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Across the City Barriers: The Sinking Road of China's Coffee Market

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ABSTRACT
The coffee market is now developing due to China's strong economic development, and more businesses are likely to join it. The purpose of the report is to provide a comprehensive image of the firm and some recommendations. This article was broken down into various parts, each of which describes the national and worldwide coffee markets in terms of production and consumption and the current situation and prospects of the Chinese coffee industry. Understanding the tastes of rising global coffee consumption in this fast-growing industry is crucial for coffee producers and merchants in China. This article also looked at the habits of Chinese coffee customers, their spending goals, and the Chinese coffee culture. This study reviewed the theory of brand image and made survey to test consumers' purchase intention on coffee in the third-tier city in China. The culture emphasized that showing an educated and wealthy lifestyle is far more significant than the culture produced by westerners hundreds of years ago. As a result, rather than mixes, tastes, or methodological techniques, China's drinking culture signifies a burgeoning middle class and increasing spending power. Because of improving living standards among Chinese workers and the continued expansion of the national coffee company, China, a native tea country, is expected to become one of the nation's most significant major European coffee customers.

Keywords: *Coffee, Brand Image, Satisfaction, Purchase Intention.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The Chinese coffee market is currently through a rapid development period. As a result, major coffee companies like Starbucks have spent the last few years solidifying their selling positions and growing their footprints by speeding up the development of stores, setting out high market ends, and improving their coffee supply chains. This is transforming the traditionally tea-drinking country into the most promising market for coffee producers and multinational coffee corporations. Improved living conditions and a growing understanding of coffee culture among Chinese people, along with a sizable set population, have boosted domestic coffee consumption.

According to online statistics and research, China has a rapidly growing coffee consumer base, with around 600 million middle-class customers. Middle-class residents, for example, live in third and fourth-tier cities rather than Shanghai or Beijing. Together with China's first- and second-tier cities, millennials significantly influence coffee consumption.

Compared to other end-user verticals in China, the coffee sector is undergoing a digital revolution. Coffee consumption is quickly increasing outside of first-tier cities. For all coffee companies, growth has always been a source of anxiety. When client acquisition costs in first- and second-tier cities rise, marketing rivalry heats up, and the market gets saturated. One way out could be small-town teenagers to sink the market. They are targeting teenagers because they are the ones who are most inclined to consume coffee.

1.2. Research Gap

A downward trend in China's coffee drink business has been pronounced in recent years. Starbucks and other large coffee companies entered the Chinese market to hasten the demise of fast coffee shops [1]. Due to the popularization of coffee culture and the rise in urban inhabitants' economic levels, cities below the second and first-tier began to demonstrate a relatively high demand for coffee. Coffee consumption is being upgraded in high-tier cities and in low-tier cities where there is a significant demand for beverages. As a result, the falling market in the upper-tier cities is brimming with untapped potential. In these low-tier cities, all coffee companies have reported an increase in the number of retailers.

The decreasing market has evolved into the next chance for industrial development after the emergence of the Chinese coffee industry in first- and second-tier cities. Due to the declining market, coffee shops and coffee consumption are expanding in China, increasing footprints and product ranges in low-tier cities. Chinese people have adopted some Western ideas by including coffee in their everyday routines. In the future years, the coffee sector will continue to compete for market dominance.

Coffee production in China is growing. Production has risen over a couple of years, making the output more foreseeable and sustainable, and the value of coffee beans that were created became advanced. Cultivators got strong returns that enhanced their income from producing additional crops such as fruit.

Both domestic and foreign coffee chains are growing in China. These coffee chains are a long way from conveying the mandate for an excellent coffee shop experience in the third and fourth-tier cities, which lead to industrial development due to the urgent and aim to satisfy consumer needs.

1.3. Motivation

A real industrial problem is a current deficit in the supply chain of coffee beans. Coffee supply is shrinking, and the wholesale prices are rising, with the hard-hit market expecting further fallout from a global shortage of coffee. This production deficit can be rectified by increasing and promoting the local growth of coffee beans. The farmers can be taught the production of high-quality coffee beans, making high-quality coffee. They can open supply chains in low-level ties with an inevitable price surge. As a coffee market, China applies an irresistible pull for western varieties. Chinese coffee consumption has grown significantly after expansion to third and fourth-tier cities. This has led to job creation, especially among the town youth, and improved living standards [2]. The profits can also be used to develop the infrastructure of these cities and create a better living environment for residents. People living in third - and fourth-tier cities have also improved their living standards. For example, people are able to spend more money on their favorite accessories and eating out at high-end restaurants more often. Thus, there is a need to use the sinking market to make profits that can help the residents.

The coffee market has improved the residents' living standards in China's third and fourth-tier cities by creating job opportunities such as a barista and even store managers among the youth living in these cities. The residents are encouraged and taught to grow high-quality coffee bought by these coffee-making industries, making the farmers earn some money that takes care of their primary and secondary needs.

1.4. Importance

China is far from being the world's coffee market in consumption and production. However, this can be corrected by using the sinking market and opening more coffee supply markets. They can learn what the Chinese coffee consumers like more and adjust to their needs. They should recognize more markets of coffee consumers and cater to them according to their need. The education of consumers is also vital in developing the coffee industry. The curious to try out what is taught leads to buy more coffee leading to a rise in profits. Consumers, too, should be eager to learn and try out new coffee varieties to increase consumption. When there is a surge in consumption, profits tend to increase too. The sinking market can become the next upsurge of the Chinese coffee industry. Large coffee shop chains lead to various consumption scenarios to capture the broad market. Small-scale coffee shops should also try to use this idea. They consider what consumers might want hence evaluating the market carefully, earning a fortune. The sinking market is an opportunity for an upsurge of the coffee industry since the coffee shop chains have evaluated all the possible outcomes and what their customers like most according to their age gaps. The Chinese citizens are loyal to their favorite brands hence tend to come back for the goods if satisfied.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Historical Development

2.1.1 Brand Image

In 1990, Dobni pointed out that this kind of symbolic meaning can be defined as a subjective and perceptual brand phenomenon associated with the associative network in consumers' memory [3]. Seven years later, Mudambi et al. reported that it was hard for people to distinguish products or services with tangible quality characteristics. So brand image plays a vital role in the market [4]. In 2010, Park et al. stated that brand image consists of three benefits: functional, symbolic, and experience [5]. In 2015, Budiman expounded that brand image is one of the critical factors affecting consumers' decisions. It is formed by consumers' impressions and experience, representing their overall cognition of a particular band [6].

2.1.2 Satisfaction

Although there are many different defines of satisfaction, Oliver in 1980 proposed a satisfactory model, which has been widely recognized. He explained that customer satisfaction could be reflected by comparing the expectation of the product or service before consumption with the actual perception after consumption. If the accurate perception meets or even surpasses the expectation, customers will feel satisfied, and on the contrary, the customer will feel dissatisfied [7]. According to the definition of Tse et al. in 1988, they reported that satisfaction is a subjective perception used to judge whether products or services meet the needs of consumers in their process of consumption [8].

2.1.3 Purchase Intention

The intention is the possibility of individuals generating certain behavior and pure. The intention is the possibility of individuals generating certain behavior. Purchase intention refers to the possibility of consumers purchasing certain products or services. Although the definition of purchase intention is slightly different in some studies currently, researchers like Fishbein in 1975, Dodds et al. in 1991, and Schiffman in 2001 all deemed that the possibility of purchase is the core of the concept of purchase intention [9-11]. In 1989, Oliver and Swan states that satisfaction could positively affect consumers' purchase intention [12]. As Lin et al. points in 2000, purchase intention is a measure of the possibility of whether a consumer will buy a particular product. The higher the expressed purchase intention, the greater the probability of purchase [13].

2.2. Situation Analysis

In marketing, brand image, consumer contentment, and purchase intention constraint are regarded as very effective weapons. Bilgin argues that customers see the brand image while purchasing goods and services. Yet brand image cannot be used as a standard or assurance of customer happiness [14]. This restriction has also been researched in the past, both overseas and within the country. According to Budur & Poturak, client contentment is likely to be considered among the most powerful marketing techniques for contributing to how clients view a brand's performance [15]. If a consumer is happy, it will almost likely positively impact the brand's image. Additionally, a satisfied client is often assumed to be more likely to engage in loyalty behavior, such as by intent or brand loyalty [16]. The perception of a buyer who is persuaded to buy a product is referred to as a brand image. After conducting comprehensive research, it was discovered that there is a powerful connection between corporate image, intention to purchase, and client satisfaction.

Upamannyu et al. did research to determine the impact of customer satisfaction on a corporate image and client behavioral intentions to buy [17]. Practical, Social, Metaphoric, Exploratory, and Appearance enhancement were used to measure a company image. Multiple regression analysis was used to identify the host of aspects for each variable. Finding’s regression demonstrated that corporate image and behavioral intentions have a high positive link, whereas client satisfaction and loyalty intention have a weaker association. It suggested that consumer pleasure may mediate between will buy and brand image. The Sobel test was used to evaluate the moderating impact, and the outcome of the Sobel test was determined to be affirmative. As a result, client satisfaction was discovered to mediate the purchase intention and brand image.

Dash et al. conducted a study that investigates the progress of marketing 4.0 and its effect on consumer and purchasing intention experimentally [18]. The researchers put this revised model to the test by examining all 4 of its elements concerning consumer pleasure and buying intention. According to the findings, clients' satisfaction and buying intention are influenced by brand identity and corporate image. Additionally, client satisfaction has a substantial influence on purchasing intent. They sheds light on developing global economic sectors and their primary perspective selected market. Moreover, Dash and others suggested that marketing 4.0 strategic objective based on corporate image and identity might improve client satisfaction and, as a result, enhance buying intentions.

2.3. Trend Prediction

Although the existing theories on brand image, satisfactory purchase intention have been completed, they are not enough to support future development. One of the reasons is that none of the existing theories can explain the changes brought by COVID-19. As far as the current situation is concerned, the COVID-19 epidemic has had a massive impact on business, leading to numerous consumer behavior and psychology changes. Therefore, we believe that to solve the situation where changes brought by COVID-19 are inconsistent with existing theories, and relevant researchers should consider the following aspects. First of all, the epidemic makes people pay more attention to health, and the change of consumption intention caused by this may be a significant direction of future theoretical development. Second, the epidemic has led to the rapid development of online shopping worldwide, and many physical stores have closed down due to the epidemic's impact. Therefore, this study should also pay attention to changing consumers' consumption paths. Finally, we believe that due to the continuous news of various brands' assistance to the disaster area in recent years. For example, China Hongxing Erke donated 5,000 W to the rainstorm disaster area in Henan province when it was on the brink of bankruptcy, which enhanced its brand influence and made a large number of customers purchase related products. Relevant theoretical research can start from the brand behavior to brand influence under the disaster.

3. METHOD

3.1. Research Design

The data in this study were analyzed using SPSS 25.0 and Process 3.3. The aim is to determine the correlation and influence relationship among multiple variables through multivariate statistical analysis.

3.2. Data Collection

To measure the essential terms employed in this study—including brand image (B.I.), satisfactory (S), and purchase intention (P.I.)—as showed in Figure 1, we referred to existing validated and reliable multi-item scales. Satisfaction was measured by four items (i.e., I am satisfied with the price of Starbucks.) formulated by HakJun Song in 2019 [20]. While the brand image was measured using five items (i.e., Starbucks has an image different from other coffee shops) adopted by several studies from HakJun Song et al. in 2019 and Xuemei Bian et al. in 2011 [20, 21]. Finally, purchase intention was measured by three items (i.e., I would like to recommend the products or brands introduced by my friends in social networks to other people) developed by Milad Farzin et al. in 2018 [22].

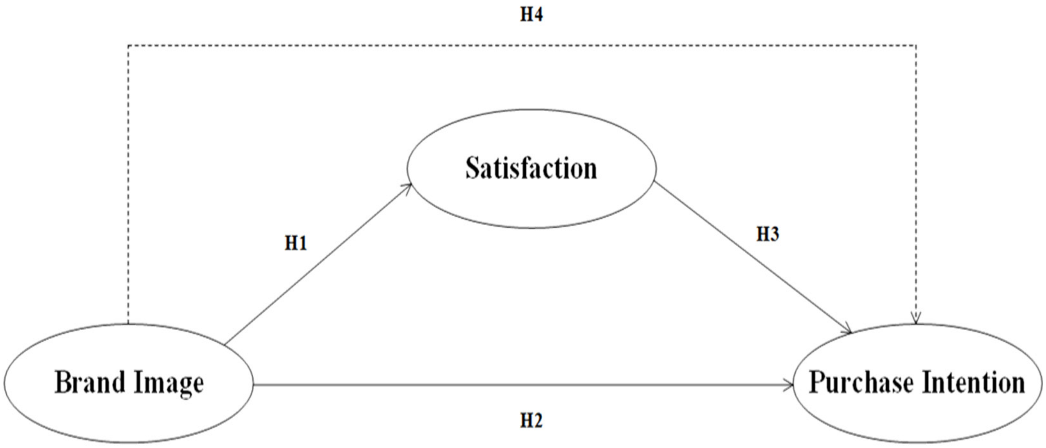

Figure 1 Research conceptual framework.

This study measured all using a 5-point Likert-type scale, representing strongly disagree and strongly agree, respectively. The questionnaire was mainly distributed in China through a widely accepted survey platform, Wenjuanxing (https://www.wjx.cn/). The data collected in this research were performed between January 4th and January 7th, 2022, in China, in a coffee shop in a fourth-tier city. A total of 189 valid anonymous questionnaires were collected during the survey period.

Table 1. Measurement items

Construct	Items	Descriptions	1 strongly disagree	2 disagree	3 not sure	4 agree	5 strongly agree
Brand Image (adapted from Song, H. J. et al., 2019) [20]	BI1	I would be more satisfied with the big brands of coffee.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	BI2	I would be more satisfied with the big brands of coffee.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	BI3	I would be more satisfied with good-looking brand packaging.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	BI4	I would have high satisfaction with interesting brand advertisements.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Satisfaction (adapted from Bian, X. et al., 2011) [21]	S1	BIBLIOTHEQUE gives a comfortable feeling.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	S2	BIBLIOTHEQUE is different from other coffee shops.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	S3	BIBLIOTHEQUE is well known.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	S4	Great atmosphere at BIBLIOTHEQUE.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	S5	The price of BIBLIOTHEQUE is good.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Purchase Intention (adapted from Mil ad et al., 2018) [22]	PI1	I would buy the coffee here because of a friend's recommendation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	PI2	I prefer to buy coffee with a good brand impression.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	PI3	I will go to the brand offline for coffee because the atmosphere is good.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3.3. Data Analysis

The sample statistics illustrated that men were more than women, accounting for 62.4% of men and 37.6% of women. In terms of age, the age distribution of coffee members is relatively wide, including the consumption group of under 22 years old to over 50 years old. As for the occupation of the consumer group, students are more, accounting for 39.2%. From the point of view of monthly disposable income, from 1500 yuan to 7500 yuan evenly distributed. In terms of purchase frequency last week, 78.8% of members have purchased, among which 22.7% have purchased more than five times. More than half of them spend more than 30 yuan, with 20.6% spending more than 50 yuan on a single purchase

Table 2. The demographic characteristics of the sample

Characteristics of respondents		N	%
Gender	male	118	62.4%
	female	71	37.6%
Age	under 22	52	27.5%
	22-30	63	33.3%
	31-40	36	19.1%
	41-50	24	12.7%
	over 50	14	7.4%
Occupation	student	75	39.2%
	teacher	15	7.9%

	company employee	37	19.6%
	institution staff	27	14.3%
	else	36	19.0%
Monthly discretionary income	less than ¥ 1500	35	18.5%
	¥ 1500-3500	45	23.8%
	¥ 3501-5500	51	27.0%
	¥ 5501-7500	21	11.1%
	over ¥ 7500	37	19.6%
Purchase frequency	0	40	21.2%
	1-2	59	31.2%
	3-5	49	25.9%
	over5	41	22.7%
Cost per purchase	less than ¥ 20	46	24.34%
	¥ 20-30	53	28.04%
	¥ 31-40	34	17.99%
	¥ 41-50	17	8.99%
	over ¥ 50	39	20.63%

4. RESULT

Table 3. illustrated that the Cronbach's α coefficient value of the question item measuring customer satisfaction was 0.872, indicating that the four questions had high internal consistency. The Cronbach's α coefficient value of the question item measuring brand image was 0.921, indicating that these five questions had high internal consistency. The Cronbach's α coefficient value of the question item measuring purchase intention is 0.781, indicating that the three questions have high internal consistency.

4.1 Reliability and Validity Test

Meanwhile, we used the measurement model to confirm whether the constructs and items adopted were valid by conducting a confirmatory factor analysis. It showed that each factor loading was more significant than 0.5. Indicating that the item had high convergence validity. Moreover, all the AVE values were more significant than 0.5, so each variable had an excellent discriminant validity.

Table 3. Reliability and validity test

		Reliability		Validity	
Dimensions	Items	Cronbach's α	C.R.	Estimate	AVE
Satisfaction	S1	0.872	0.930	0.837	0.635
	S2			0.834	
	S3			0.820	
	S4			0.823	
Brand Image	BI1	0.921	0.924	0.715	0.655
	BI2			0.745	
	BI3			0.854	
	BI4			0.823	
	BI5			0.866	
Purchase Intention	PI1	0.781	0.781	0.765	0.527
	PI2			0.697	
	PI3			0.712	

4.2 Correlation Test

The correlation coefficients of the main variables involved in this study are shown in Table 4. Brand image has a significant positive correlation with Satisfaction (P<0.01, γ=0.694), purchase intention has a significant positive correlation with Satisfaction (P<0.01, γ=0.621), purchase intention has a significant positive correlation with the brand image (P<0.01, γ=0.651).

Table 4. Associated measures

	Satisfaction	Brand Image	Purchase Intention
S	1		
BI	0.694**	1	
PI	0.621**	0.651**	1

Note: ** P < 0.01, * P < 0.05. S=Satisfaction, BI=Brand Image, PI=Purchase Intention. Correlations are shown below the diagonal. The diagonal represents the discriminant validity.

4.3 Direct and Mediating Effect Testing

As per the conceptual framework in Figure 1, Table 5. presented the brand image of the coffee shop had positive remarkable effects on S (β = 0.6149, p < 0.001) and P.I. (β = 0.3747, p < 0.001), respectively, supporting H1 and H2. Satisfaction affects P.I. (β = 0.3060, p < 0.001) remarkably and positively, supporting H3.

Table 5. Hypothesis test

Variables	S			P.I.		
	β	S.E.	P	β	S.E.	P
Constant	1.4160***	0.2697	0.0000	1.8028***	0.2501	0.0000
BI	0.6149***	0.0544	0.0000	0.3747***	0.0596	0.0000
S				0.3060***	0.0617	0.0000
P.I.						
Gender	-0.1619	0.1042	0.1221	-0.0476	0.0906	0.5998
Age	0.0000	0.0524	0.9997	0.0079	0.0453	0.8612
Job	-0.096*	0.0409	0.0199	-0.0140	0.0358	0.6960
Income	0.0047	0.0434	0.9137	0.0807*	0.0375	0.0327
Frequency	0.0381	0.0598	0.5250	-0.0618	0.0517	0.2336
Cost	0.1159***	0.0443	0.0096	-0.0828*	0.0390	0.0349
R^2		0.5344			0.6922	
F		29.6768			85.5321	

Note :S=Satisfaction, BI=Brand Image, PI=Purchase Intention. *** P < 0.001, ** P < 0.01, * P < 0.05.

As for mediating effects, Table 6. shows satisfactions would be considered the mediator between B.I. and P.I. The total effect of brand image on purchase intention was significant (β= 0.5629), with a 95% confidence interval (0.4647, 0.6610). Secondly, the direct effect was significant (β=0.3747). Furthermore, the indirect effect was significant (β=0.1882), supporting H4, i.e. satisfaction mediated the relationship between brand image and purchase intention.

Table 6. Bootstrap results of mediated effect

	Effect coefficient	SE-value	Low limit	Upper limit	Percentage of effect
Total effect	0.5629	0.0497	0.4647	0.6610	100
Direct effect	0.3747	0.0614	0.2536	0.4958	66.67
Indirect effect	0.1882	0.0479	0.0914	0.2782	33.33

5. DISCUSSION

The data analysis shows that the customers in the third and fourth-tier cities surveyed have a massive demand for coffee, so it can be inferred that the decline of the Chinese coffee market in the third and fourth-tier cities is supported by facts. According to the questionnaire results, it is not difficult to find that most customers accept the maximum price of coffee below 30 yuan, which is precisely the price of most coffee brands or coffee shops. Therefore, the probability of the price was mentioned above in the sinking process of the coffee market will be significantly reduced, and the order of the coffee market in the third and fourth-tier cities will be maintained to a large extent. In addition, the survey data also showed that customers tend to have a higher preference for big brands, well-packaged and environmentally friendly coffee, and coffee shops. This is a considerable advantage for top-tier brands such as Starbucks and Luckin coffee to sink into the market because these brands usually have enough money to build better cafes and higher awareness.

Meanwhile, the questionnaire data also shows that 82% of coffee shop customers are under 40 years old, and these people are also the main coffee buyers in the first and second-tier cities. Therefore, customer positioning of the two markets is consistent, and enterprises need not make too many changes in this aspect, which reduces the difficulty of entering the market. To sum up, we can see that the coffee market characteristics of third-tier and fourth-tier cities are to a large extent the same as those of first-tier and second-tier cities, which indicates that the market disorder caused by a price war and high unit price in the research question is unlikely to occur. It is feasible for China's coffee market to sink to third-tier and fourth-tier cities. It will be another spring to develop China's coffee industry under the dual influence of the continuous saturation of the first and second-tier coffee markets and the continuous expansion of new market demands. Therefore, the author believes that to better carry out market sinking, from the perspective of coffee brands, the following suggestions should be referred to, first of all, corporate brands must not bring "colored glass" into the third and fourth-tier cities. This means that coffee brands should treat residents in tier 3 and 4 cities with the same standards of products and services as those in tier 1 and 2 cities. If the shoddy, the final damage will only be their interests. Second, as third-tier and fourth-tier cities tend to have more substantial local characteristics, to better develop in the local market, coffee brands are not better suited to local conditions in terms of decoration style, new products, etc., by launching specialty stores regionally limited products.

Compared with previous studies, the following similarities and differences can be obtained. First, differences: According to Jennifer Ferreira & Carlos Ferreira in 2018, it is difficult to see from this survey that white-collar workers in first-tier and second-tier cities have different consumption concepts from young people [22]. They both have the high pursuit of coffee shops and the coffee itself. Secondly, Bilgin's conclusion that brand image is not equal to customer satisfaction conflicts with this questionnaire's conclusion that "there is higher satisfaction with big brand coffee" From the perspective of similarities, firstly, the brand image that Mudambi et al. said in 1997 plays a significant role in the market is consistent with the conclusion of this survey data. Based on the existing literature, this paper conducts in-depth research on the coffee market in China, which must make up for the lack of relevant Chinese materials. At the same time, the results of some foreign literature do not apply to China's national conditions.

6. CONCLUSION

Under the realistic background that the coffee market in China's first and second-tier cities tends to be saturated, this paper studies whether China's coffee industry can achieve a second spring in third and fourth-tier cities. Through the study of brand image, Satisfaction and other relevant theories, and the application of questionnaire survey and other methods, the author finally believes that the third and fourth-tier cities will be the birthplace of the next upsurge of China's coffee industry after the first and second-tier cities tend to be saturated. This conclusion is consistent with the hypothesis at the beginning of the article that "the third and fourth-tier cities will be the second spring of China's coffee industry". In addition, the following opinions were put forward in the discussion: First. The number of data must be enough to be representative. Second, the survey class and age must be extensive. Third, more research should be carried out according to the actual situation. After all, China's national conditions are exceptional.

The contribution and influence of this paper are mainly as following: First. This paper studies some foreign literature and analyzes China's national conditions, providing relevant ideas for relevant special case studies. Secondly, this paper partly makes up for the lack of global research and relevant materials on China's coffee industry. Thirdly, this paper puts forward relevant suggestions for coffee brands to enter third and fourth-tier cities in the future and puts forward specific suggestions for the particular situation in China. However, there are also deficiencies in this paper. First of all, due to the limited number of respondents and the limited number of respondents, the analysis results cannot represent the status qua of the coffee market in the whole third - and fourth-tier cities. Secondly, due to the research scope of this paper being set in China, there are few relevant references. At the same time, due to the limited time and the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic, this paper cannot survey various groups, and the survey scope is not extensive enough. Given relevant problems, researchers should expand the scope of investigation in future studies, issue questionnaires, and carry out surveys in several third - and fourth-tier cities. In addition, due to the lack of references, it is hoped that relevant researchers can conduct research on China's national conditions and local characteristics in the future and constantly improve relevant literature materials with Chinese characteristics.

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