

INFLUENCING OF SERVICE QUALITY, BRAND EXPERIENCE AND BRAND PERCEPTION ON CONSUMER SATISFACTION: A CASE STUDY OF ZHANGJIAJIE SPORTS TOURISM BRAND

A INFLUÊNCIA DA QUALIDADE DO SERVIÇO, DA EXPERIÊNCIA COM A MARCA E DA PERCEPÇÃO DA MARCA NA SATISFAÇÃO DO CONSUMIDOR: UM ESTUDO DE CASO DA MARCA DE TURISMO ESPORTIVO DE ZHANGJIAJIE

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Abstract

With the sports tourism market booming and consumers growing younger, identifying key drivers of satisfaction is essential. This study examines the Zhangjiajie sports tourism brand to: (1) assess service quality, brand experience, and brand perception; (2) test their direct effects on satisfaction and the mediating role of brand perception; and (3) build a structural model. Using a mixed-methods design, surveying 340 tourists via PLS-SEM and consulting ten experts, results show service quality and brand experience boost brand perception and satisfaction, with perception partially mediating these relationships. These findings offer empirical support for Zhangjiajie sports tourism operators to optimize service processes, enrich experiential design, and strengthen brand image, and they provide valuable insights for policy formulation and market promotion strategies.

Keywords: Service Quality. Brand Experience. Brand Perception. Consumer Satisfaction. Zhangjiajie Sports Tourism Brand.

Resumo

Com o mercado do turismo esportivo em expansão e um público cada vez mais jovem, é essencial identificar os principais fatores que determinam a satisfação. Este estudo analisa a marca de turismo esportivo de Zhangjiajie com o objetivo de: (1) avaliar a qualidade do serviço, a experiência com a marca e a percepção da marca; (2) testar seus efeitos diretos sobre a satisfação e o papel mediador da percepção da marca; e (3) construir um modelo estrutural. Utilizando um desenho de métodos mistos, com pesquisa de 340 turistas via PLS-SEM e consulta a dez especialistas, os resultados mostram que a qualidade do serviço e a experiência da marca aumentam a percepção da marca e a satisfação, com a percepção mediando parcialmente essas relações. Essas descobertas oferecem suporte empírico para que os operadores de turismo esportivo de Zhangjiajie otimizem os processos de serviço, enriqueçam o design experiencial e fortaleçam a imagem da marca, além de fornecerem insights valiosos para a formulação de políticas e estratégias de promoção de mercado.

Palavras-chave: Qualidade do Serviço. Experiência da Marca. Percepção da Marca. Satisfação do Consumidor. Marca de Turismo Esportivo de Zhangjiajie.



1. INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development of the sports tourism industry and the increasingly younger consumer demographic, enhancing the competitiveness of local sports tourism brands has become a strategic issue. While international sports tourism brands in Europe and the United States, such as Wimbledon, the World Cup, and the Super Bowl, have won the favor of global tourists through high-quality service design, unique experience design, and cultural connotations (Zhang, Y.,2021), there is still room for improvement in brand development in China. Zhangjiajie, despite its rich natural resources and sports tourism potential, still faces bottlenecks such as insufficient service quality standardization, a lack of experience innovation, and ambiguous brand perception (Wen, Y., 2024).

Thus, this study, taking the Zhangjiajie sports tourism brand as a case study, explores how the three core factors of service quality, brand experience, and brand perception influence consumer satisfaction. A structural model is constructed to reveal the direct and mediating mechanisms between these factors. By examining the Zhangjiajie brand system, this study aims to provide empirical support for sports brand optimization and policy formulation.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Kano customer satisfaction model

The Kano Model is a framework for identifying the most important features in a product and their expected role in increasing user satisfaction. It also shows the relationship between customer satisfaction levels and different attributes of a product or service. The focus of the Kano Model is to help teams see products from the user's perspective (Zhou, K.,2023) .By using the Kano Model, it is possible to create products that not only satisfy customer needs but also ensure lasting value. Teams that employ the model compile a list of new product features or attributes that are likely to enhance the customer experience(Bhardwaj, J.,2021).

2.2 Service quality and consumer satisfaction

Service quality is considered to be the consumer's perception of the gap between the service provided by the service provider and their expectations. Higher service quality leads to greater consumer satisfaction, especially in experiential contexts such as sports tourism, where professional guidance, reliable facilities, and attentive support shape the overall brand evaluation. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Service quality positively influences consumer satisfaction of the Zhangjiajie sports tourism brand.

2.3 Brand experience and consumer satisfaction

Brand experience theory believes that brand experience covers multiple dimensions such as sensory, emotional, thinking and behavioral factors, which have a comprehensive effect on consumer satisfaction. Brand experience (encompassing sensory, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions) has been shown overwhelmingly to boost consumer satisfaction in sports tourism by fostering emotional resonance, reinforcing brand identity, and facilitating interactive engagement (Rane, 2023; Supriyanto, 2021). Empirical studies in similar contexts confirm that richer, more cohesive experiences translate into higher satisfaction and loyalty (Pasaribu, 2022; Kumar, 2022). Though overly high expectations can occasionally blunt this effect (Mainardes, 2023; PJ, 2021), careful expectation management ensures that delivered experiences align with consumer perceptions, safeguarding satisfaction. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Brand experience positively influences consumer satisfaction of the Zhangjiajie sports tourism brand.

2.4 Service quality and brand perception

Service quality directly affects customers' perception of the brand. Essardi (2022) pointed out High-quality services will make customers have a stronger sense of trust and favorability towards the brand, thereby improving their overall perception of the brand.

Especially in the sports tourism industry, customers' high evaluation of service quality can effectively improve their perception of the brand, including the brand's reputation, image and brand personality characteristics. Syah (2022) pointed out in his brand cognition model that service quality is an important part of consumers' overall perception of the brand. the brand experience (such as service reception, information accuracy, employee attitude, etc.) can affect customers' perception of the brand, thereby affecting the brand's cognitive value. High-quality service quality can enhance customers' positive perception of the brand and form a more stable brand perception. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Service quality positively influences brand perception of the Zhangjiajie sports tourism brand.

2.5 Brand experience and brand perception

In examining the factors that shape brand perception, brand experience has been widely recognized as a key influence. Many scholars support the view that sensory, emotional, and interactive experiences contribute positively to how consumers perceive a brand. For instance, (Brakus *et al.*2009) and (Ghorbanzadeh, 2024) emphasized that brand experience deepens consumers' cognitive and emotional connection with the brand, thus enhancing brand perception. Yu (2024) further noted that emotional engagement built through brand experience strengthens brand identity and trust. In the sports tourism sector, where immersive and memorable experiences are central, this relationship becomes even more significant. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Brand experience positively influences brand perception of the Zhangjiajie sports tourism brand.

2.6 Brand perception and consumer satisfaction

Understanding the role of brand perception in shaping customer attitudes is crucial in the field of sports tourism. Most scholars agree that brand perception, formed through brand knowledge, emotional connection, and consistent messaging, has a significant positive influence on how customers perceive the brand overall. Keller (2023)

emphasized that positive brand perception strengthens brand preference and loyalty. Aaker (1996) identified dimensions such as brand awareness and brand association as key drivers of customer perception. Similarly, Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) argued that emotional resonance formed through brand perception enhances customer attitudes and loyalty. In the context of sports tourism, where emotional and experiential factors are central, studies such as Yoo and Donthu (2020) further confirm that strong brand perception fosters favorable customer evaluations. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Brand perception positively influences consumer satisfaction of the Zhangjiajie sports tourism brand.

2.7 Brand perception, service quality and consumer satisfaction

Understanding how service quality influences customer brand perception, especially through the mediating role of brand perception, is essential in the context of sports tourism. Most empirical studies agree that high-quality service enhances brand perception, which in turn strengthens customers' overall evaluation of the brand. Essardi (2022), using the SERVQUAL model, showed that dimensions such as reliability and empathy significantly shape consumers' perception of the brand. Heskett *et al.* (1994) also found that superior service builds emotional connections with customers, reinforcing brand identity. Handayani (2021) emphasized the mediating role of brand perception, suggesting that excellent service indirectly enhances customer brand loyalty through improved perception. This view is echoed by Chaudhuri and Ifedi (2024), and Tahir (2024), who demonstrated that better service leads to stronger brand perception, which then boosts loyalty. In Zhangjiajie's sports tourism setting, improvements in service quality have been shown to elevate brand perception and deepen customer loyalty. therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Brand perception positively mediates the relationship between service quality and consumer satisfaction of the Zhangjiajie sports tourism brand.

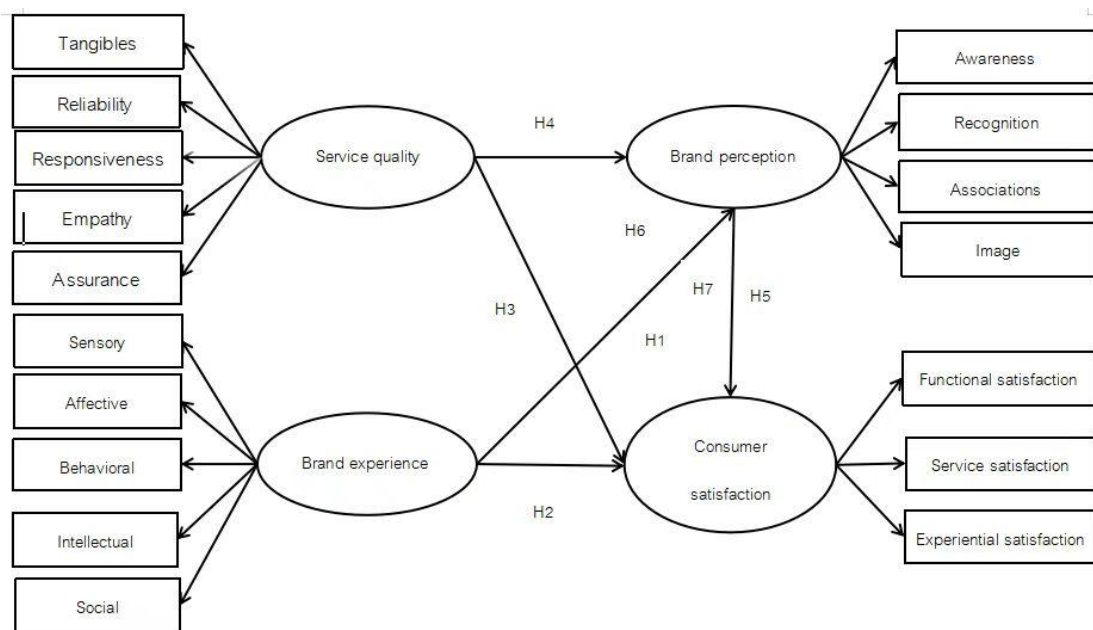
2.8 Brand perception, brand experience and consumer satisfaction

Exploring how brand experience influences customer brand perception, through the mediating role of brand perception, is crucial in understanding consumer loyalty, especially in sports tourism contexts. Most empirical studies suggest that high-quality brand experience fosters stronger brand perception, which in turn enhances how customers perceive the brand overall. Subbotin (2024) identified five key dimensions of brand experience (sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social) , which collectively shape consumers' brand perception. Pine and Winasis (2024) further emphasized that in the “experience economy,” consumers form emotional bonds with brands through meaningful interactions, which improves brand perception and loyalty. In Zhangjiajie's sports tourism setting, immersive experiences, such as engaging activities, personalized services, and cultural storytelling, have been shown to strengthen consumers' brand perception and deepen their brand identification. Higgins and Scholer (2009) and Abelmar (2024) similarly support that positive brand experiences enhance emotional and cognitive engagement, leading to stronger brand attitudes and loyalty. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Brand perception positively mediates the relationship between brand experience and consumer satisfaction of the Zhangjiajie sports tourism brand.

2.9 Research model

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

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

The target population used in this study is the people who enjoy in sports tourism in Zhangjiajie. This study will select 340 samples from the tourist population.

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 service quality, brand experience, brand perception and consumer's satisfaction. The consumer's satisfaction questionnaire mainly includes four aspects: Perceived quality, Perceived value and Customer expectations. The questionnaire refers to the questionnaire developed by Geebren, A. (2021), Siregar, A. P (2022) and Madiistriyatno, H. (2020). The brand experience questionnaire mainly includes five aspects: sensory, affective, behavioral,

intellectual and Social. The questionnaire refers to the questionnaire developed by Brakus, *et al* (2009), Chung, MR and Welty Peachey, J. (2022). The brand perception questionnaire mainly includes four aspects: brand awareness, brand recognition, brand association and brand image. The questionnaire refers to the questionnaire developed by Azadi, A. Y. D. A. (2015)

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	Approx. Chi-Square	Alpha	P
Functional satisfaction (FS)	5	2216.482	0.853	0.000
Service satisfaction (SSA)	3	1253.964	0.773	0.000
Experiential satisfaction (ES)	4	1386.997	0.775	0.000
Tangibles (TAN)	4	1730.673	0.782	0.000
Reliability (RL)	3	1373.975	0.791	0.000
Responsiveness (RES)	3	1437.509	0.761	0.000
Empathy (EMP)	3	1281.535	0.766	0.000
Assurance (ASS)	3	1434.407	0.771	0.000
Intellectual (INT)	3	1297.476	0.885	0.000
Behavioral (BEH)	3	1259.743	0.792	0.000
Affective (AF)	4	1305.703	0.767	0.000
Sensory (SS)	3	1228.571	0.859	0.000
Social (SO)	3	889.4	0.797	0.000
Awareness (AW)	3	1502.019	0.778	0.000
Recognition (RE)	3	1273.207	0.825	0.000
Associations (ASSO)	3	1499.557	0.812	0.000
Image (IM)	3	1314.449	0.793	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 2.

Table 2

Discriminant Validity by using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	BE	CS	PE	SQ
BE	0.74			
CS	0.53	0.756		
PE	0.533	0.583	0.775	
SQ	0.329	0.488	0.437	0.768

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

Frist-order dimension Cross-loading

	FS	SSA	ES	TAN	RL	RES	EMP	ASS	INT	BEH	AF	SS	SO	AW	RE	ASSO	AM
FS	1																
SSA	.327**	1															
ES	.355**	.396**	1														
TAN	.294**	.276**	.246**	1													
RL	.267**	.252**	.261**	.763**	1												
RES	.275**	.337**	.286**	.384**	.392**	1											
EMP	.278**	.242**	.377**	.406**	.430**	.459**	1										
ASS	.238**	.264**	.349**	.348**	.376**	.659**	.671**	1									
INT	.201**	.257**	.372**	.163**	.169**	.192**	.205**	.173**	1								
BEH	.355**	.397**	.360**	.216**	.222**	.191**	.209**	.213**	.344**	1							
AF	.228**	.343**	.289**	.145**	.183**	.118*	.162**	.142**	.371**	.583**	1						
SS	.195**	.239**	.356**	.165**	.200**	.199**	.208**	.189**	.661**	.366**	.353**	1					
SO	.169**	.283**	.325**	.189**	.204**	.223**	.229**	.215**	.525**	.396**	.360**	.405**	1				
AW	.356**	.381**	.404**	.226**	.294**	.320**	.338**	.294**	.467**	.396**	.246**	.394**	.343**	1			
RE	.312**	.375**	.421**	.220**	.284**	.285**	.257**	.268**	.325**	.380**	.270**	.313**	.301**	.571**	1		
ASSO	.313**	.337**	.330**	.273**	.305**	.319**	.292**	.285**	.225**	.261**	.279**	.283**	.213**	.448**	.417**	1	
AM	.228**	.252**	.339**	.121*	.186**	.185**	.223**	.142**	.288**	.274**	.269**	.251**	.254**	.494**	.519**	.366**	1

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

Table 4:

Assessing the correlation, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

	VIF
AF	1.612
AM	1.51
ASS	2.551
ASSO	1.336
AW	1.697
BEH	1.647
EMP	1.974
ES	1.271
FS	1.201
INT	2.065
RE	1.696
RES	1.865
RL	2.498
SO	1.485
SS	1.852
SSA	1.242

Checking of the observation variable relationship in the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) by using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient revealed that it was less than 0.90 which was consistent with the criteria defined as the Correlation Coefficient of 0.90 and above would be a multicollinearity (Kline, 2016; Pallant, 2010; Hair *et al.*, 2010). 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
CS	0.459	0.454	High
PE	0.361	0.357	High

Table 5: The R-Square (R²) of Brand Perception (BP) was 0.361, and the R-Square Adjusted was 0.357 indicating the high prediction accuracy affected by Service quality (SQ) and Brand Experience (BE), then Service quality (SQ) and Brand Experience (BE) could describe the variance of Brand Perception (BP) at 35.7%.

The R-Square (R²) of Consumer Satisfaction (CS) was 0.459, and the R-Square Adjusted was 0.454 indicating the high prediction accuracy affected by Service quality (SQ), Brand Experience (BE) and Brand Perception (BP), then Service quality (SQ), Brand Experience (BE) and Brand Perception (BP) could describe the variance of Consumer Satisfaction (CS) at 45.4%.

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)
BE	1705	1161.286	0.319
BP	1364	905.418	0.336
CS	1023	851.612	0.168
SQ	1705	1053.179	0.382

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 Experience (BE) is 0.319, The value of Brand Perception (BP) is 0.336, The value of Consumer Satisfaction (CS) is 0.168, The value of Service quality (SQ) is 0.382.

4.4 Significance of path coefficients

Figure 1

The statistical significance test results by Bootstrapping (n = 340)

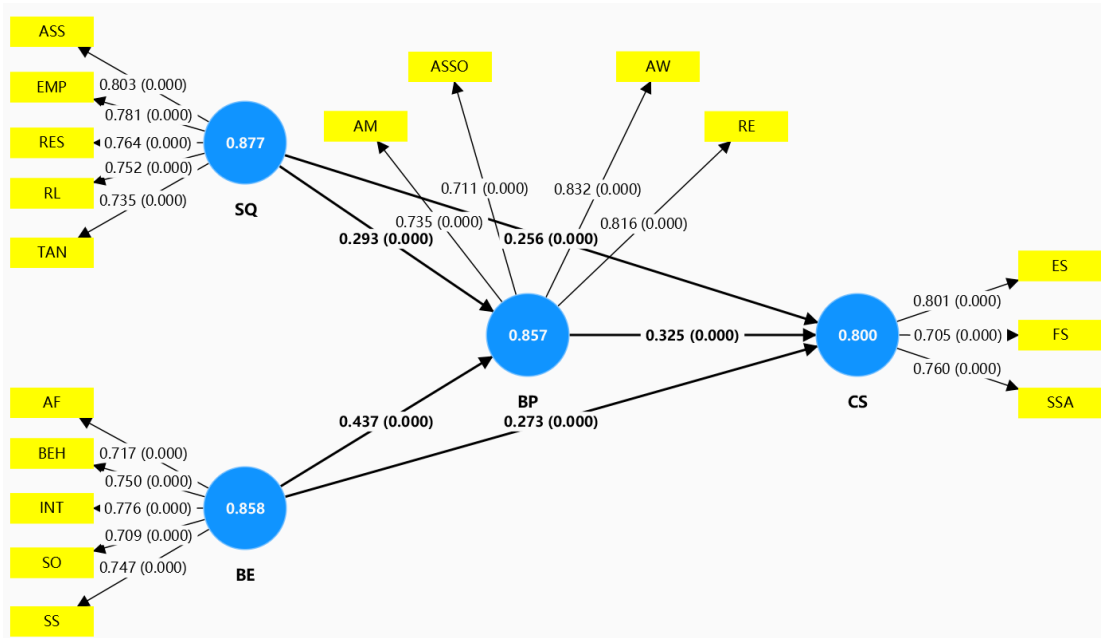


Table 7:

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

Relationship	Path Coefficient	Standard Deviation	t-value	P-values	2.50%	97.50%
BE -> CS	0.273	0.05	5.473***	0.000	0.173	0.368
BE -> BP	0.439	0.054	8.154***	0.000	0.33	0.54
BP -> CS	0.325	0.052	6.26***	0.000	0.224	0.427
SQ -> CS	0.256	0.048	5.319***	0.000	0.159	0.349
SQ -> BP	0.293	0.05	5.858***	0.000	0.194	0.389

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 Experience (BE) and Consumer Satisfaction (CS) revealed that the Path Coefficient was 0.273 (t-value = 5.473) which

was greater than the critical value (3.29), indicating that Brand Experience (BE) had a direct positive relationship to Consumer Satisfaction (CS).

Considering the Path Coefficient on Brand Experience (BE) and Brand Perception (BP) revealed that the Path Coefficient was 0.439 (t-value = 8.154) which was greater than the critical value (3.29), indicating that Brand Experience (BE) had a direct positive relationship to Brand Perception (BP).

Considering the Path Coefficient on Brand Perception (BP) and Consumer Satisfaction (CS) revealed that the Path Coefficient was 0.325 (t-value = 6.26) which was greater than the critical value (3.29), indicating that Brand Perception (BP) had a direct positive relationship to Consumer Satisfaction (CS).

Considering the Path Coefficient on Service quality (SQ) and Consumer Satisfaction (CS) revealed that the Path Coefficient was 0.256 (t-value = 5.319) which was greater than the critical value (3.29), indicating that Service quality (SQ) had a direct positive relationship to Consumer Satisfaction (CS).

Considering the Path Coefficient on Service quality (SQ) and Brand Perception (BP) revealed that the Path Coefficient was 0.293 (t-value = 5.858) which was greater than the critical value (3.29), indicating that Service quality (SQ) had a direct positive relationship to Brand Perception (BP).

Table 8

Testing results of the statistical significance of the mediator effect

Relationship	Path Coefficient	Standard Deviation	t-value	P-values
SQ -> BP -> CS	0.095	0.022	4.334***	0.000
BE -> BP -> CS	0.143	0.031	4.521***	0.000

Table 8, considering the effect of Brand Perception (BP) as the intervening variable that transmitted the indirect effect revealed that the Path Coefficient was 0.095 (t-value = 4.334) which was greater than the critical value (3.29), partially transmitted from Service quality (SQ) to Consumer Satisfaction (CS) by Brand Perception (BP).

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 Experience (BE) to Consumer Satisfaction (CS) by Brand Perception (BP).

Table 9

Parameter estimation results of the Direct Effect Coefficient, Indirect Effect Coefficient, and Total Effect Coefficient from the modified equation modeling (n = 340)

Dependent Variable	R2	Effect	Independent Variable		
			Service quality (SQ)	Brand Experience (BE)	Brand Perception (BP)
Brand Perception (BP)	0.357	Direct	0.293*** (5.858)	0.437*** (8.154)	-
		Indirect	-	-	-
		Total	0.293*** (5.858)	0.437*** (8.154)	-
Consumer Satisfaction (CS)	0.454	Direct	0.256*** (5.319)	0.273*** (5.473)	0.325*** (6.26)
		Indirect	0.095*** (4.334)	0.143*** (4.521)	-
		Total	0.351*** (7.616)	0.415*** (9.648)	0.325*** (6.26)

Table 9 revealed that Service quality (SQ) and Brand Experience (BE) affected Brand Perception (BP); Service quality (SQ), Brand Experience (BE) and Brand Perception (BP) affected Consumer Satisfaction (CS), and the details of effect coefficient estimation were as follows;

1. Service quality (SQ) had a direct effect on Brand Perception (BP) with a Coefficient of 0.293 at a 0.001 level of significance.
2. Brand Experience (BE) had a direct effect on Brand Perception (BP) with a Coefficient of 0.437 at a 0.001 level of significance.
3. Service quality (SQ) had a direct effect on Consumer Satisfaction (CS) with a Coefficient of 0.256 at a 0.001 level of significance.
4. Brand Experience (BE) had a direct effect on Consumer Satisfaction (CS) with a Coefficient of 0.273 at a 0.001 level of significance.
5. Brand Perception (BP) had a direct effect on Consumer Satisfaction (CS) with a Coefficient of 0.325 at a 0.01 level of significance.
6. Service quality (SQ) and Brand Experience (BE) could be joined to predict Brand Perception (BP) at 35.70%.
7. Service quality (SQ), Brand Experience (BE) and Brand Perception (BP) could be joined to predict Consumer Satisfaction (CS) at 45.40%.

Empirical results show that both service quality and brand experience significantly influence brand perception and consumer satisfaction. Brand perception has a positive impact on consumer satisfaction and plays a significant mediating role in the influence of service quality and brand experience on satisfaction. This research enriches the theoretical framework of consumer satisfaction in the sports tourism sector, deepens understanding of the interactive mechanisms among service quality, brand experience, and brand perception, and provides important practical reference for improving customer satisfaction and brand building in Zhangjiajie sports tourism.

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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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