Research on the Influence of Sichuan Cuisine Catering Brand Experience on Brand Image

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Abstract: The catering industry has entered a brand era, and the development and maintenance of brands is very important for the growth of catering enterprises. We studied the influence between brand experience and brand image by taking Sichuan cuisine brand as an example. We refer to a large number of research literatures, put forward research hypotheses based on relevant theories and practical problems, constructed a research model of brand experience-brand image, and designed a questionnaire to verify the hypothesis. Finally, 203 valid samples were recovered and analyzed by SPSS and AMOS software. There is a certain positive correlation between brand experience and brand image. Relatively speaking, the emotional experience dimension has the strongest impact on brand image, followed by sensory, service, and association, and culture has the weakest impact. This research not only enriched the relevant theories of brand experience and brand image, but also provided corresponding management suggestions for the development of catering industry brands, especially the establishment of Sichuan cuisine brand image.

1. Introduction

Sichuan cuisine is one of the eight major folk cuisines with a long history and a world-renowned reputation in China. With cultural integration and commercial development, Sichuan-flavored brands have entered the world. For example, Sichuan-Yurenjia, Taoranjia, Dayu Hotpot, Dalongyi, Baguo Noodles and other catering brands are well known and loved by many consumers. In order to encourage the development of Sichuan cuisine culture and increase the influence of Sichuan cuisine, the policy document "Sichuan Province Three-Year Action Plan for Promoting Sichuan Cuisine to Go Global (2018-2020)" emphasizes the need to strengthen the protection, innovation and inheritance of Sichuan cuisine culture, and encourage Sichuan cuisine enterprises to continue create a new Sichuan cuisine brand to enhance the popularity of Sichuan cuisine. In the catering industry, due to the low barriers to entry and fierce competition, various catering brands emerge in an endless stream, and the number of Sichuan cuisine stores has also declined, making it difficult to maintain the continuous vitality of the brand. In fact, catering brands not only face the competition crisis, but also face the challenge of upgrading under the trend of consumption upgrading. Therefore, in order to maintain brand vitality, Sichuan cuisine catering brands need to constantly adjust their marketing strategies to meet the needs of changing consumer psychology, shape catering brands around customer experience, and establish a good brand image. Based on this, this paper mainly studies the

influence of Sichuan cuisine catering brand experience on brand image, and discusses the moderating effect of Sichuan cuisine cultural preference, in order to provide practical guidance for the establishment of Sichuan cuisine catering brand image.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1 brand experience

In the 1990s, the academic circles put forward the concept of brand experience, which subsequently led to a lot of research on brand experience. The definition of brand experience has also formed many different interpretations, especially the brand experience in different industries has not yet been clearly defined. The original concept of brand experience focused primarily on the cognitive and emotional aspects of the consumer experience. Brakus et al. (2009) proposed that the concept of brand experience should be multi-dimensional, including cognition, emotion, feeling, behavior and society [1]. In addition, the concept of brand experience also emphasizes the elements of brand experience. Different from the concepts of consumption experience and customer experience, Yajing et al. (2012) proposed that customer brand experience is not just about products and services, but also all the consumer environment, surrounding environment and interactive experience of service personnel in all aspects of the customer consumption process[2]. Guangsheng and Gangling (2014) believed that brand experience also includes brand names, trademarks, appearance and other brand-related characteristics that lead to change in customer cognition, emotion, and behavior [3].

In the dimension of brand experience, the current research mainly includes two, three, four and five dimensions. Among them, Schmitt (1999) proposed to divide brand experience into sensory, emotion, thinking, action and association dimensions from the perspective of consumers' psychological cognitive process, and then many studies have expanded on this basis and developed measurement scales for different industries [4]. For example, Hongji et al. (2021) combined previous research and the characteristics of theme parks to divide the brand experience into the dimensions of sensory, pleasant, thinking, association, and functional experience [5]. Yajing (2016) proposed sensory, emotional and relational experiences in combination with the catering industry [6]. This paper combines the research of Zarantonello and Schmitt (2009) and Yajing (2016) and proposes the dimensions of sensory, emotion, association, culture and service experience based on the characteristics of Sichuan cuisine[6] [7]. Sensory experience refers to the visual, auditory, olfactory and other sensory feelings brought to consumers by the brand name, logo, environment decoration, smell, music and other elements; Related experience refers to the feelings which customer feel connected to the brand and other consumers; Cultural experience refers to the brand cultural connotation felt by consumers in the process of contacting the brand; Service experience refers to consumers' perception of the quality of products and services provided by catering brands.

2.2 Brand image

Brand image is a very important concept in marketing. Brand image refers to consumers' perception of a brand and the feeling that a brand brings to consumers (Keller, 2003) [8]. Research by Ansary and Nik Hashim (2017) highlights the importance of brand image and also demonstrates that brand image is moderated by product type and word of mouth [9]. From the consumer's point of view, now consumers are not only buying stylish items, but also value the brand and its image. The brand image often symbolizes the user's own image and value. A unique and subjective cognition and opinion generated [10]. Brand image is a valuable intangible asset of a company. Brand image can affect the image of a catering company, as well as consumers' first impression of the services and products provided by the restaurant.

A strong brand image has a positive impact on consumer perception and is also an important reason for consumers to buy the brand, which further makes the brand more competitive as a whole [11] [12]. However, there are also studies believed that consumers have different evaluation methods for different types of products, and consumers do not necessarily use brand image to evaluate all products. But the catering industry has developed to a high-quality stage. Consumers have higher and higher requirements for catering. While pursuing safety, health and hygiene, they will also pay attention to catering brands. The development of catering branding has become a trend. Guoqing et al. (2013) believed that experiential marketing will not directly market customer behavioral intentions, but must directly influence customer experience value and brand image as a bridge, among which sensory experience, emotional experience and action experience are the most important online marketing for customers experience [13]. Xi (2016) pointed out that not only experiential marketing (including sensory experience, emotional experience, thinking experience, action experience and association experience) positively affects perceived value, but also experience marketing and perceived value (including perceived quality, perceived service and perceived brand image) [14]. It also has a significant positive impact on customer loyalty. Brand image measurement is also the research focus of scholars. There are currently twelve methods for brand measurement technology: brand concept map, constant sum method, dichotomous scaling method, focus group method, free association idea, free choice method, in-depth interview method, Likert scale method, projection method, ranking method, Kuge method, semantic difference scaling method. Among them, Likert scales are commonly used to measure brand image, including Aaker (1997) 42-item brand personality scale and Davies et al. (2003) 49-item enterprise personality scale [15] [16].

2.3 The effect of brand experience on brand image

Brand experience may be a prerequisite for the formation of brand image. Brand experience will form brand memory, and subsequent brand related information will stimulate brand association, thus having an impact on brand image. There are relatively few studies on how brand experience affects brand image. Studies such as Walter et al. (2014) have proved that brand experience has an impact on brand image, and its impact is higher than that on brand perception (Chang& Chieng, 2006)[17][18]. In the investigation of the relationship between consumers and brand relationship, it is found that there is a connection between brand experience and brand image, and between brand experience and consumer brand relationship, brand image is an important mediating factor. But there are few studies on consumer brand experience and brand image based on the catering industry. Therefore, this paper focuses on the relationship between the two and proposes the following assumptions:
H1 sensory experience has a significant positive impact on brand image;
H2 emotional experience has a significant positive impact on brand image;
H3 related experience has a significant positive impact on brand image;
H4 cultural experience has a significant positive impact on brand image;
H5 service experience has a significant positive impact on brand image;
H6 brand experience has a significant positive impact on brand image.

3. Empirical research

3.1 Questionnaire Design and Data Collection

To analyze the research questions, a questionnaire was designed on the basis of literature review. The questionnaire is divided into third parts: the first part is the individual characteristics of the respondents, including gender, age, education level, and monthly household income; the second part is the respondents' measurement of Sichuan cuisine catering brand experience; the third part is the

respondents' measurement of Sichuan cuisine catering brand image. The main variables of the questionnaire were measured using a five-point Likert scale. In terms of the content of the questionnaire, the measurement of brand experience including sensory, emotion, association, culture and service experience refers to Schmitt and Bernd (1999) and Yajing et al. (2012), and the measurement of brand image refers to Ansary and Nik Hashim (2017) [4][6][9]. In this study, the online survey method was used to distribute the questionnaires. The researchers distributed the questionnaires to people of different genders, ages, educational backgrounds, and income levels through the questionnaire star in March 2021. A total of 203 questionnaires were collected, and 203 were valid questionnaires.

3.2 Data analysis results

3.2.1 Reliability and Validity Test

Table 1: Reliability analysis results of latent variables.

		Unstd	S.E.	t-value	P	Std	SMC	CR	AVE
SE	SE4	1				0.818	0.669	0.954	0.807
	SE3	1.158	0.071	16.41	***	0.903	0.815		
	SE5	1.245	0.068	18.232	***	0.96	0.922		
	SE6	1.229	0.068	18.133	***	0.957	0.916		
	SE8	1.035	0.07	14.711	***	0.844	0.712		
EE	EE3	1				0.969	0.939	0.971	0.917
	EE2	0.972	0.03	32.045	***	0.947	0.897		
	EE1	0.984	0.029	33.744	***	0.956	0.914		
RE	RE3	1				0.934	0.872	0.96	0.829
	RE2	1.096	0.04	27.258	***	0.951	0.904		
	RE1	1.003	0.04	24.965	***	0.929	0.863		
	RE4	1.025	0.054	19.031	***	0.849	0.721		
	RE5	1.013	0.047	21.385	***	0.886	0.785		
CE	CE2	1				0.896	0.803	0.957	0.881
	CE3	1.085	0.045	23.907	***	0.963	0.927		
	CE4	1.045	0.044	23.542	***	0.956	0.914		
SSE	SSE3	1				0.965	0.931	0.951	0.866
	SSE2	0.986	0.039	24.958	***	0.914	0.835		
	SSE1	0.851	0.034	24.704	***	0.912	0.832		
BI	BI3	1				0.922	0.85	0.971	0.85
	BI2	1.031	0.039	26.613	***	0.955	0.912		
	BI1	1.013	0.04	25.198	***	0.941	0.885		
	BI4	1.013	0.042	24.312	***	0.932	0.869		
	BI5	0.966	0.049	19.82	***	0.87	0.757		
	BI6	0.97	0.043	22.515	***	0.91	0.828		

First, this paper uses the Cronbach α reliability coefficient to test the reliability of the sample data. The analysis results (see Table 1) show that sensory experience (SE), association experience (EE), emotional experience (RE), cultural experience (The Cronbach's alpha values of the six item combinations of CE), service experience (SEE), and brand image (BI) were all higher than 0.90, indicating that the reliability of the questionnaire data in this study was high. Secondly, the scales in this paper refer to representative domestic and foreign literatures, so confirmatory factor analysis is

used to explore the convergent validity of the scales. A separate correlation model is made and analyzed for all variables, and the factor load is less than 0.60 and the residual is less than 0.36. Among them, only the related experience and brand image items have an ideal fit, and all items can be retained (see Table 2). The revised factor loadings of all facets are between 0.818 and 0.969 and are significant, the combined reliability CR is maintained in the range of 0.95 to 0.98, and the AVE value is between 0.807 and 0.917, which is in line with Fornell and Larcker (1981) standard [19]. All variables were then modeled with full correlation, and the results showed that the fitting effect was very good. Therefore, in general, all modified variables have good convergent validity. Finally, we used the correlation of all variables to determine the discriminant validity. The results showed that the correlation between all variables was between 0.501 and 0.917. The 95% confidence interval of each correlation coefficient did not contain 1, and was close to or lower than the square root of AVE, indicating that the scale has good discriminant validity.

Table 2: Results of discriminant validity analysis.

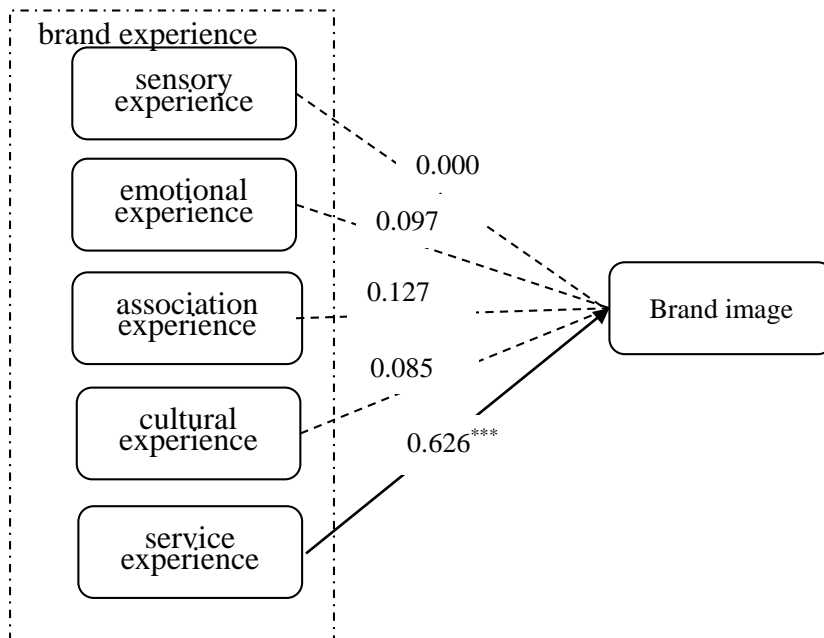|	AVE	CL	BI	SSE	CE	RE	EE	SE
CL	0.705	0.840						
BI	0.85	0.606	0.922					
SSE	0.866	0.602	0.932	0.931				
CE	0.881	0.59	0.6	0.501	0.939			
RE	0.829	0.704	0.797	0.738	0.804	0.910		
EE	0.917	0.691	0.882	0.883	0.619	0.837	0.958	
SE	0.807	0.742	0.839	0.847	0.576	0.807	0.897	0.898

3.2.2 Research result

Figure 1: Model result path coefficient.

In order to verify the hypothesis in this paper, we used AMOS 22 to conduct structural equation model analysis on the survey data, and the final results obtained are shown in the figure 1. From the fitting results of the model, x^2/df is equal to 2.544, RMSEA is equal to 0.087. The composite index NFI, CFI, IFI, and TFI were all greater than 0.9, GFI was equal to 0.789, and AGFI was equal to

0.736. Overall, the model fitting results were good, and the data supported the conceptual model well and explained the relationship between the latent variables. At the same time, the fitting results show the influence of various dimensions of brand experience on brand image. Only service experience has a direct and significant impact on brand image, with an impact factor of 0.626. Other sensory, emotional, association, and cultural experiences have no significant impact on brand image. Therefore, assuming that H5 is accepted, H1, H2, H3, H4 are not accepted (see Figure 1).

At the same time, in order to verify how the five dimensions of brand experience affect the brand image as a whole, this paper conducts a second-order confirmatory factor analysis to verify the impact of brand experience on brand image. The target coefficient is 0.818, close to 1, indicating that the second-order model is more concise (see Table 3). Then, to verify Hypothesis 6, we also applied AMOS 22 to perform structural equation model analysis on the data, and obtained the results as shown in the figure. From the model fitting results, x^2/df is equal to 3.004, RMSEA is equal to 0.010, and each fitting index NFI , CFI, IFI and TLI are all greater than 0.9, GFI is equal to 0.739, AGFI is equal to 0.684, the model fitting results are acceptable, but there is still room for improvement. Therefore, this paper refers to Lance et al. (2010), the higher order model may have residual correlation which can be modified by releasing the residual [20]. After setting the residual correlation between the related experience and cultural experience, service experience and brand image, the fitting results of revised model are that x^2/df is equal to 2.543, RMSEA is equal to 0.087, the fitting indices NFI, CFI, IFI and TFI are all greater than 0.9, GFI is equal to 0.781, AGFI is equal to 0.733, and the fitting results are good. At the same time, it is verified that the brand experience significantly and directly affects the brand image, and the coefficient is 0.910(see Figure 2). Therefore, it is assumed that H6 is established. Among the five dimensions of measuring brand experience, emotional experience is the highest dimension that affects brand experience, with an impact factor of 0.969, followed by sensory experience, service experience, association experience and cultural experience.

Table 3: Index of fitting degree of factor confirmatory model

| classification	Fit indices	recommended value	First order fit value	Second order fit value
Absolute fit index	x^2	the smaller, the better	426.020	520.630
	x^2/df	<3.0	2.650	3.212
	GFI	>0.9	0.833	0.780
	RMR	<0.05	0.049	0.077
	RMSEA	<0.1	0.090	0.105
Value added fit index	AGFI	>0.9	0.777	0.715
	NFI	>0.9	0.935	0.918
	TLI	>0.9	0.949	0.932
	CFI	>0.9	0.958	0.942
Simplify the fit index	AIC	the smaller, the better	472.314	558.165
	CAIC	the smaller, the better	679.348	743.633
Coefficient of the target	x^2(first-order model)/ x^2(second-order model)	As close to 1 as possible	426.020/520.630=0.818	
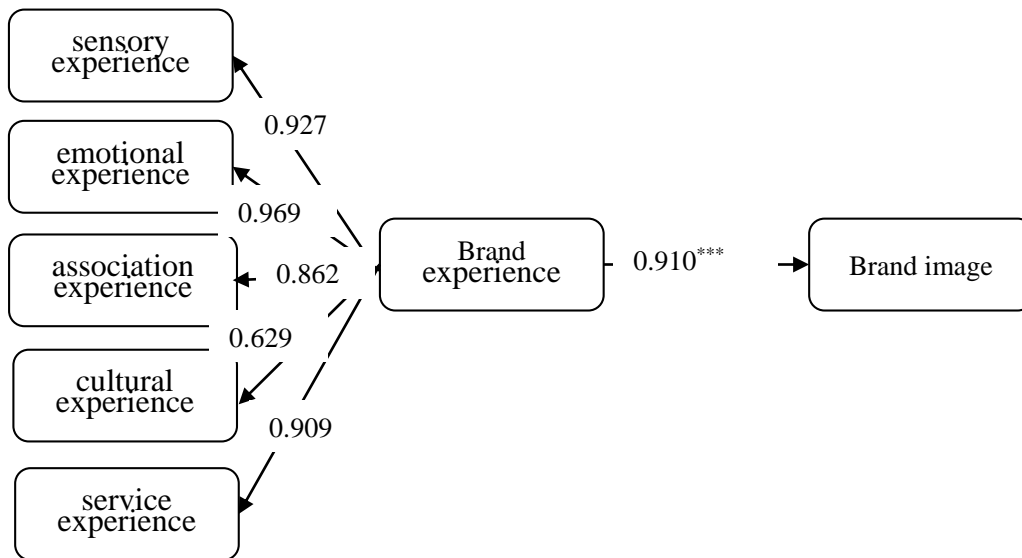
Figure 2: Model result path coefficient

4. Conclusions

The full text studies the relationship and influence of brand experience and brand image from the perspective of Sichuan cuisine catering brand. The research shows that brand experience can be divided into five dimensions: sensory experience, emotional experience, association experience, cultural experience and service experience. Emotional experience has the greatest impact, followed by sensory, service, connection, and culture experience. Enterprises need to pay special attention to the customer's emotional experience, and further improve other experiences on the basis of satisfying the customer's emotional experience. Catering companies need to pay attention to the emotional needs of customers, and meet the emotional needs of customers through products, services and the environment of the restaurant. Catering companies can improve the sensory experience by improving the restaurant environment, such as keeping the air in the restaurant fresh and playing some cheerful music appropriately. A Sichuan cuisine catering company also needs to pay attention to the inheritance and promotion of Sichuan cuisine culture, so that Sichuan cuisine culture can continue to develop through the efforts of the enterprise. Catering companies also need to pay attention to the customer's service experience. They can clearly communicate the company's service concept to employees and practice it in their daily work through centralized training of employees, so that employees can provide customers with higher quality and humanized services. It can also provide differentiated services according to the needs of characteristic groups to improve the service experience of customers. Enterprises can use various platforms to promote the Sichuan cuisine culture of restaurants to attract customers to consume.

Brand experience can positively affect the brand image, and the quality of the brand experience is very important for the maintenance of the brand image of catering companies. Among the five dimensions of brand experience, service experience has a significant direct impact on brand image, while other experience dimensions have no significant direct impact on brand image. But it does not mean that other experience dimensions do not indirectly affect brand image through other factors. The research results have a certain practical reference value for the development of the catering industry, especially the Sichuan cuisine brand catering enterprises in maintaining their own brand image, and also enriches the theoretical research in this area.

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