

Article

The Role of Demographics and Previous Experience in Tourists' Experiential Perceptions

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Abstract: Tourism experiences are personal events characterized by their subjective nature. Because of this, each consumer has his or her way of perceiving the experience depending on their individual characteristics. The literature suggests that demographic and prior experience variables are factors that may influence tourists' perceptions. While some studies have examined the influence of these factors on marketing variables, more information is still needed to help predict tourists' behavior and to understand how they interpret experiences. This study explored whether experiential quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions differ according to individuals' demographic characteristics and previous experience. An online survey collected data from 367 tourists participating in tourism experiences. A *t*-test for independent samples and a Kruskal–Wallis test were used for the analysis. The results showed that the main differences were between gender groups (males and females).

Keywords: tourism experience; demographic variables; first-time tourists; repeat tourists; tourism marketing



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1. Introduction

The emergence of a new economic stage at the end of the 1990s, known as the “Experience Economy” [1], marked a trend in the tourism sector towards the experiential consumption of tourism products and services. It has been widely recognized that, in this experiential tourism context, the interest of consumers goes beyond the functional characteristics of a product or service and instead places more importance on the personal or emotional benefits that it can provide them [2–5]. Tourism experiences, unlike traditional tourism services, focus on generating affective responses [6]. Given this new approach to consumer behavior, academics and professionals must face the challenge of adapting new strategies to manage tourism experiences, especially their quality-related aspects.

Quality is an imperative factor for providing consumers with superior experiences. When tourists perceive high levels of quality, they consider their experiences to be more valuable [7]. Furthermore, it is a key issue associated with high levels of customer satisfaction and favorable behavioral intentions [8]. In the tourism literature, quality research has been generally associated with service quality. Specifically, during the last thirty years, more than one hundred scales and models for measuring service quality have been developed in different tourism contexts [9]. However, despite the importance of service quality, the new experientially oriented consumer trends require the adoption of a new quality management approach adapted to the characteristics of the new experiential offers [10].

Given the current experiential tourism context, researchers have turned their attention to experiential quality to understand better the experiential aspects of consumption [11–13]. The relevance of experiential quality lies in assessing tourists' subjective reactions [3,5,14]. Furthermore, it represents a relevant predictor of satisfaction and behavioral intentions [12,15,16]. Several studies have confirmed that high levels of experiential quality produce satisfied visitors, favoring positive behavioral intentions [12,13,16–19]. However,

the repercussion of demographic factors within the “experiential-quality–satisfaction–behavioral intention” framework needs further exploration [18]. This is especially important as one of the main characteristics of tourism experiences is that they are personal events [20]. Hence, each consumer has their own way of perceiving the experience [21] depending on their characteristics [22]. In this regard, previous studies have proposed that the demographic factors of age, gender, and education have an impact on tourists’ perceptions, intentions, and attitudes toward the experiential consumption of a product or service and their behavioral outcomes [23–26]. Even though these studies have provided relevant empirical evidence about the influence of these factors on marketing variables, more information is still needed to predict tourists’ behavior in the current experiential tourism context [27].

In addition to demographic factors, the literature suggests that tourists’ behavior may differ according to the number of times they have participated in an experience or visited a destination [23,25,28–30]. For example, some studies suggest that the motivations of first-time tourists differ from those of repeat tourists. Thus, first-time tourists are oriented towards experiencing novel activities and visiting iconic tourist attractions. In contrast, repeat tourists seek activities with which they are familiar and value feeling relaxed during their experience [31,32]. Other studies indicate that first-time visitors show a higher level of satisfaction than regular customers [32,33]. However, repeat tourists may show more favorable behavioral intentions than first-time tourists [32,34]. Analyzing the differences between first-time and repeat tourists has primarily captured the attention of marketing and tourism scholars [34]. Hence, given the empirical evidence from these previous studies, examining how experiencing a destination or experience for the first time, or conversely experiencing it regularly, may influence individuals’ attitudes is relevant to explain tourists’ behavior.

Based on this background, this study progressed beyond the functional assessment of the quality of travel experiences. It adopted an experiential approach by analyzing experiential quality, including satisfaction and behavioral intentions as subsequent outcomes. Specifically, this work extended the focus of previous studies by assessing to what extent tourists’ attitudes toward experiential quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions differ depending on demographic factors and previous experience. This could offer new insights into the configuration of quality experiences and the development of tourists’ behavioral intentions according to the characteristics of different market segments. At a theoretical level, this is intended to provide a better understanding of the potential characteristics that shape the behavior and attitudes of the experiential tourist. On a practical level, this will help tourism professionals to establish marketing strategies appropriate to the unique needs of each market segment.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Conceptualization of Tourism Experience

The concept of experience has been a relevant issue in the tourism literature since the 1970s [35]. Throughout this period, multiple interpretations of the term have emerged. Some studies refer to the tourism experience as an event different from the routine of everyday life [36]. For example, MacCannell [37] conceptualized it as a modern practice involving the search for authenticity. Smith [38] associated it with tourists’ need to visit a place different from home to experience a change. Cohen [39] related it to the search for the unknown and the novel. Other definitions emphasize the subjective nature of the tourist experience. For example, Holbrook and Hirschman [40] noted that the consumption experience involves “a constant flow of fantasies, feelings and fun” (p. 132). Csikszentmihalyi [41] argued that the experience comprises sensations of euphoria and deep enjoyment. Arnould and Price [42] stated that high levels of emotional intensity characterize the tourist experience. Otto and Ritchie [5] defined it as the subjective state of mind experienced by tourists.

In contrast to the above approaches, the tourism experience has also been defined according to the form in which it is produced. For example, Stamboulis and Skayannis [43] argued that the tourism experience results from the interaction between the tourist and the destination. Ooi [44] stated that it arises from the participation of tourists in activities that take place in a physical environment. Andersson [45] stated that it is obtained when tourism services are produced and consumed simultaneously. Prebensen et al. [46] argued that experience entails a set of cognitive and affective effects caused by encounters that occur before, during, and after the trip.

Based on the above definitions, two relevant issues of the tourism experience can be highlighted. First, one of the distinctive aspects of the tourist experience is its subjective nature [47]. According to Barnes et al. [6], this subjectivity differentiates experiences from services, as experiences focus on generating affective responses. In contrast, services are concerned with solving tourists' problems when they travel. Secondly, the tourism experience results from the tourist's interaction with various destination elements. In this regard, Walls et al. [22] pointed out that a destination brings elements of different natures that constitute the primary source of tourists' subjective responses to their experience. Therefore, destinations are also part of the generation of experiences through the organization of the place, providing the right conditions for the tourist experience to take place. Finally, to these two issues, it should be added that tourism experiences are personal events [20], and therefore each consumer has his or her way of perceiving the experience [21]. Walls et al. [22] argued that experiences vary from consumer to consumer depending on their individual characteristics, their interaction with destination elements, and the situational factors in the environment. These aspects can influence how tourists interpret their experience. Therefore, each individual assigns a different meaning to a given event, making the tourism experience unique for each person. Consequently, even if several customers are exposed to the same experience, the impact will differ for each individual [6].

2.2. *Experiential Quality, Satisfaction, and Behavioral Intentions*

Given the current experiential tourism context, researchers have turned their attention to experiential quality to understand better the experiential aspects of consumption and the emotional responses of tourists [11–13]. Several researchers have focused their attention on the study of experiential quality in different experiential tourism contexts, such as heritage tourism [12,48], theme parks [13,19,49], creative tourism [18,50], culinary tourism [51], island destinations [52], wine tourism [14], and cultural tourism [53]. While the focus of these previous studies has been on deepening the knowledge on the dimensions of experiential quality, they have also addressed the association between experiential quality and certain outcome variables. For example, in the context of heritage tourism, Chen and Chen [12] proposed the "Experience Quality-Behavioral Intention Model", which suggested that experiential quality represents a driver of perceived value, satisfaction, and behavioral intention [18]. Subsequent studies have applied this model to explain tourists' behavior from an experiential perspective [13,16,18,19,52]. Based on these antecedents and due to the experiential context of this study, it was considered appropriate to adapt this model by analyzing experiential quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. However, this work intended not to examine how these variables are correlated but to determine how the factors associated with the consumer and with the experience can contribute to explaining the performance of these variables. Putting these variables together could offer relevant information about the tourists' behavior, especially in the current tourism context in which affective responses predominate consumer perceptions and the evaluation of the experience.

2.3. *Influence of Demographic Variables on the Behavior of Experiential Tourists*

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of considering demographic factors when studying consumer behavior in tourism [54]. These considerations have led several research studies to focus on determining how certain demographic variables such as gender,

age, and education level may influence consumer attitudes towards a tourism product or service. For example, Bhat and Darzi [23] found that the effect of satisfaction on loyalty differed according to the gender of tourists. Milićević et al. [24] found that gender and age significantly impacted tourist attitudes towards some key attributes of a tourism product. Sthapit et al. [25], in the context of gastronomic tourism experiences, identified that age and gender significantly influenced the relationship between novelty seeking and the memorability of the gastronomic experience. Zhao et al. [26] examined the perceptions of homestay guests and found that gender, age, and educational level influenced the perceived value of the experience at the functional, emotional, and social levels. Okumus et al. [27], in the context of food tourism, found that age, gender, and education level strongly influenced food awareness and involvement in culinary experiences.

Based on the results of the studies mentioned above, the role of the demographic characteristics of tourists in evaluating the tourism experience is evident. In this regard, the present study aimed to determine the association between demographic factors, experiential quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. The concept of experiential quality represents the affective component of the experience [5] and encompasses the subjective responses (emotional reactions and personal feelings) of customers regarding their travel experience [12,14]. Satisfaction refers to the evaluation of the experience from a cognitive and affective perspective [55], i.e., it involves the assessment of the perceived performance of the experience and the feelings it has generated in customers [56]. Finally, behavioral intentions are defined as the tendency of consumers to engage in specific behaviors after consumption [57]. In the tourism literature, behavioral intentions reflect the likelihood of tourists repeating the experience, recommending it, or providing positive feedback [58,59]. Given the above considerations, the following hypotheses were proposed:

- H1.** *Experiential quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions differ according to tourists' gender.*
- H2.** *Experiential quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions differ according to tourists' age.*
- H3.** *Experiential quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions differ by tourists' educational level.*

2.4. Influence of Previous Experience on Experiential Tourist Behavior

In addition to demographic factors, the literature suggests that previous experience influences tourists' perceptions of their experience [29]. According to Jarumaneerat [28], experiences gained from previous trips become a source of accumulated knowledge, providing information that encourages individuals to interpret a given context or situation in one way or another. Because of this, previous studies have examined how the valuation of an experience can vary depending on whether the tourist is visiting the destination or participating in the experience for the first time or whether they are a repeat tourist. For example, Bhat and Darzi [23] found that repeat visitors tended to show higher satisfaction levels and develop more favorable behavioral intentions than first-time tourists. Sthapit et al. [25] demonstrated that first-time tourists participating in a dining experience were more willing to experiment with new culinary products.

In contrast, repeat tourists prefer local foods with which they are more acquainted. Rather et al. [30] confirmed that there were significant differences between first-time and repeat visitors regarding customer engagement with the destination and consumer experience ratings. In contrast to the results of these studies, Shavanddasht and Allan [33], in the context of hot spring tourism experiences, found that there were no significant differences between first-time and repeat visitors regarding their emotional involvement, satisfaction, and loyalty to the experience. However, they observed that repeat visitors tended to be slightly more loyal to the experience and emotionally involved and satisfied than first-time visitors.

Given the above considerations, it is evident that the experience gained on previous trips determines the future behavior of tourists. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the influence of previous experience on experiential quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. Prior experience in this study refers to previous visits to the destination, previous

participation in the experience, and previous participation in experiences similar to that considered in this study.

H4. *A previous visit to the destination influences experiential quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions.*

H5. *Previous participation in the experience influences experiential quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions.*

H6. *Previous participation in similar experiences influences experiential quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions.*

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Instrument

This study followed an exploratory approach and adopted a quantitative methodology. An online survey was used for data collection because, on the one hand, it offered the possibility to collect data at an international level and, on the other hand, the empirical work coincided with the health crisis caused by the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Given that the possibility of conducting face-to-face surveys was utterly diminished during this situation, an online survey was the most appropriate way of collecting data [60]. For the online survey, a structured questionnaire was prepared in English, French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. Given the international scope of the study, a survey developed in several languages was required due to the need to contact people who had participated in tourism experiences offered in different international geographical areas. Furthermore, as an online survey could increase the likelihood of obtaining a low response rate [61], a multilingual survey allowed access to a broader sample of tourists. Prior to the launch of the survey, a pre-test and a pilot test were carried out.

3.2. Variable Measurement

For the measurement of the variables, scales tested in previous research were adapted to the context of this study. For experiential quality, the scale of Domínguez-Quintero et al. was adapted [53]. For satisfaction, we used five indicators adapted from Ali et al. [62], Ghorbanzade et al. [19], Jin et al. [13], Loureiro and Cunha [63], and Song et al. [64]. For behavioral intentions, the scale of Muskat et al. [65] was adapted. The adapted scales are presented in Appendix A. Following the advantages outlined by Chen et al. [66], all variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. To minimize the effects of common method variance (CMV), the order of measurement of the dependent and independent variables was modified [67].

3.3. Research Context and Participants

A set of tourism experiences offered at the international level was identified for the selection of the sample. Nature-based and cultural tourism experiences were selected, as these typologies have experienced remarkable growth worldwide due to their ability to provide unique tourism experiences to visitors [68]. Furthermore, these experiences were chosen based on specific criteria that allowed them to be correctly identified as tourism experiences. To this end, we verified that they included aspects of the dimensions of Pine and Gilmore's experience model [1]. The sample was selected using the non-probabilistic convenience sampling method and was composed of tourists who had participated in one of the selected tourism experiences.

3.4. Fieldwork

Participants were contacted through the Facebook page of the companies offering the selected experiences. Specifically, the survey was sent as a private message to those tourists who had left a comment or opinion about any of the selected experiences on this social network. This made it possible to verify that the participants had participated in such an experience. We also obtained the collaboration of certain tourism companies that offered

some of the selected tourism experiences. They disseminated the survey through email and social networks among their customers. As a result of the survey dissemination activities, a total sample of 367 valid observations was obtained. The fieldwork was carried out in 2021 from February to May.

3.5. Data Analysis

Before data analysis, the possible presence of CMV was tested by applying Harman's single-factor test consisting of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) [67]. The EFA results recorded three common factors explaining 64.32% of the total variance, with the first accounting for 48.64% of the total variance. This indicated that CMV was absent in the data obtained, as the total variance explained by the first factor was less than 50% [67]. Following the recommendations of Verma and Salam [69], the normality of the data distribution was verified by applying the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. The results indicated that the study variables showed a non-normal distribution. Finally, the reliability of the scales measuring the variables was assessed using the Cronbach's alpha statistical method. Hair et al. [70] state that values of 0.60 to 0.70 indicate adequate levels of reliability. Table 1 shows that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient values were above the recommended thresholds. Therefore, it was confirmed that the scales measuring experiential quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions had adequate levels of reliability.

Table 1. Assessment of the reliability of the scales used to measure the variables.

Variable	Item	Cronbach's Alpha
Experiential quality	7	0.804
Satisfaction	5	0.912
Behavioral intentions	5	0.878

Source: own elaboration.

To verify the research hypotheses, a *t*-test for independent samples was used to determine whether the assessments of experiential quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions differed according to the tourists' gender, previous visits to the destination, previous participation in the experience, and previous participation in similar experiences. A *t*-test for independent samples is one of the most commonly used parametric tests to explore differences between two separate groups [69]. Although the data of this study showed a non-normal distribution, Sarstedt and Mooi [71] state that parametric tests present robust results even if the assumptions of normality are not met. Furthermore, the *t*-test for independent samples offers values close to those obtained with the Z statistic test [72], which is employed in the Mann–Whitney U test [73]. On the other hand, the non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis test was used for the variables of age and educational level. The Kruskal–Wallis test allows the comparison of more than two groups for one variable and is an alternative to the parametric ANOVA test [69]. Although ANOVA can be used on data with a non-normal distribution, this can generate a significant bias in the results, especially when the groups to be compared have an unequal sample size [71]. Given that this was the case for the sample sizes of the groups' age and educational level, Kruskal–Wallis was considered the most appropriate test. The IBM SPSS 29.0.0.0 statistical program was used for data analysis.

The results of the demographic profile shown in Table 2 indicated that the highest percentage of the sample was made up of women (71.8%). Most participants were aged between 26 and 45 years (51.6%) and had received higher education (76.9%). Regarding the place of residence, the sample comprised participants from different parts of the world; specifically, from 35 countries. The most representative places of residence in the sample were Mexico (19.3%), Spain (13.9%), Chile (11.2%), the United States (7.9%), Argentina (7.6%), Italy (5.4%), and France (4.6%). These countries comprised 69.9% of the total sample, while 30.1% was distributed among the 28 remaining countries.

Table 2. Socio-demographic profile of the tourists.

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender (<i>n</i> = 355)	Female	255	71.8
	Male	100	28.2
Age (<i>n</i> = 355)	18–25 years old	34	9.6
	26–35 years old	94	26.5
	36–45 years old	89	25.1
	46–55 years old	64	18.0
	56–65 years old	55	15.5
	Above 65 years old	19	5.4
Educational level (<i>n</i> = 355)	Primary school	7	2.0
	Secondary school	46	13.0
	Higher education	273	76.9
	Other	29	8.2
Place of residence (<i>n</i> = 355)	Mexico	71	19.3
	Spain	51	13.9
	Chile	41	11.2
	United States	29	7.9
	Argentina	28	7.6
	Italy	20	5.4
	France	17	4.6
	Other countries	98	30.1

Source: own elaboration.

Concerning the tourism experience, the results in Table 3 indicate that the years 2017, 2018, and 2019 represented the periods in which most tourists reported having participated in a tourism experience. The results also showed that the highest percentage of tourists visited the destination for the first time (73.8%) and participated in the tourism experience for the first time (79.6%). This indicated that most of the sample comprised tourists who had visited the destination or participated in the experience for the first time. Finally, it was observed that most tourists had participated in experiences similar to that reported in this study (60.5%).

Table 3. General characteristics of participation in tourist experiences.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Year of the experience (<i>n</i> = 367)	2021	28	7.6
	2020	38	10.4
	2019	138	37.6
	2018	71	19.3
	2017	55	15.0
	2016	22	6.0
	2015	6	1.6
	2012	1	0.3
	2011	1	0.3
	Other years	7	1.9
Previous visit to the destination (<i>n</i> = 367)	Yes	271	73.8
	No	96	26.2
Previous participation in the experience (<i>n</i> = 367)	Yes	292	79.6
	No	75	20.4
Previous participation in similar experiences (<i>n</i> = 367)	Yes	222	60.5
	No	145	39.5

Source: own elaboration.

4. Results

The *t*-test for independent samples in Table 4 shows significant differences between males and females in terms of perceived experiential quality and satisfaction. However, for behavioral intentions, there were no significant differences between the groups. These results suggested that hypothesis H1 found partial empirical support in the data of this study.

Table 4. Independent-samples *t*-test for the gender variable.

Variable/Item	Female		Male		<i>t</i> Value	<i>p</i> Value
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.		
Experiential quality ^b	4.80	0.344	4.66	0.492	2.631	0.009 *
CEX1 ^b	4.87	0.420	4.76	0.553	1.807	0.036 *
CEX2 ^a	4.84	0.516	4.69	0.615	2.205	0.014 *
CEX3 ^b	4.70	0.719	4.58	0.843	1.367	0.086 ^{ns}
CEX4 ^b	4.84	0.526	4.66	0.728	2.243	0.013 *
CEX5 ^b	4.77	0.530	4.63	0.630	1.946	0.027 *
CEX6 ^b	4.86	0.426	4.72	0.604	2.160	0.016 *
CEX7 ^b	4.76	0.588	4.62	0.736	1.759	0.040 *
Satisfaction ^b	4.89	0.327	4.76	0.566	2.120	0.036 *
SAT1 ^b	4.90	0.472	4.80	0.620	1.485	0.070 ^{ns}
SAT2 ^b	4.84	0.485	4.76	0.638	1.177	0.120 ^{ns}
SAT3 ^b	4.88	0.403	4.75	0.592	1.994	0.024 *
SAT4 ^b	4.91	0.344	4.74	0.613	2.672	0.004 *
SAT5 ^b	4.92	0.357	4.77	0.548	2.561	0.006 *
Behavioral intentions ^b	4.90	0.307	4.83	0.439	1.466	0.145 ^{ns}
FIC1 ^b	4.83	0.539	4.74	0.676	1.209	0.114 ^{ns}
FIC2 ^b	4.93	0.317	4.87	0.442	1.146	0.127 ^{ns}
FIC3 ^b	4.93	0.272	4.84	0.465	1.805	0.037 *
FIC4 ^a	4.89	0.421	4.84	0.507	0.953	0.171 ^{ns}
FIC5 ^b	4.93	0.330	4.86	0.450	1.323	0.094 ^{ns}

^a Equal variances were assumed; ^b equal variances were not assumed; * significant $p < 0.05$; ^{ns} not significant. Source: own elaboration.

The findings of the Kruskal–Wallis test presented in Table 5 show that there were no significant differences between the age groups in terms of experiential quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. Therefore, hypothesis H2 did not find empirical support in the data of this study. Despite these results, by analyzing each item, it could be observed that for experiential quality, tourists highly valued the fact that their experience allowed them to escape from their daily routine (CEX6). Specifically, as shown in Table 6, comparing the age groups, this represented an aspect highly valued by tourists from 26 to 35 years old.

Table 7 shows the results of the Kruskal–Wallis test for the educational level variable. The results showed no differences between the educational-level groups in terms of the perceived experiential quality, satisfaction with the experience, and future behavioral intentions. Therefore, hypothesis H3 did not find empirical support in the data of this study.

Table 5. Kruskal–Wallis test for the age variable.

Variable/Item	H of Kruskal–Wallis Test	Sig.
Experiential quality	5.235	0.388 ^{ns}
CEX1	5.832	0.323 ^{ns}
CEX2	9.506	0.090 ^{ns}
CEX3	5.665	0.340 ^{ns}
CEX4	8.633	0.125 ^{ns}
CEX5	6.150	0.292 ^{ns}
CEX6	14.558	0.012 *
CEX7	3.908	0.563 ^{ns}
Satisfaction	7.666	0.176 ^{ns}
SAT1	3.268	0.659 ^{ns}
SAT2	6.730	0.242 ^{ns}
SAT3	7.329	0.197 ^{ns}
SAT4	3.946	0.557 ^{ns}
SAT5	5.039	0.411 ^{ns}
Behavioral intentions	2.368	0.796 ^{ns}
FIC1	3.848	0.572 ^{ns}
FIC2	6.331	0.275 ^{ns}
FIC3	3.762	0.584 ^{ns}
FIC4	1.565	0.905 ^{ns}
FIC5	3.391	0.640 ^{ns}

* Significant $p < 0.05$; ^{ns} not significant. Source: own elaboration.

Table 6. Comparison between groups for the item CEX6.

Item	Pairwise Comparisons	Sig.
CEX6	18–25 years old (mean = 4.68)	0.018 *
	26–35 years old (mean = 4.95)	0.029 *
	36–45 years old (mean = 4.82)	0.011 *
	46–55 years old (mean = 4.78)	0.002 *
	Above 65 years old (mean = 4.58)	0.002 *

* Significant $p < 0.05$. Source: own elaboration.

Table 7. Kruskal–Wallis test for the educational-level variable.

Variable/Item	H of Kruskal–Wallis Test	Sig.
Experiential quality	2.153	0.541 ^{ns}
CEX1	1.638	0.651 ^{ns}
CEX2	1.545	0.672 ^{ns}
CEX3	2.747	0.432 ^{ns}
CEX4	1.549	0.671 ^{ns}
CEX5	2.825	0.419 ^{ns}
CEX6	3.193	0.363 ^{ns}
CEX7	6.303	0.098 ^{ns}
Satisfaction	1.747	0.627 ^{ns}
SAT1	2.477	0.480 ^{ns}
SAT2	1.332	0.722 ^{ns}
SAT3	1.075	0.783 ^{ns}
SAT4	2.372	0.499 ^{ns}
SAT5	1.539	0.673 ^{ns}
Behavioral intentions	2.409	0.492 ^{ns}
FIC1	1.948	0.574 ^{ns}
FIC2	0.574	0.902 ^{ns}
FIC3	1.713	0.634 ^{ns}
FIC4	2.694	0.441 ^{ns}
FIC5	1.473	0.688 ^{ns}

^{ns} not significant. Source: own elaboration.

The results of the t -test for independent samples in Table 8 show that there were no relevant significant differences between first-time and repeat tourists in terms of perceived experiential quality, satisfaction with the experience, and future behavioral intentions. Therefore, hypothesis H4 did not find empirical support in the data of this study.

Table 8. Independent-samples *t*-test for the previous destination visit variable.

Variable/Item	First-Time Visitors		Repeat Visitors		<i>t</i> Value	<i>p</i> Value
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.		
Experiential quality ^a	4.76	0.405	4.78	0.351	−0.313	0.754 ^{ns}
CEX1 ^a	4.84	0.482	4.85	0.383	−0.303	0.381 ^{ns}
CEX2 ^b	4.79	0.576	4.86	0.426	−1.408	0.080 ^{ns}
CEX3 ^b	4.66	0.796	4.74	0.585	−1.077	0.141 ^{ns}
CEX4 ^b	4.82	0.536	4.71	0.710	1.443	0.076 ^{ns}
CEX5 ^a	4.74	0.566	4.73	0.533	0.134	0.447 ^{ns}
CEX6 ^a	4.84	0.488	4.79	0.457	0.872	0.192 ^{ns}
CEX7 ^b	4.70	0.662	4.80	0.515	−1.469	0.072 ^{ns}
Satisfaction ^a	4.84	0.437	4.89	0.300	−0.949	0.343 ^{ns}
SAT1 ^b	4.85	0.571	4.95	0.266	−2.167	0.015 [*]
SAT2 ^a	4.81	0.564	4.86	0.401	−0.903	0.184 ^{ns}
SAT3 ^b	4.83	0.495	4.90	0.340	−1.429	0.077 ^{ns}
SAT4 ^a	4.86	0.463	4.89	0.352	−0.423	0.336 ^{ns}
SAT5 ^a	4.89	0.382	4.88	0.508	0.213	0.416 ^{ns}
Behavioral intentions ^a	4.87	0.369	4.90	0.288	−0.698	0.486 ^{ns}
FIC1 ^b	4.78	0.629	4.88	0.417	−1.686	0.046 [*]
FIC2 ^a	4.91	0.369	4.92	0.313	−0.211	0.416 ^{ns}
FIC3 ^a	4.90	0.342	4.92	0.313	−0.317	0.376 ^{ns}
FIC4 ^a	4.86	0.479	4.91	0.358	−0.799	0.212 ^{ns}
FIC5 ^b	4.91	0.375	4.90	0.340	0.359	0.360 ^{ns}

^a Equal variances were assumed; ^b equal variances were not assumed; ^{*} significant $p < 0.05$; ^{ns} not significant. Source: own elaboration.

The independent-samples *t*-test results in Table 9 show that perceived experiential quality, satisfaction with the experience, and behavioral intentions did not differ significantly between first-time and repeat tourists. Therefore, hypothesis H5 did not find empirical support in the data of this study. By analyzing each item, significant differences were only found for CEX2 and CEX4, corresponding to experiential quality, and FIC1 and FIC2, related to behavioral intentions.

Table 9. Independent-samples *t*-test for the variable of previous participation in the experience.

Variable/Item	First-Time Visitors		Repeat Visitors		<i>t</i> Value	<i>p</i> Value
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.		
Experiential quality	4.78	0.397	4.74	0.368	0.805	0.421 ^{ns}
CEX1 ^b	4.86	0.423	4.79	0.576	0.979	0.165 ^{ns}
CEX2 ^b	4.79	0.571	4.88	0.401	−1.616	0.054 [*]
CEX3 ^a	4.67	0.775	4.72	0.627	−0.539	0.295 ^{ns}
CEX4 ^b	4.85	0.495	4.57	0.825	2.772	0.003 [*]
CEX5 ^b	4.76	0.543	4.65	0.604	1.351	0.090 ^{ns}
CEX6 ^b	4.85	0.462	4.76	0.541	1.261	0.105 ^{ns}
CEX7 ^b	4.71	0.659	4.81	0.485	−1.537	0.063 ^{ns}
Satisfaction	4.85	0.435	4.88	0.259	−0.670	0.503 ^{ns}
SAT1 ^a	4.87	0.517	4.92	0.487	−0.810	0.209 ^{ns}
SAT2 ^b	4.81	0.566	4.88	0.327	−1.429	0.077 ^{ns}
SAT3 ^a	4.85	0.484	4.85	0.356	−0.125	0.450 ^{ns}
SAT4 ^a	4.86	0.466	4.91	0.293	−0.833	0.203 ^{ns}
SAT5 ^a	4.88	0.389	4.88	0.519	0.066	0.474 ^{ns}

Table 9. Cont.

Variable/Item	First-Time Visitors		Repeat Visitors		t Value	p Value
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.		
Behavioral intentions	4.86	0.376	4.93	0.209	−1.389	0.166 ^{ns}
FIC1 ^b	4.78	0.622	4.91	0.374	−2.289	0.012 [*]
FIC2 ^b	4.90	0.384	4.96	0.197	−1.961	0.026 [*]
FIC3 ^a	4.90	0.348	4.92	0.273	−0.367	0.357 ^{ns}
FIC4 ^b	4.86	0.478	4.92	0.319	−1.232	0.110 ^{ns}
FIC5 ^b	4.90	0.393	4.95	0.226	−1.420	0.079 ^{ns}

^a Equal variances were assumed; ^b equal variances were not assumed; * significant $p < 0.05$; ^{ns} not significant. Source: own elaboration.

The results of the independent-samples *t*-test in Table 10 show that perceived experiential quality, satisfaction with the experience, and behavioral intentions were similarly based on whether tourists had or had not previously participated in similar experiences. Therefore, hypothesis H6 did not find empirical support in the data of this study. By analyzing each item, significant differences were only found for CEX6 for experiential quality.

Table 10. Independent-samples *t*-test for the variable of previous participation in similar experiences.

Variable/Item	Previous Participation in Similar Experience				t Value	p Value
	Yes		No			
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.		
Experiential quality	4.76	0.417	4.78	0.349	−0.387	0.699 ^{ns}
CEX1 ^b	4.82	0.507	4.88	0.370	−1.222	0.111 ^{ns}
CEX2 ^a	4.79	0.590	4.83	0.457	−0.799	0.212 ^{ns}
CEX3 ^a	4.68	0.719	4.68	0.790	0.054	0.478 ^{ns}
CEX4 ^a	4.80	0.584	4.78	0.595	0.358	0.360 ^{ns}
CEX5 ^a	4.76	0.542	4.70	0.579	0.897	0.185 ^{ns}
CEX6 ^b	4.78	0.553	4.90	0.328	−2.450	0.007 [*]
CEX7 ^a	4.74	0.641	4.72	0.609	0.320	0.374 ^{ns}
Satisfaction	4.87	0.384	4.83	0.437	0.971	0.332 ^{ns}
SAT1 ^a	4.88	0.537	4.88	0.470	0.046	0.482 ^{ns}
SAT2 ^b	4.86	0.473	4.77	0.598	1.416	0.079 ^{ns}
SAT3 ^a	4.86	0.436	4.82	0.495	0.899	0.185 ^{ns}
SAT4 ^b	4.89	0.411	4.83	0.472	1.198	0.116 ^{ns}
SAT5 ^a	4.89	0.443	4.87	0.377	0.513	0.304 ^{ns}
Behavioral intentions	4.89	0.340	4.85	0.364	1.067	0.287 ^{ns}
FIC1 ^a	4.82	0.579	4.77	0.586	0.835	0.202 ^{ns}
FIC2 ^a	4.91	0.365	4.90	0.340	0.289	0.386 ^{ns}
FIC3 ^a	4.91	0.344	4.90	0.319	0.181	0.428 ^{ns}
FIC4 ^b	4.92	0.384	4.81	0.531	2.194	0.015 ^{ns}
FIC5 ^a	4.91	0.365	4.90	0.368	0.457	0.324 ^{ns}

^a Equal variances were assumed; ^b equal variances were not assumed; * significant $p < 0.05$; ^{ns} not significant. Source: own elaboration.

5. Discussion

This study's results showed no significant differences in behavioral intentions between males and females. These results were similar to those of Lu et al. [74], who found that loyalty did not differ according to the gender of visitors. In contrast to this result, significant differences were found between males and females with respect to experiential quality and satisfaction. In particular, it was observed that women rated experiential quality more highly and were more satisfied with their experience. This could be because women seek benefits from their experiences [75].

Consequently, when experiences meet these expectations, their satisfaction with the experience may increase. These results differed from those obtained by Bhat and Darzi [23], who found that, compared to women, male tourists showed higher levels of satisfaction. The disparity between the results of the two studies may be because Bhat and Darzi [23] examined the association between destination image, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. In this case, male tourists may be more likely to rate their satisfaction based on their image of the destination they have visited.

Regarding the age of the tourists, the results revealed no significant differences between age groups in terms of their satisfaction with the experience and their behavioral intentions. These findings were consistent with Geetha et al. [76] and Lu et al. [74]. Despite there being no significant differences, it could be observed that for experiential quality, there were significant differences between the age groups regarding tourists' ratings of the fact that the tourism experience allowed them to escape from their daily routine. Compared to tourists in the other age groups, this aspect was more important for the 26–45 age group. This could be because people in this age group still maintain active work and family lives with more marked routines. Therefore, tourism is a means to provide them with the opportunity to experience new activities and escape their daily routine.

Another study finding revealed that there were no differences between the educational-level groups in terms of perceived experiential quality, satisfaction with the experience, and future behavioral intentions. These results were similar to those obtained by Lu et al. [74], who found that, besides gender and age, educational level did not influence the effect of experiential quality and satisfaction on loyalty. The educational level may determine tourists' behavior in specific tourism experiences and be associated with other factors. For example, Okumus et al. [27] confirmed that tourists with a higher level of education were more willing to participate in culinary tourism experiences compared to visitors with a basic level of education.

Concerning previous experience, whether tourists were first-time or repeat consumers did not generate differences in perceived experiential quality, satisfaction with the experience, and behavioral intentions. These findings were in line with those of Shavanddasht and Allan [33], who found no significant differences between first-time and repeat visitors in terms of their emotional involvement, satisfaction, and loyalty to the experience. Although the differences between the two groups were insignificant, the results showed that, in terms of experiential quality, first-time visitors valued more highly the fact that their experience allowed them to learn, actively participate, and escape from their daily routine. On the contrary, those who had previously visited the destination, participated in the experience, and had similar experiences were more likely to value the fact that, during a tourist experience, they could have fun and feel at ease, relaxed, and safe. These differences could be attributed to the fact that first-time tourists show a more active attitude when encountering new experiences [13]. In contrast, repeat visitors with more knowledge about the experience may be more interested in enjoying the experience in a more hedonic way.

Finally, the findings suggested that tourists who had previously visited the destination, participated in the experience, and had similar experiences showed slightly higher levels of satisfaction and behavioral intentions compared to first-time tourists. This could be because repeat tourists develop a personal attachment to the destination, thus expressing more satisfaction with their experience and developing more favorable behavioral intentions [33]. In contrast, first-time tourists generally avoid developing a personal attachment to the destination, as they have less information about it [30]. This consequently affects their satisfaction with the experience and their behavioral intentions.

6. Conclusions

This study aimed to determine how perceived experiential quality, satisfaction with the experience, and behavioral intentions could differ between groups classified by demographic factors and previous experience. The results showed that the main differences were found within gender groups (males and females). In contrast, groups classified by

age, educational level, previous visits to the destination, previous participation in the experience, and previous participation in similar experiences did not show significant differences. The main contribution of this study consists in providing empirical insights about the possible characteristics inherent to the tourist and the experience that determine the behavior of a consumer of tourism experiences in terms of developing pleasant affective responses and favorable levels of satisfaction and behavioral intentions.

From a theoretical perspective, this study made the following contributions. First, it contributed to the literature on experiential tourism by analyzing the differences in assessing experiential quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions according to demographic factors and previous experience. Given the current experiential tourism context and considering that tourism experiences are purely personal subjective events, it is relevant to understand how demographic variables shape individual interests and attitudes. Additionally, although previous studies have explored the differences between first-time and repeat visitors, this work provided additional evidence about the quality preferences of each group of visitors in regard to tourism experiences. Second, with the inclusion of experiential quality, this study contributed to the body of knowledge about quality in tourism by providing an enhanced understanding of this subject from a more experiential than functional approach. Previous studies on experiential quality have mainly focused on identifying the dimensions that make up experiential quality and establishing their links with variables. Therefore, this work broadened the scope of past studies on experiential quality by investigating tourists' tendencies to experience one type of affective response as a function of their characteristics and previous experience. Finally, in terms of satisfaction and behavioral intentions, although no significant relevant differences were found, except for the gender variable, the results contributed to the tourism literature by demonstrating that research could move towards studying outcome variables that go beyond satisfaction and are associated with more personal benefits, such as happiness, quality of life, or transformation.

From a practical perspective, the results of this study contributed information that could guide tourism professionals in establishing marketing strategies appropriate to the unique needs of each market segment. With respect to the analysis of demographic variables, gender was the variable that was most strongly associated with perceived quality, satisfaction, and intentions to behave. In this regard, business and destination managers should consider the preferences and needs of each group when designing tourism experiences, as this will subsequently determine their satisfaction with the experience and their behavioral intentions towards it. For example, considering the attributes that have a greater effect on women, tourism companies should design experiences with a component of fun, learning, escapism, relaxation, and safety. For men, the components of fun and escapism are the most valued in a tourism experience. On the other hand, marketing strategies should be designed to convey appropriate messages for each market segment. These messages should inform tourists about the experiential characteristics of the service or product offered.

In the case of first-time and repeat visitors, Lehto et al. [77] pointed out that, without knowing the differences between the two groups, it is challenging to design tourism products suited to the needs of each market segment and, above all, to establish marketing strategies that attract tourists more effectively. Therefore, in this study, although no significant differences were detected between the two groups, it was possible to observe the tendency of each segment to adopt a specific type of behavior or to have particular preferences. Thus, for first-time tourists, company and destination managers could focus on designing experiences that allow them to learn new things, participate actively, and escape from their daily routine. This could be achieved by including educational and interpretative elements (e.g., videos, photos, and virtual reality) that convey information in a didactic and attractive way to capture visitors' attention. It is also essential that during the experience, these tourists have the opportunity to "do things", as first-time customers seek to enjoy the destination in a more active rather than passive way, which in turn will contribute to an increased sense of escape from their daily activities.

On the other hand, repeat tourists are more likely to value the fact that, during a tourism experience, they can have fun and feel at ease, relaxed, and safe. This implies that destination managers and companies should take actions to ensure that this group of customers obtain an experience with all the necessary and personalized services. In this respect, companies could gather information about recurrent consumers' travel habits to anticipate their needs.

The study's limitations were related to the use of non-probability convenience sampling, which may have limited the generalizability of the results. Second, this study examined the association between demographic variables, prior experience, experiential quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. Further studies could explore how each aspect that determines experiential quality influences tourists' satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Third, age, gender, and educational level were considered as the demographic variables. Future studies could include other variables such as income, occupation, travel arrangements, the number of people travelling together, and the length of stay. Finally, satisfaction and behavioral intentions were considered as the outcome variables. Future studies could analyze outcome variables associated with the personal sphere of tourists, e.g., quality of life, subjective well-being, happiness, and transformation.

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Appendix A. Measurement Items

Experiential quality

CEX1_In that experience I had fun.

CEX2_In that experience I felt at ease.

CEX3_In that experience I felt relaxed.

CEX4_In that experience I learnt new things.

CEX5_In that experience I actively participated.

CEX6_In that experience I escaped from the routine by doing something new.

CEX7_In that experience I felt safe.

Satisfaction

- SAT1_I was satisfied with my decision to participate in that experience.
- SAT2_That experience met my expectations.
- SAT3_My feelings towards that experience were positive.
- SAT4_Overall, I was satisfied with that experience.
- SAT5_My choice to participate in that experience was a wise one.

Behavioral intentions

- FIC1_I would like to participate in that experience again.
- FIC2_I would recommend that experience to others.
- FIC3_I would say positive things about that experience to others.
- FIC4_I would like to participate in similar experiences.
- FIC5_I would recommend to others to participate in similar experiences.

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