visible. Moreover, giving importance to physical elements may also be related to risk and uncertainty avoidance. Türkiye is a country where uncertainty avoidance is quite high with a score of 85.

The relatively lower rate of the tangibles dimension in English reviews of UK restaurants (12.78% positive, 19.91% negative) suggests that physical splendor is a secondary priority in terms of service quality in low power distance societies. On the other hand, the high level of the "responsiveness" dimension in the same comments indicates that speed, accessibility and interactivity are prioritized in customer expectations in low power distance cultures. This differentiation provides evidence that the perceptual framework for service delivery is strongly influenced by cultural background. The UK is a country that not only has a low power distance score (PDI: 35) but also a low level of uncertainty avoidance (UAI: 35). This indicates a customer profile that is more focused on the functionality, speed and direct interaction rather than the formal qualities of the service. However, the tangibles - such as building structure, furniture, decoration, quality of equipment, cleanliness of utensils such as plates, knives, etc., and the appearance of service personnel - stand out as important symbols in the tourism and hospitality experience. It is also emphasized in the literature that customers in cultures with high levels of uncertainty and risk aversion (e.g. from Taiwan) attach more importance to the tangibles, the physical elements of the service when making quality decisions than customers in cultures with low levels of uncertainty aversion (e.g. from the USA) (Hsieh and Tsai, 2009; Chatterjee et al., 2023). In this context, it can be said that cultural differences transform service expectations not only perceptually but also structurally.

The findings of the study not only provide a theoretical cultural analysis but also have important practical implications for cross-cultural service management. Such analyses of which dimensions of service will stand out in cultures with different levels of power distance allow restaurants and tourism-service businesses in general to develop service design that is sensitive to cultural expectations. For example, the prominence of the tangibles dimension in high power distance cultures and service speed and employee interaction styles in low power distance cultures suggests that cultural adaptation may be a more sustainable approach rather than uniform service standardization. Therefore, this study reveals that service quality management should not only be operational, but also culturally sensitive, and in this respect, it makes an important contribution to the differentiation of cross-cultural service strategies.

CONCLUSION

Some studies on service quality have found the tangibles as the least important dimension of all five dimensions (Alsheyad and Albalushi, 2020; Vanichchinchai, 2021). However, this research has revealed the extent to which tangibles can be decisive in the perception of service quality, especially in a cultural context with high power distance. The predominance of the "tangibles" dimension in both positive and

negative evaluations in Turkish customer reviews in Türkiye indicates that physical indicators - such as aesthetics, order, ambiance and presentation - are directly associated with service quality in the Turkish cultural structure. In cultures like Türkiye, where power distance is high, customers may attach much more importance to the tangibles elements and the physical aspects of the service.

The fact that the "responsiveness" dimension stands out in the comments made in English by the UK customers, a culture with a low level of power distance, shows that customer expectations vary depending on the cultural differences. In some cultures, "how" the service is provided rather than "what" the service is may become more important in determining the value of the service. This study emphasizes the need to consider the cultural aspects and cultural characteristics in the evaluation of service quality. It needs to be remembered that ignoring cultural differences cost Euro Disney more than 2 billion dollars (Koç, 2025). Instead of a universal service quality approach, the development of service strategies that are culturally sensitive and tailored to the characteristics of the customers plays a vital role in improving customer satisfaction and hence ensuring competitiveness of the service business. Furthermore, this research contributes to both theory and practice, by pointing out how the SERVQUAL model may operate differently across different cultural contexts.

Also, the study makes important contributions to both theory and practice by demonstrating that customer perceptions of service quality are not standardized and they cannot be evaluated independent of cultural differences. In particular, the finding that tangibles, one of the five dimensions of the SERVQUAL model, can be a determinant indicator of service quality in cultures with a relatively high-power distance, e.g., Türkiye, offers an alternative perspective to the existing literature that tangibles are generally of secondary importance (Alsheyad and Albalushi, 2020; Vanichchinchai, 2021). Moreover, the study's use of customer comments as a natural data source and systematic analysis of these comments according to SERVQUAL dimensions through keyword matching can be considered as a comprehensive methodological contribution combining qualitative and quantitative analysis approaches. In practical terms, this study highlights the importance of culturally sensitive service design processes for international service providers and draws attention to the fact that service is not evaluated in the same way in every culture. This finding suggests that cultural adaptation rather than homogeneous service standardization may be more effective in improving customer satisfaction, especially in the restaurant, hospitality and hospitality industries in general.

However, the research has some limitations. First, the analysis is limited to the customer reviews obtained from Türkiye and the United Kingdom. In this context, similar studies to be conducted in countries with other cultural structures are important to test the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the classification of SERVQUAL dimensions was performed through a semi-automatic process based on word matching, and content analyses supported by more advanced natural language processing models (e.g. BERT, ChatGPT, LLM-based classifiers) or human coding may reveal the contextual depth of the dimensions more comprehensively.

In future research, it is recommended to comparatively examine the effects of Hofstede's other cultural dimensions such as uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity- inferiority on service quality perceptions across different sectors and cultures. It is also recommended not to rely solely on textual data, but to use a variety of data collection sources such as observation, in-depth interviews and experimental methods. Finally, conducting such analyses over time series can provide important information and findings in terms of measuring the effects of cultural changes on service perception.

MICHELIN RESTORANLARINDA KÜLTÜREL FARKLILIKLAR: TÜRKİYE VE İNGİLTERE ÖRNEĞİ

1. GİRİŞ

Ziyaret edilen destinasyonların kültürel kimliğinin bir yansıması olarak gastronomi turizmi, yalnızca mutfak deneyimlerini değil, aynı zamanda sunulan hizmet kalitesini ve müşteri memnuniyetini de kapsayan çok boyutlu bir alan haline gelmiştir. Hizmet kalitesi, müşteri deneyimleri ve beklentileri, gastronomi turizmi destinasyonlarının tercih edilmesini şekillendiren ve etkileyen kritik unsurlar haline gelmiş; seyahat planlarını ve yeniden ziyaret edilme olasılığını önemli ölçüde etkilemektedir. Restoranlar tarafından sunulan hizmet kalitesi ve genel müşteri memnuniyeti, yalnızca yiyeceklerin kalitesiyle değil, aynı zamanda sunum tarzı, misafirperverlik yaklaşımı ve hizmet süreçlerinin bütüncül yapısıyla da doğrudan ilişkilidir. Restoran hizmetlerinin bu çok boyutlu doğası, müşterilerin algılarını, tepkilerini ve nihayetinde genel deneyimlerini doğrudan şekillendirmektedir.

 Müşteri deneyimi, müşterilerin hizmet aldıkları işletmelere yönelik doğrudan veya dolaylı olarak sergiledikleri tepkiler şeklinde tanımlanmaktadır. Ayyıldız ve Kuday'a (2023:55) göre müşteri deneyimi, tüketici tercihlerini etkileyen en güçlü faktörlerden biridir. Bu nedenle, alternatifler arasında seçim yaparken sıklıkla zorluk veya kararsızlık yaşayan müşteriler, giderek daha fazla sayıda dijital platformda yer alan çevrimiçi yorumlara ve puanlamalara güvenmektedir. Ayrıca restoran tercihini etkileyen diğer önemli unsurlar arasında çocuklara uygun seçenekler, hijyen standartları, çalışma saatleri, ambiyans, ürün ve hizmet kalitesi, hizmet hızı, menü çeşitliliği, yiyeceklerin kalitesi ve sağlıklılığı, marka imajı, temizlik ve konum gibi faktörler yer almaktadır (Koç, 2006; Albayrak, 2014). Bununla birlikte, bazı tüketici grupları, belirli hizmet standartlarını tanımlayan ve restoranların uluslararası düzeyde tanınmasına katkı sağlayan Michelin Rehberi'ni gastronomi turizminde önemli bir referans noktası olarak kabul etmektedir.

2. YÖNTEM

Bu çalışma, Türkiye ve Birleşik Krallık'ta bulunan bir Michelin yıldızlı restoranlara ilişkin müşteri yorumlarını analiz ederek güç mesafesi, hizmet hataları ve telafi

stratejileri arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemektedir. Analiz, Tripadvisor platformunda kullanıcılar tarafından oluşturulan çevrimiçi yorumlarla sınırlıdır. Web kazıma (web scraping) teknikleri kullanılarak toplanan yorumlar, her iki ülkede Tripadvisor'da listelenen tüm bir yıldızlı Michelin restoranlara ait tüm müşteri geri bildirimlerini içermektedir. Diğer çevrimiçi platformlar veya doğrudan müşteri görüşmeleri kapsam dışı bırakılarak yalnızca bu platformdan elde edilen veriler kullanılmıştır.

Kullanıcı tarafından oluşturulan içeriğin doğası gereği, Tripadvisor yorumları öznel ve zaman zaman tutarsız olabilmekte, bu durum veri yorumlama sürecinde çeşitli zorluklara yol açabilmektedir. Ayrıca, bu çalışma yüz yüze müşteri deneyimlerini, çalışanların bakış açılarını veya restoranların iç operasyonel süreçlerini kapsamamakta; bu unsurlar araştırmanın kapsamı dışında bırakılmıştır.

3. BULGULAR

Analiz sonuçları, Türkçe müşteri yorumlarında—hem olumlu hem de olumsuz— SERVQUAL boyutları arasında Fiziksel Varlıklar boyutunun diğerlerine kıyasla daha yüksek oranlarda yer aldığını ortaya koymuştur. Bu bulgu, çevresel estetik özellikler, mekânsal düzenlemeler, ambiyans, temizlik ve sunum tarzı gibi fiziksel unsurların Türk müşteriler tarafından hizmet kalitesinin temel göstergeleri olarak algılandığını göstermektedir. Bu sonuç, Hofstede'nin güç mesafesi kültürel boyutu ile ilişkilendirilebilir. Hofstede'ye göre, yüksek güç mesafesine sahip toplumlar hiyerarşik farklılıkları daha kolay kabullenmekte ve sosyal statü ile prestiji yansıtan sembollere daha fazla değer atfetmektedir. Türkiye'nin yüksek güç mesafesi puanı (PDI: 66), hizmet kalitesinin algılanmasında fiziksel unsurlara verilen önemi kültürel olarak desteklemektedir.

Buna karşılık, İngilizce olarak yazılmış yorumların—hem olumlu hem de olumsuz— analizi, Hizmet Hevesliliği (Responsiveness) boyutunun en belirgin SERVQUAL boyutu olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bu boyut, hizmetin hızlı sunulmasını, çalışanların yardımseverliğini ve sorun çözmeye yönelik yaklaşımlarını ifade etmektedir. İngilizce yorumlarda Fiziksel Varlıklara verilen görece daha düşük önem (olumlu yorumlarda %12,78, olumsuz yorumlarda %19,91), düşük güç mesafesine sahip kültürlerde hizmet kalitesinin daha çok etkileşimsel ve dinamik hizmet unsurlarıyla ilişkilendirildiğini göstermektedir. Bu farklılık, Hofstede'nin güç mesafesi boyutu çerçevesinde değerlendirildiğinde daha anlamlı hale gelmektedir; çünkü Birleşik Krallık'ın düşük güç mesafesi puanı (PDI: 35), kişiler arası eşitliği ve karşılıklı etkileşimi önemseyen bir kültürel yönelimi yansıtmaktadır.

4. TARTIŞMA

Bu çalışmanın bulguları, yüksek güç mesafesine sahip kültürlerdeki müşterilerin turizm ve konaklama hizmetlerinin fiziksel yönlerine önemli ölçüde daha fazla değer verdiğini öne süren mevcut literatürle tutarlıdır (Donthu & Yoo, 1998; Koç, 2013b; Hsieh & Tsai, 2009; Bhattacharyya & Borhart, 2018). Furrer ve arkadaşları (2000),

yüksek güç mesafesine sahip kültürlerde (örneğin, Türkiye – PDI: 66), somut hizmet unsurlarının ihtişam, elitlik, sosyal prestij ve hiyerarşik statü sembolleri olarak hizmet ettiğini savunmaktadır. Mimari tasarım, dekorasyon ve estetik sunum gibi fiziksel ipuçları, yalnızca hizmet niteliği olarak değil, aynı zamanda müşterinin kendi sosyal konumunun bir yansıması olarak da değerlendirilmektedir. Bu görüşü destekleyen Cho (2001) ve Nath ve arkadaşları (2016), fiziksel unsurların öne çıkmasının bu tür kültürlerde ayrıcalık, seçkinlik ve statü göstergeleriyle sıkça ilişkili olduğunu vurgulamaktadır (Koç, 2025). Buna karşılık, eşitlikçi değerlerin ve kişiler arası eşitliğin ön planda olduğu Birleşik Krallık gibi düşük güç mesafesine sahip kültürlerde (PDI: 35), müşteriler fiziksel özelliklerin yansıttığı ihtişam veya prestije daha az ilgilenebilir. Bunun yerine, hizmet kalitesi çoğunlukla kişiler arası etkileşim, hizmet hevesliliği ve işlevsellik üzerinden değerlendirilmektedir (Koç, 2021). Bu kültürel farklılıklar, hizmet stratejilerinin kültürel olarak yerleşik beklentilere uyumlu biçimde geliştirilmesinin önemini pekiştirmektedir.

SONUÇ

Bu çalışma, hizmet kalitesinin değerlendirilmesinde kültürel bağlamın dikkate alınmasının gerekliliğini vurgulamaktadır. Evrensel bir hizmet mükemmeliyeti anlayışı arayışından ziyade, belirli müşteri profillerine uygun şekilde kültürel olarak hassas hizmet stratejilerinin geliştirilmesini savunmaktadır. Bu yaklaşım, müşteri memnuniyetinin artırılmasında kritik bir rol oynamaktadır. Elde edilen bulgular, hizmet kalitesine ilişkin müşteri algılarının kültürel çerçevelerden bağımsız olarak değerlendirilemeyeceğini ortaya koymaktadır. Özellikle, mevcut literatürde çoğunlukla ikincil olarak değerlendirilen fiziksel unsurların, yüksek güç mesafesine sahip kültürlerde hizmet kalitesinin birincil göstergeleri olarak işlev görebileceğinin keşfi, kuramsal tartışmalara yeni bir bakış açısı sunmaktadır.

Çalışma metodolojik açıdan da katkı sunmakta; müşteri tarafından oluşturulan içeriği doğal bir veri kaynağı olarak kullanmakta ve bu içeriği anahtar kelime eşleştirmesi yoluyla sistematik olarak SERVQUAL boyutlarına sınıflandırarak nitel ve nicel yaklaşımları birleştirmektedir. Uygulama açısından ise, bulgular özellikle restoran, konaklama ve turizm gibi sektörlerde faaliyet gösteren uluslararası hizmet sağlayıcılar için kültürel olarak uyarlanmış hizmet tasarımının önemini vurgulamaktadır. Bu bulgu, çeşitli pazarlarda müşteri memnuniyetini artırmada standartlaştırılmış hizmet sunumundan ziyade kültürel uyumun daha etkili olabileceğini göstermektedir

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