

INFLUENCING OF BRAND PERCEPTION, BRAND PERSONALITY AND SELF-CONGRUITY ON SPORTS TOURISM BRAND LOYALTY IN ZHANGJIAJIE CITY, CHINA

A INFLUÊNCIA DA PERCEPÇÃO DA MARCA, DA PERSONALIDADE DA MARCA E DA CONGRUÊNCIA PESSOAL NA LEALDADE À MARCA DE TURISMO ESPORTIVO NA CIDADE DE ZHANGJIAJIE, CHINA

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Abstract

In recent years, sports tourism has emerged as a driver of regional development. Leveraging its natural landscapes and sports events, Zhangjiajie has built a distinctive local sports tourism brand. However, empirical research on how brand perception, brand personality, and self-congruity jointly influence brand loyalty remains limited. This study investigates the relationships among these variables and constructs a structural model of their effects on brand loyalty. A mixed-methods approach was adopted: qualitative research through interviews and literature review, and quantitative analysis using data from 320 questionnaire responses analyzed via structural equation modeling. Expert evaluations were also conducted to validate findings. Results reveal that brand perception, brand personality, and self-congruity all positively influence brand loyalty, with self-congruity mediating the effects of both brand perception and brand personality. These findings offer practical implications for enhancing brand loyalty in Zhangjiajie's sports tourism sector.

Keywords: Brand Perception. Brand Personality. Self-Congruity. Sports Tourism Brand Loyalty. Zhangjiajie City.

Resumo

Nos últimos anos, o turismo esportivo tem se destacado como um impulsionador do desenvolvimento regional. Aproveitando suas paisagens naturais e eventos esportivos, Zhangjiajie construiu uma marca local distinta de turismo esportivo. No entanto, as pesquisas empíricas sobre como a percepção da marca, a personalidade da marca e a congruência pessoal influenciam conjuntamente a lealdade à marca ainda são limitadas. Este estudo investiga as relações entre essas variáveis e constrói um modelo estrutural de seus efeitos sobre a lealdade à marca. Foi adotada uma abordagem de métodos mistos: pesquisa qualitativa por meio de entrevistas e revisão da literatura, e análise quantitativa utilizando dados de 320 respostas a questionários analisadas por meio de modelagem de equações estruturais. Avaliações de especialistas também foram realizadas para validar os resultados. Os resultados revelam que a percepção da marca, a personalidade da marca e a congruência pessoal influenciam positivamente a lealdade à marca, com a congruência pessoal mediando os efeitos tanto da percepção da marca quanto da personalidade da marca. Essas descobertas oferecem implicações práticas para o aumento da lealdade à marca no setor de turismo esportivo de Zhangjiajie.

Palavras-chave: Percepção da Marca. Personalidade da Marca. Congruência Pessoal. Lealdade à Marca de Turismo Esportivo. Cidade de Zhangjiajie.



1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, sports tourism has emerged as a strategic engine for regional development, blending leisure consumption with economic and cultural growth (Wang, 2023). Zhangjiajie, renowned for its dramatic karst landscapes and ecological richness, has leveraged its natural advantages to position itself as a premier destination for outdoor and extreme sports. Since hosting landmark events such as the World Aerobic Competition in 1999, the city has continually expanded its “sports + tourism” framework, driving innovation in event IP development, facility construction, and brand building (Wen, 2024; Rednet, 2021).

Government initiatives, such as the signing of the cooperative agreement with the Hunan Provincial Sports Bureau and the implementation of the “Zhangjiajie Sports Tourism Industry Development Plan (2021–2030)”, have further institutionalized the integration of sports and tourism, contributing to the city’s post-pandemic recovery and long-term tourism resilience (Hunan Provincial Sports Bureau, 2020). Notably, the role of outdoor sports enthusiasts as a loyal, influential consumer group has become increasingly central. These individuals not only demand high service quality but also display strong brand loyalty, shaping word-of-mouth and market positioning (Wang, 2023).

Against this backdrop, understanding how brand perception, brand personality, and self-congruity interact to influence sports tourism brand loyalty in Zhangjiajie is both timely and necessary. This study aims to explore the mechanism through which these factors contribute to loyalty, thereby offering insights for both theory and practice in tourism brand management.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Oliver's brand loyalty model

Oliver’s (1997) Brand Loyalty Model outlines a four-stage progression of consumer loyalty (cognitive, affective, conative, and action loyalty) following a cognition–affect–conation–action sequence. At the cognitive stage, consumers begin by

believing that one brand is superior based on information or past experience (Cuesta-Valiño, 2022). With repeated satisfying encounters, they move to the affective stage, forming emotional attachment or liking toward the brand (Bae, 2023). This emotional bond deepens into conative loyalty, where consumers express a strong intention or commitment to repurchase the brand despite alternatives (Seduram, 2022). Finally, in the action stage, intentions are converted into consistent purchase behavior, supported by a desire to overcome potential barriers—resulting in what Oliver calls “action inertia” (Kuhl & Beckmann, 2015; Wisker, 2023). This model helps explain how brand loyalty develops and stabilizes over time, and is widely applied in consumer behavior and tourism studies.

2.2 Brand perception and sports tourism brand loyalty

Brand perception plays a vital role in sports tourism brand management, especially in shaping consumer loyalty. For Zhangjiajie's sports tourism brand, brand perception influences not only tourists' initial impressions but also their ongoing loyalty. Research has demonstrated that various dimensions of brand perception—such as brand image, brand cognition, and brand association, significantly impact brand loyalty (Bruckberger, 2023). Brand image is a primary factor affecting loyalty, as a clear and attractive brand image enhances consumer trust, thereby strengthening loyalty to sports tourism brands (Kumaradeepan, 2023; Rachmad, 2023). Zhangjiajie's unique natural landscapes and diverse sports activities form a strong brand image that increases its competitiveness. Additionally, brand cognition is crucial in establishing loyalty, with higher brand awareness linked to better customer retention (Nguyen, 2023). Zhangjiajie has improved its brand cognition through extensive promotion on social media and digital platforms, further boosting loyalty. Finally, brand association fosters emotional connections between consumers and the brand, which consolidates Zhangjiajie's sports tourism brand loyalty. Therefore, this study proposes the hypothesis that brand perception positively influences sports tourism brand loyalty in Zhangjiajie City, China. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Brand perception positively influences sports tourism brand loyalty in Zhangjiajie City, China.

2.3 Brand personality and sports tourism brand loyalty

Brand personality is a crucial element in sports tourism brand management, representing the unique traits that a brand embodies in the minds of consumers (Aji, 2023). According to Shetty (2022), brand personality humanizes sports tourism brands and creates uniqueness, thereby strengthening emotional bonds with consumers, which is vital for fostering brand loyalty (Heleta, 2023). Specifically for Zhangjiajie's sports tourism brand, brand personality positively influences brand loyalty. First, it enhances brand recognition by distinguishing the brand from competitors and making it stand out; for instance, Zhangjiajie's brand can be characterized by adventure and natural exploration, attracting tourists seeking such experiences (Salsabila, 2024). Second, brand personality fosters emotional connections, as consumers tend to be loyal when they perceive alignment between their own personality or values and the brand's traits (Letukyte, 2022). If Zhangjiajie's sports tourism brand communicates values of nature, health, and adventure, it can deepen tourists' emotional attachment. Additionally, brand personality improves the pleasure derived from the brand experience, encouraging repeated engagement and loyalty (Nugraha, 2023). By cultivating a vibrant and positive brand personality, Zhangjiajie can enhance tourist satisfaction and thus increase brand loyalty. Therefore, this study proposes the hypothesis that brand personality positively influences sports tourism brand loyalty in Zhangjiajie City, China. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Brand personality positively influences sports tourism brand loyalty in Zhangjiajie City, China.

2.4 Brand perception and self-congruity

Brand perception plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior, particularly in influencing self-congruity, which refers to the extent to which consumers perceive a brand's image as consistent with their own self-concept, including both actual and ideal selves (Li, 2022). When the brand image aligns with consumers' self-concept, they tend to develop positive feelings toward the sports tourism brand and prefer it over others. In the case of Zhangjiajie's sports tourism brand, brand perception has a significant positive

effect on self-congruity. Firstly, elements of brand perception such as brand image and brand personality help establish self-congruity; for example, Zhangjiajie's unique natural beauty and cultural characteristics enable consumers to connect the brand with their own love for nature and spirit of adventure, thereby enhancing self-congruity (Simanjuntak, 2022). Secondly, brand perception can increase self-congruity by strengthening consumers' sense of self-identity; when Zhangjiajie's brand projects ideals like health, vitality, and exploration, consumers are more likely to identify with the brand and maintain a consistent self-concept (Tran, 2022). Finally, emotional connections fostered by brand perception further enhance self-congruity—when consumers perceive that Zhangjiajie's values align with their own personal values, a stronger emotional bond forms, reinforcing their self-consistency (Malär et al., 2011). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed: brand perception positively influences self-congruity in Zhangjiajie City, China. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Brand perception positively influences self-congruity in Zhangjiajie City, China.

2.5 Brand personality and self-congruity

Brand personality plays a vital role in brand management, particularly in enhancing self-congruity, which refers to consumers' tendency to choose brands that reflect or reinforce their self-image (Juhaidi, 2024). In the context of Zhangjiajie's sports tourism brand, brand personality has a significant positive impact on consumers' self-consistency. Firstly, brand personality helps establish a psychological fit between consumers and the brand by personifying the brand with human traits, making it easier for consumers to relate it to their self-image (Wilkie, 2022). For instance, if Zhangjiajie's sports tourism brand embodies characteristics such as adventure, nature, and health, it will attract consumers who identify with these values, thereby enhancing their self-consistency. Secondly, brand personality strengthens self-expression; consumers often select brands that align with their ideal self, and when Zhangjiajie's brand personality matches consumers' ideal self, they are more likely to identify with the brand and use it as a form of self-expression, further enhancing self-consistency (Kim, 2023; Bagaskara, 2023). Finally, brand personality can increase self-consistency by fostering brand loyalty.

When consumers perceive a high consistency between brand personality and their self-image, they develop an emotional attachment to the brand, which strengthens their psychological fit and reinforces self-consistency (Swaminathan et al., 2009). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed: brand personality positively influences self-congruity in Zhangjiajie City, China. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: Brand personality positively influences self-congruity in Zhangjiajie City, China.

2.6 Self-congruity and sports tourism brand loyalty

Self-congruity theory suggests that consumers tend to choose brands consistent with their self-image, which positively influences brand choice and consumer behavior by enhancing brand identity and loyalty (Zhang, X., 2022). In the context of Zhangjiajie's sports tourism brand, self-congruity plays a significant positive role. First, self-congruity strengthens consumers' identification with the brand, as when they perceive Zhangjiajie's sports tourism brand aligns closely with their self-image, they form a stronger emotional connection, increasing their willingness to choose Zhangjiajie as a travel destination and influencing their travel decisions (Chieng, F., 2022). Second, self-congruity enhances brand performance by fostering loyalty; consumers whose self-concepts align with the brand are more likely to remain loyal and promote the destination through word-of-mouth (Kressmann et al., 2006). Finally, self-congruity increases the perceived value of the brand, which boosts its market competitiveness and premium pricing ability (Sarita, 2024). Therefore, for Zhangjiajie's sports tourism brand, aligning brand image with consumers' self-concept enhances overall perceived value and strengthens its competitive advantage in the tourism market. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed: self-congruity positively influences sports tourism brand loyalty in Zhangjiajie City, China. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H5: Self-congruity positively influences sports tourism brand loyalty in Zhangjiajie City, China.

2.7 Self-congruity, brand perception and sports tourism brand loyalty

Brand perception, encompassing dimensions such as brand popularity, image, and associations, is a crucial factor influencing consumer behavior, particularly brand loyalty. However, the influence of brand perception on sports tourism brand loyalty is not direct; self-congruity plays a significant mediating role (Byeon, H., 2022). When consumers hold a positive perception of Zhangjiajie's sports tourism brand, they are more likely to perceive a high level of alignment between the brand and their self-image, which strengthens their identity and emotional connection with the brand, thus enhancing loyalty (Seran, C. Y., 2024). For example, consumers who see Zhangjiajie's brand as consistent with their own traits, such as love for adventure, nature, and a healthy lifestyle, tend to show greater loyalty to the brand (Onur, M., 2024). Moreover, self-congruity amplifies the effect of brand perception on loyalty; when brand perception aligns with consumers' self-concept, it deepens the psychological fit and increases consumer loyalty, manifested not only in repeat visits or purchases but also in positive word-of-mouth (Siswandi, 2023). This mediating role of self-congruity explains how brand perception shapes psychological attachment to the brand, which in turn strengthens loyalty. Therefore, by effectively conveying a brand image consistent with consumers' self-image, Zhangjiajie's sports tourism brand can cultivate a loyal customer base that both returns and recommends the destination (Khoirunnisa, 2024). In summary, self-congruity is a key mediator between brand perception and brand loyalty in Zhangjiajie's sports tourism context, highlighting the importance of enhancing consumers' self-consistency to convert positive brand perception into loyalty. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed: self-congruity mediates the relationship between brand perception and sports tourism brand loyalty in Zhangjiajie City, China. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H6: Self-congruity positively mediates the relationship between brand perception and sports tourism brand loyalty in Zhangjiajie City, China.

2.8 Self-congruity, brand personality and sports tourism brand loyalty

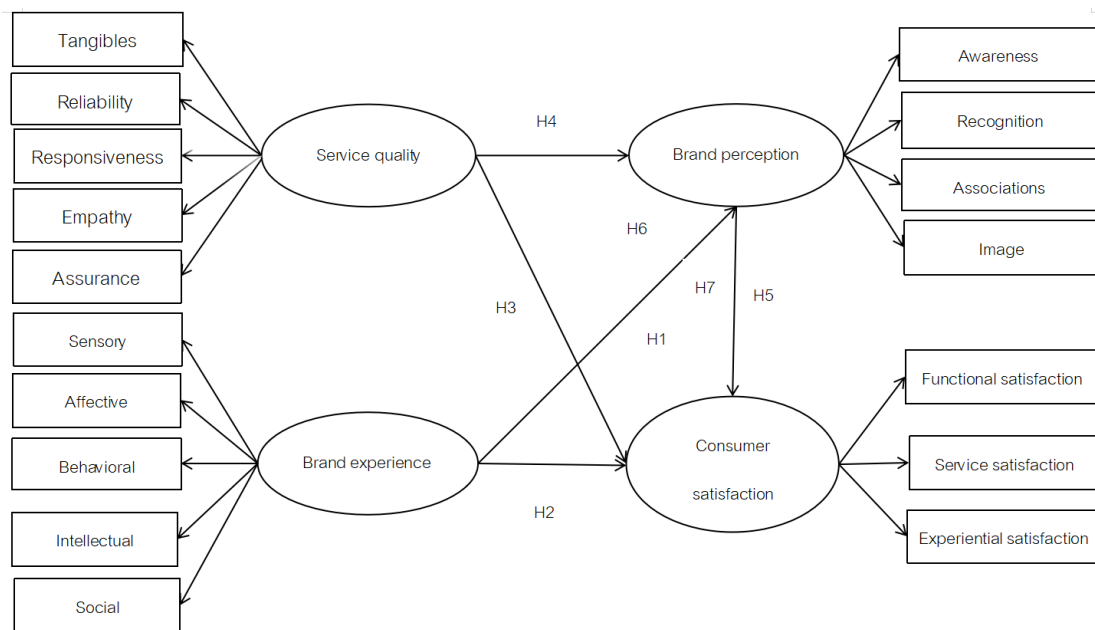
Brand personality, reflecting personalized traits such as "adventure," "nature," and "health," plays a significant role in shaping sports tourism brand loyalty by aligning with

consumers' own personality characteristics. However, this influence is not direct; self-congruity acts as a crucial mediator (Siswandi, R. A., 2023). When Zhangjiajie's sports tourism brand presents personality traits that closely match the consumer's self-image, consumers perceive a strong fit between the brand and their self-concept, which enhances their sense of identity and emotional attachment to the brand, thereby increasing loyalty (Simanjuntak, 2022). For instance, consumers who view Zhangjiajie's brand personality as adventurous and nature-oriented—matching their personal values—tend to exhibit greater loyalty to the brand. Furthermore, self-congruity strengthens the effect of brand personality on loyalty; when consumers feel alignment between brand personality and their self-concept, they are more likely to choose the brand and actively promote it via word-of-mouth, reinforcing brand loyalty (Li, M. H., 2024). As a mediating factor, self-congruity explains how brand personality deepens consumers' psychological connection and emotional bond with the brand, further solidifying loyalty (Faheema, 2022). By cultivating a brand personality that resonates with consumers' self-image, Zhangjiajie's sports tourism brand can more effectively attract and retain its target audience, enhancing its competitive position. In summary, self-congruity is a vital mediator between brand personality and sports tourism brand loyalty in Zhangjiajie. Enhancing consumers' self-consistency enables the conversion of brand personality into stronger brand loyalty, which is crucial for Zhangjiajie's success in a competitive tourism market. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed: self-congruity mediates the relationship between brand personality and sports tourism brand loyalty in Zhangjiajie City, China. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H7: Self-congruity positively mediates the relationship between brand personality and sports tourism brand loyalty in Zhangjiajie City, China.

2.9 Research model

Based on the literature review and research hypotheses, the conceptual model of sports tourism brand loyalty is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1*Conceptual model***3 METHODOLOGY****3.1 Participants and sample design**

Population The target population of this study is Tianmen Mountain tourists, 320 tourists were randomly selected.

3.2 Measurement

This study employed established measurement scales for variables from both domestic and international sources, modifying the items to align with the specific context of Chinese consumers. The variables in this study include brand perception, brand personality, self-congruity and sports tourism brand loyalty. Sports tourism brand loyalty questionnaire mainly covers four aspects: Recommend, Exclusive, Attitude, and Behavior. It refers to questionnaires developed by Mi Ryoung Chung (2021), Quester (2003), Divanoglu (2022), and Xie Chunlong (2022). Brand perception is measured through aspects such as brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand

credibility. The scale used is adapted from studies by Aaker (2022), Keller (2001), and Yoo et al. (2023). Brand personality questionnaire measures brand personality across five dimensions: Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness. It refers to the brand personality scale developed by Viratthanant (2018) and further adapted for sports tourism by Ekinici & Hosany (2006). Self-congruity is measured based on how well the sports tourism brand aligns with the individual's self-image. The questionnaire refers to scales developed by Sirgy et al. (1997), Kressmann et al. (2006), and Jaipong (2022).

4 DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This study constructs a PLS-SEM model and employs Smart PLS 4.0 software to conduct validity and reliability tests as well as path coefficient analysis to verify the proposed hypotheses.

4.1 Reliability and convergent validity analysis

Table 1

Reliability Test for Each Variable

Dimension	Number of items	Alpha	p
Brand recommend(BR)	5	0.901	0.000
Attitude loyalty(AL)	3	0.821	0.000
Revisit Intention(RI)	4	0.823	0.000
Awareness (AW)	4	0.830	0.000
Recognition(RE)	4	0.839	0.000
Associations(AS)	5	0.809	0.000
Image (EMP)	3	0.814	0.000
Vibrancy(VI)	3	0.819	0.000
Sophistication(SO)	5	0.933	0.000
Competence (CO)	3	0.840	0.000
Contemporary (CON)	4	0.815	0.000
Sincerity(SI)	4	0.907	0.000
Actual self-congruity(ASC)	4	0.845	0.000
Ideal self-congruity(ISC)	3	0.826	0.000
Social self-congruity(SSC)	5	0.873	0.000
Ideal social self-congruity(ISSC)	5	0.862	0.000

From Table 1: Checking the identity matrix by using Bartlett's Test of Sphericity and Measure of Sampling Adequacy(MSA) with 18 observation variables in the Structural Equation Modeling(SEM) to check the adequacy of the relationship between variables for the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis revealed that the correlation of the observation variables was not the identity matrix ($\text{Alpha} > 0.7$, $p < 0.000$), it indicated that the overall observation variables had adequate relationship for the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis.

4.2 Fornell-larcker criterion

Testing the Discriminant Validity in the level of latent variables would be considered by the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$) of each latent variable and other latent variables. If the AVE was greater than the relationship between that latent variable and other latent variables, it indicated that the indicator of that latent variable had adequate Discriminant Validity (Hair et al., 2014; Lowry and Gaskin, 2014) as shown in Table 1.

Table 2

Discriminant Validity by using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	BP	BPE	SC	SPBL
BP	0.77			
BPE	0.338	0.78		
SC	0.505	0.568	0.827	
SPBL	0.471	0.494	0.587	0.792

Remark: Squared correlations; AVE in the diagonal

Table 2 revealed that the AVE ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$) of each latent variable in this research was greater than the relationship between that latent variable and other latent variables in the square root model, it indicated that the indicator of each latent variable of this research had adequate Discriminant Validity as the indicator of one latent variable would be separated from other latent variables.

Table 3

	BR	AL	RI	AW	RE	AS	IM	VI	SO	CO	CON	SI	ASC	ISC	SSC	ISCO
BR	1															
AL	.428**	1														
RI	.473**	.430**	1													
AW	.221**	.181**	.307**	1												
RE	.255**	.185**	.338**	.713**	1											
AS	.308**	.302**	.415**	.363**	.380**	1										
IM	.292**	.234**	.319**	.400**	.472**	.450**	1									
VI	.218**	.318**	.346**	.182**	.238**	.219**	.234**	1								
SO	.334**	.408**	.336**	.237**	.232**	.174**	.209**	.439**	1							
CO	.251**	.370**	.271**	.213**	.203**	.163**	.158**	.468**	.633**	1						
CON	.232**	.308**	.340**	.187**	.214**	.216**	.167**	.713**	.440**	.488**	1					
SI	.217**	.281**	.280**	.235**	.253**	.199**	.224**	.569**	.421**	.441**	.485**	1				
ASC	.337**	.450**	.433**	.257**	.314**	.362**	.359**	.498**	.413**	.332**	.479**	.354**	1			
ISC	.324**	.449**	.415**	.185**	.254**	.316**	.264**	.426**	.373**	.353**	.448**	.337**	.640**	1		
SSC	.283**	.409**	.417**	.290**	.389**	.566**	.482**	.342**	.333**	.268**	.258**	.310**	.520**	.548**	1	
ISCO	.280**	.378**	.364**	.178**	.219**	.235**	.280**	.414**	.358**	.344**	.357**	.256**	.591**	.671**	.499**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Frist-order dimension Cross-loading

Table 4

Assessing the correlation, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

	VIF
AL	1.333
AS	1.331
ASC	1.932
AW	2.082
BR	1.400
CO	1.886
CON	2.194
IM	1.451
ISC	2.304
ISCO	2.023
RE	2.241
RI	1.403
SI	1.604
SO	1.780
SSC	1.570
VI	2.384

VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) is a statistical measure used to detect multicollinearity in regression analysis. All VIF values are between 1 and 3, There is a moderate level of multicollinearity, but it is generally acceptable.

Table 5*R-Square (R²)*

	R Square	R Square Adjusted	Result
SC	0.434	0.430	High
SPBL	0.418	0.412	High

Table 5 The R-Square(R²) of Self-congruity(SC) was 0.434, and the R-Square Adjusted was 0.430 indicating the high prediction accuracy affected by Brand perception(BP) and Brand personality(BPE), then Brand perception(BP) and Brand personality(BPE) could describe the variance of Brand Perception(BP) at 43.0%.

The R-Square(R²) of Sports tourism brand loyalty(STBL) was 0.418, and the R-Square Adjusted was 0.412 indicating the high prediction accuracy affected by Brand perception(BP),Brand personality(BPE) and Self-congruity(SC), then Service quality(SQ),Brand Experience(BE) and Brand Perception(BP) could describe the variance of Consumer Satisfaction(CS) at 41.2%.

4.3 Prediction of indicator values of outcome variables-total affect (Q²) by the criteria of Q² of greater than 0 would be acceptable

Table 6*Analysis of the prediction of indicator values of outcome variables-total affect (Q²)*

	SSO	(SSE)	Q ² (=1-SSE/SSO)
BP	1280	870.624	0.320
BPE	1600	942.715	0.411
SC	1280	683.097	0.466
STBL	960	708.059	0.262

Table 6 revealed that the casual variables in the structural model affected the prediction of indicator values of outcome variables (Q² > 0); The value of Brand perception(BP) is 0.320, The value of Brand personality(BPE) is 0.411, The value of Self-congruity(SC) is 0.466, The value of Sports tourism brand loyalty(STBL) is 0.262.

4.4 Significance of path coefficients

Figure 1

The statistical significance test results by Bootstrapping (n = 320)

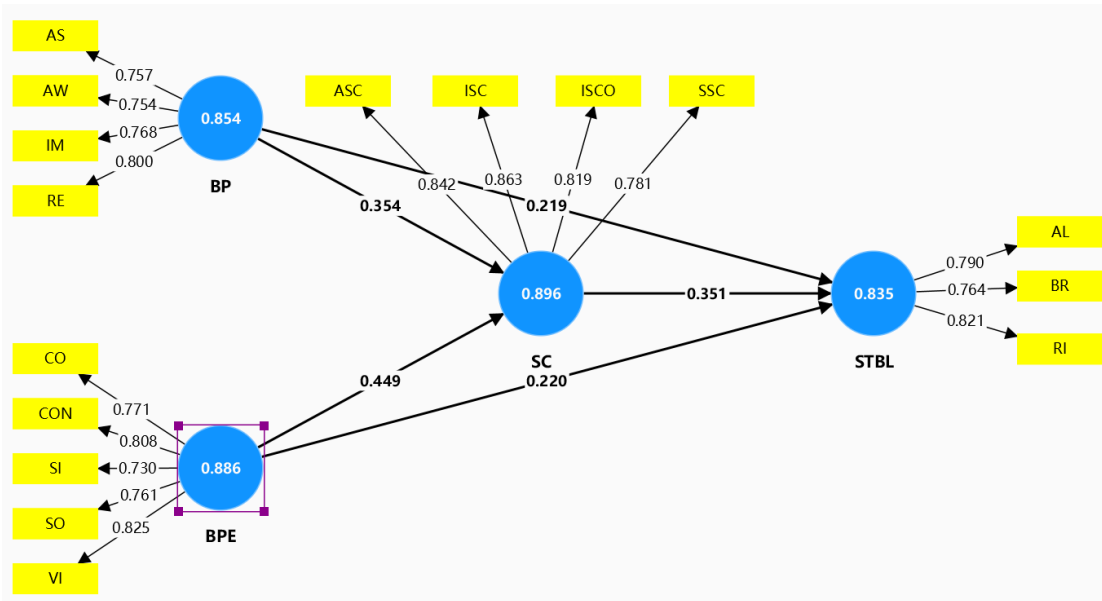


Table 7

The statistical significance test results of the Factors Influencing Zhangjiajie sports tourism brand loyalty

Relationship	Path Coefficient	Standard Deviation	t-value	2.50%	97.50%
BP -> SC	0.354	0.051	6.955***	0.249	0.45
BP -> STBL	0.219	0.054	4.049***	0.109	0.321
BPE -> SC	0.449	0.056	7.981***	0.334	0.552
BPE -> STBL	0.220	0.056	3.92***	0.107	0.329
SC -> STBL	0.351	0.059	5.935***	0.237	0.468

Figure 1 and Table 7 revealed the values that appeared in the relationship line between the indicator variables and latent variables were P-values, and the values that appeared on the relationship line between the latent variables were Path Coefficients and P-values, consecutively as follows;

Considering the Path Coefficient on Brand perception (BP) and Self-congruity (SC) revealed that the Path Coefficient was 0.354 (t-value = 6.955) which was greater than the critical value (3.29), indicating that Brand perception (BP) had a direct positive relationship to Self-congruity (SC).

Considering the Path Coefficient on Brand perception (BP) and Sports tourism brand loyalty (STBL) revealed that the Path Coefficient was 0.219 (t-value = 4.049) which was greater than the critical value (3.29), indicating that Brand perception (BP) had a direct positive relationship to Sports tourism brand loyalty (STBL).

Considering the Path Coefficient on Brand personality (BPE) and Self-congruity (SC) revealed that the Path Coefficient was 0.449 (t-value = 7.981) which was greater than the critical value (3.29), indicating that Brand personality (BPE) had a direct positive relationship to Self-congruity (SC).

Considering the Path Coefficient on Brand personality (BPE) and Sports tourism brand loyalty (STBL) revealed that the Path Coefficient was 0.220 (t-value = 3.920) which was greater than the critical value (3.29), indicating that Brand personality (BPE) had a direct positive relationship to Sports tourism brand loyalty (STBL).

Considering the Path Coefficient on Self-congruity (SC) and Sports tourism brand loyalty (STBL) revealed that the Path Coefficient was 0.351 (t-value = 5.935) which was greater than the critical value (3.29), indicating that Self-congruity (SC) had a direct positive relationship to Sports tourism brand loyalty (STBL).

Table 8

Testing results of the statistical significance of the mediator effect

Relationship	Path Coefficient	Standard Deviation	t-value	2.50%	97.50%
BP -> SC -> SPBL	0.124	0.030	4.193***	0.072	0.188
BPE -> SC -> SPBL	0.158	0.037	4.227***	0.092	0.239

Table 8 considering the effect of Self-congruity (SC) as the intervening variable that transmitted the indirect effect revealed that the Path Coefficient was 0.124 (t-value = 4.193) which was greater than the critical value (3.29), partially transmitted from Brand perception (BP) to Sports tourism brand loyalty (STBL) by Self-congruity (SC).

Considering the effect of Brand Perception (BP) as the intervening variable that transmitted the indirect effect revealed that the Path Coefficient was 0.143 (t-value = 4.521) which was greater than the critical value (3.29), partially transmitted from Brand personality (BPE) to Sports tourism brand loyalty (STBL) by Self-congruity (SC).

Table 9

Parameter estimation results of the Direct Effect Coefficient, Indirect Effect Coefficient, and Total Effect Coefficient from the modified equation modeling (n = 320)

Dependent Variable	R2	Effect	Independent Variable		
			Brand perception (BP)	Brand personality (BPE)	Self-congruity (SC)
SC	0.430	Direct	0.354*** (6.955)	0.449*** (7,981)	-
		Indirect	-	-	-
		Total	0.354*** (6.955)	0.449*** (7,981)	-
STBL	0.412	Direct	0.219***(4.049)	0.220*** (3.920)	0.351*** (5.935)
		Indirect	0.124***(4.193)	0.158*** (4.227)	-
		Total	0.343*** (6.664)	0.378*** (8.007)	0.351*** (5.935)

Table 9 revealed that Brand perception (BP) and Brand personality (BPE) affected Self-congruity (SC); Brand perception (BP), Brand personality (BPE) and Self-congruity (SC) affected Sports tourism brand loyalty (STBL), and the details of effect coefficient estimation were as follows;

1. Brand perception (BP) had a direct effect on Self-congruity (SC) with a Coefficient of 0.354 at a 0.001 level of significance.
2. Brand personality (BPE) had a direct effect on Self-congruity (SC) with a Coefficient of 0.449 at a 0.001 level of significance.
3. Brand perception (BP) had a direct effect on Sports tourism brand loyalty (STBL) with a Coefficient of 0.219 at a 0.001 level of significance.
4. Brand personality (BPE) had a direct effect on Sports tourism brand loyalty (STBL) with a Coefficient of 0.220 at a 0.001 level of significance.
5. Self-congruity (SC) had a direct effect on Sports tourism brand loyalty (STBL) with a Coefficient of 0.351 at a 0.01 level of significance.
6. Brand perception (BP) and Brand personality (BPE) could be joined to predict Self-congruity (SC) at 43.0%
7. Brand perception (BP) and Brand personality (BPE) and Self-congruity (SC) could be joined to predict Sports tourism brand loyalty (STBL) at 41.2%.

The empirical findings indicate that both brand perception and brand personality exert significant positive influences on self-congruity and sports tourism brand loyalty. Moreover, self-congruity functions as a critical mediating variable in the relationships between brand perception, brand personality, and brand loyalty. These results contribute to the theoretical enrichment of consumer behavior and brand management within the

sports tourism context. Specifically, the study enhances scholarly understanding of the underlying psychological mechanisms linking brand-related constructs to loyalty outcomes. Furthermore, the findings offer important managerial implications for destination marketers in Zhangjiajie, suggesting that cultivating a coherent brand perception and a relatable brand personality aligned with tourists' self-concepts can effectively strengthen brand loyalty and elevate the competitive positioning of Zhangjiajie's sports tourism brand.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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