

ANALYSIS OF THE SATISFACTION OF CHINESE YOUNG CONSUMERS TO BAIJIU

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Abstract

This study aimed to analyze the key factors influencing the satisfaction of young Chinese consumers with Baijiu (a traditional Chinese liquor) and subsequently to propose targeted marketing strategies. By integrating the Howard-Sheth model and China Customer Satisfaction Index (CCSI), a comprehensive framework was constructed to evaluate the perceptions of young consumers. Through a survey of 1,052 young consumers, data were collected and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The results revealed that product quality and perceived quality are the most significant factors, while brand image has limited influence. A positive attitude toward the product directly impacts satisfaction. The study highlights the importance of prioritizing product quality and consumer-centric marketing strategies to cater to young consumers. Furthermore, this study incorporated Necessary Condition Analysis (NCA) to further explore the critical factors influencing young consumers' attitudes towards purchasing Baijiu. The NCA results highlighted that a clear purchase attitude is a necessary condition, while perceived quality is one of the necessary conditions for forming such an attitude.

Keywords: Baijiu, Young consumers, SEM, NCA, Satisfaction

1. INTRODUCTION

Liquor continues to show potential for growth as millennials are increasingly favoring spirits over beer and wine (Distilled Spirits Council of the United States, 2019). As an important part of Chinese traditional culture, Baijiu (a traditional Chinese liquor) has a long history, unique brewing technology, rich flavor and taste, and profound cultural significance (Xu et al., 2017). China leads the world in spirits consumption, with approximately 7.5 billion liters consumed in 2021 (National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China [NBSPRC], 2021). With the Baijiu industry's rapid growth, young consumers have emerged as a key potential group. The practical implications for Baijiu brands in targeting young consumers are significant, particularly in terms of market growth and cultural preservation. However, as younger generations increasingly embrace modernity and globalization, the traditional consumption patterns of Baijiu are being challenged. Younger consumers, especially teenagers and Gen Y (born 1977-1994), are significantly increasing their purchasing power and have become an important spending force (Hwang & Kandampully, 2012). Salam et. al. (2024)

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argue that young consumer groups are not only a crucial force driving the adaptation of marketing strategies in the digital era, but also the core target for enterprises to capture the purchasing power dividends of young consumers and sustain their market competitiveness.

Previous studies have explored topics such as brand rejuvenation and consumer satisfaction, but did not delve into the role of brand choice on young consumers' purchasing attitudes, nor have they fully studied the impact of psychological expectation correlation in the context of brand relationship management. "Iconic" feelings are an important consideration when young consumers shop, heralding huge growth potential if brands can effectively attract them (Norris et al., 2021). Nevertheless, there are significant gaps in the existing literature regarding consumer behavior in the Baijiu market, especially among young consumers. Wang and Zhang (2020) analyzed obstacles to Baijiu brand rejuvenation, such as homogenization and a lack of understanding of consumer needs. Dorn (2023) highlighted young people's low awareness and decreasing share of Baijiu, with its cultural status declining among them. Zhang and Guo (2023) defined brand rejuvenation and aging, emphasizing the importance of rejuvenation. Gou et al. (2023) noted these consumers' preferences for lighter products, with lower-alcohol content, and diverse-flavors, which conflicts with the traditional Baijiu image. Traditional brands must adjust to cater to these tastes. This shows that significant gaps remain in the literature. It is necessary to explore these areas in order to understand satisfaction among young consumers.

This study focuses on a single group of young consumers, defined as people aged 20-30, taking Y Baijiu as an example product. To clearly articulate the identified research gap, the research differentiates itself from previous works, offering a novel perspective on how to engage this consumer segment, and understand this emerging key potential consumer group amidst the rapid growth of the Baijiu industry. This study pays special attention to the specific purchasing behavior and preferences of young consumers in the Baijiu market.

Y Baijiu, through innovation and promotion, has become a leading brand in China, favored for its fresh, pure characteristics, especially in the high-end market. This study involved a survey of consumer satisfaction with Y Baijiu, to identify the key factors affecting young consumers' satisfaction and provide targeted marketing strategies for Baijiu brands to increase their market share among this group.

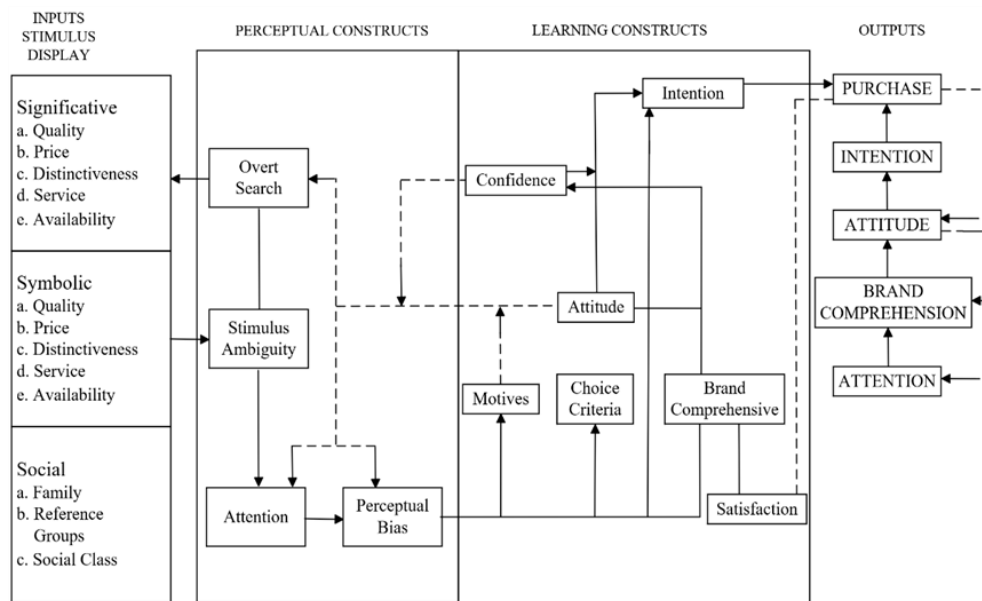
Integrating the Howard-Sheth model and CCSI provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing consumer decision-making in the Chinese market, particularly for Y Baijiu. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of consumer perceptions, attitudes, and satisfaction, informing targeted marketing strategies and product developments tailored to the preferences and behaviors of young Chinese consumers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Howard-Sheth Model

The Howard-Sheth model stands out as a seminal and holistic framework within the realm of consumer behavior research, first conceptualized by Howard and Sheth in 1969 (Howard & Sheth, 1969). Beyond merely presenting a comprehensive structure, the Howard-Sheth model serves as a cornerstone for interpreting the intricate interplay among various factors influencing consumer purchasing choices. It offers a multifaceted lens through which researchers can dissect and comprehend the intricate web of influences shaping consumer behavior. Furthermore, this model has laid the foundation for the formulation of novel theories and methodologies in the field, fostering advancements in the understanding of consumer decision-making processes.

Figure 1. Howard-Sheth Model

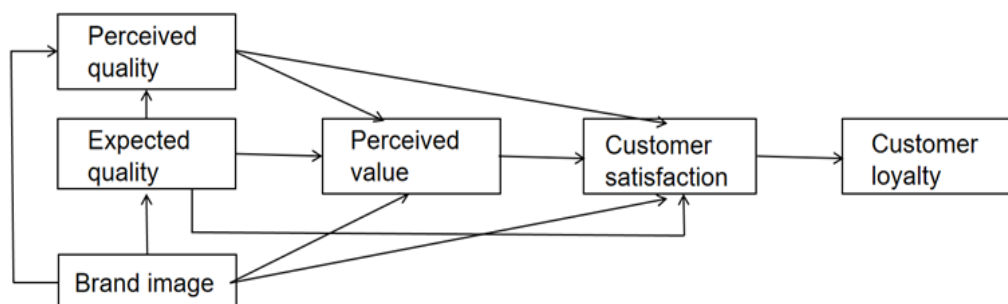


(Source: Howard, J. A. & Sheth, J. N, The Theory of Buyer Behaviour, 1969)

2.2 China Customer Satisfaction Index (CCSI)

The China Customer Satisfaction Index (CCSI) is a tailored indicator designed to capture the unique nuances of the Chinese market. Four key variables are used for analysis: overall customer contentment with the product or service, pre-consumption expectations, the level of satisfaction with the quality of the product or service relative to its rival brands, and the genuine satisfaction of the customer in relation to their idealized product or service (Zhang, Q. et al., 2018).

Figure 2. CCSI Model



(Source: Zhang, Q., Zheng, K., Lu, H., Zhang, X., & Zhang, L, The Job-Hunting Wechat Official Account Satisfaction Model Based on CCSI Model, 2018)

This index offers a specific and localized perspective on customer satisfaction, which is crucial for understanding the distinct preferences and behaviors of Chinese consumers. Qin (2023) used the CCSI model to select a mature dairy company, as a case study to conduct empirical research. A structural equation model (SEM) was employed to examine elements influencing customer satisfaction. In this study, the CCSI model can be used to explore how businesses can leverage customer insights to drive service innovation and enhance customer satisfaction.

2.3 Perceived Quality

Perceived quality, as defined by Zeithaml (1988), is a multifaceted construct that encapsulates a consumer's holistic assessment of a product or service, drawing upon both direct experiences and extrinsic information. This assessment is shaped by both direct personal experiences and extrinsic information, such as reviews and recommendations. In the context of Baijiu, perceived quality becomes even more crucial, as consumers often rely on this holistic judgment to navigate the diverse offerings within this traditional liquor category. Marcos and Coelho (2022) highlighted its role in word-of-mouth marketing, while Dam and Dam (2021) noted the synergy between perceived quality and brand image, enhancing purchase likelihood. Lim and Kwon (2022) conducted empirical tests to examine the direct positive impact of perceived quality (e.g., product usability and price rationality) on consumers' product attitudes, and they further revealed the mediating role of satisfaction in this relationship. This study elaborates on the mechanism through which perceived quality operates in specific consumption scenarios.

H1: Perceived quality positively influences consumer attitude.

2.4 Brand Image

Brand image, a critical dimension of brand equity, has emerged as a significant influence on consumer behavior, as articulated by Zia et al. (2021). In the Baijiu industry, a strong brand image can differentiate one product from another, often based on historical significance, craftsmanship, and traditional values. Huang and Bunchapattanasakda (2023) pointed out that brand equity dimensions and brand equity have an enhancing effect on customers willingness to pay a price premium. Brand love has become an interesting concept among academia in brand management related disciplines (Napontun et al., 2024). In the Baijiu context, fostering brand love involves creating an emotional connection with consumers, often through storytelling, cultural heritage celebrations, and unique brand experiences.

H2: Brand image has a positive impact on attitude.

2.5 Expected Quality

Expected quality refers to the consumer's expectations of product quality before purchase, based on past experiences, brand reputation, and market information (Parasuraman et al., 1988). In the Baijiu market, consumers' expectations are often influenced by the brand's history, traditional brewing methods, and the overall perception of quality within the category. The difference between perceived and expected quality determines satisfaction (Grönroos, 1984; Oh, S. et al., 2022). Online ratings and reviews significantly influence expected quality in the digital market (Gou et al., 2023), particularly in the Baijiu market where consumers rely on peer insights to make informed purchasing decisions. Manosudhikul (2024) found that a strategy that puts a high-quality experience first can greatly enhance user satisfaction.

H3: Expected quality has a positive impact on attitude.

2.6 Attitude

Consumer attitude, shaped by perceived value, experiences, and external influences, is pivotal to behavioral intentions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Perceived value, integrating emotional, social, and economic dimensions, correlates positively with satisfaction (Fehrenbach & Herrando, 2021; Miao et al., 2022). Therefore, Lan, Y., and Liu, G. (2024) emphasize that retailers should make efforts to improve consumers' rational attitudes, and

obtain consumers' trust as well as achieve a win-win result between retailers and consumers.

H4: A positive attitude towards a product or brand has a direct and positive impact on consumer satisfaction.

2.7 Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction, as conceptualized by Oliver (1980), is a comprehensive evaluation of a product or service based on the disparity between a consumer's expected and actual perceptions of quality. Kotler et. al. (1997) noted its strategic importance in fostering loyalty. Zeithaml et al. (2020) identified perceived quality, expected quality, brand image, and attitude as key drivers.

Recent research by Tijjani et al. (2023) underscores the strong link between satisfaction and brand loyalty, revealing that higher levels of satisfaction lead to the development of loyal purchasing habits and a preference for the respective brand over its competitors. Senachai et al. (2024) indicated that satisfaction was found to influence trust, while satisfaction and trust were found to influence behavioral intentions.

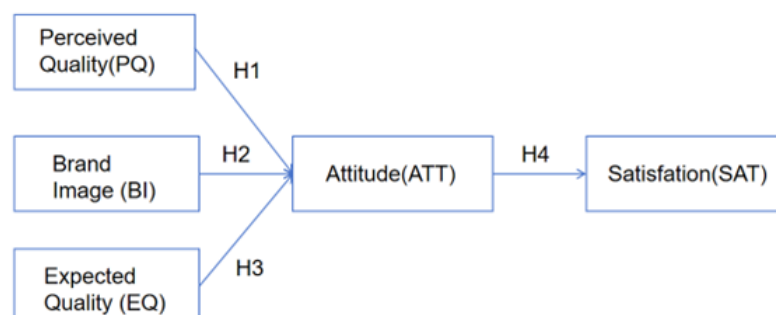
2.8 Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Integrating the Howard-Sheth model and CCSI provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing consumer decision-making in the Chinese market, particularly for Y Baijiu. The Howard-Sheth model provides a broad and theoretical framework, helping researchers to understand the overall process of consumer decision-making. It highlights the various inputs, such as personal factors, social influences, and psychological variables, that shape consumer behavior. In contrast, the CCSI offers a more focused and empirical perspective by measuring specific aspects of customer satisfaction related to Baijiu.

By combining these two approaches, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of how Baijiu consumers make purchasing decisions and how their satisfaction is influenced by various factors. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of consumer perceptions, attitudes, and satisfaction, informing targeted marketing strategies and product developments tailored to Chinese consumers' preferences and behaviors. By examining these factors within the context of Baijiu, researchers and marketers can gain insights into how to effectively engage with Chinese consumers and enhance their overall satisfaction with the product.

It is important to explore each hypothesis in depth, linking them to theoretical frameworks and prior empirical studies, with a specific focus on how these relationships are relevant to the Baijiu market. By establishing perceived structure, purchase attitude, and purchase satisfaction, as pivotal factors influencing young consumers' decisions to purchase Y Baijiu, this research delves into the primary components of the perceived structure, including taste, intrinsic factors, and input stimuli as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3 Conceptual Framework of the Study and Research Hypotheses



3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Population and Sample

In this study, investigation areas were divided into economically developed and underdeveloped regions based on economic development status. Questionnaires were distributed to people between 20-30 years old in Guangdong through online and offline methods, with a total of 1,102 questionnaires being issued, and 1,052 valid responses being retrieved, resulting in a validity rate of 95.46%; 45% of the surveyed sample were male and 55% were female. The respondents were mainly company employees, accounting for 65.61%, followed by freelancers and public institution staff, with each accounting for 8.09%. It is therefore accepted that the important young consumers of Baijiu are company employees.

3.2 Measurement and Questionnaire Design

The research tool was a questionnaire consisting of 21 items. These items focused on young consumers' preferences for purchasing Baijiu, highlighting aspects such as perceived quality, expected quality, brand image, attitude and satisfaction. All measurements utilized a 5-point Likert scale. To assess the validity of the research tool, three experts were consulted, and the Item Objective Congruence (IOC) index was calculated to evaluate the consistency between the question items and the research objectives. The IOC values for all items were greater than 0.5, thus the questionnaire passed the validity test. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed through a pilot test with 35 participants. The calculated Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.835, indicating high reliability (Hair et al., 2019). The data used in this study were collected through an online questionnaire survey. The questionnaire consisted of five main sections, which are summarized below in Table 1.

Table 1 Source of Measurement Items Used in the Questionnaire

Variables	Measurement Items	Source
Perceived Quality	1. The product performs well compared to my expectations. 2. This product is of higher quality than similar products on the market. 3. The craftsmanship of this product is excellent. 4. The overall quality of this product is consistent.	Ciavolino, E., & Dahlgaard, J. J. (2007).
Expected Quality	1. I expected this product to offer excellent performance. 2. My expectations for the quality of this product were high before purchasing it. 3. Based on its reputation, I anticipated this product would deliver great value. 4. I expected this product to meet my functional needs completely.	Ertz et al. (2022).
Brand Image	1. This brand has a positive reputation among consumers. 2. I have a favorable opinion of this brand compared to others. 3. This brand represents quality and reliability. 4. The image of this brand is consistent with my personal values. 5. I trust this brand to deliver high-quality products.	Iglesias et al. (2019).
Attitude	1. I have a positive attitude towards this product. 2. This product aligns well with my preferences. 3. I feel satisfied when using this product.	Arghashi et al. (2021).

	4. My overall feelings towards this product are favorable.	
	5. I would recommend this product to others based on my positive experiences.	
Satisfaction	1. I am highly satisfied with the overall quality of this product.	Ciavolino, E., & Dahlgaard, J. J. (2007).
	2. I am pleased with my decision to purchase this product.	
	3. I am satisfied with my experience using this product.	

3.3 Data Analysis

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is esteemed as a crucial benchmark in the study of social and behavioral sciences and is favored as a research technique (Mac Callum & Austin, 2000). Owing to its remarkable precision and efficiency, this statistical model has gained widespread usage. SEM, recognized as the leading multivariable analysis method in the second generation, has effectively surmounted the constraints of the initial generation's analysis technology, thereby becoming a key player in current and future studies (Zaman et al., 2022). Hair et. al. (2019) identified the primary elements of SEM as use of methods for confirming measurement models and assessing structural models. SEM aims to support diverse research methods, including linear regression, hypothesis testing, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and variance analysis (Cudeck et al., 2001).

In contrast to much of the existing research, this study uniquely applies the composite factor scores derived from IGSCA within the NCA model, strictly adhering to the guidelines put forward by Dul (2016). This technology is becoming more and more popular, as shown in SEM literature (Manosuthi et al., 2021; Satitsamitpong et al., 2024). In this study, component-based SEM methods were used to generate linear composite fractions suitable for further analysis, a threshold p-value of below 0.05 for each variable was used as a necessary condition for NCA. This novel combination of methods and criteria sets the study's findings apart and contributes new insights to the field.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Demographic Information

4.1.1 Respondents' Descriptive Analysis

According to the statistical results of the questionnaire, the age distribution of the surveyed sample group was concentrated between 20 and 30 years old, with 45% of the respondents being male and 55% female. The respondents were mainly company employees, accounting for 65.61%, followed by freelancers and public institution staff, both accounting for 8.09%, service workers and manual workers accounted for relatively small proportions at 5.59% and 3.08% respectively. It can be concluded that young company employees are a key target group for the consumption of Baijiu.

Most young people prefer low-alcohol Baijiu, accounting for 63.2%, while 26.97% prefer medium-alcohol Baijiu, and a smaller portion prefer high-alcohol or extra-high-alcohol Baijiu, accounting for 7.32% and 2.5%, respectively. Young people who chose low-alcohol content Baijiu mostly drank at friends' parties, business negotiations, or as personal drinks, of which business negotiations accounted for the highest proportion (32.99%); the proportion of gathering with friends was also high (32.49%); the proportion of respondents consuming Baijiu for the purpose of relaxing before bed, or supporting sleep was at least 5.08%.

4.1.2 Discriminant Validity

The analysis results show that most of the variables were found to have significant correlations with each other through Pearson correlation analysis. According to the correlation coefficients, the majority of the correlation coefficients (r) between the variables were greater than 0. It can therefore be concluded that most of the variables in this analysis exhibit a significant positive correlation with each other. The correlation between any two constructs should be less than the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Discriminant Validity

	PQ	EQ	BI	ATT	SAT
PQ	0.775				
EQ	0.310**	0.721			
BI	0.011	0.054	0.764		
ATT	0.272**	0.578**	0.041	0.734	
SAT	0.173**	0.260**	-0.04	0.166**	0.732

Note ** indicates $p < .01$

The mean interpretation criteria for each criterion (Solin et al., 2010) are shown in Table 3, which offers comprehensive information on the average value and significance assigned to the mean values of the assessment items, enhancing comprehension of all components.

Table 3 Criteria for the Interpretation of the Mean Value of Each Standard

Mean Value	Level of Agreement
4.51 - 5.00	Strongly Agree
3.51 - 4.50	Agree
2.51 - 3.50	Neutral
1.51 - 2.50	Disagree
1.00 - 1.50	Strongly Disagree

4.1.3 Reliability and Validity Analysis

This study evaluated the reliability of the Y Baijiu purchase scale for young consumers. Table 4 presents the descriptive statistical analysis and normality test results of the factors used in this study, shows the descriptive statistics: Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0 to 1, indicating reliability, with higher values signifying greater consistency. The average values are mainly concentrated between 3 and 4, and the values of BI are all within the "Agree" range, with SD values all around 1, while Kurtosis and Skewness are both distributed between -2 and 2.

Table 4 Descriptive Analysis of Measurement Scales

	Item	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Total-M	Total-SD
Perceived Quality (PQ)	PQ1	3.26	0.974	0.05	0.206	3.3666	0.89865
	PQ2	3.28	1.152	-0.2	-0.672		
	PQ3	3.55	1.108	0.583	-0.142		
	PQ4	3.37	1.072	-0.306	-0.495		

Expected Quality (EQ)	EQ1	3.35	0.855	-0.261	0.433	3.3459	0.73724
	EQ2	3.44	0.922	-0.51	0.391		
	EQ3	3.55	0.959	-0.402	0.192		
	EQ4	3.04	0.969	0.176	0.101		
Brand Image (BI)	BI1	4.14	1.093	1.332	1.157	3.9484	0.85403
	BI2	3.95	1.059	0.902	0.393		
	BI3	3.88	1.039	-0.843	0.286		
	BI4	3.9	1.023	-1.049	0.971		
	BI5	3.88	1.013	0.943	0.657		
Attitude (ATT)	ATT1	3.54	0.821	0.539	0.623	3.6004	0.68661
	ATT2	3.77	0.925	0.65	0.551		
	ATT3	3.64	0.865	-0.304	0.139		
	ATT4	3.58	0.879	0.328	0.42		
	ATT5	3.47	0.914	0.204	0.029		
Satisfaction (SAT)	SAT1	2.45	1.1	0.291	0.761	2.402	0.97164
	SAT2	1.97	1.105	0.902	-0.177		
	SAT3	2.78	1.167	0.073	-0.770		

Table 5 shows the consistency values of the model data, with variables as latent components. Validation focused on the latent variables, where factor loadings > 0.30 , CR $>$ AVE, and AVE > 0.50 confirmed convergent validity (Hair et al., 2006). In consumer behavior scale validation, all dimensions had AVE > 0.5 and CR > 0.7 . Factor loadings were in the range 0.683 - 0.903, exceeding the 0.50 threshold (Hair et al., 2019). Cronbach's alpha values for all items were in the range 0.806 - 0.875, surpassing the 0.70 threshold. CR values were in the range 0.811 - 0.876, above the 0.70 threshold, while AVE values were in the range 0.520 - 0.601, exceeding the 0.50 threshold. Consequently, all dimensions demonstrated strong convergent validity and reliability.

Table 5 Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results, CR and AVE

Latent Variables	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE	CR
PQ1	0.753	0.853	0.601	0.857
PQ2	0.865			
PQ3	0.779			
PQ4	0.869			
EQ1	0.713	0.806	0.520	0.811
EQ2	0.818			
EQ3	0.683			
EQ4	0.703			
BI1	0.834	0.875	0.585	0.876
BI2	0.795			
BI3	0.799			
BI4	0.832			
BI5	0.822			
ATT1	0.792	0.838	0.539	0.840

ATT2	0.708			
ATT3	0.710			
ATT4	0.759			
ATT5	0.747			
SAT1	0.903			
SAT2	0.829	0.830	0.536	0.832
SAT3	0.821			

4.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

CFA was conducted to measure the factor loading values, determining discriminant validity. Due to the statistical values for the CFA being very much within the acceptable values, no adjustments were needed. The normalized factor load was greater than 0.5, indicating that each observed variable could explain the latent variables well.

Table 6 Goodness of Fit Assessment for the Measurement Model

Index	Acceptable Values	Statistical Values
CMIN/DF	< 3.00 (Hair et al., 2006)	1.445
IFI	≥ 0.80 (Bentler, 1990)	0.990
TLI	≥ 0.80 (Bentler, 1990)	0.988
CFI	≥ 0.80 (Bentler, 1990)	0.990
RMSEA	< 0.08 (Pedroso et al., 2016)	0.029
Model summary		Acceptable Model Fit

4.3 Structural Equation Model

Based on the model fit test results shown in Table 7, it can be observed that the CMIN/DF (Chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio) = 2.241, which falls within the excellent range of 1-3, while RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) = 0.049, which is also within the excellent range of < 0.05. Additionally, the test results for IFI, TLI, and CFI were all above 0.9, reaching an excellent level.

Table 7 Goodness of Fit Assessment for the Structural Model

Index	Acceptable Values	Statistical Values
CMIN/DF	< 3.00 (Hair et al., 2006)	2.241
IFI	≥ 0.80 (Bentler, 1990)	0.952
TLI	≥ 0.80 (Bentler, 1990)	0.946
CFI	≥ 0.80 (Bentler, 1990)	0.952
RMSEA	< 0.08 (Pedroso et al., 2016)	0.049
Model summary		Acceptable Model Fit

Therefore, the comprehensive analysis results indicate that the consumer behavior satisfaction model has a good fit. This study used survey data and applied SEM to explore the factors influencing young people's consumption of Baijiu, along with the optimization path of the SEM model. Through the analysis of the structural equation model, young consumers' satisfaction with Baijiu was found to be primarily influenced by the intrinsic quality and taste

of the product. While advertising or promotional activities (stimulus inputs) in the market had some impact, they were not as important as the product itself. Therefore, when Baijiu brands aim to attract young consumers, they should place greater emphasis on the quality and experience of the product itself.

4.4 Hypothesis Testing Results and Path Analysis

SEM analysis was performed to evaluate the hypothesis, paying particular attention to the path coefficients. The results of the hypothesis test are shown in Table 8 below, revealing the confirmation of four important hypotheses. Except for the path coefficients related to BI and ATT, which had no statistical significance on SAT ($\beta = 0.014$, $p = 0.731 > 0.05$), all path coefficients were found to be significant at either the 0.001 or 0.05 level.

Table 8 Hypothesis Testing Results of the Structural Equation Modeling

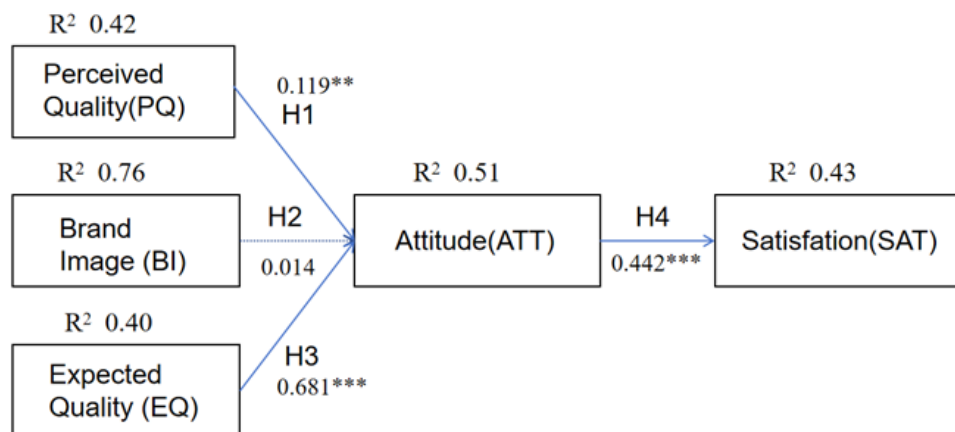
	Hypothesis	β	S.E.	C.R.	P	Result
H1:	PQ→ATT	0.119	0.039	2.781	0.05	Accept
H2:	BI→ATT	0.014	0.029	0.344	0.731	Reject
H3:	EQ→ATT	0.681	0.056	11.512	***	Accept
H4:	ATT→SAT	0.442	0.087	3.906	***	Accept

Note*** $p < 0.001$

The test results for the research hypotheses show that PQ has a significant positive predictive effect on purchasing attitude ($\beta = 0.119$, $0.001 < p < 0.05$), so hypothesis H1 is supported. Meanwhile, BI had no significant positive predictive effect on purchasing attitude ($\beta = 0.014$, $p > 0.05$), so H2 was not established. EQ had a significant positive predictive effect on purchasing attitude ($\beta = 0.681$, $p < 0.001$), supporting hypothesis H3. Purchasing attitude had a significant positive predictive effect on purchasing satisfaction ($\beta = 0.442$, $p < 0.001$), supporting hypothesis H4.

Additionally, Figure 4 shows the results of the hypothesis testing used in the path analysis. PQ and EQ were shown to be the main influencers of purchase satisfaction, with intrinsic factors having the greatest impact, while the influence of BI was relatively minor. The analysis found that the factors corresponding to hypotheses H1, H3 and H4 had a direct effect at significance levels of 0.01 or 0.05.

Figure 4 Results of the Structural Equation Model (Path analysis)



The study also considered factors that have an indirect impact on the purchase of Baijiu by young consumers. It is worth noting that through the study of PQ, BI and EQ variables, it was found that the strength of ATT has an indirect impact on the satisfaction of purchasing Baijiu. When the significance level is 0.01, the total effect value is 0.442. Although the factors associated with and EQ did not show a direct effect, a detailed analysis of their indirect effects showed that these factors influence the satisfaction of purchasing Baijiu through variables focused on ATT. This effect was quantified as a total effect size of 0.301 with a significance level of 0.01 (Table 9).

Table 9 Coefficients for the Direct, Indirect, And Total Effects

Independent Variables	Attitude (ATT)				Satisfaction (SAT)			
	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	R ²	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	R ²
PQ	0.119**	—	0.119**	0.51	—	0.053**	0.053**	0.43
BI	0.014	—	0.014		—	0.006	0.006	
EQ	0.681***	—	0.681***		—	0.301***	0.301***	
ATT	—	—	—		0.442***	—	0.442***	

Note **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

4.5 NCA Results

A necessary condition analysis (NCA) was employed to ascertain the crucial factors (Napontun et al., 2024), as NCA can efficiently identify and predict the outcomes of variables within a structural framework (Wattanawaraporn & Manosudhtikul, 2024). Additionally, NCA can analyze and uncover diverse conditions that were not recognized in the previous SEM analysis (Pinthong et al., 2024). In the context of component - based SEM, each factor can be evaluated by analyzing its necessity and sufficiency (Rasmidatta, 2023). The results of the Single Necessary Condition Analysis (NCA) as shown in Table10, Figures 5, and Figure 6, which present the NCA plots, provide a clear illustration of the interactions and key structures within the model. This analysis shows that ATT, PQ, BI and EQ are all necessary conditions for young consumers to achieve satisfaction (SAT) regarding Baijiu consumption, with a confidence level of 95%. PQ, EI and EQ are necessary conditions for young consumers to form positive attitudes regarding the purchase of Baijiu (ATT) with a confidence level of 95%. All variables were found to be important and necessary.

Table 10 Results of Single Necessary Condition Analysis

Outcome ATT	CR-FDH (d)	p-value	Necessary?
PQ	0.303	0.000	In kind*
BI	0.284	0.000	In kind*
EQ	0.327	0.000	In kind*
Outcome SAT	CR-FDH (d)	p-value	Necessary?
ATT	0.320	0.000	In kind*
PQ	0.175	0.000	In kind*

BI	0.222	0.000	In kind*
EQ	0.354	0.000	In kind*

Note. CR-FDH = Ceiling Regression with Free Disposal Hull, * = .05 Significance level, Perceived Quality = PQ, Brand Image = BI, Expected Quality = EQ, Attitude = ATT, Satisfaction = SAT

Figure 5 NCA Plots (ATT as Outcome)

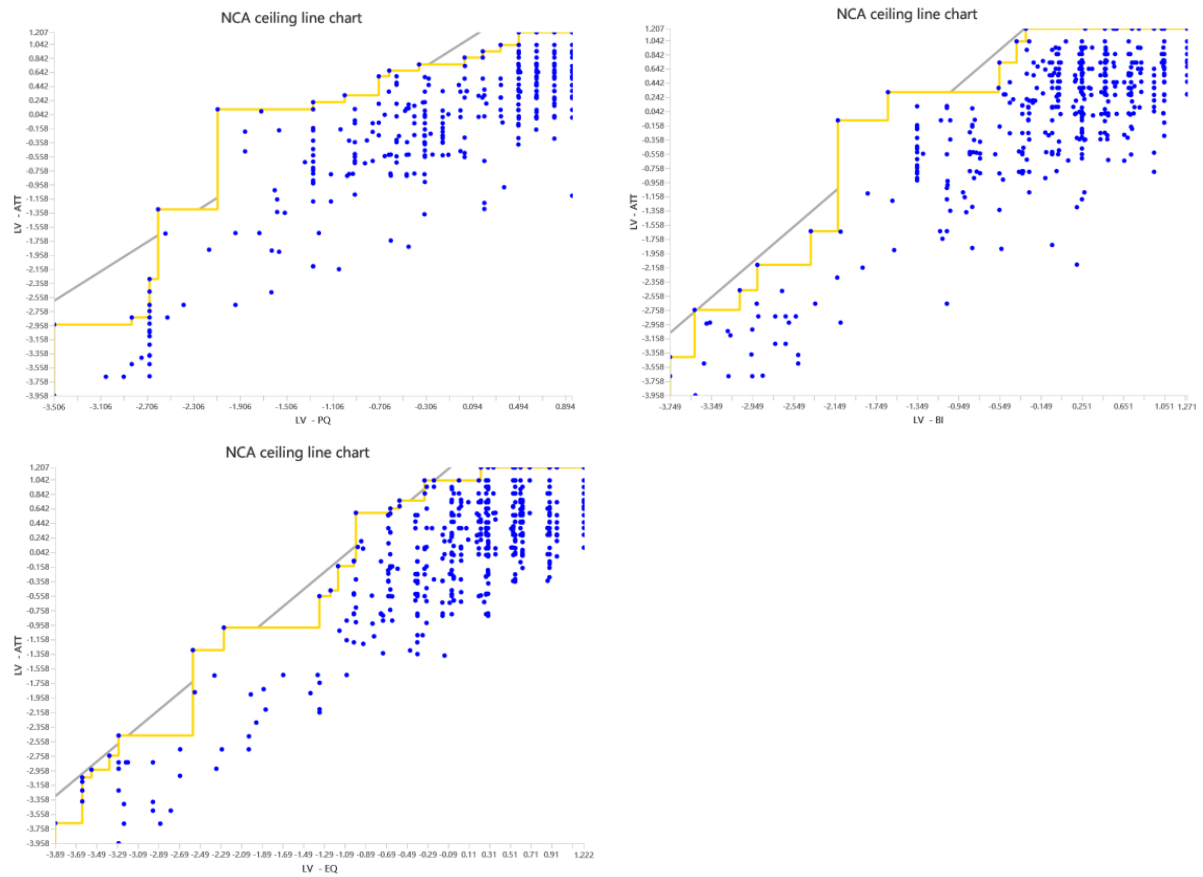
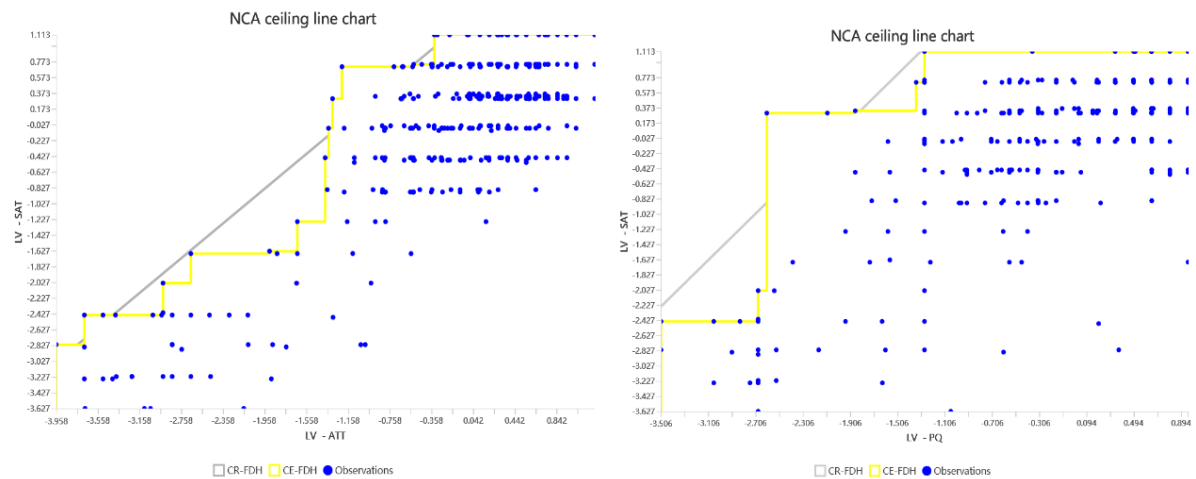
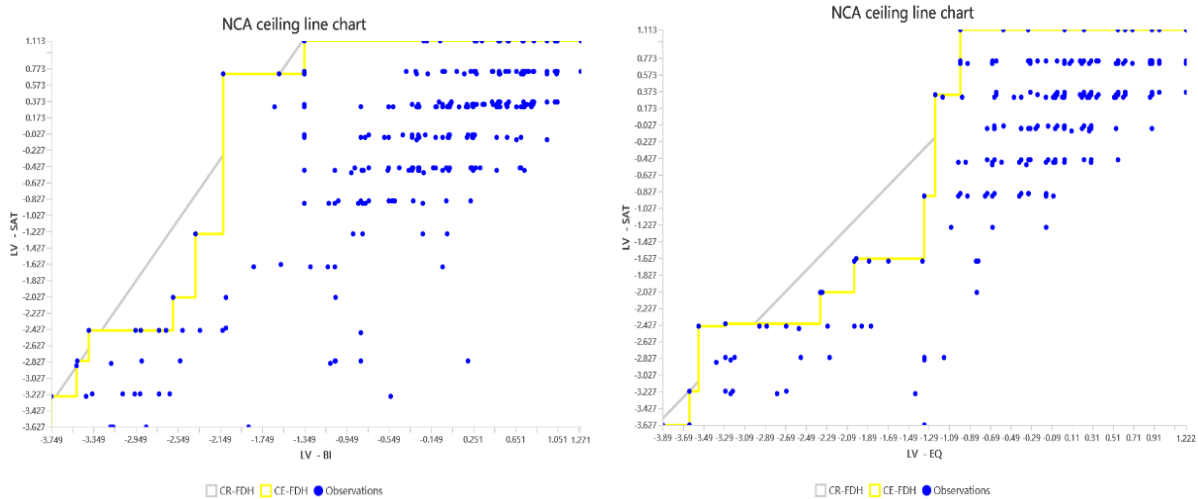


Figure 6 NCA Plots (SAT as Outcome)





5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Main Findings

This study focused on the consumption behavior of young Chinese consumers aged 20–30 in the Baijiu industry, whose opinions were lacking in prior literature, employing empirical analysis to investigate the impacts of Expected Quality (EQ), Perceived Quality (PQ), Brand Image (BI), and consumption mindset on purchase Attitude (ATT) and Satisfaction (SAT). The study results provide guidance for the following strategic recommendations for brand rejuvenation in the Baijiu sector. Main findings include:

Firstly, the results highlight the pivotal role of quality perception. Both EQ and PQ were found to significantly influence consumer satisfaction. Notably, the path coefficient of EQ was higher, suggesting that expected experiential quality plays a more critical role in young consumers' decision-making processes. When perceived quality exceeds expectations, consumers' satisfaction will increase, aligning with the findings of Dam & Dam (2021). This may be because young consumers pay greater attention to product quality and word-of-mouth and tend to choose those brands with guaranteed quality.

Secondly, brand image indirectly influences purchasing behavior by shaping consumer attitudes. To achieve this, it is essential to cultivate positive perceptions across three dimensions: functional, emotional, and social. Brands should emphasize their symbolic value of “reliable quality,” which resonates with propositions regarding the impact of brand identity on repurchase intentions (Fakfare et al., 2024). The fundamental reason for the small impact of Baijiu brands' effects on young consumers is that these brands have not yet fully adapted to the changes in the needs of young consumers, and it takes time for young people to form brand loyalty, so there is no fixed brand loyalty at present.

Thirdly, the NCA survey highlights the importance of unique buying mindsets and PQ in shaping consumer perceptions. By systematically validating the mechanism of PQ, BI, and consumption mindset within the Baijiu context, this research extends the theoretical framework on perceived value (Zeithaml et al., 2020). The hierarchical relationship $EQ > ATT > PQ > BI$ highlights that quality expectations and emotional attitudes are central factors. Social needs, such as those related to social contexts, directly affect purchase intentions, echoing the strategy for culturally empowering products (Bitsch & Hanf, 2021). By leveraging culture-empowered products and various forms of cultural expression, brands can resonate with consumers, provide additional consumption experiences, and achieve cultural identity, ultimately enhancing perceived value and achieving customer satisfaction.

The final contribution of this study relates to the challenge of brand rejuvenation. Younger consumers exhibit lower brand loyalty, primarily due to brands failing to fully adapt to their evolving needs. It is recommended that Baijiu brands take measures to enhance cultural resonance through cross-sector collaborations (e.g., partnerships with fashion brands or film/game IPs), integrate digital marketing strategies (e.g., short videos, KOL collaborations), and innovate product offerings by developing low-alcohol-content adaptations and diversified flavors (e.g., jasmine and lemon). Promoting healthy drinking habits can further enhance appeal. Additionally, organizing joint activities and leveraging festival marketing could help integrate into youth consumption and social scenarios, thereby holding joint activities and festival marketing to enhance cultural identity is a recommended strategy. This study further complements cultural marketing research by revealing the mediating role of attitudes in translating brand image into behavioral outcomes (Kang et al., 2023).

5.2 Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has certain limitations, particularly in its exclusive emphasis on the attitudes and satisfaction of young Chinese consumers regarding Baijiu. Moreover, it does not thoroughly examine the specific dimensions of perceived quality (PQ), such as flavor profiles and packaging design, nor does it delve deeply into the subtle mechanisms by which digital marketing shapes consumer perceptions. Future studies are encouraged to bridge these gaps by focusing on three key directions.

Firstly, methodologies from established research on liquor consumption—such as studies on Japanese sake and Scotch whisky—can offer valuable insights. For example, the Japanese sake industry's use of “terroir” narratives to strengthen regional identity (Tseng & Kishi, 2023), along with Scotch whisky's differentiation between single malt and blended varieties (Stewart et al., 2021), present effective value-added strategies. These cases provide important international references that can inform the modernization and global expansion of Baijiu.

In addition, to better understand consumer preference priorities, this study proposes utilizing Yasunaga's (2024) conjoint analysis framework to quantify how young consumers rank various quality attributes, such as raw materials and brewing methods. A comprehensive database of Baijiu flavor profiles will be established to measure the impact of different production techniques on perceived quality—for example, analyzing flavor compound differences between sweet and strong aroma varieties. These findings will guide the development of targeted products that better align with the preferences of young consumers.

Furthermore, research into digital marketing should be strengthened. Based on the current dominance of short video content and interactive engagement, which are very effective in attracting younger audiences, many Baijiu enterprises have begun to try to conduct comprehensive marketing activities through various media. It is therefore important to examine the differential effects of social media platforms (Bilibili, Rednote), AI-driven recommendations, and gamified brand experiences on brand perception, specifically exploring how user generated content and interactive technologies can enhance PQ perceptions and purchase intent, leveraging emerging trends in China's digital ecosystem.

By incorporating these global perspectives, these strategies can serve as valuable case studies for Baijiu brands to capture the young market, enhancing the generalizability of the findings, and providing valuable insights into how traditional alcoholic beverages, including Baijiu, are evolving to capture young market segments, and viable strategies for Baijiu's modernization and global appeal.

6. CONCLUSION

This study contributes significantly to a broader understanding of consumer behavior and satisfaction theories by shedding light on the intricate factors influencing the satisfaction of Chinese young consumers towards Baijiu. The statistical analysis, employing tools such as CFA, SEM, NCA, and regression analysis, reveals a nuanced picture where product quality, perceived quality, and brand image emerge as pivotal drivers of consumer satisfaction. These findings underscore the importance of intrinsic attributes and consumer perceptions in shaping purchasing decisions, aligning with theories that emphasize the role of product excellence and consumer expectations in fostering satisfaction.

For Baijiu brands, the study offers detailed recommendations. Firstly, prioritizing product quality and innovation is paramount. Brands should focus on refining taste and overall quality to meet the discerning palate of young consumers. Secondly, enhancing perceived quality is crucial. Strategies such as consistent quality assurance, transparent communication about production processes, and positive consumer testimonials can bridge the gap between expected and perceived quality, leading to higher satisfaction levels. Moreover, leveraging cultural identity in marketing can resonate deeply with consumers, emphasizing the heritage and authenticity of Baijiu while appealing to their emotional connections.

The findings are also situated well within research on broader consumer behavior trends, particularly the shift from functional to emotional branding. In today's market, consumers are increasingly driven by emotional connections and brand value, rather than just functional benefits. This underscores the importance of Baijiu brands cultivating a positive and healthy brand image, which goes beyond product attributes to encompass social responsibility and community engagement. Sponsoring public welfare activities and engaging in environmental protection initiatives can better align Baijiu brands with the values of younger consumers, fostering deeper emotional connections and loyalty.

Additionally, the study highlights the pivotal role of consumer attitudes in the purchasing process. A positive attitude towards a product can significantly enhance satisfaction and drive loyalty, reinforcing the need for Baijiu brands to foster positive associations and experiences through their marketing efforts.

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide invaluable insights for Baijiu brands. To effectively meet the expectations of young consumers and enhance their satisfaction, brands must prioritize product quality and innovation, focus on value-oriented attributes, and align their marketing strategies with broader consumer behavior trends. By doing so, Baijiu brands can not only survive but thrive in the competitive market, fostering long-term loyalty and growth.

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Disclaimer: This study extensively employed AI tools for verifying grammatical correctness and initially gathering keywords. AI instruments aided in the initial phases of the study, the authors executed all following activities, such as analyzing data, interpreting results, and preparing the final manuscript. The study’s authors accept complete accountability for its content and findings.

This study focuses on young consumers aged 20 to 30, with all survey participants falling within this age range. The findings and conclusions of the study are based solely on the respondents’ genuine feedback and data analysis, without any influence from external journals or peer reviews. The views and conclusions expressed by the respondents reflect their individual opinions and are not affiliated with any journal or academic review organization.

This study strictly adheres to all relevant legal regulations and ethical guidelines. All participants voluntarily took part in the research after being fully informed about its purpose and procedures, with all participants providing informed consent prior to participation. All respondents were of legal age and fully met the eligibility criteria for inclusion in the study.