

RETAILER BRAND EXPERIENCE, BRAND EXPERIENCE CONGRUENCE, AND CONSUMER SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

In light of the recent development of the *brand experience* construct, a study was conducted in order to test (1) the usefulness of the concept in a retailing context and (2) how the brand experience with a focal retailer and that of an alternative retailer operate as they lead to creation of brand personality, satisfaction, and loyalty. For the latter, recent methodological advancements were used based on Cheung's (2009) structural equation modeling-based latent congruence model (LCM). Brakus et al.'s (2009) model of brand experience was replicated for these purposes. The results show that a retail setting offers a unique perspective on brand experience and brand experience congruence, as well as their consequences.

INTRODUCTION

Brands continue to represent one of firms' most valuable assets (Keller 2008; LeBoeuf and Simmons 2010; Shankar et al. 2008), and managing brands (e.g., brand loyalty) has been a popular research topic in marketing for several decades. Among the recent developments in brand-related measurement includes that of brand experience (Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello 2009). Brakus et al. (2009) proposed a scale of the concept that purports to provide greater explanation and predictive validity of consumer behavior, and the current research aims to examine the applicability of the scale in a retailing context.

According to Brakus et al. (2009, p. 52), brand experience refers to "sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments." Different from product experience, shopping experience, and consumption experience, brand experience is a unique construct that captures subjective, internal consumer responses to brand-specific stimuli. To

date only a few studies have reported their empirical results using the scale (e.g., Zarantonello and Schmitt 2010; Iglesias, Singh, and Batisa-Foguet 2011), and one of the contributions of the study reported in this article is to examine the applicability of the brand experience scale in a retail setting. In developing the brand experience scale, Brakus et al. (2009) analyzed consumer descriptions of brand experiences for a wide variety of goods and services brands ("experiential brands") among which were a few retailer brands. Their final analysis of construct validity was inclusive of brands of many product categories, but it is not clear whether the scale is robust enough to be used only in a retailing context. This is important because the current literature of retailing and service management has not considered customer experience as a separate construct; instead researchers have paid attention to (1) specific aspects of customer experience such as atmospheric and service interface and (2) outcomes such as customer satisfaction and service quality (cf. Verhoef et al. 2009). The proposed definition in Verhoef et al. (2009) is that "the customer experience construct is holistic in nature and involves the customer's cognitive, affective, emotional, social and physical responses to the retailer" (p. 22), and they suggest we "move beyond the focus of a limited set of elements under the control of the retailer" (p. 33) and develop a scale that measures the customer's experience in its full detail.

In addition, **the present research concerns consumer brand experience with a focal (or preferred, currently/most recently used) retailer in relation to the best alternative retailer.** As such, this article methodologically contributes to the literature by modeling brand experience *congruence* as an independent construct based on consumer experience with the focal brand and experience with the best alternative brand. Also demonstrated are the

differing effects of brand experience and brand experience congruence on outcome variables such as satisfaction and loyalty. The comparison and congruence between the focal and the alternative retailer brand experience not only adds value to the predictive/criterion validity of brand experience scale, but it also allows for consumer experience to be examined in a comparative way. For the latter, the pivotal role of “relative” aspect in evaluation has been regaining attention recently in determining consumer perceptions of overall utility (Dhar and Wertenbroch 2011), willingness to pay premium price (Saini, Rao, and Monga 2010), and quality perceptions (Steenkamp, Heerde, and Geyskens 2010), to name a few. Thus, in addition to verifying the applicability of the brand experience scale in a retail setting, the present research investigates whether customer retail experience sufficiently determines relevant outcomes such as satisfaction and loyalty or should experience be measured in a relative manner (i.e., relative to an alternative retailer) to improve predictability. The outcome of this research offers insights for both researchers and practitioners, as customers’ retail experience congruence has not been explicitly studied.

The proposed congruence measurement takes advantage of recent methodological advancements based on Cheung’s (2009) structural equation modeling-based latent congruence modeling (LCM) in order to model relative brand experience as a unique latent construct. Previously, the use of difference score approach has been limited due mainly to reduced reliability of the calculated scores (see Peter et al. 1993 for review), but the SEM-based LCM approach can overcome the reliability issues along with ensuring measurement equivalence across the component measures.

The remainder of this article is divided into several sections. First, a brief overview of the brand experience construct is presented. Next, the conceptualization and operationalization of brand experience congruence is discussed. Third, we articulate the methods and results of the present study assessing the applicability of a brand experience scale in a retail setting, as well as the modeling of brand experience congruence. The discussion is followed by an empirical replication and analysis of Brakus et al.’s (2009) model of brand experience. Finally, the managerial and research implications of the reported research are explicated.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

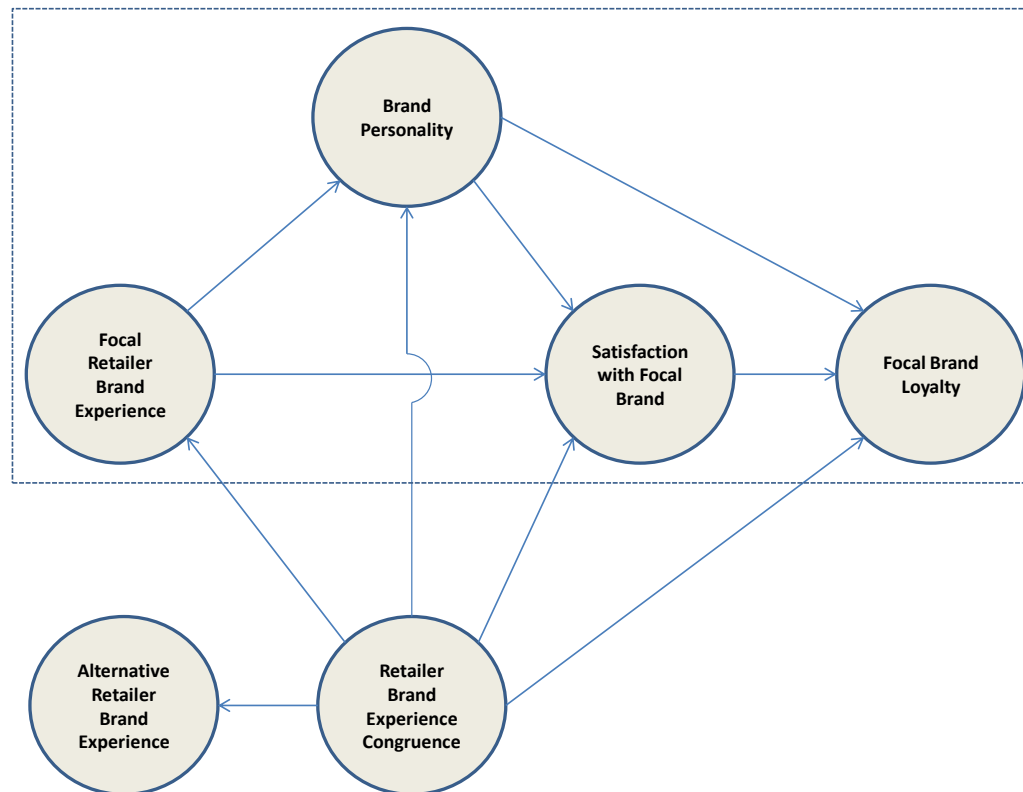
Brand Experience as a Construct

Brand experience as “sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand’s design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments” (Brakus et al. 2009, p. 52) is a second-order construct that consists of four first-order constructs: sensory, affective, behavioral, and intellectual experiences. As demonstrated by Brakus (2009), brand experience is distinguished from other brand-related constructs such as brand attachment, involvement, brand association, and brand personality. In comparison to brand attachment (Thomson 2005), brand experience is not an emotional relationship with the brand. It is also not a motivational concept, hence differs from involvement (Zaichkowsky 1985). Because brand experience captures specific sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses, it also is a separate concept from attitude (Fishbein 1975), which corresponds to general evaluative judgments about the brand. Brand personality, or “the set of human characteristics associated with the brand” (Aaker 1997, p. 347), is another construct that relates closely to brand experience. Previous studies show that forming brand personality is a highly inferential process (Johar, Sengupta, and Aaker 2005), and in Brakus et al. (2009) brand experience is proposed to be an antecedent of brand personality.

Figure 1 represents the model tested in Brakus et al. (2009), and this extension model. Brakus et al. (2009) used the model to demonstrate their proposed brand experience scale’s discriminant and predictive validity. The study reported in this article extends their inquiry from experiential brands in general to retailer brands (i.e., retailer names). As we aim to verify the applicability of brand experience scale in a retailing context, it is critical to compare the results to Brakus et al. (2009) to determine whether retailer-specific experience operates the same way as general brand experiences in terms of predictive and discriminant validity. In addition to the replication, included in Figure 1 is a brand experience congruence construct to determine whether congruence in experiences offer any additional contribution to predictive validity. The process of developing the latent scale for this purpose is described next.

FIGURE 1

Brand Experience and its Direct and Indirect Effects on Satisfaction and Loyalty (Model by Brakus et al. 2009 in dash-lined box) and the Extension Proposed by Ishida and Taylor



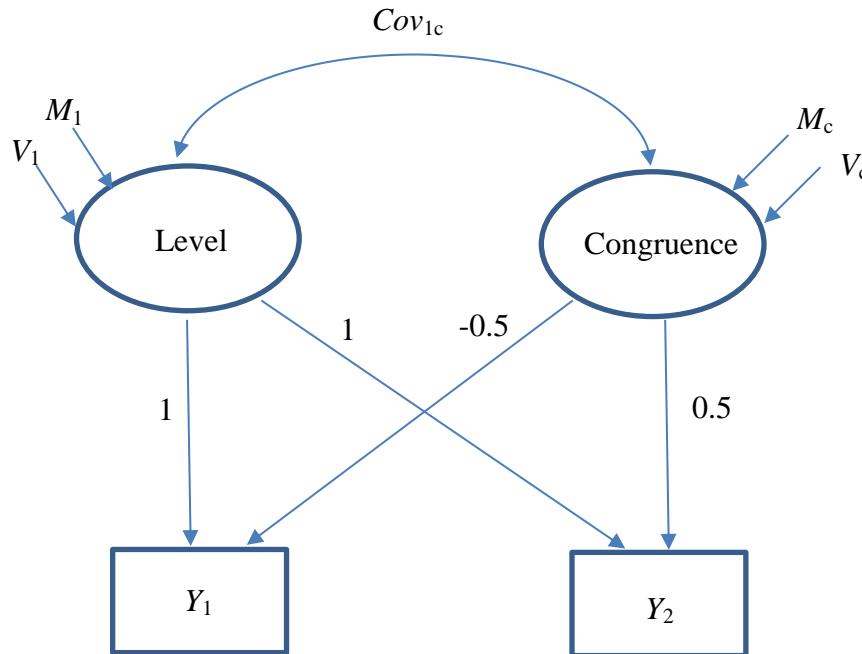
Modeling Brand Experience Congruence as a Unique Latent Construct using LCM

In addition to examining the applicability of a brand experience scale in retailing, the present study also attempts to explore the role of *experience congruence*. Does a consumer's brand experience at a focal retailer directly impact his/her satisfaction with the retailer brand, or can the differences/similarities in brand experiences (as compared with alternative retailer brand

experience) better inform us of the level of consumer satisfaction and loyalty? To answer this question, Cheung's (2009) LCM was operationalized, which allows the creation of an independent latent construct of experience congruence. Cheung (2009) defines congruence as involving agreement, fit, or similarity. Consistent with Cheung's conceptualization, brand experience congruence is a process of congruence between the brand experience at the focal brand retailer and the brand experience at the best alternative retailer.

FIGURE 2

Basic Latent Congruence Model (adopted from Cheung 2009, p. 9)



The basic premise of Cheung's (2009) LCM is to create two higher-order factors to represent the mean ("level") and difference ("congruence") of two independent component measures (See Figure 2). The factor Level is operationalized as the mean rating of Y_1 (focal brand experience) and Y_2 (alternative brand experience), which are independent observed variables, and is specified as a latent factor that has fixed factor loadings of 1 on Y_1 and Y_2 . Congruence is a latent factor that has fixed factor loadings of -0.5 on Y_1 and 0.5 on Y_2 and is operationalized as the difference in rating between Y_1 and Y_2 . The LCM can be expressed as:

$$Y_1 = \text{Level} - 0.5 \text{ Congruence} \quad (1)$$

$$Y_2 = \text{Level} + 0.5 \text{ Congruence} \quad (2)$$

Adding equations 1 and 2 yields:

$$\text{Level} = \frac{Y_1 + Y_2}{2} \quad (3)$$

Subtracting Equation 1 from Equation 2 produces:

$$\text{Congruence} = Y_2 - Y_1 \quad (4)$$

Also shown in Figure 2 are M_1 (the Level grand mean), V_1 (variance of the mean rating of Y_1 and Y_2), M_c (the average difference between Y_1 and Y_2), and V_c (the variance of the difference). The Level and Congruence are allowed to co-vary, which is represented by cov_{1c} .¹

The two observed variables Y_1 and Y_2 can be further replaced by two latent variables (η_1 and η_2) with multiple indicators (Latent LCM). This then becomes a second-order factor analysis model in which the second-order factors ξ_1 and ξ_2 define the Level and Congruence of the two first-order latent variables (η_1 and η_2). The structural equation of η and ξ is:

$$\eta = \alpha + B\eta + \Gamma\xi + \zeta \quad (5)$$

where α are the intercepts, B are the regression coefficients among η , Γ are the regression

¹ For more complete mathematical description of the five model parameters (M_1 , M_c , V_1 , V_c , and cov_{1c}), refer to Appendix A of Cheung (2009, p.26)

coefficients of η on ξ , and ζ are residuals of the structural equations. From Equation (5) η_1 and η_2 can be expressed as:

$$\eta_1 = \alpha_1 + \xi_1 - 0.5\xi_2 + \zeta_1, \text{ and} \quad (6)$$

$$\eta_2 = \alpha_2 + \xi_1 - 0.5\xi_2 + \zeta_2 \quad (7)$$

The expected values of η_1 and η_2 are:

$$E(\eta_1) = \alpha_1 + E(\xi_1) - 0.5E(\xi_2) = \alpha_1 + \kappa_1 - 0.5\kappa_2 \quad (8)$$

and

$$E(\eta_2) = \alpha_2 + E(\xi_1) - 0.5E(\xi_2) = \alpha_2 + \kappa_1 + 0.5\kappa_2 \quad (9)$$

where κ_1 and κ_2 are estimates of M_1 and M_c , respectively. To solve (6) and (7) and to identify the model, the constraint of $\alpha_1 = \alpha_2 = 0$ is made, such that:

$$\kappa_1 = \frac{E(\eta_1) + E(\eta_2)}{2} \quad (10)$$

$$\kappa_2 = E(\eta_2) - E(\eta_1) \quad (11)$$

Therefore, κ_1 and κ_2 are estimates of M_1 and M_c , respectively. In Study 1 and Study 2 the LCM method is used to create a latent construct of congruence to represent brand experience congruence between the focal brand experience and alternative brand experience. In the present study focal brand experience is represented as Y_1 , while Y_2 represents alternative brand experience.

Figure 1 depicts this extension of Brakus et al. (2009) model for brand experience influences by adding the latent factor of *brand experience congruence*. This latent construct captures the similarity between one's brand experience at the focal retailer and that of the best alternative. This model will help us understand whether an alternative retailer brand experience indirectly impacts the focal retailer satisfaction and loyalty.

METHODS

A total of 225 undergraduate students (at a mid-sized/large public university in the Midwest) were recruited from marketing classes and participated in the study, which was conducted online. The final sample size, after deletion of eight incompletely filled out questionnaires, six failing to assert truthfulness in a validity check, and 13 for asserting strongly

negative perceptions of their focal brand was 211. The final sample consisted of 105 male (49.8 %) and 106 female (50.2 %) students. This student sample is deemed appropriate considering their extensive experience with retailers as consumers. For the focal retailer brand, the participants were instructed to choose a retailer that they have "personally frequented and that provides a strong experience" for them. An alternative retailer brand was named by the participants that "directly competes with this selected retailer brand." Example brand names (Wal-Mart and Best Buy) were provided to avoid confusion. Measurement items are displayed in the Appendix. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 19.0 and AMOS 19.0. Data were normalized prior to model estimation.

Measurement

A total of five constructs were included in this study: focal retailer brand experience, alternative retailer brand experience, brand personality, satisfaction with focal retailer brand, and focal retailer brand loyalty. Consistent with the current study's aim, Brakus et al.'s (2009) brand experience scale was used to measure both the focal and the alternative retailer brand experiences. We also used the same scales used in Brakus et al. (2009) for the other three variables to be consistent in this measurement so that the comparison between their study context (brands of all kinds) to this context (retailing) was a fair comparison.

The Appendix contains all the measurement items used in the study and their composite reliability scores and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). After deleting items that had factor loadings below 0.60, all of the composite reliability scores exceeded Bagozzi and Yi's (1988) recommended threshold of 0.60 for composite reliability. Similarly, all AVE's were above Fornell and Larcker's (1981) recommended threshold of 0.50. Discriminant validity was assessed as per Anderson and Gerbing (1988). Every pair of constructs passed a pairwise χ^2 difference test. Readers will note that some items were dropped in the process of measurement assessment (CFA), leading to a significant number of item deletions having occurred with the brand experience scale. The details are provided in the following results section. Correlation and descriptive statistics are reported in Table 1.

TABLE 1¹
CORRELATION AND DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS^{1,2}

	Mean	Std. Dev.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Focal Brand Experience	3.95	1.18	1.000					
2. Alternative Brand Experience	3.56	1.09	.137*	1.000				
3. Brand Personality	4.73	1.04	.587*	-.066	1.000			
4. Focal Brand Satisfaction	5.78	1.09	.374*	-.193*	.553*	1.000		
5. Focal Brand Loyalty	5.20	1.39	.481*	-.078	.581*	.719*	1.000	
6. Marker Variable	3.64	1.38	.380*	-.001	.544*	.396*	.572*	1.0

¹ The values reported here are based on composite scales

² Value with asterisk (*) indicates $p < .05$

Measurement Validation: Common Method Bias

Common method variance is a potentially significant problem in survey research (Podsakoff et al., 2003, Williams et al., 2010). Williams et al. (2010) propose the Comprehensive CFA Marker Technique (CCMT, hereafter) as a method designed to control shared variance associated with the use of self-reports as a measurement method (e.g., consistency motifs, transient mood states, illusory correlations, item similarity, and social desirability). The CCMT compares multiple models using a marker variable to control for shared variance.

Briefly, the CCMT operates by first developing a Baseline Model that (1) fixes the factor loadings and measurement variance estimates for the marker variable based on the CFA, and (2) identifies the marker variable as orthogonal by not allowing factor correlations with the substantive constructs. This is necessary to establish the meaning of the marker (latent) variable because in all subsequent models the marker latent variable is linked to the substantive indicators via secondary loadings. The Method-C model adds additional (fixed) factor loadings from the marker latent variable to each of the indicators

of the substantive constructs in the model. Comparing the Baseline to the Method-C models provides a test of the presence of method variance associated with the marker variable. The Method-U model relaxes the fixed constraint in the Method-C model. Comparing the Method-C and Method-U models provides a test of the assumption of equal method effects. Finally, the Method-R model uses the obtained factor correlations from the Baseline Model to compare to the Method-C or Method-U model, respectively. The Method-R assessment tests the biasing effects of the marker variable on substantive relationships (i.e., whether the factor correlations are significantly biased by marker variable effects). Thus, an insignificant Method-R comparison signals a measure of comfort in concluding that common method variance does not bias obtained results in model assessment.

In choosing a marker variable, Williams et al.'s (2010, p. 31) suggests a marker variable "... capturing or tapping into one or more sources of bias that can occur in the measurement context for given substantive variables being examined, ...". We reasoned that an alternative potential source of theoretically-related bias in the context of the current research might be the brand equity associated with the less-preferred substitute

retailer brand. That is, brand equity perceptions for an alternative brand stored in a consumer’s memory might color perceptions of brand experiences and subsequent attitudes, such as through memory markers similar to that proposed by Hee-Kyung et al. (2009). Table 2 presents the results of the multi-step CCMT methodology in the current research. We were able to demonstrate with some confidence that shared variance does not influence the obtained results. Specifically, the chi-square difference test passes between the Baseline Model and Method-C Model ($\Delta\chi^2= 2.87$, critical value = 3.84), which suggests that marker variable effects are not significant. However, readers are cautioned to consider that the subsequent comparisons between Method-C and Method-U ($\Delta\chi^2= 75.34$, critical value = 25) and between Method-U and Method-R ($\Delta\chi^2=$

140.88, critical value = 16.92) suggest potential non-equal method effects and a significant bias factor correlation estimates, respectively.

Phase two of CCMT involves reliability decomposition, which allows for quantifying the amount of method variance associated with the measurement of the latent variables in the current study. Using Method-U model, which was the best model accounting for marker variance on substantive indicators, the following results were obtained:

$$R_{Total} = R_{Substantive} + R_{Method} \rightarrow .9022 = .8962 + .0077$$

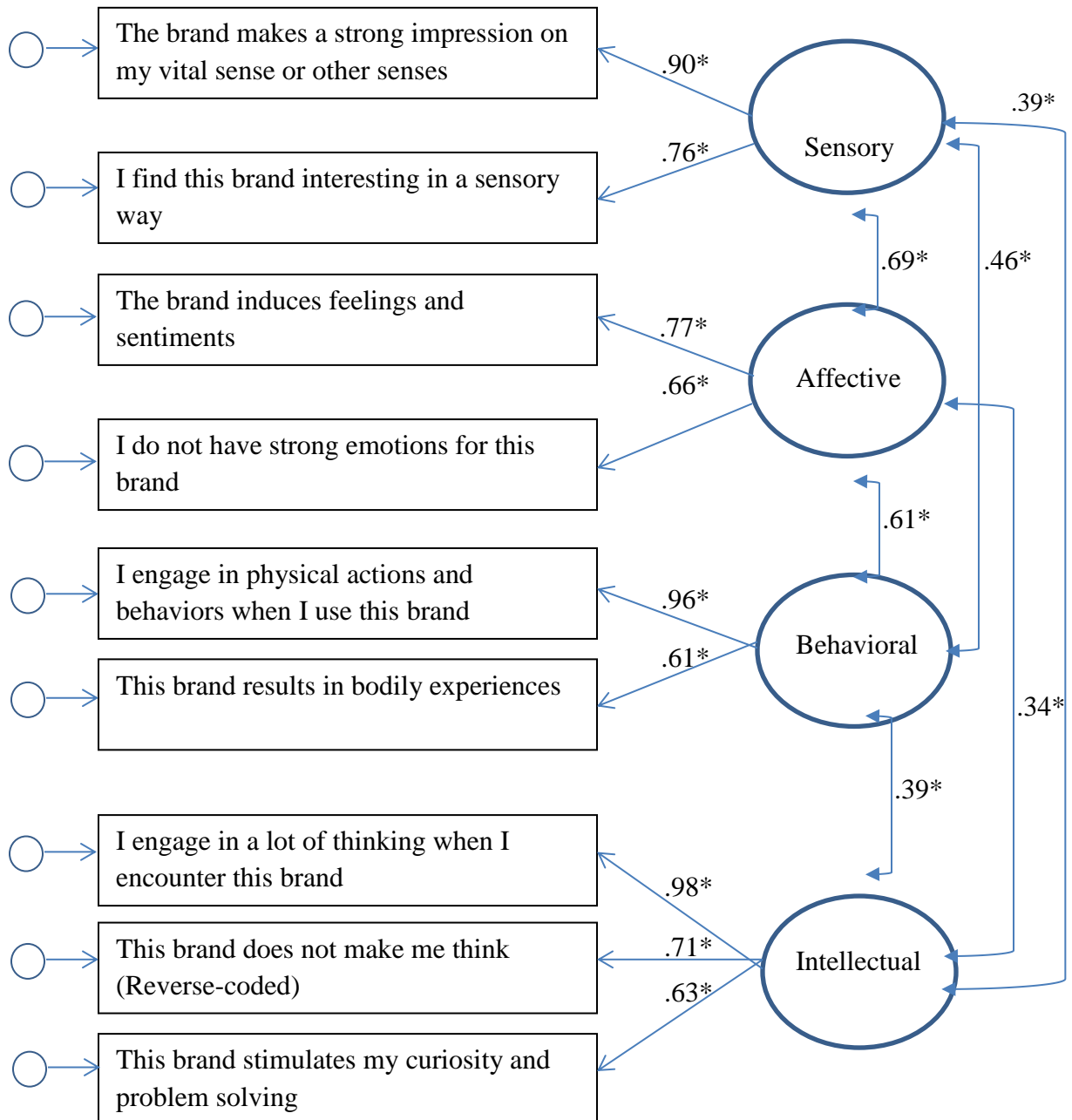
It is demonstrated that very little of the achieved reliability scores can be attributed to issues related to methods (Williams et al., 2010).

TABLE 2

Common Method Variance Assessment

CCMT Model	χ^2	df	CFI
CFA	304.97	137	.92
Baseline	372.39	147	.89
Method-C	369.52	146	.89
Method-U	294.18	131	.92
Method-R	435.06	140	.86
<i>Chi-square Model Comparison Tests</i>			
Δ Models	$\Delta \chi^2$	df	Critical Value
Baseline vs. Method-C	2.87	1	3.84
Method-C vs. Method-U	75.34	15	25.00
Method-U vs. Method-R	140.88	9	16.92

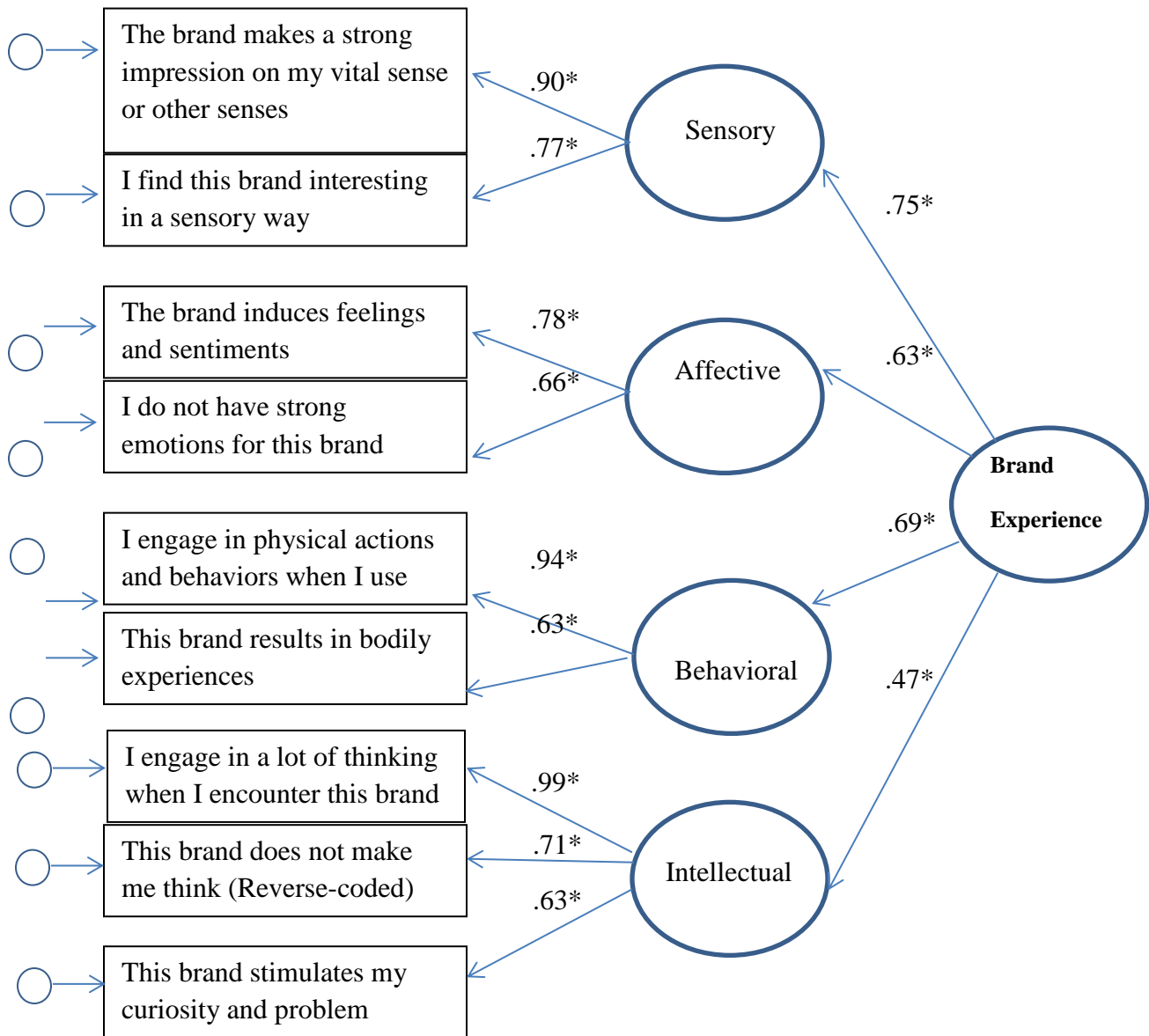
FIGURE 3

Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results for the Four-Factor Model^{1,2}

1. Factor loadings are standardized estimates. Double-arrows represent correlations

2. * = $p < .05$

FIGURE 4
One-Factor Higher Order CFA



Applicability of Brand Experience Scale in Retailing

In order to test the applicability of brand experience scale developed by Brakus et al. (2009) in a retailing context, we conducted a CFA based on all the brand experience measurement items. As shown in Figure 3, the four-factor model (no higher order scale of brand experience included) resulted in acceptable factor loadings and model fit ($\chi^2 = 57.08$, $df = 21$, $CFI = .95$, $TLI =$

$.92$, $IFI = .95$, $RMSEA = .09$). However, when modeling brand experience as a second-order factor (see Figure 4), the Intellectual Experience factor dropped its prominence with a factor loading of $.47$, which is statistically significant but not substantial (i.e., $>.60$). Thus, Intellectual Experience fails to substantially account for the higher-order factor of brand experience. The outcome indicates that, in a retailing context, the second-order four-factor brand experience scale as postulated by Brakus et al. (2009) does not appear

to adequately converge. In other words, only sensory, affective, and behavioral experiences appear to contribute to the retail brand experience. With the higher-order consisting of the three subdimensions, the model fits well fit ($\chi^2 = 13.08$, $df = 6$, CFI=.98, TLI = .96, IFI = .98, RMSEA = .075).

Prior to estimating these models, we also checked for possible multicollinearity between focal brand experience and congruence by (1) checking the correlation coefficient between the two and (2) analyzing the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) in a regression form. For the former, the correlation coefficient was 0.137 ($p < .05$). VIF between the two first and second-order factors

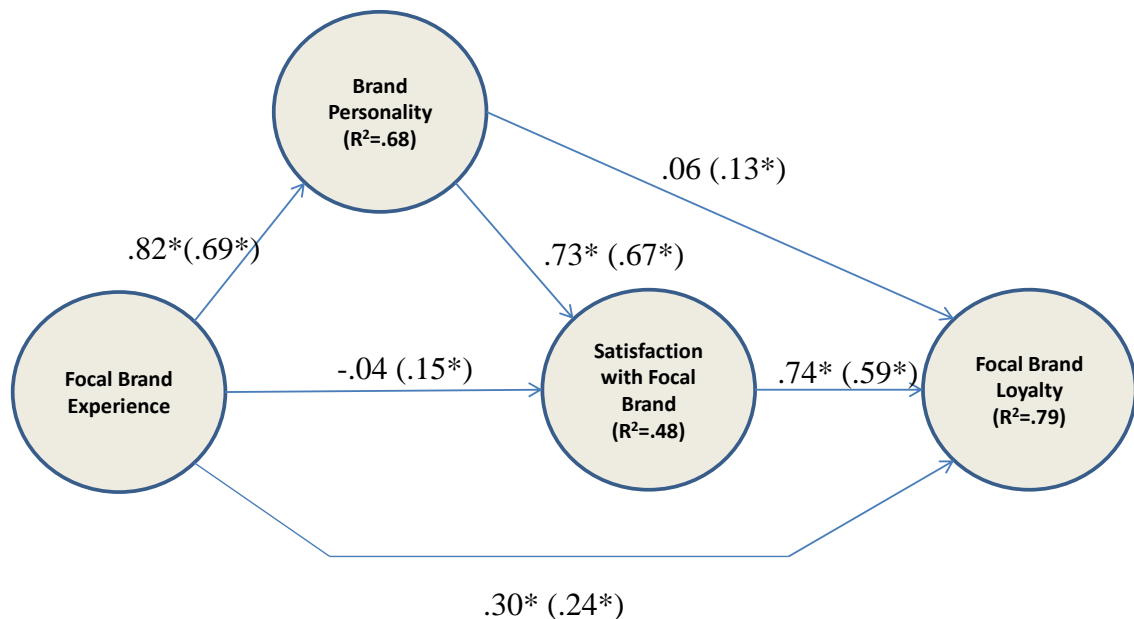
were 1.019 with tolerance of .981, and VIF is sufficiently below recommended threshold of 10 (Myers 1990).

Assessment of the Brakus et al. (2009) Model in a Retailing Context

As identified in the preceding section, we modeled brand experience as a second-order factor with only three subdimensions (sensory, affective, behavioral experiences) in subsequent analyses.

FIGURE 5

Study Results in Comparison to Brakus et al. (2009)^{3,4,5}



Fit indices: $\chi^2 = 190.74$, $df = 83$, CFI = .94, TLI = .92, IFI = .94, RMSEA = .08

³ Standardized coefficients are shown with asterisk indicating $p < .05$

⁴ Brakus et al. 2009 results in parenthesis

⁵ R^2 values reported are from this current study

As shown in Figure 5, two of the paths that were reported significant in the Brakus et al. (2009) study were not significant in this study: Brand Experience → Satisfaction, and Brand Personality → Brand Loyalty. The remaining paths resulted in a very similar pattern with the ones reported by Brakus et al. (2009), in terms of the magnitude of effects. The model exhibited acceptable fit ($\chi^2 = 190.74$, $df = 83$, $CFI = .94$, $TLI = .92$, $IFI = .94$, $RMSEA = .08$). The R^2 values for brand personality, satisfaction, and loyalty are .68, .48, and .79, respectively. The outcome may be due to two things. First, as described in the previous section, this brand experience scale did not include intellectual experiences as a subdimension. Another possibility is that in a

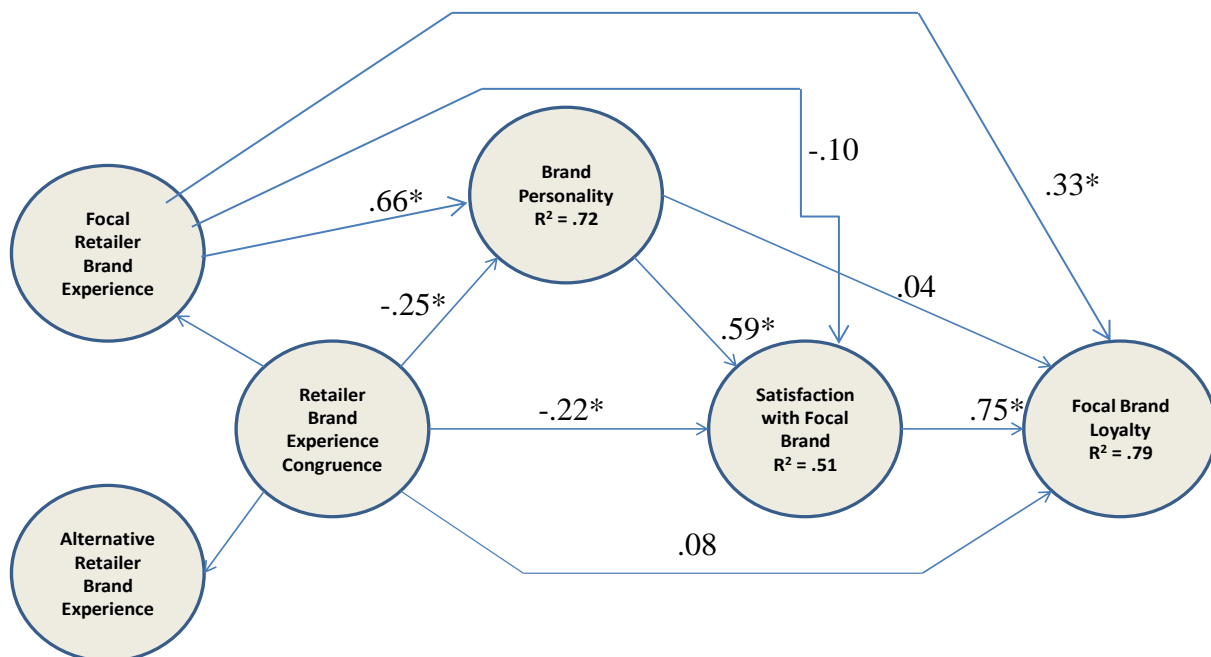
retailing context, these paths may simply be non-existent.

Assessment of the Role of Brand Experience Congruence

Next, *brand experience congruence* was added to the original model. We used Cheung's (2009) LCM approach to model a latent congruence construct deriving from the difference between focal retailer brand experience and alternative retailer brand experience. The results are shown in Figure 6. The model resulted in acceptable fit ($\chi^2 = 267.39$, $df = 124$, $CFI = .92$, $TLI = .91$, $IFI = .93$, $RMSEA = .07$). The R^2 values for brand personality, satisfaction, and loyalty are .72, .51, and .79, respectively.

FIGURE 6

Alternative Model Results



($\chi^2 = 267.39$, $df = 124$, $CFI = .92$, $TLI = .91$, $IFI = .93$, $RMSEA = .07$).

Readers are encouraged to compare the results reported in Figure 5 with these in Figure 6.

First, the newly introduced concept of retailer brand experience congruence contributed to the explained variance of both brand personality and satisfaction with the focal brand. The results suggest that brand experience congruence does detract from the focal brand experience \rightarrow brand personality path. **That is, the extent to which two retailer brands offer similar experiences the less the consumer associates focal brand personality with the focal brand experience. Another key finding is that, as reported in Figure 5, while the brand experience \rightarrow satisfaction path remains non-significant ($\beta = -.10$, $p > .05$), the brand experience congruence \rightarrow satisfaction is ($\beta = .22$, $p < .05$). This suggests that, in a retailing context, brand experience does not lead to satisfaction, but satisfaction may be lessened if the brand experience at focal retailer is similar to that at the alternative retailer.** Interestingly, focal brand experiences do associate positively with brand loyalty, whereas brand experience congruence do not.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the applicability of the recently developed brand experience scale developed by Brakus et al. (2009) in a retailing context. We also implemented a recently developed method of latent congruence modeling (LCM) proposed by Cheung (2009) to model brand experience congruence in order to explore the role of experience congruence. The results of both the original model and the alternative model together suggest a number of managerial and research implications.

Implications

First, with regards to the applicability of the Brand Experience scale in a retailing context, the results suggest that the scale performs well overall only as a first-order four-factor model. When modeled as a second-order factor with four subdimensions, intellectual experience shows less than substantial factor loading to the higher-order scale of brand experience. This suggests that consumers do not equate cognitive activities with

the retailer brand per se. Rather, they more or less engage in cognitive thinking with brands of product they purchase from the retailer.

Second, the brand experience scale was used without the intellectual experience subdimension to test the model proposed by Brakus et al. (2009) as a means of assessing the predictability of the brand experience scale. As shown in Figure 5, two of the paths that were reported by Brakus et al. (2009) to be significant and positive (focal brand experience \rightarrow satisfaction, and brand personality \rightarrow brand loyalty) were not significant in this study when extended to retailer brands. There are a couple of possibilities that can explain these results. It is possible that the differences in results were due simply to the fact that this brand experience did not include intellectual experience. In addition, the discrepancy could have been caused by the context of this particular study. It is possible that, in a retailing context, brand personality's role is minor in development of brand loyalty. Similarly, it is also possible that retailer brand experience is not a significant direct predictor of satisfaction in a retailing situation.

Lastly, brand experience *congruence* was added to the original model, and the results (Figure 6) suggest that experience congruence does offer additional insights into how consumers develop retailer brand satisfaction and loyalty. For example, results from this study reveals that it is not the retailer brand that directly impacts the retailer satisfaction, but it is the experience congruence with an alternative retailer brand. In the Brakus et al. (2009) study brand experience directly influenced satisfaction. The difference here could be due to (1) this study's context of retailing or (2) the use of three subdimensions as compared to four used in their study. We also found that focal retailer brand experience was positively associated with brand loyalty, while brand experience congruence was not. This suggests that brand experience and brand experience congruence operate differently in the minds of consumers in a way that uniquely explains retailer brand experience's role in consumer satisfaction and loyalty. This was also the case with the formation of brand personality. Focal retailer brand experience remained significant and positive in the formation of brand personality, but this effect was mitigated by the brand experience congruence. In other words, the more similar the consumer's brand experiences

are at focal and an alternative retailer brand, the less the consumer identifies brand personality with the focal retailer brand.

In sum, this study's context of retailing extends Brakus et al. (2009) in a way that offers a unique perspective of brand experience and its consequences. The use of LCM to model congruence also allowed us to explore the differing effects of brand experience congruence. Up to now, there have been both theoretical and methodological barriers to furthering this understanding of modeling the congruence concept. The current research highlights experience congruence's potentially unique and prominent role in the development of retailer satisfaction and loyalty. This has managerial implications. For example, if a retailer wants to increase customer satisfaction the manager should highlight differences in retailer brand experience compared to those of competitors. Similarly, distinguishing the retailer from competitors would also aid shoppers in identifying brand personality for the retailer brand.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

The present study offers new insights into brand experience in a retailing context, but it is not without room for improvement and for future research opportunities that can further this understanding. First, we had a limited number of variables in this survey in order to test the model proposed by Brakus et al. to test discriminant and predictive validity of brand experience. Future studies may explore the role of brand experience and experience congruence in terms of other brand-related and non-brand-related consequences such as brand attitude (Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann 2003) and perceived value (Grewal, Monroe, and Krishnan 1998).

Second, although Brakus et al. (2009) included retail brands in the brand experience scale development, our study suggests that the scale may need additional experiential attributes specific to a retailing context. For example, the retail purchase performance scale by Mathwick, Malhotra, and Rigdon (2001) might profitably be used in conjunction with the Brakus et al. (2009) scale. The former includes seven indicators of experiential value: efficiency, economic value, intrinsic enjoyment, escapism, visual appeal, entertainment, and service excellence. Other

studies have also focused on the effect of retail environment on atmospheric experience of shopping (Cameron et al. 2003; Grewal et al. 2003; Morin et al. 2007). Future studies may consider expanding the retailing-specific brand experience operationalization beyond that used in Brakus et al. (2009).

Related to this second limitation is concern over the choice of brand equity as a marker variable. Williams et al. (2010) point out that our collective understanding of "appropriate" marker variables is very limited at this time. These authors suggest that researchers examine the nomological nets of the substantive variables being examined. Judgments can then be made about how central a potential marker variable is in such a net. They caution researchers to take care in selecting potential marker variables with strong theoretical and empirical relationships to substantive variables. In the case of the current research, brand equity was selected because the constitutive and operational nuances between independent brand concepts are not well understood. Hence, we consider the use of brand equity to be perhaps an overly conservative approach toward trying to parse out the common variance associated with issues related to price in brand decisions. Had we chosen instead to focus on customer value perceptions explicitly, this may have been problematic. It is our considered opinion that the approach we took is defensible as we established discriminant validity, the lack of multicollinearity, and that the marker variable performed as designed in the methodological analyses.

Lastly, in the survey respondents were instructed to choose a retailer that they have "personally frequented and that provides a strong experience" for them; however we did not specify a line of trade. Examples of retailers (Wal-Mart, Best Buy) were mentioned in the survey instrument; however it is possible that respondents chose dissimilar lines of trade in which brand experience and brand experience congruence may vary in importance. This could present a serious limitation in terms of explaining brand experience's relationships to other brand-related variables. Though, we also note that (1) the brand experience scale itself is versatile and (2) brand experience congruence (i.e., difference between focal brand experience and that of an alternative) also needn't be unique to a specific line of trade, as variances in importance of brand experience

and brand experience congruence also vary between individuals. Nonetheless, future research may further verify this point by specifying lines of trade and then making comparisons to the results from our study.

As a future research direction it will also be interesting to investigate the influence of marketing strategy, such as a brand's positioning strategy and marketing mix on brand experience (congruence) formation, as research has shown these can significantly impact a consumer's loyalty intensity (Bhattacharya 1998; Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006). The extant research has also shown the prominent role of advertising on retail experience (Deighton 1988; Cutler et al. 2000), and this too may enhance the understanding of not only retail brand experience but also experience congruence. Lastly, the implementation of the LCM method contributes to advancing our understanding of congruence formation, and perhaps in the future it can be further explored in other contexts.

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APPENDIX
Measures^a

Variable	Source	Measures	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Ex- tracted (AVE)
Satisfaction (+3 to -3, 7 points)	Adapted from Brakus et al. (2009)	Overall, I would characterize my experience with the retailer I selected as84	.52
		I'm Disgusted to I'm Content I'm Dissatisfied to I'm Satisfied They are Doing a Poor Job to They are Doing a Great Job A Poor Choice to A Wise Choice I'm Unhappy to I'm Happy		
Brand loyalty (7-Point Likert Scales)	Adapted from Brakus et al. (2009) and Keller (2008)	I consider myself loyal to my selected retailer brand. I buy at my selected retailer brand whenever I can. This is the one retailer brand I would prefer to buy from/use. I would go out of my way to shop at this retailer brand. In the future, I will be loyal to this retailer brand.	.88	.72
<i>Sensory Experience</i>				
Brand Experience (7-Point Scales Poled from Not At All Descriptive to Extremely Descriptive)	Brakus et al. (2009)	This retailer brand makes a strong impression. I find this retailer brand interesting in a sensory way. This retailer brand does not appeal to my senses. ^b (-)	.82/.75	.70/.61
		This retailer brand induces feelings and sentiments. I do not have strong emotions for this retailer brand. ^{b, c} (-) This retailer brand is an emotional brand.		
<i>Affective Experience</i>				
<i>Behavioral Experience</i>				
<i>Intellectual Experience</i>				
<i>Sensory Experience</i>				
<i>Affective Experience</i>				
<i>Behavioral Experience</i>				
<i>Intellectual Experience</i>				

Brand Personality (7-Point Scales Poled from Not At All Descriptive to Extremely Descriptive)	Brakus et al. (2009) adapted from Aaker (1997)	Sincerity: “down-to-earth,”	.86	.61
		“honest,” “wholesome,”	.84	.64
		“cheerful”	.68	.52
		Excitement: “daring,” “spirited,”	.79	.65
		“imaginative,” ^b “up-to-date”		
		Competence: “reliable,”		
		“intelligent,” “successful” ^b		
		Sophistication: “upper-class”		
		“charming”		
		Ruggedness: “outdoorsy, tough”		
Marker Variable – Brand Equity (7-Point Likert Scales)	Taylor et al. (2007) adapted from Netemeyer et al. (2004)	The prices at the alternative retailer brand I selected would have to go up quite a bit before I would switch to another retailer. I am willing to pay a higher price for the alternative retailer brand I selected than for other retailer brands. I am willing to pay a lot more for the alternative retailer brand I selected than other retailer brands.	.84	.65

a = Readers will note two sets of analysis associated with the constructs of Brand Experience. The first score refers to reliability/AVE for the focal brand, and the second for the alternative brand.

b= This item was dropped from Experience scale for focal brand based on CFA.

c = This item was dropped from Experience scale for alternative brand based on CFA.