

Starbucks' Customer Brand Strategy

- From Customer Satisfaction to Customer Superiority

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ABSTRACT

Since Starbucks entered the Chinese market, it has been deeply loved by consumers for its comfortable environment and high-quality services. It has even become a model for competitors and other service industries to imitate. However, the complaint of the consumer in the 'Middle Cup Incident' in 2016 and the voices on the Internet saying that they are suffering the same experience reminded Starbucks that is focusing only on customer satisfaction is no longer in line with the trend of the times. This report uses a research method that combines primary data (in-depth interviews) and secondary data (data collection and analysis) to reveal the specific manifestations and causes of customer superiority, which is the next stage of customer satisfaction. This study found that (1) Customer superiority is a psychological enjoyment beyond satisfaction. (2) The formation of superiority is mainly due to the realization of vanity or customized needs. (3) Improving business performance by shaping customer superiority is generally applicable to the luxury goods industry or high-end-positioned catering and service business. Consumers will always pursue a higher level of pleasure, and in recent years, customization has become more and more valued by consumers. This report has made a preliminary conceptualization of customer superiority and hopes that future research can continue to enrich or refine the causes of customer superiority and put forward more practical suggestions from the operational level.

Keywords: Starbucks marketing strategy, Customer satisfaction, Customer superiority

1. INTRODUCTION

Starbucks started in 1971, is one of the dominating fresh ground coffee providers worldwide, with more than 32,000 stores and over 400,000 employees in 82 markets worldwide. Ever since its entrance into the Chinese market in 1999, the company has accomplished deep market penetration and gradually consolidated its firm supremacy in the Chinese coffee industry. With more than 70% market share in the country's coffee market[1], Starbucks' hegemony is rooted in its core proposition of providing consumers with a 'third place', a place for people to escape from home or workplace and embrace their true identity. Throughout its development, providing excellent customer services has always acted to be the "north star" of its business.

Yet, one incident regarding customer service happened in 2018 stimulated strong repercussion in the entire society. Mr. Lin, a senior 5-year Gold Member of

Starbucks from Hangzhou, China, published an article to complain about repeatedly receiving identical questions on preference for coffee cup size. Cups in Starbucks are classified as medium (Tall), large (Grande), and Venti Medium based on the different volume capacities. Yet, this can be misleading to the public as the smallest size is normally regarded as a "small cup" and a "medium cup" implies a larger volume. To avoid easy misunderstanding, the Starbucks clerks will remind customers of the cup volume and recommend them to try "Grande cup" with additional 3 yuan every time they place an order. But the routine question annoyed Mr. Lin, who expressed his anger in the Open letter To Starbucks China CEO Wang Jingying: When will you not feel that the customers are ignorant or stupid, where he explicitly wrote that receiving the same questions countless times despite his identity as a senior member "makes him feel that he is "ignorant or stupid". Public attention surged as other WeChat public accounts forwarded the article, even

including China's mainstream media, People's Daily Public. Many Starbucks' customers expressed similar dissatisfaction with receiving the same question.

The phenomenal incident provides rich insights: First, customer satisfaction is no longer the ultimate service objective and the metric to evaluate service quality. An increasing number of customers have been seeking a higher level of fulfilment: a perception of customer superiority generated from differentiated and customized service treatment. This is precisely what Mr. Lin was asking for: to be treated as a regular customer with consuming preferences remembered. For companies to obtain wider customer loyalty, it is time to endeavour on customer personalization and individualization. Second, although Starbucks has succeeded in cultivating the sense of customer superiority, failure to explicitly recognize customers' demands for individuality disenables the company to maximize customer satisfaction. Therefore, the conceptualization of customer superiority has a crucial impact on consolidating customer loyalty for businesses and provides direction for other companies' strategy-making. What is the idea of customer superiority? What is Starbucks' business strategy towards its customers that cultivates this feeling? Compared with other companies, what does Starbucks' customer orientation bring the competitive landscape? The text focuses on Starbucks as a study subject. It employs the qualitative analysis with second-hand surveys and journals to study the customer strategy of Starbucks and its cultivation of customer superiority.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on Customer Satisfaction and Superiority. At present, lots of attempts have been made to customer satisfaction, and the research field is very extensive. And these studies can be roughly classified into four types. The first type mainly focuses on the definition and concept of customer satisfaction. Giese and Cote believe that customer satisfaction is an emotional response with different intensity [2]. The second type mainly focuses on the evaluation model and application of the customer satisfaction index. The academic community mainly divides its evaluation model into three models: Swedish customer satisfaction barometer index (SCSB), American customer satisfaction index (ACSI), and European customer satisfaction index (ECSI). The third type is the research on the influencing factors of customer satisfaction. Scholars point out that it is mainly affected by personalized service, interactivity, product quality assurance, convenience and price advantage, the display and quality of goods, and so on[4][5]. The fourth type mainly studies the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Chunmei Gu notes that customer satisfaction directly impacts the four types of customer loyalty, and the impact of customer satisfaction

on attitude loyalty is greater than that on behavior loyalty[6]. Now little attention has been focused on customer superiority, and the related research literature is relatively scarce. However, the existing research can fall into two categories. One is the definition and concept of customer superiority. Customer superiority refers to recognizing and promoting personal identity advantages gained by customers through purchasing products or services [7]. The second is about the source of customer superiority. Shengwei Liang points out that customer superiority mainly comes from five aspects: shaping the convenience of users' life, creating the feeling of being superior to others, exceeding users' expectations, satisfying users' vanity, and satisfying users' personality psychology [8].

Literature on Starbucks Brand Strategy. As far as brand strategy is concerned, Starbucks has made many efforts in building brand image and enhancing customer loyalty. One of Starbucks' main competitive strategies is communicating with customers in the coffee shop, with special emphasis on communication with customers [9]. "Huang Jiufen also pointed out that Starbucks has its advantages in-store design, staff dress, product quality and emphasis on customer experience, thus successfully establishing customers' brand trust in Starbucks[10]. Starbucks has successfully met the needs of a number of customers through its brand image building and thus established a relatively solid relationship with customers. Another noteworthy aspect of Starbucks is its unique brand marketing method. Han Runrun pointed out that Starbucks never does media advertising but shapes its brand and spreads its cultural connotation through the ancient way of word of mouth [11]. They arouse customers' curiosity through the initial indirect publicity so that consumers know the brand inadvertently. Wang Jingyi believes that Starbucks cleverly avoids the traditional advertising model, such as the overwhelming print or media advertising, which saves a huge amount of promotional advertising costs [9]. In this mode, Starbucks fully trains its employees to make them have the ability to explain each coffee product's characteristics in detail to win customers' trust and reputation.

Literature on the Correlation Between Customer Satisfaction and Brand Strategy. The research on the correlation between customer satisfaction and brand strategy is divided into two fields. The first is whether the brand strategy impacts customer satisfaction, and most of the research has given a positive answer. According to ACSI(American Customer Satisfaction Index), customer satisfaction is the final objective variable. In contrast, customer expectations, perceived quality, and perceived value are the causal variables of customer satisfaction, customer complaint, and customer loyalty are the outcome variables of customer satisfaction[12].

Starbucks'customers tend to have high expectations. Its products are more expensive than their competitors, so the company is always taking advantage of its brand positioning to enhance its perceived value. Although Starbucks has never spent a dime on mass media advertising, word-of-mouth marketing is unique to Starbucks advertising. By promoting the brand through customer referrals, more and more consumers will recognize the value of the name - "Starbucks "[13].

The second type of research focuses on what specific strategies can improve customer satisfaction. In recent years, customer experience has proven to be more influential than price, advertising, and other factors in customer satisfaction[14]. According to the analytic hierarchy process, customer satisfaction indicators include five aspects: idea satisfaction, behavior satisfaction, audio-visual satisfaction, product satisfaction, and service satisfaction[12]. Coincidentally, Starbucks'unique experience marketing could meet almost all of these criteria. In order to achieve the ideal satisfaction, Starbuck's most creative initiative is the "Third space" construction. The idea behind the "Third space" is "Your neighborhood, an extension of the family living room, a refreshing social setting, a third best place to be outside of work and home". When people buy coffee at Starbucks, they also buy a new way of life[15]. To achieve audio-visual satisfaction, at Starbucks headquarters, there is a special group of experts, artists, designers, and architects gathered to discuss the design and decoration of the Starbucks store, to create a rich sensory experience for every store in the world, thus satisfies the consumer on the audio-visual enjoyment. This strategy, known as "tie-in", is about connecting customers and the image of the cafe. In terms of product satisfaction, Starbucks has procurement experts who travel around the Arab region, the Pacific Rim, Latin America, carefully select the quality of coffee beans. The goal is to get people to drink the purest coffee. Starbucks also has strict standards for picking, transporting, roasting, and distributing coffee beans [16].

The overview of the literature. Although the previous research has put forward five aspects about the source of superiority, there is no system between them which means there is no logic or progressive relationship between points. Moreover, there is no research to explain the specific connotation of each aspect in the past, so it can not reveal the psychological process of customer's feeling of superiority. Therefore, based on previous research, this research has the following innovation points:(1) A new theoretical framework is proposed to generate customer superiority. (2) Analyze every aspect in detail and fully demonstrates its logical relationship. (3) Take Starbucks as a case to highlight the practicality. Despite the huge literature endeavor, some deficiencies

are also discovered in previous researches. Previous literature regarding customer behavior mostly focuses on the theme of 'customer satisfaction, whereas studies about the perception of 'customer superiority' are far from adequate. Yet, with the increasing awareness of distinguished customer identity, modern customers have exceeded the pursuit of satisfaction and aim for the higher-leveled customer superiority. Our study fills in the blank space of previous literature and is deemed to have a higher value for its reflection of on-the-day customer mentality. Second, most previous researches study the concepts in general without a specific case study. While the study results are widely applicable, they fail to provide empirical understandings. Our study uses Starbucks' customer business strategy as a real-life case study to give a more comprehensive illustration of the idea of customer superiority and its effect on customer business strategy.

3. DEVELOPMENT HISTORY OF STARBUCKS' MARKETING STRATEGY

3.1 Strategic Objectives

In general, the strategic objective of Starbucks experienced three major stages. At the initiation of its business, Starbucks positioned itself as a professional coffee provider that sold coffee beans, spices, and coffee mills. After Howard Schultz, Chairman of Starbucks acquired the company in 1987, the brand transferred its positioning to "third place", aiming to provide the world with a warm and welcoming third place, an escape from both home and workplace, to relax indulge themselves. Its premium-based experiential retail strategy accumulated initial business popularity and granted the momentum for Starbucks to expand globally. After Starbucks' entrance into the Chinese market, the company has shifted the focus to localization, adjusting the menu to suit the appetite of Chinese customers. Its endeavours won profound business support, helped Starbucks to make deeper market penetration, and eventually established its supremacy in the Chinese coffee industry. With increasing customer loyalty, Starbucks established its VIP system and began to establish individualized services in 2011. However, due to the emergence of e-commerce and online retail, Starbucks China encountered fierce competition from Luckin Coffee, which took cost leadership strategy and used a technology-driven model integrating online and offline retail. Luckin's affordability through "low prices" and convenience through "super-speedy delivery" enabled the aggressive expansion. Starbucks, in response, launched an online retail program that aims to reach out to more customers.

3.2 Specific Strategy

1971-1987 Coffee Products-oriented

In 1971, Starbucks opened its first store in Seattle, mainly selling high-quality coffee beans and coffee equipment. In the first ten years of its establishment, Starbucks was only a local coffee bean retailer. Although the current CEO, Schultz, who was only a salesperson at that time, proposed transforming Starbucks into an Italian-style coffee chain, the founders declined the idea[17]. At this stage, Starbucks is the raw material supplier of high-end coffee products and intends to transform into a high-end coffee chain store.

1987-1999 Third Place Positioning and Localization

In 1987, Schultz acquired Starbucks and refreshed the vision of Starbucks: "We are not the service provider that sells coffee products, but coffee provider that sells the business." From then on, in-store services, instead of coffee itself, had become the central focus of Starbucks' strategy. It used plush interiors with orange-yellow lighting, wooden tables, soothing background music and Gothic-style portrait hung on the wall, creating a lively in-store life scene that gives every customer huge refreshment. Compared with other brands, Starbucks never made media advertising but paid more attention to creating interactive between customers and waiters[18].

In 1999, Starbucks teamed up with Beijing Meida Starbucks Coffee Co., Ltd. to open the first Starbucks store in China in Beijing, which marked Starbucks' entrance into the Chinese market. In 2000, Starbucks cooperated with Shanghai Uni-President Starbucks Coffee Co., Ltd. to enter the Shanghai market; In 2002, it cooperated with Starbucks Coffee Catering Co., Ltd to enter Guangzhou and Shenzhen market. While Chinese customers lack coffee consumption, Starbucks adjusted its menu for local culture and launched many new products, including moon cakes during the mid-Autumn festival, Chinese tea, and Matcha Frappuccino[18]. It has also opened the Asia-Pacific R&D Center to tailor-made products specifically for Asian customers.

In 2011, Starbucks launched its VIP system and customer loyalty program to further cultivate brand recognition[18]. It promoted the Starbucks card, which can record in-store purchases as "Starbucks points," and then rewarded customers with premium or discounts for a certain level of points.

At this stage, Starbucks put forward the concept of "the third place-a place between your home and workplace.". Therefore, Starbucks is mainly based on in-store service, including in-store decoration, staff service, and customer satisfaction, to win more customer satisfaction and loyalty. At the same time, Starbucks has

entered the Chinese market through cooperation with Chinese companies and won the favor of customers by providing customized services and regional food.

2017-Current

With the emergence of online e-commerce, Starbucks China, which primarily focuses on in-store, encountered fierce competition from Luckin Coffee, which established a wider customer retail network with integrated online and offline channels. In response, Starbucks also made its own strategic advancement[19]. In August 2018, Starbucks and Alibaba Group announced a new comprehensive retail strategic partnership in Shanghai; in July 2019, Starbucks officially opened its membership system with Ele. me, allowing customers to join the Starbucks Star Club on the Ele. me Starbucks website page. Starbucks announced that it had implemented a coffee delivery service in 2,100 restaurants in 35 cities across China in terms of delivery service. The cooperation between Ele. me and Starbucks have been given strategic value as a new retail exploration in the coffee industry." It can be seen that Starbucks increased its investment in digitalization during this period, complying with the trend of The Times and seizing the "fourth space" market[20].

At this stage, under the threat of competitors' Luckin coffee, Starbucks put forward a higher concept-"the fourth place". It integrates offline resources, conforms to the trend of e-commerce and digitization, establishes a membership system and online business system, and continues to occupy market share.

3.3 Operational Outcomes in Different Stages

At the beginning stage of its business, Starbucks only own a small coffee products retailer with four stores in the Seattle area. Ever since the transformation to an Italian-styled coffee retailer, Starbucks chain stores have expanded from 11 to 190, and total annual revenue has soared from US\$1.3 million to US\$92 million. In 1992, Starbucks was listed on the Nasdaq as the first specialty coffee company. Since then, Starbucks stock has maintained double-digit growth. Its stock price has increased 22 times in ten years, and its market value has exceeded tens of billions of dollars. At the same time, its brand image has gradually been recognized globally, and it has been awarded the title of "Global 100 Best Brands" by the US "Business Week"[17].

Since 1999, Starbucks gradually established its presence in larger and medium-sized cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Ningbo, Qingdao, Dalian, Chengdu, and Chongqing. As of October 2006, Starbucks had opened more than 190 direct-operated stores in 19 cities in mainland China in just one year. Subsequently, its

expansion speed further accelerated. In the 2014 fiscal year, it was recorded that, on average, Starbucks opened a new store every day. On September 27, 2015, Starbucks had 1,811 stores in China, including 1,026 directly-operated stores and 785 franchised-stores[17].

3.4 Overall Strategic Shift

Wholistically, Starbucks' customer strategy has evolved to be more and more customer-centric. It has gradually shifted the orientation from products to the customer. Customers are not only the buyers of the products but the opinion leader of Starbucks' overall strategy. Through this transformation, Starbucks cultivated a strong sense of customer loyalty towards its products and reinforced the idea that customers are essential partners of the business, whose opinions and feedback serve as a fundamental building block of the overall strategy. In that sense, customers matter because of their individual opinions and feelings, not because of their wholistic identity as a "customer" itself.

4. FROM CUSTOMER SATISFACTION TO CUSTOMER SUPERIORITY-INSPIRATION FROM STARBUCKS

4.1 Comparative analysis of customer satisfaction and customer superiority

4.1.1 The similarities between customer satisfaction and customer superiority

Based on the similarities of customer satisfaction and customer superiority. We will summarize it in three aspects.

First, they all emphasize customer orientation. In the literature review of this paper, the definition and concept of customer satisfaction and customer superiority are the important research direction of scholars. And in the research, customers are often regarded as the central object to study whether they are satisfied with the brand or have superior feelings. Starbucks China's brand strategy is always customer-oriented and customer-centered in different stages of its strategy focusing on customer satisfaction and customer superiority. No matter its brand positioning of "the third place", or its excellent store decoration, environment construction, and personnel service, all aim to create more customer value.

The second is to emphasize the improvement of customer experience in the study of the two definitions. We find that customer satisfaction is considered as an emotional response and a pleasant emotional state, and customer superiority is considered as a higher feeling and superior feeling to get rid of inferiority. Whether it is customer satisfaction or customer superiority, its core is

about creating customer feeling, and Starbucks China has taken corresponding marketing strategies in different stages of brand strategy to enhance its customer feeling.

The third is they are both from the buyer's object in order to strengthen customer recognition of the brand. The improvement of customer satisfaction mainly depends on the continuous upgrading of personalized service and commodity quality to obtain the recognition and pursuit of customers for the brand. At the same time, previous studies have concluded that customer satisfaction directly impacts customer loyalty, which has a positive impact on customer recognition of the brand. Regarding the shaping of customers' sense of superiority, taking many five-star hotels as an example, they rely on big data analysis to get customers' habits and make customers feel valued so as to improve their brand recognition. The ultimate goal of both is to strengthen the recognition of the brand from the customer side.

4.1.2 The differences between customer satisfaction and customer superiority

Rather than saying that customer satisfaction and customer superiority are different, they are just different levels of the same thing. It can also be said that customer satisfaction is a prerequisite for customer superiority. The conditions for the formation of customer superiority are extremely demanding, and its foundation is to meet all customer satisfaction indicators. Specifically, customers must be satisfied with brand positioning, audio-visual experience, product quality, and service quality before achieving superiority. However, it is worth noting that they still may not bring customer superiority when these indicators reach the extreme. For example, if a restaurant's dishes are delicious enough and the service is perfect, customers will not necessarily feel superior because the price may be very low. Since the restaurant is positioned to be cheap and delicious, eating here can hardly become an experience for customers to 'show off'. In other words, it cannot satisfy the vanity of some customers. And whether to satisfy vanity is not the traditional indicator used to measure customer satisfaction.

In addition to the vanity, another emotion contained in 'superiority' more than 'satisfaction' is whether the customer feels that he is treated as an individual rather than just a customer. When this feeling is reflected in a product or service, we call it customization. The practice has proved that when customers can customize unique products or enjoy one-to-one services, they will have a sense of superiority. This sense of superiority comes from the fact that the customer has a product that can meet all their needs and when the customer sees a special option in the customized scheme, he will also feel that his unique habits and preferences are respected. In summary, in the

case of insufficient research on customer superiority, this report currently defines the difference between the two as customer superiority is the evolution of customer satisfaction, which is manifested in the realization of vanity and customization.

4.2 How Starbucks creates Customer Superiority

4.2.1 Vanity

To further interpret the source of vanity, we divide it into three types of psychology: comparison, identity, and hedonism. The psychology of comparison means that consumers' demand for a certain product increases with the increase in the number of others consuming the same product, reflecting their desire to catch up with the trend. Identity refers to the consumer's belief that buying a product means that he belongs to a specific social class. Hedonism means that consumers are keen to pursue immediate happiness. No matter which kind of psychology is at work, the price is the last thing customers care about to satisfy their vanity. Vanity and superiority are derogatory terms to some extent, but it is undeniable that Starbucks is indeed selling vanity. Their specific measures are to make full use of the advantages of 'coffee culture' and 'brand positioning'.

Coffee culture. In China, globalization has brought about economic and social changes and brought about cultural flow subtly. In the beginning, some people think that the western lifestyle is healthy and fashionable, so the western diet should also be respectable. In this context, coffee culture with a strong exotic feel has gradually become popular in China. In the imported overseas film and television dramas, the lives of the social elites cannot do without a cup of coffee, which makes people naturally associate coffee with the elite class. Up to now, coffee culture has been fully recognized and has even become synonymous with a city. When the city's economy is prosperous, the workplace atmosphere is strong, and the service industry develops to a certain extent, the demand for cafes and coffee will increase. In recent years, the number of cafes in Shanghai has grown rapidly. The average annual consumption of 20 cups of coffee per capita in Shanghai leads the country. Shanghai is also the first choice for many international coffee brands to enter China. In 2021, Shanghai opened a coffee culture week with the slogan "Because of coffee, so Shanghai". The "Salute to Shanghai" series of coffees are the new creations of the international coffee giant Starbucks dedicated to the city of Shanghai. In fact, not just in Shanghai, most Chinese people think that being a regular Starbucks customer is equivalent to being among the elite. This is the so-called identity in vanity.

Brand positioning. Starbucks' brand positioning - the third space, is the best place to rest besides work and home. Explained in two more specific dimensions are a high price and a good experience. In order to show how Starbucks has achieved such an image in the minds of consumers, we start from the perspective of the marketing mix. In terms of products, Starbucks has specialized procurement experts who travel around the world all year round, carefully selecting quality coffee beans. The purpose is to let people drink the purest coffee. From the picking, transportation, roasting, blending, and sales of coffee beans, Starbucks has a set of strict standards. However, Starbucks products are not just coffee. At Starbucks headquarters, there is a special group of artists, designers, and architects gathered to discuss the design and decoration of the Starbucks store to create a rich sensory experience for every store in the world. Starbucks uses orange lighting tones with various wooden tables, chairs, and sofas to create a warm feeling. The walls are hung with Gothic-style portraits that match the artistic taste of white-collar workers. Here, customers can move tables and chairs freely, listen to soothing music, smell the aroma of freshly brewed coffee, and feel the atmosphere of life through audio-visual experience so that the "third space" can maximize its value. The third biggest selling point of Starbucks is service. General employees can only provide services at Starbucks after receiving professional training. The content of the training includes corporate culture, coffee blending methods, and customer service skills. Here, Starbucks also provides customers with free services such as wireless Internet access, magazines, and music auditions. Simultaneously, the staff in the blending area will carefully explain coffee blending knowledge to customers. Starbucks realized the vision of spreading coffee culture and strengthened the interaction between employees and consumers. So far, when Starbucks' coffee, decoration, and service have become unmatched, those hedonistic consumers will never choose other competitors. Starbucks' location and pricing strategy are also consistent with its brand positioning. Their coffee is much more expensive than similar products, and they are all located in department stores in high-end commercial districts. Starbucks' promotion strategy is unique. They hardly spend money on mass advertising but believe in the power of word of mouth. Starbucks is very good at content marketing. They understand that audiences who like different content will inevitably pay attention to different product attributes. We found that in articles published in four different online communities, Starbucks was described as 'a drink that allows you to experience British aristocracy', 'a drink that allows you to experience the aesthetics of life', 'A localized high-end drink that focuses on research and development', 'a drink that makes selfies more stylish'. These articles have led the fashion trend in various groups. What is fashion?

Fashion is that if someone else buys it, I want to buy it too. This just fits the comparison psychology of vanity consumers. In addition, saying that "Starbucks is suitable for making selfies" also implies that others do the communication for them. Those who like photography and selfies will definitely take Starbucks' photos more beautiful than the real thing and then post them to the community to attract more people.

4.2.2 Customization

When we discuss coffee customization in the area of customer superiority, we are not discussing whether they can add milk or sugar. In other words, if these services are not available, they will not even be able to achieve customer satisfaction. We learned from Starbucks that only extreme customization can achieve customer superiority. The extreme customization is first reflected in the choice of coffee flavors. At Starbucks, customers can choose cup types including tall, grand, and venti, coffee types to choose from Espresso, Jamaican coffee, Americano, Blue mountain, Latte, Italian coffee, Mocha, French coffee, Cappuccino, Caramel macchiato, Flat white, Irish coffee, Vienna coffee, breve or Frappuccino, and flavors to choose from Hazelnut, Vanilla, Caramel, Toffee nut, Cinnamon, Raspberry, Peppermint, Cherry, Chocolate, Mango, Whipped cream, Dry, Wet, Skinny, Unleaded, Decaf or Extra and so on. At Starbucks, staff can make 87,000 different drinks according to different customer needs, and they are still developing new options.

Furthermore, a variety of "hidden menus" are also popular on the Internet. Customers like to follow these recipes officially launched by Starbucks or recommended by fans to make their own drinks. When you receive a cup of coffee with your name written on it, it is a unique coffee made for you and just for you. When a customer walks into Starbucks and says, "Hi, I want a triple decaf shots grande peppermint soymilk caramel skinny Espresso Macchiato", he feels the double superiority of his coffee taste and coffee knowledge. When developing online channels, Starbucks has not forgotten its strengths. On Starbucks' own online ordering software and software that cooperates with other food delivery companies, customers can also make the same customization as they did in the store. When using "Starbucks Now", customers can design a secret sign by themselves as a password to pick up drinks in the store. The extreme customization of Starbucks is also reflected in the service. For customers who are not very familiar with Starbucks, the staff will make suggestions based on the customer's preferred temperature, taste, and even mood of the day. For regular customers, the staff must remember their names and preferences. In this way, the customer will always feel that Starbucks is dedicated to serving himself. Coffee was originally a homogenized product, but Starbucks has

identified each customer's identity through customization, which is the sublimation from satisfaction to superiority.

5. DISCUSSION

After the preceding discussion, we come to the following conclusion: firstly, customer orientation in Starbucks' business strategy has contributed to its popularity and customer loyalty; secondly, customer superiority can be built upon two major aspects: customization and vanity; lastly, compared to customer satisfaction, customer superiority is a more nuanced metric to evaluate customers' feedback towards the brand, which will provide more insights for companies to improve their service quality and optimize their overall business strategy.

6. CONCLUSION

Several limitations can be discovered in this article. Firstly, limited information resources diminished the comprehensiveness of the analysis. Since the theoretical foundation for this topic is quite limited, the framework proposed in this article might lack adequate support. Secondly, the application of the conclusion might be restrained. As we proposed in the article, the satisfaction of vanity is an essential component to build up customer superiority. However, as different companies may have different positioning, the metric of superiority might be incompatible and irrelevant to those who follow cost leadership strategy or pursue a deeper customer penetration. That is, while customer satisfaction can be adopted universally, customer superiority might not be an absolutely good metric that applies in all situations. The latter is supposed to be helpful mostly for high-end and premium brands. But are there supposed to be other similar parameters in relation to companies with different positioning? Is there any other factor that will contribute to the sense of perceived customer superiority? More endeavor is expected to be made to strengthen the framework and extend the scope of analysis.

However, the article still makes profound contributions on both theoretical and practical levels. It enriches the discussion for customer superiority at a theoretical level by establishing a comprehensive framework for the components and origin of this mentality. The conceptualization of superiority generates great insights for future business strategy-making as this parameter can guide companies, especially those positioned as relatively high-end, to develop a customer strategy in a more nuanced way. Lack of awareness on this issue might make the company overlook important aspects of customer mentality and fails to cater to customers' precise needs. As what happened in the 'Starbucks' Middle-Cup' incident, although Starbucks has cultivated strong customer superiority in its branding,

lack of precision in understanding the mentality of customers leads to the company's failure in customer service and stimulates wider social criticism. Therefore, companies must take on a more rigorous perspective to evaluate customer feedback and thus increase the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of their strategies. On the practical level, the article provides specific measures to cultivate customer superiority with the analysis of Starbucks. Practitioners in various industries may make endeavors correspondingly in pursuit of greater customer loyalty to create higher value for the brand.

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