How Do E-Brand Experience and In-Store Experience Influence the Brand Loyalty of Novel Coffee Brands in China? Exploring the Roles of Customer Satisfaction and Self–Brand Congruity

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Abstract: China's coffee sector is experiencing a transformation related to sustainability. While the media have reported various novel coffee brands in China, scholars have mostly focused on established non-Chinese coffee brands. These studies still cite the relevance of the growing middle class, which adopts coffee as part of an 'exquisite Western lifestyle' and form the antecedents of brand loyalty from an established coffee brand perspective. These antecedents may not directly apply to novel coffee brands that face the changing consumption habits of younger Chinese consumers, who stress coffee's functionality and price performance. Drawing on a social service perspective, this study addresses how E-brand experience and in-store experience each affect customer satisfaction and brand loyalty, as well as the role of customer's self–brand congruity. The conceptual model was empirically tested using an online survey of 332 Chinese novel coffee brand customers. Our results suggest that E-brand experience (EBE) and in-store experience (SBE) both affect customer satisfaction (CA), with each relationship moderated by self–brand congruity (SBC); CA mediates the relationship between EBE and brand loyalty and that between SBE and brand loyalty. Moreover, younger respondents in this study were more likely to develop customer satisfaction and brand loyalty toward novel Chinese coffee brands.

Keywords: E-brand experience; in-store experience; novel coffee brand; self-congruity; customer satisfaction; brand loyalty

1. Introduction

The coffee sector, as a global value chain, has been deemed as 'soft gold' and a 'green bank' that affords a livelihood to coffee growers and sustainable growth in the local economy [1]. The sector has experienced transformations relating to sustainability [2], with over 1.5 billion workers from Asia, South America and Africa producing over 1025.62 million tons of coffee consumed in European and American markets [3]. However, China's emergence in the global value chain has been recent, although attention has been growing as the country's coffee consumption surges, with coffee shop retail revenue exceeding $3 billion in 2016 [4,5]. The literature has attributed China's surging coffee market to the country's rapid economic growth, improving living standards and cultural transformation (i.e., embracing a Western lifestyle among middle-class consumers) [6–8]. Moreover, research interest has been primarily on non-Chinese brands such as Starbucks, Tim Horton's, Costa Coffee and Lavazza, which have dominated the local coffee consumption markets [4].

Most studies have sought to explain how established non-Chinese brands such as Starbucks obtain customer loyalty and form a dominant market position [6–8], with limited attention to novel brands. These researchers have not considered the coffee produced in China. Specifically, Yunnan province contributes 98% of China's coffee output [4], supplying coffee beans to the novel coffee brands in the country. The prevailing focus on antecedents (e.g., brand image, corporate reputation, perceived quality) of brand loyalty for established coffee brands could be problematic because those antecedents [9–11] may not

directly apply to novel brands. This probably explains why a significant proportion of new brands often fail, despite various efforts to develop them [12,13]. This is particularly the case for novel coffee brands in China, such as Luckin, Pacific Coffee, Manner, Seesaw and T97. These brands provide services in coffee shops and packaged coffee products in retail stores and online shopping websites such as Taobao and JD. Understanding the antecedents that shape consumers' loyalty to novel coffee brands is important for China's sustainable development of its coffee sector. Moreover, from a customer experience perspective, the discovery of antecedents in order for customers to develop repeated purchase (i.e., loyalty) can contribute to understanding how coffee-drinking habits among Chinese consumers is developing in a sustainable manner [2].

In the competitive coffee market, reaching customers and obtaining their brand loyalty proves to be a challenging task [5]. A number of authors [14–16] have identified the various marketing strategies that Chinese coffee brands adopt to improve their presence and consumer experience, including adopting coffee production technologies, obtaining international certifications, improving interactions with customers on live-stream platforms and improving customer services in retail stores. When purchasing coffee in different settings, customers consume coffee made of different beans mixed with water and milk of different qualities, interact with different service providers and experience different types of background music, lighting and aroma [17].

So far, not much has been written about consumers' psychological responses to novel coffee brands. The limited studies on novel brands have focused on chocolate [18], apparel [19] and household appliances [20]; these products are different from coffee itself in consumption settings. The service-scape perspective has been used to interpret how customers respond to the environment-specific stimuli that are generated from customer–environment interactions and can provide satisfaction and pleasure that lead to brand loyalty [21]. Chinese novel coffee brands primarily interact with customers in two scenarios: livestreaming platforms and retail shops. Livestreaming platforms such as TikTok allow novel coffee brands to reach a large number of potential customers, introduce coffee consumption knowledge, improve brand exposure and sell vouchers and coupons. These collectively lead to E-brand experience, i.e., customers' responses to novel brands in digital spaces [22]. So far, attention to customers' E-brand experience on livestream platforms primarily appears in news reports, rather than research. Another stream of literature studies customers' in-store experience, i.e., in coffee shops [11]. The identified antecedents of customer loyalty include coffee shops' public image [23], cognitive awareness, perceived value, affective feelings and brand satisfaction [11]. However, these studies primarily focus on established brands such as Starbucks, assuming that these antecedents are developed in retail stores. Nevertheless, we argue that, for novel coffee brands that have low market exposure, these antecedents may collectively come from digital platforms and retail stores.

In addition to the aforementioned antecedents, several scholars [17,24] note that customers' repeated coffee consumption may be affected by their perceptions of the values and meanings embodied in novel coffee brands. In particular, the alignment between customers' self-concept and the perceived image of a branded product (i.e., self–brand congruity) could affect consumers' repeated purchases [25]. Therefore, this study aims to answer: how do the above-mentioned environmental cues collectively form the E-brand experience and in-store experience that influence customers' satisfaction, which further affects loyalty? How does self–brand congruity moderate such a relationship? In this study, we draw on the social service-scape perspective to investigate the relative importance of E-brand experience, store experience, customer satisfaction and person–brand congruity on brand loyalty towards novel coffee brands in China.

The research was conducted on 347 customers of a novel coffee brand in China. It makes an initial contribution to the understanding of antecedents of brand loyalty to novel coffee brands in China. Our findings suggest an important transformation in the coffee market in China, i.e., younger and lower-income customers who consume coffee for price value and convenience and develop loyalty not only based on in-store experience but

also E-experience on digital platforms. We make practical implications for novel coffee brands in order to integrate unique elements such as ingredients and decorations to deliver customer experiences that align with customers' self-concepts.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Novel Coffee Brands in China

Rapidly growing coffee markets and the success of foreign coffee brands in China have inspired Chinese investors and coffee producers to establish their coffee chain brands and led to the fast development of online and offline stores which sell coffee-related products [8,14]. By 2022, Luckin Coffee had opened 7843 stores, higher than the 5761 stores that Starbucks had opened; likewise, two other Chinese brands, i.e., Pacific Coffee (423 stores) and Manner Coffee (400 stores), are catching up with their non-Chinese counterparts Costa Coffee (418 stores) and Tim Hortons Coffee (443 stores) in China [26]. The rapid growth of Chinese coffee brands is attributed to several reasons, such as growing incomes associated with increased access to social media and digital purchasing platforms, and the new generation of middle-class consumers who seek novelty and anticipate super-visor service experiences [5,7]. These consumers are more open to Western lifestyles and brands than traditional consumers and tend to demonstrate their choices as indications of both their aspirations and status [27,28]. Moreover, the novel coffee brands have enhanced consumers' digital shopping experience by creating mobile apps and livestream selling by rappers and Internet celebrities [29]. These efforts played important roles during the COVID-19 pandemic, where quarantine policies made consumption in physical stores less available. Specifically, the quarantine policies led to a dramatic change in consumption habits, with online ordering and 'no-touch' delivery becoming major trends [14,30]. Moreover, the novel coffee stores have provided services that feature speed, coupons and localized decoration styles. Unlike the non-Chinese coffee stores that feature Western-style decorations in central business districts, Chinese coffee brands choose residential areas and feature local culture in their decoration to stimulate customer curiosity. In particular, young Chinese consumers increasingly pay attention to the aesthetics related to coffee brands [31]. For them, consuming coffee is no longer the only goal; in addition, coffee customers increasingly visit beautifully and uniquely decorated places to take photos that they share on social media to demonstrate their taste and lifestyle. While non-Chinese coffee brands such as Starbucks still dominate the coffee market in China, the novel coffee brands' differentiation strategies have attracted younger and lower-income customers (e.g., born in 1996–2010) who account for 15% of the country's population and favor the functionality and price performance of coffee brands [32]. Despite such shifts in customer preferences and the growths of novel coffee brands that are widely reported, not much research has been conducted about how the integration of the digital shopping experience and the aesthetic design of novel coffee brands influence customers' satisfaction and brand loyalty in China.

2.2. Social Service-Scape Perspective

The service-scape perspective explains how customers' responses to various environmental stimuli (e.g., sounds, images and smells) during customer–environment interactions could deliver the satisfaction and pleasure that influence their specific brand loyalty [21,33]. Service-scape refers to the environment in which service providers interact with customers by using tangible items to facilitate service delivery and communication [34–36]. The service-scape perspective has identified a number of environmental attributes responsible for customers' favorable reactions to a coffee shop's store environment, such as ambient conditions, space and function, signs and symbols, facility aesthetics and cleanliness [37,38], thereby influencing customers' brand loyalty. However, the service-scape perspective is criticized for failing to include the impact of customers' social behavior within the service-scape, i.e., customers' behavior forms part of the service-scape atmosphere [39,40]. Scholars further suggest that services are often provided with other customers presents. For a

coffee brand, the presence of other customers can bring positive results, as the pleasant experience of one customer observing such an experience could be contagious to other customers [40,41]. For instance, a customer queuing in a coffee shop may feel a pleasant experience when a shop attendant greets him or her with conversation while taking the order. This customer may then share this experience as comments and pictures on the shop's app or social media, not only regarding the shop's coffee quality and ambient setting but also the unique experience, which further influences other audiences, thereby attracting more customers and repeated consumption in the shop. The social service-scape perspective, therefore, allows us to examine the impacts of social elements in customers' e-brand experiences (on digital platforms) and in-store experiences for novel Chinese coffee brands on customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

2.3. Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty refers to a consumer's positive attitude and commitment toward repeated purchases of the products or services related to a brand [42]. According to [43], brand loyalty includes customers' positive attitude and positive purchasing behavior over time with a favorable emotive and evaluative tendency towards the products and services related to a brand [44]; it can help explain why consumers want to pick a novel coffee brand. Previous studies have identified the impacts of customer satisfaction on brand loyalty [44–46]. Indeed, when customers are satisfied with the products associated with a novel coffee brand, they are more likely to share the experience on their social media and recommend the brand to those in their lives, and thus more likely to repeat the purchase. In particular, during the current COVID-19 pandemic, when visits to coffee shops are restrained and customer habits are changing, Chinese novel coffee brands may seek to compete against established coffee brands through interactions on digital platforms and localized store experiences. When these new efforts generate customer satisfaction, customers are likely to demonstrate loyal behaviors such as repeated purchases. As a result, the following hypothesis can be developed:

H1 : *Customer satisfaction developed from Chinese novel coffee brands is positively associated with customers' brand loyalty.*

2.4. E-Brand Experience

Customer experience involves customers' interaction with actors and elements of a service process, including the brand, the facilities, the service providers' employees and other customers [47]. The experience involves a number of social factors, such as interactions on digital platforms and physical interfaces [48]. Customer experience could incur customers' emotional responses during the direct or indirect interaction with this brand, i.e., brand experience [49]. In the digital context, [22] further termed E-brand experience, a customer's subjective response is a reaction to contact with a specific brand in the digital environment. Hospitality studies that investigate unique online settings and interactive marketing activities have mostly focused on brand websites that enable consumers to find product-related information with speedy, two-way communication and to actively control their search for and use of information [50,51]. The recent COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine policies have pushed novel coffee brands to interact with customers beyond websites and apps through livestreaming platforms such as TikTok, which has over 400 million users in China [29]. Specifically, novel Chinese brands such as T97 Coffee hire professional live-streamers to provide knowledge of coffee extraction and brewing, interact with audiences through raps and music that highlight the coffee brands, and sell vouchers and coupons. The live-streamers include not only coffee professionals but also young rappers who can generate content that connects with young audiences [52]. The informative and creative content about novel coffee brands on livestreaming platforms and social media could enhance the e-brand experience of customers [19]. Therefore, the following hypothesis can be developed:

H2 : *E-brand experience delivered by Chinese novel coffee brands on livestreaming platforms is positively associated with Chinese customers' satisfaction.*

E-brand experience could be an important predictor of brand loyalty [53,54]. The E-brand experiences could provide customers with pleasant feelings that could be stored in memory [55] and further influence their active and repeated purchase of a novel coffee brand. However, researchers [56,57] remind us that customers' post-purchase satisfaction determines their attitude toward whether to repeat the purchase or not, i.e., an antecedent of brand loyalty. As such, customer loyalty towards a novel Chinese coffee brand is achieved through the customer's positive post-purchase evaluations of whether a coffee service in the shop can meet his or her needs and expectations [58]. We predict that customers' satisfaction with the purchasing experience of a novel coffee brand on digital platforms will influence their continuous purchase behavior and enhance their loyalty to this new brand. Given the above discussion, the following hypotheses can be developed:

H3 : *Customer satisfaction towards a specific Chinese novel coffee brand positively mediates the relationship between E-brand experience and brand loyalty.*

2.5. In-Store Experience

The purchase and consumption of coffee involve a highly interactive process, requiring service providers to recognize the social, physical and emotional demands of customers [59]. While novel coffee brands can advertise the superior quality and low costs of their coffee products on social media and digital platforms, the effectiveness of such messages can still be determined by in-store experiences, as other researchers [60,61] have identified in different retail contexts. In-store experience allows customers to verify whether the store can deliver the services that they advertised and promised [60]. Non-Chinese coffee brands have sought to meet customers' social needs by decorating stores that feature coffee workshops with families and friends and private seat reservations for business meetings or social gatherings; in contrast, novel Chinese coffee brands have featured pre-order and pick-up services to avoid peak-hour waiting, thereby giving customers more control of their orders. To cater to customers' diversified needs (e.g., efficiency and leisure), novel Chinese coffee brands feature localized cultural elements such as calligraphy, porcelain and lotus. The featured background music helps novel Chinese coffee brands to shape their image and position [62,63]. For instance, coffee brands match classical music with soft lighting and multiple service staff to create a prestigious image, which may attract the younger generation who seek superior services. In short, once the retail stores of Chinese novel coffee brands can deliver superior services and products that live up to the promises made on livestreaming platforms (e.g., advertising videos), customers are more likely to develop satisfaction towards these brands. As a result, the following hypothesis can be developed:

H4 : *The in-store experience of a Chinese novel coffee brand is positively associated with customer satisfaction.*

Chinese traditional atmospheric elements and technology-enhanced efficiency adopted by Chinese novel coffee brands may generate superior in-store experience that further predicts positive attitude and repeated purchase behaviors [60]. This could be achieved by creating desirable post-purchase memories that customers can share on social media, retell stories to families and friends and even bring them to the retail stores of these novel coffee brands for a new experience, i.e.,

H5 : *Customer satisfaction towards a Chinese novel coffee brand positively mediates the relationship between in-store experience and brand loyalty.*

2.6. Self–Brand Congruity

Despite the above-hypothesized relationships, previous studies focus on individual preferences (e.g., motivation & involvement) among customers in their coffee consumption [17,24,64,65]. However, these scholars have not paid much attention to customers'

different perceptions of the values and meanings embodied in novel coffee brands and how they align with their self-concepts, i.e., individuals' perceptions about themselves as experiencing and functioning individuals [66]. In particular, the alignment between consumers' self-concept and the perceived image of a branded product (i.e., self–brand congruity) could lead to consumers' preferences [25]. According to this logic, when customers identify coffee brands that fit their self-concepts, they can experience internal self-consistency [67].

Non-Chinese food and beverage brands have dominated the coffee market in China and long enjoyed a reputation for superior quality and services that give consumers higher value and social status [68]. However, this pattern has been changing since 2014, since when Chinese brands such as ChinaMobile, Huawei, Taobao, JD, Wechat and Tencent have appeared on the list of the Top 100 Most Valuable Brands. The younger generation of customers in China have shifted from non-Chinese brands towards domestic brands. Known examples include the Chinese sportswear brand Anta, whose market share rose from 8.0% in 2018 to 15.4% in 2021, compared to Adidas (17.4% in 2021). Scholars have commented that, while young Chinese consumers grow up under the influence of Western cultures and lifestyles, they remain loyal to the Chinese national identity and perceive themselves as modern Chinese [6]. In particular, young Chinese consumers may seek to demonstrate their patriotic feelings by consuming domestic brands [69,70]. The identity of a brand can reflect the consumers' identity and personal values [71]. As a result, consumers could identify themselves with their favorite brands. So far, not much empirical evidence has been found on how young Chinese consumers align with Chinese novel coffee brands.

In the competitive coffee market, novel coffee brands may differentiate themselves from non-Chinese competitors by including new symbolic meanings that align with the self-concept of consumers [72]. Their efforts include hiring live live-streamers that perform rap with Chinese lyrics that reflect Chinese customers' concerns for happiness, health and even the giving up of life-styles that do not match their income and status. Moreover, Chinese novel coffee brands seek to develop coffee that can be affordable to the working class, featuring low cost and convenience, in contrast to Western brands that feature 'exquisite and superior' customer experiences. It can be predicted that, once the live-streamers' promoted messages resonate with young customers' self-concept, customers are more likely to achieve satisfaction. As such, the following hypothesis can be developed:

H6 : *Customers' self–brand congruity positively moderates the relationship between E-brand experience and customer satisfaction towards a Chinese novel coffee brand.*

Moreover, Chinese novel coffee shops may design their retail stores in a manner that features Chinese coffee brands alongside localized cultural elements such as calligraphy, porcelain and the lotus. These features could help novel Chinese coffee brands shape their image and position [62,63,73]. When domestic customers consider value for money, resonance of meaning, coffee shop design and coffee quality, their self-concepts may align with customer service during the in-store experience, thus developing a higher degree of satisfaction [74]. In other words, the impacts of in-store experience on customer satisfaction can be enhanced by self–brand congruity [71]. As such, the following hypothesis can be developed:

H7 : *Customers' self–brand congruity positively moderates the relationship between in-store experience and customer satisfaction towards a Chinese novel coffee brand.*

The above hypotheses can be illustrated as follows (see Figure 1):
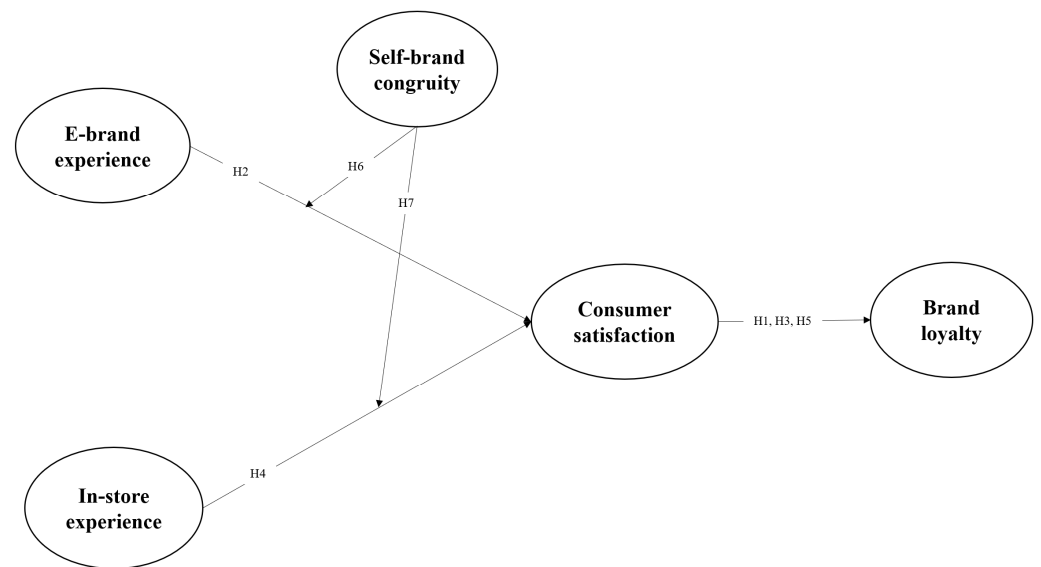
Figure 1. Conceptual model.

3. Methods

3.1. Sampling

In this study, we collected data with the help of a novel coffee brand in China. Using G-power 3.1.9.7, $\alpha = 0.05$, effect size (f^2) = 0.15 (medium) and number of predictors = 6, it was determined that a sample size of 146 was required for the study's analysis (linear multiple regression). This study utilized a larger sample size to improve statistical power and account for the likelihood of nonresponse error [75]. The brand has a digital presence in prevailing digital platforms and over 1000 retail stores in 43 cities in China. With the company's endorsement, we sent an online invitation to 600 customers who have purchased and consumed coffee of this brand and 421 of them agreed to participate in the survey. As they were recruited online, we did not ask them to specify their cities. Participants were informed of the purpose of the survey and the procedures for how to fill in the questionnaire. Participants were requested to evaluate their own level of E-brand experience, store brand experience, customer satisfaction, self–brand congruity and brand loyalty. Eventually, we received 347 questionnaires and, after excluding 28 invalid samples, finally received 332 valid samples. The demographics of the respondents were as follows (Table 1): More than half the respondents were female (N = 190, 57.2%) and the majority were young (50.0% aged less than 25 years old). In terms of marital status, 84.0% of the respondents were single (N = 279), 53.6% of the respondents held a bachelor's degree (N = 178), most respondents spent between 1001 and 2000 yuan in total (N = 226, 68.1%) and annual income ranged from 3000 to 4500 yuan for 53.6% of respondents (N = 178).

Table 1. Demographics of respondents.

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	142	42.8%
	Female	190	57.2%
Age	Less than 25 years old	166	50.0%
	26–30 years old	114	34.3%
	31 years old and above	52	15.7%
Marital status	Single	279	84.0%
	Married	53	16.0%

Table 1. *Cont.*

		Frequency	Percentage
Education	Intermediate	89	26.8%
	Bachelor	178	53.6%
	Master	54	16.3%
	Other	11	3.3%
Total spend	1000 yuan below	51	15.4%
	1001–2000 yuan	226	68.1%
	2001–3000 yuan	36	10.8%
	30001yuan and above	19	5.7%
Annual income	3000 yuan below	19	5.7%
	3001–4500 yuan	178	53.6%
	4501–6000 yuan	93	28.0%
	6001 yuan and above	42	12.7%

3.2. Measures

All items went through a back-translation process [76] because the original scales were created in English. One English-Chinese scholar translated the items into Chinese and then another Chinese-English scholar translated them back into English, guaranteeing a flawless translation. Measures were scored using a 5-point scale.

3.2.1. E-Brand Experience

This study measured E-brand experience with the five-item scale of [77]. Sample items are, "The layout of this coffee brand's website, app and online store is appealing, "This coffee brand's website, app and online store are easy to navigate" and "Results are always returned promptly when browsing this website, app and online store" (α = 0.913).

3.2.2. In-Store Experience

In-store experience was measured by adapting 11 items from [78]. Sample items are, "The coffee store of this brand makes a strong impression on my visual sense or other senses, "I find the decoration of this coffee store interesting in a sensory way, "The aroma of this coffee store induces feelings and sentiments" (α = 0.961).

3.2.3. Customer Satisfaction

A four-item scale was adapted from [79] to measure customer satisfaction. Sample items are, "I believe I made the right choice in deciding to buy and consume coffee from this brand, "The online/in-store purchases I have made for this brand have been satisfactory, "I am satisfied with how this brand deals with the sales they have made with me" (α = 0.924).

3.2.4. Self–Brand Congruity

Self–brand congruity was measured by a seven-item scale adapted from [80]. Sample items are, "This brand expresses what I find important in life, "This brand represents exactly how I see myself" (α = 0.918).

3.2.5. Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty was measured by four-Items adapted from [81]. Sample items are, "I like this coffee brand more so than other brands, "I have a strong preference for this coffee brand" (α = 0.913).

3.2.6. Control Variables

This study was performed with a number of control variables, including gender, age, marital status, education, total spending on coffee and annual income [78].

3.3. Analytical Procedures

This study utilized confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ensure the convergent and discriminant validity [82] of the five major study variables: E-brand experience, store brand experience, customer satisfaction, self–brand congruity and brand loyalty. To evaluate the overall model fit, this study specifically examined the values of chi-square (2), the comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) and the root mean square residual (RMR). We used SPSS PROCESS, which was developed by Preacher and Hayes (2004), to test our hypotheses. 5000 resamples were set for bootstrapping. The gender, age, marital status, education, total spending and annual income of consumers' demographic data were controlled. In order to avoid the issue of collinearity, this study standardized the independent variables and moderators when testing hypotheses [83].

4. Results

4.1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Before testing our hypotheses, we conducted a CFA to evaluate the convergent and discriminant validity using Amos 24.0. As shown in Table 2, the CFA results indicated that our four-factor baseline model fitted the data significantly better than any alternative model, confirming discriminant validity (X^2 = 672.471, df = 424, CFI = 0.971, TLI = 0.968, RMSEA = 0.042, RMR = 0.047). The square roots of the average variance extracted for each latent construct are displayed in Table 3. All estimates were greater than the correlation between the factors constituting each pair. In addition, all parcels loaded significantly on the intended latent constructs and had standardized loadings greater than 0.5 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Consequently, each of the proposed constructs has excellent convergent and discriminant validity.

Table 2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results.

Variable	Items	STD. Factor Loading	CR	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha
E-brand experience	EBE1	0.748	0.915	0.683	0.913
	EBE2	0.781			
	EBE3	0.829			
	EBE4	0.824			
	EBE5	0.938			
Store brand experience	SBE1	0.815	0.963	0.704	0.961
	SBE2	0.880			
	SBE3	0.847			
	SBE4	0.829			
	SBE5	0.828			
	SBE6	0.818			
	SBE7	0.765			
	SBE8	0.889			
	SBE9	0.777			
	SBE10	0.868			
	SBE11	0.902			
Customer satisfaction	CA1	0.850	0.932	0.773	0.924
	CA2	0.894			
	CA3	0.922			
	CA4	0.849			

Table 2. *Cont.*

Self–brand congruity	SBC1	0.831			
	SBC2	0.798			
	SBC3	0.746			
	SBC4	0.828	0.919	0.618	0.918
	SBC5	0.751			
	SBC6	0.753			
	SBC7	0.789			
Brand loyalty	BL1	0.857			
	BL2	0.832	0.915	0.730	0.913
	BL3	0.895			
	BL4	0.832			

Note: EBE, E-brand experience; SBE, Store brand experience; CA, Customer satisfaction; SBC, Self–brand congruity; BL, Brand loyalty.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics, Correlations and Discriminant Validities.

.	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1.Gender	1.57	0.50	-										
2.Age	1.66	0.74	−0.039	-									
3.Marital status	1.16	0.37	0.078	−0.020	-								
4.Education	1.96	0.75	−0.029	−0.096	−0.043	-							
5.Total spend	2.07	0.70	−0.019	−0.012	0.027	−0.099	-						
6.Annual income	2.48	0.79	0.082	−0.035	0.019	0.114 *	0.028	-					
7.EBE	3.84	1.00	−0.064	−0.167 **	0.042	0.055	0.099	−0.020	0.827				
8.SBE	3.53	0.95	−0.022	−0.165 **	0.006	0.040	0.050	0.019	0.429 **	0.839			
9.CA	3.77	0.92	−0.025	−0.203 **	0.050	0.006	0.011	−0.047	0.322 **	0.445 **	0.879		
10.SBC	3.58	0.94	−0.047	−0.081	−0.030	−0.031	0.001	0.017	0.112 *	0.142 **	0.179 **	0.786	
11.BL	3.74	0.98	−0.016	−0.275 **	−0.044	−0.026	0.009	−0.045	0.373 **	0.349 **	0.334 **	0.233 **	0.854

Note: *, $p < 0.05$; **, $p < 0.01$; EBE, E-brand experience; SBE, Store brand experience; CA, Customer satisfaction; SBC, Self–brand congruity; BL, Brand loyalty; N = 332. Square roots of AVEs are on the diagonal in parentheses.

4.2. Common Method Bias

Harman's single-factor test was administered to examine the problem of common method bias. Five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were identified by the analysis, with the first factor explaining less than 40% (Podsakoff et al., 2003) of the variance (36.05% of 74.39%). Consequently, there were no significant indications of common method variance in the findings.

4.3. Hypothesis Testing

The results of the regression analysis in Table 4 indicate that all the hypothesized relationships were supported. In addition, our results suggest that age has a significant impact on customer satisfaction and brand loyalty (i.e., the 'less than 25 years old' group has the largest effect size of all ages). In other words, the younger respondents have a much more significant effect on results related to customer satisfaction and brand loyalty towards Chinese novel coffee brands.

Customer satisfaction has a positive effect on brand loyalty (β = 0.273, $p < 0.05$), supporting hypothesis 1. That is, customers' satisfaction with the overall in-store experience and E-brand experience of a Chinese novel coffee brand will affect their continuous purchase behavior, i.e., enhancing their loyalty to these brands.

E-brand experience (EBE) has a positive effect on customer satisfaction (β = 0.266, $p < 0.05$); in particular, the EBE developed through livestreaming platforms allows customers of Chinese novel coffee brands to develop pleasant feelings that could be stored in memory. This relationship is positively moderated by self–brand congruity (β = 0.174, $p < 0.05$). In other words, when customers find that the value for money, resonance of brand meaning, coffee shop design and coffee quality associated with the Chinese novel coffee brands align with their self-concepts, they are more likely to be satisfied with the functional and hedonic benefits of the coffee drinking experience. As such, hypotheses 2 and 3 are supported. In-store experience (SBE) has a positive effect on customer satisfaction

(CA) (β = 0.423, p < 0.05); that is, the localized atmospheric elements, technology-enhanced efficiency, combined with service quality and product quality experienced in the retail stores of Chinese novel coffee brands can positively influence customers' satisfaction. this relationship is moderated by self–brand congruity (SBC) (β = 0.140, p < 0.05); in other words, the above relationship will grow stronger when customers find that the distinctive brand images and social cues of Chinese novel coffee brands align with their self-concepts. As such, hypotheses 4 and 5 are supported.

Table 4. Results of main effects and moderating effects.

Variable	CA				BL
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Gender = Female	−0.002	0.013	−0.009	−0.002	−0.003
Age = 26-30 years old	−0.010	−0.013	−0.039	−0.027	−0.036
Age = 31 years old and above	−0.177 **	−0.172 **	−0.136 *	−0.119 *	−0.273 ***
Marital status = Married	0.037	0.036	0.049	0.041	−0.073
Education = Intermediate	0.001	0.004	0.005	0.007	0.054
Education = Master	−0.010	−0.001	−0.020	−0.016	0.004
Education = Other	−0.001	−0.002	0.019	0.020	0.011
Total spend = 1000 yuan below	0.018	0.014	0.013	0.014	0.065
Total spend = 2,001–3,000yuan	0.006	−0.001	0.023	0.029	−0.039
Total spend = 3,001 yuan and above	−0.001	−0.006	−0.001	−0.009	0.037
Annual income = 3,000 yuan below	0.044	0.036	0.071	0.055	0.013
Annual income = 4,501–6,000 yuan	0.035	0.031	0.041	0.033	0.038
Annual income = 6,001 yuan and above	−0.059	−0.055	−0.058	−0.066	−0.007
EBE	0.272 ***	0.266 ***			
SBE			0.406 ***	0.423 ***	
SBC	0.135 *	0.129 *	0.119 *	0.117 *	
EBE*SBC		0.174 **			
SBE*SBC				0.140 **	
CA					0.273 ***
R2	0.163	0.193	0.245	0.264	0.193
Adj.R2	0.123	0.152	0.209	0.226	0.157
F	4.103 ***	4.695 ***	6.843 ***	7.049 ***	5.417 ***

Note: *, p < 0.05; **, p < 0.01; ***, p < 0.001; EBE, E-brand experience; SBE, Store brand experience; CA, Customer satisfaction; SBC, Self–brand congruity; BL, Brand loyalty.

When the interaction values (EBE*SBC, SBE*SBC) were plotted and probed with a simple slope test (Aiken & West, 1991) in Figures 2 and 3, we found that the positive relationship of EBE and CA was stronger when SBC is high; the positive relationship between SBE and CA was stronger, when SBC is high. In other words, the impact of e-brand experience on customer satisfaction toward a specific Chinese novel coffee brand is stronger with a higher value of self–brand congruity; the impact of in-store experience on customer satisfaction toward a specific Chinese novel coffee brand is stronger with a higher value of self–brand congruity.

This study utilized the bootstrap method to examine the effect of indirect mediation using the SPSS PROCESS template model 4. According to Table 5, the indirect effect of EBE on BL via CA was 0.060 and the bootstrapped 95% confidence interval did not include zero (0.024, 0.101); the indirect effect of SBE on BL via CA was 0.083 and the bootstrapped 95% confidence interval did not include zero (0.023, 0.135). Therefore, hypotheses 6 and 7 were supported.
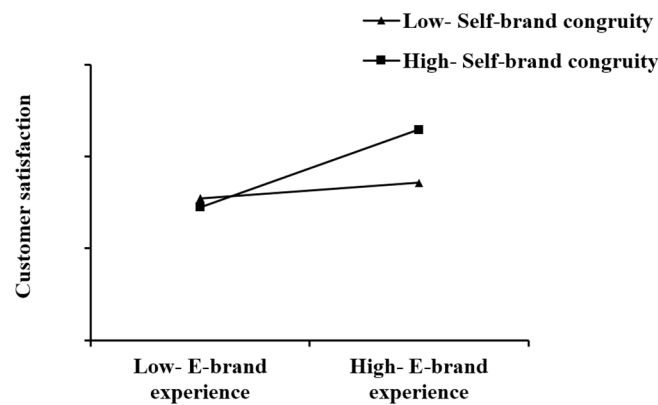
Figure 2. Moderating effect of SBC on EBE & CA.

Figure 3. Moderating effect of SBC on SBE & CA.

Table 5. Results of mediation effects.

Path		Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Direct effect	EBE-BL	0.278	0.051	0.177	0.379
	SBE-BL	0.240	0.057	0.128	0.353
Indirect effect	EBE-CA-BL	0.060	0.020	0.024	0.101
	SBE-CA-BL	0.083	0.028	0.023	0.135

Note: EBE, E-brand experience; SBE, Store brand experience; CA, Customer satisfaction; SBC, Self–brand congruity; BL, Brand loyalty.

5. Discussion

China's emergence in the global value chain for coffee has been recent, despite the growing attention to the country's coffee consumption. Previous studies have sought to explain how established non-Chinese brands such as Starbucks obtain customer loyalty and form a dominant market position [6–8]. These scholars have attributed non-Chinese coffee brands' success in China's coffee market to the country's rapid economic growth, improving living standards and the influence of Western cultures and lifestyles on young Chinese consumers. These studies have not considered whether and how such antecedent factors could be adopted by the increasing number of novel Chinese coffee brands to obtain brand loyalty; especially the impacts of recent incidences such as the COVID-19 pandemic and demographic change (i.e., an increasing number of Generation Z who share different consumption habits). While a number of Chinese authors [14,15] have investigated the marketing strategies of novel Chinese coffee brands, they failed to examine customers' psychological responses to these brands. Given the above knowledge gap, this study draws on the social service-scape perspective to examine the antecedents that

shape consumers' loyalty toward Chinese novel coffee brands, aiming to contribute to an understanding of how coffee-drinking habits among Chinese consumers is developing in a sustainable manner [2]. Specifically, this study examined the relative importance of E-brand experience, store experience, customer satisfaction and person-brand congruity on brand loyalty of novel coffee brands in China, with the results suggesting several theoretical and practical implications.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

This study makes several theoretical contributions. First, it contributes to the service-scape literature by highlighting how customers' interaction with live-streamers and other customers on digital platforms forms the social environment that delivers an E-brand experience that leads to customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. Unlike atmospheric studies [34,36] that highlight stimuli (e.g., spatial layout & scents) from the physical environment (e.g., hotels), this study highlights how E-brand experiences impact social behaviors among customers, live-streamers and brands. In doing so, we provide empirical evidence for the social service-scape concept proposed by [39]. Second, is one of the initial attempts to understand the antecedents of customers' brand loyalty towards novel coffee brands in China. While industry reports have highlighted the practices and strategies adopted by novel Chinese coffee brands and how they differentiate themselves from established non-Chinese coffee brands, the literature has not paid much attention to such brands. Our investigation of these novel brands, as well as empirical evidence on the impact of age and self–brand congruity, collectively prove an important change in the coffee market in China: the growing number of younger and lower-income customers and their preference for price value and convenience and interactions on digital platforms may challenge former assumptions about Chinese consumers' perception of coffee as an 'exquisite product' and representation of Western lifestyle. Third, while some scholars [29] have increasingly recognized the importance of E-brand experience, especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they have not included the integral role of in-store experience in obtaining customer loyalty. This is problematic for coffee consumption, since the E-brand experience alone cannot complete the coffee consumption process; eventually, customers still need a superior in-store experience to develop satisfaction and loyalty. Our study examined the collective impact of E-brand experience and in-store experience to provide a fuller picture of customer loyalty. Finally, our framework on the antecedents of brand loyalty might be applicable to other food and beverage products (e.g., dry white wine, dry red wine, & rosé wine) in different markets. Through superior E-brand experience, new brands could tailor their marketing mix (e.g., products, pricing and promotion) to address the young and price-sensitive markets by creating brand image that aligns with the target customers.

5.2. Practical Implications

Our research findings have some practical implications for novel Chinese coffee brands, established non-Chinese coffee brands and digital shopping platforms in China. First, novel Chinese coffee brands should notice the demographic change in the country's coffee market, where coffee is gradually consumed as an ordinary product and its linkage to the Western lifestyle is becoming weaker. In that case, novel Chinese coffee brands should integrate unique elements (e.g., localized ingredients & decorations) to deliver experiences that match customers' preferences and self-concepts. In doing so, these novel coffee brands can differentiate themselves from established brands. Second, established non-Chinee coffee brands should recognize the shifting preferences of younger and lower-income customers. While their brand stories and services frequently appear on social media and in business school textbooks, established non-Chinese coffee brands could consider delivering diversified and localized E-brand experiences. Moreover, established non-Chinese coffee brands should pay attention to young Chinese customers' preferences for convenience and value while maintaining their superior in-store experiences (which are often more time-consuming). Finally, coffee brands that seek to enhance their E-brand experience

through digital platforms should still pay attention to customers' in-store experience, which is an integral part of coffee consumption.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

Despite the authors' efforts, this study is subject to some limitations. First, we only investigated the roles of E-brand experience and in-store experience in novel coffee brands that operate both online and offline. Since coffee consumption has its unique characteristics, our results may not be generalizable to other food and beverage settings. Future research can include other food and beverage (e.g., fast food brands and milkshake brands) contexts to improve the generalizability of our findings. Second, due to the purpose of this study being investigation of novel Chinese coffee brands, established non-Chinese coffee brands were excluded from the study. Future studies could compare novel and established coffee brands by examining the explaining power of our proposed conceptual model, thereby developing a fuller conclusion. Finally, we adopted cross-sectional data to examine antecedents of brand loyalty towards novel Chinese coffee brands; future studies could consider qualitative interviews, observations and text-mining to develop a richer and more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon covered in this study.

6. Conclusions

Drawing on the social service-scape perspective, this study presented and empirically tested a theoretical model regarding the impacts of E-brand experience, in-store experience, customer satisfaction and self–brand congruity on brand loyalty towards novel Chinese coffee brands. The paper concludes that E-brand experience positively influences customer satisfaction, with the relationship positively moderated by self–brand congruity, in-store experience positively influences customer satisfaction, with the relationship positively moderated by self–brand congruity, and customer satisfaction positively mediates the relationships between E-brand experience and brand loyalty and that between in-store experience and brand loyalty. Finally, age has a significant impact on the above relationships, with younger customers reporting more satisfaction and demonstrating stronger loyalty towards Chinese novel coffee brands. Our brand loyalty model could be applicable to new food and beverage brands for customers who are sensitive to prices while open to new experiences.

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