

Integrating SERVQUAL, Servicescape Model and Stimulus-Response Theory to Ascertain Patronage of Specialty Coffee Outlet

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ABSTRACT

Customer patronage is critical to the success of a specialty coffee outlet. Based on this, the influence of service quality, physical environment, and promotion on customer's patronage of a specialty coffee outlet was ascertained in this study. Convenience sampling was used to distribute 350 questionnaires physically at a specialty coffee outlet. The study uncovered that physical environment was the most dominating factor driving customer patronage of the specialty coffee outlet, followed by service quality. To sum, in practice specialty coffee outlets must invest in a well-designed physical environment to provide an enjoyable and memorable experience for customers that could lead to increase in patronage and business growth. This is possible by leveraging on online influencers producing food review vlogs to showcase their distinctive store ambience and atmosphere of the coffee outlet. Impeccable service quality rendered by specialty coffee outlets too can differentiate a specialty coffee outlet from competitors and attract new customers. Good service quality can elevate customer satisfaction, drive loyalty and ultimately driving patronage. Theoretically, the Stimulus-Response Theory has been extended to integrate the SERVQUAL and Servicescape models together with promotion to ascertain the direct cause of customer's observable behaviour of patronizing a specialty coffee outlet based on these external stimuli.

Keywords: customer patronage, physical environment, promotion, service quality, specialty coffee outlet

INTRODUCTION

Coffee is consumed worldwide (Statista, 2022) and often considered as a social lubricant beverage as it promotes calm and comfortable composure in a social setting. The Malaysian coffee industry's significant growth is attributed to the evolving consumer culture and preference that value taste and quality. This has gravitated the doors for "specialty coffee" and development of social coffee outlets, such as Starbucks, Coffee Bean and alike. Instant coffee, brewed coffee and specialty coffee are the

most popular type of coffee among Malaysian coffee drinkers. According to Statista Market Insights in 2025, the Malaysian coffee market users are projected to reach 2.6 mil. by 2029, with user penetration estimated at 5.8% in 2025 rising to 7.2% by 2029 (statista.com). This growth is propelled by an increase in volume consumption per person in tandem with the rising café culture and RTD coffee popularity. Rising urbanization and a more affluent middle class too are contributing to increased demand for premium coffee products among Malaysians.

Two types of coffee outlet prevail in Malaysia, the local brand and international brand, with most operating under a franchise system. However, the international café has rapidly transformed and influenced coffee culture in Malaysia, serving all types of beverages with coffee being their core ingredient, and other non-caffeine beverage options. Malaysia Specialty Coffee Association (MSCA), reported there were more than 80 coffee-related brands available in Malaysia. These include brands such as Artisan Roastery, 103 Coffee, Gigi Coffee, HWC Coffee, Copenhagen Coffee, MlountBatten Café, The Brew Crew, ZUSPRESSO, and Toothless Coffee among others (MSCA, 2020). As their numbers grow, there is a need to continuously ensure consistent patronage among current and new customers to ensure their business profitability and sustainability (Filimonau et al., 2023). The Malaysian government too has instituted a multi-pronged strategy to actively support the premium coffee ecosystem, from bean cultivation and halal certification to digital sales, funding, export promotion, and regulatory ease. To name a few are the i-Tekad grants that offers start-up funding to lower entry barrier for new cafes (digitalmarketreports.com), PEMUDAH focuses on regulation easing to accelerate business set-up (en.wikipedia.org), plantation investment to extend farm support for the production of better bean quality locally (malaymail.com), and MyKiosk tasked to construct or upgrade appropriate infrastructure particularly affordable physical outlets (themalaysianreserve.com).

Despite of all these initiatives specialty coffee outlets still experience fluctuations in customer patronage due to shortcomings linked to their location, products assortments, brand reputation, promotion, service quality and physical environment (Lukiyana & Pratama, 2023; Luu & Westh, 2023). Based on this, the relationship between service quality, physical environment and promotion (independent variables) were examined as prime drivers of customer patronage (dependent variable) for a specialty coffee outlet in this study.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Customer Patronage

Customer patronage is the number of outlet visitor of a business (Diyaolu et al., 2022; Usani et al., 2022). The financial sustainability of specialty coffee outlets relies heavily on customer patronage, as it plays a critical role in providing continuous support for maintaining operations and generating a steady flow of revenue and long-term profitability (Widadi & Dellyana, 2023). A satisfied customer is pivotal in driving growth of specialty coffee outlets by increasing the likelihood of positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Hwang et al., 2021) and foster a supportive customer community (Karthik et al., 2022). An engaged and supportive customer community in turn fosters a collaborative atmosphere, sense of belonging, that encourages frequent visits and recommendations (Padungyos et al., 2020). A specialty coffee outlet that consistently delivers high-quality products and excellent service is more likely to achieve long-term sustainability (Rusti & Irham, 2023). In contrast, a visible lack of patronage may result in prospective customers perceiving poor quality, service, or value, thus discouraging them from trying the outlet (Adeniyi et al., 2021). A lack of customers may in turn demoralize employees, making it difficult to retain staff (Salwa, 2023).

To measure customer patronage of specialty coffee outlets, purchase intention and purchase are the factors to be considered (Greene et al., 2023). Purchase intention constitutes customer's inclination

to make a purchase from the coffee outlet. It indicates their interest in trying the products or services offered and likelihood of visiting the coffee outlet in the future. Purchase intention may lead to actual purchasing behavior (Iqbal et al., 2023). Assistance offered when a customer enters an outlet with the intention to make a purchase such as helpful guidance, personalized recommendations, good service quality and physical environment, collectively contributes to the customer's decision to complete the purchase (Nurjuman et al., 2023). Purchase at a specialty coffee outlet, involves customers acquisition of various products and services including freshly brewed coffee, specialty coffee beans, espresso-based beverages, brewed tea, delectable pastries, and other complementary items (Alita et al., 2023) and completing the exchange of payment, in the form of cash or through electronic means (Marera et al., 2023).

Service Quality

Service quality rendered by specialty coffee outlets, entails the overall assessment of a customer's experience with the coffee outlet based on their perception of the service provided (Setyawan et al., 2023). It embodies dimensions such as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Lim et al., 2022). The long standing SERVQUAL framework developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) measures service quality based on customer expectations and perceptions of the aforesaid five dimensions (Ren et al., 2023). Holistic service quality delivered by specialty coffee outlets can enhance customer satisfaction, encourage repeat visits, foster loyalty and create positive overall impression of the establishment, which can increase the likelihood of patronage (purchase intention and purchases) (Kabir, 2023). Additionally, high service quality can differentiate a specialty coffee outlet from competitors, create positive word-of-mouth, and attract new customers making it a critical factor in building strong brand reputation and maintaining a competitive edge in the market (Ren et al., 2023).

Service quality in the context of specialty coffee outlets, includes various factors related to the abovementioned dimensions. Tangible dimension focuses on the professional appearance of employees, particularly baristas. Appropriate uniform, including wearing a cap and apron, adds to the professional image of the baristas (Jaju, 2023). Standardized and appropriate uniform can reinforce the brand identity of the coffee outlet and create a sense of consistency and professionalism (Liu et al., 2023). Neat and well-dressed barista creates a positive impression and signifies attention to details and competence, which can contribute to customer satisfaction and patronage (Pojmann, 2020, Amoako et al., 2023). Reliability is the ability to provide services consistently, accurately, and dependably. Accuracy in serving beverages exactly as ordered is a critical aspect of service quality (Binowo et al., 2023). When baristas consistently deliver error-free orders, it builds customer confidence in the outlet's reliability (Pamuji & Sutedjo, 2023). Accurate billing is another aspect of service reliability (Kukanja et al., 2023) as it demonstrates transparency and trustworthiness contributing to a positive customer experience, higher levels of satisfaction, trust and loyalty, leading to sustained patronage (Nuryadin et al., 2023, Fernando et al., 2023). Responsiveness is the willingness of baristas to assist customers according to their requests. It involves aspects such as promptly addressing customer inquiries or resolving any issues that may arise during the service interaction. When baristas demonstrate a helpful attitude and respond promptly to customer needs, it creates a positive customer experience (Opoku et al., 2022). Another element of responsiveness is patience. Patience in taking customer orders is crucial for delivering quality service (Setyo & Andesta, 2023), especially during peak hours or when customers have specific preferences or questions. It creates a welcoming and customer-centric atmosphere. Responsive service enhances customer satisfaction, builds rapport, hence driving satisfaction and patronage (Rane et al., 2023, Setyawan et al., 2023).

In a specialty coffee outlet, assurance is delivered through well-trained baristas with coffee expertise, ability to answer customer's queries, and provide recommendations (Setyo & Andesta, 2023). Baristas with in-depth knowledge about coffee offerings, brewing methods, and alike instills confidence in customers (Gazzola et al., 2023). Additionally, baristas with a good understanding of customers'

preferences, dietary restrictions, and specific requests, fosters a personalized experience that creates a sense of importance and care (Amoako et al., 2023). This empathetic approach leads to increased customer satisfaction that encourages customer patronage (Djatola & Hilal, 2023). Being sympathetic and reassuring if something goes wrong is also a vital element of service quality. By addressing problems promptly, taking responsibility, and providing reassurance, baristas can turn a potentially negative experience into a positive one (Putra & Pinariya, 2022). Past studies involving SERVQUAL predominantly ascertained the influence of service quality on satisfaction and loyalty towards specialty coffee outlets (Saputra, et al., 2024, Pérez-Morón et al., 2022). However, this study addressed customer patronage of specialty coffee outlet, and the SERVQUAL framework was adopted and adapted to incorporate: tangibles (professional appearance, uniforms), reliability (accuracy of orders and billing), responsiveness (prompt service, willingness to help), assurance (knowledge, understanding of customer needs), and empathy (attentiveness, sympathy, and reassurance) (Lim et al., 2022).

H1: Service quality will positively influence customer patronage of specialty coffee outlet.

Physical Environment

The physical environment of a specialty coffee outlet encompasses the tangible elements and sensory cues that customers experience while interacting with the outlet. It is important as it creates a unique and memorable experience for customers (Luu & Westh, 2023). According to (Bitner, 1992) physical environment shapes customer perceptions and behaviours of a service setting which in turn forms customers impressions of the service and ultimately their patronage decision. A well-designed physical environment can enhance customer satisfaction, encourage repeat visits, and foster positive word-of-mouth (Ali et al., 2021). It also differentiates a specialty coffee outlet from competitors, establishing a unique brand image and attracting new customers (Kandampully et al., 2023).

Physical environment of a specialty coffee outlets, includes specific measures such as interior design, wall decoration, colors, paintings, ambiance, background music, aroma, environment, lighting, temperature, spatial layout, and seating arrangement (Luu & Westh, 2023). These factors contribute to creating a warm and inviting atmosphere (Lockwood & Pyun, 2020). A visually appealing interior design such as visual cues, signage and decor can enhance the aesthetic appeal of the outlet and make customers feel comfortable and relaxed leaving a positive impression on customers, leading to increased patronage (Rizqiawan & Iful, 2023, Sahin & Artuger, 2023). Choice of background music can influence the mood and create a pleasant environment for customers (Korper & Rodrigues, 2023). Properly designed lighting, temperature and aroma of freshly brewed coffee creates a warm and comfortable atmosphere, making customers feel cozy and relaxed (Lockwood & Pyun, 2020). A positive ambience can make customers feel more comfortable, encourage them to spend time at the outlet, and increase their likelihood of becoming loyal patrons (Ariyanto et al., 2023). Lastly, a thoughtfully planned spatial layout, seating arrangement and counter position, provides customers with enough space to move around comfortably (Raniya et al., 2023).

An efficiently designed spatial layout allows customers to find suitable seating, promotes social interaction, and enhances their overall experience, leading to increased patronage (Barber & Münster, 2023). Several studies in Malaysia have examined the Servicescape model and its impact on customer patronage, in retail, hospitality, food and beverage settings, including cafes and specialty coffee outlets. In short, few studies focus exclusively on specialty coffee outlets but instead most combine cafés/restaurants (Safri, & Mohi, 2022). This study has focus specifically on specialty coffee outlet and included all the key components of physical environment proposed by the Servicescape model, namely ambient conditions, space/functionality and signs, symbols and artifacts.

H2: Physical environment will positively influence customer patronage of specialty coffee outlet.

Promotion

Promotional activities include advertising, public relations, revenue promotions, and direct marketing (Halid et al., 2023). Effective promotion can help to create brand awareness, generate interest, and foster preference for a particular outlet (Atito et al., 2023) and differentiate a specialty coffee outlet from competitors, by conveying value propositions, and establishing a unique brand image (Kulkarni & Longani, 2022). Promotions too serve as a catalyst for stimulating customer purchase interest and motivating them to consider patronizing the coffee outlet and completing their purchase (Mohammad & Windasari, 2022). The effectiveness of promotion for specialty coffee outlets, can be measured through their social media engagement, website traffic, event attendance, customer inquiries resulting from promotion, revenue growth during promotional campaigns, and customer participation in loyalty programs and discounts. A strong social media (e.g. Facebook & Instagram) presence allows specialty coffee outlets to engage with customers, share visually appealing content, create a sense of community (Abbasi et al., 2023), increase brand visibility, attract new customers, and encourage customer patronage (Tania et al., 2023).

A well-designed, informative and user-friendly website serves as a virtual storefront for specialty coffee outlets capable of positively influencing customer patronage (Rahmiati et al., 2023). Hosting events such as coffee tastings and workshops creates opportunities for customers to experience the specialty coffee offerings firsthand and can create a sense of excitement, and emotional connection, leading to increased patronage (Prayitno et al., 2023). Offering samples of specialty coffee products allows customers to taste and evaluate the quality and flavors which ultimately can generate interest, and increase the likelihood of customer patronage (Dopson, 2021). Offering customers free gifts, such as branded merchandise or small samples, can create a sense of reciprocity, gratitude and encourage customers to patronize the outlet again.

Crafting customer loyalty program is an effective way to cultivate customer loyalty and increase patronage of coffee outlets (Osmanova et al., 2023). This can be done through points-based systems, exclusive offers, or personalized discounts (Adawiyah et al., 2023). Loyalty programs foster a sense of appreciation and strengthen the relationship between the outlet and its customers (Pachau & Kumar, 2023). Offering discounts such as percentage-based discounts on specific products or special pricing during certain times of the day can attract customers as it creates a perception of value for customers (Yuliati & Wahyuni, 2022). Positive word of Mouth (WOM) promotion creates a sense of trust, credibility and social validation, capable of driving purchase intention and purchase action (Sulemana et al., 2023, Armawan et al., 2023). Satisfied customers may continue to spread positive WOM, further attracting new customers and creating a cycle of patronage, leading to increased customer retention, repeat visits, and sustained patronage over time (Liao et al., 2023).

Past studies on promotion for specialty coffee has focused largely on traditional promotional tools such as discounts, loyalty program, limited time offer, digital promotion in driving loyalty and retention (Rahmiati et al., 2023; Prayitno et al., 2023). This study has combined both traditional and digital promotion in ascertaining their influence on customer patronage of a specialty coffee outlet. Both the SERVQUAL and Servicescape model does not directly address promotion, but effective promotion (e.g. discounts or special offers) can enhance the perceived value of service quality and the physical environment. In short, promotion can draw customer patronage, where a positive service quality and enjoyable atmosphere may lead them into re-patronage. Consequently, the S-R Theory (Stimulus-Response Theory) postulated by Pavlov (1927) formed the basis to ascertain the direct causality that is the observable behaviour of customer patronizing a specialty coffee outlet based on external stimuli being promotion through a variety of social media and tools, service quality and physical environment.

H3: Promotion will positively influence customer patronage of specialty coffee outlet.

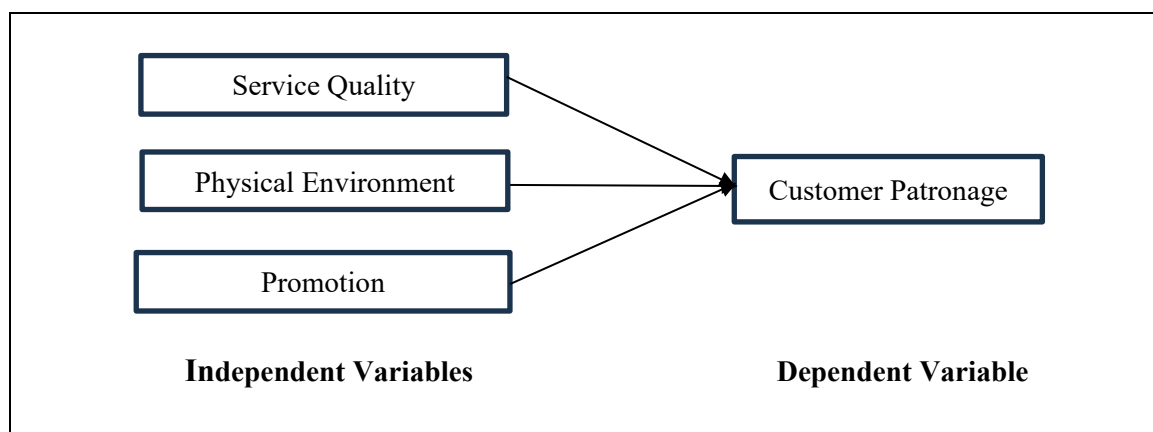


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of The Study

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This descriptive study examined the relationship between service quality, physical environment, and promotion on customer patronage for a specialty coffee outlet. The unit of analysis are individual customers who have visited the selected specialty coffee outlet. Based on a population size of 1400 (an estimated 1,380 no. of visitors monthly), a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 5%, a sample size of 301 respondents were selected for the study (Cohen et al., 2018). However, 350 was distributed with an additional 16% of questionnaires to act as a buffer in the event there is a need to discard incomplete questionnaire with 25% of missing values (Sekaran & Bougie, 2013). Convenience sampling technique was used for data collection in the absence of a complete listing for walk-in visitors (sampling frame) to the specialty coffee outlet, using a self-administered structured questionnaire with 5-point Likert scale. Questionnaire included questions on demographics, and constructs on promotion, service quality, physical environment, and customer patronage. The questionnaire was pre-tested to detect flaws in the questionnaire contents, instructions, and design. The reliability, descriptive and regression analysis was performed on the final set of data collected.

Primary and secondary data sources were solicited for this study. Primary data were obtained from a survey of walk-in customers to this specialty coffee outlet. Secondary data were sourced from books, journal articles and official government publications, industry analysis and books. The SERVQUAL framework was adopted and adapted to measure tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy dimensions. Physical environment components of specialty coffee outlet were based on the Servicescape model while effective promotion was measured through the use of traditional and social media to attract customers. The questionnaire was pretested prior to full-scale data collection to ensure the language, contents were appropriate, easily understood and well sequenced without biased questions. Results from the pre-test showed that the questionnaire was clear and easy to understand. The distribution and collection of questionnaires were conducted over two weeks during weekdays and weekends at the outlet's peak business hours to ensure a good representation of the sample. SPSS version 24 was used for data analysis. The item consistency reliability of the independent and dependent variables was measured using Cronbach's Alpha value introduced by Hair et al. (2003). Both the descriptive and inferential statistics were performed. The regression analysis examined the hypothesized relationship between service quality, physical environment, promotion and customer patronage.

Data on the demographics of respondents for this study (Table 1) showed males (54%) are slightly more than females (46%). The two largest age groups who patronized this specialty coffee outlet are 18 to 29 years (41%), followed by the 30 to 39 years (37%). Malays made up the majority (87%) who patronized this specialty coffee outlet, followed by Chinese (13%). A majority (51.2%) earned less than RM 4,850

while 29% earned between RM 4,850 and RM 10,959 per month respectively. In terms of frequency of store visit, 35% seldom visit the outlet, 23% visited once every 2 to 4 week and 20% visited once every 4 to 6 weeks. In as far as the purpose of outlet visit is concern, a majority (50.8%) visited for relaxation purpose, 19% visited the outlet to have beverages and 15% came for discussion and study purpose. Based on the customers spending per visit at the outlet, 51% spent less than RM 25 per visit, 32% spent more than RM 40 per visit, and 18% spent between RM 25 to RM 40 per visit.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Attribute	Particular	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	139	46.2
	Male	162	53.8
Age	Less than 18 years old	2	0.7
	18~29 years old	123	40.9
	30~39 years old	112	37.2
	40~49 years old	48	15.9
	50~64 years old	16	5.3
Race	Chinese	38	12.6
	Malay	261	86.7
	Sino Kadazan	2	0.7
Income Group (Monthly)	< RM 4,850	154	51.2
	RM 4,850 to RM 10,959	88	29.2
	> RM 10,959	59	19.6
Frequency of Visit	Once, Every week	59	19.6
	Once, Every 2 ~ 4 weeks	68	22.6
	Once, Every 4 ~ 6 weeks	60	19.9
	Once, Every 6 ~ 8 weeks	8	2.7
	Once, More than 8 weeks (Very Seldom)	106	35.2
Purpose of Visit	Beverages	57	18.9
	Discussion & Study	45	15.0
	Gathering	37	12.3
	Meals	9	3.0
	Relaxation	153	50.8
Spending per Visit	Less than RM25	152	50.5
	RM25 ~ RM40	54	17.9
	More than RM40	95	31.6

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

A total of 350 questionnaires were physically distributed to customers at the specialty coffee outlet to get the appropriate sample size of 301 respondents. A total of 301 completed questionnaires with valid responses were used for the analysis. Result of the reliability analysis exhibited strong internal consistency, reflected by Cronbach's Alpha values ranging from 0.757 to 0.951. The highest Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.951 was obtained for service quality, while the lowest Cronbach Apha value of 0.757 for promotion. Physical environment and customer patronage demonstrated excellent reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.912 and 0.941, respectively. According to George & Mallery (2003), variables with Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.7 and above are considered acceptable.

Based on the mean values, service quality attained the highest mean value of 4.4372, followed by physical environment with mean value of 4.3673. The result indicates that the majority of consumers agreed that service quality and physical environment are important factors influencing the patronage of

specialty coffee outlet. Consequently, consumers have neither agreed nor disagreed that promotion's influence on patronage of specialty coffee outlets with a mean value of 3.0419.

Table 2: Overall Mean and Standard Deviation for Salient Factors Influencing Customer Patronage

Salient Factors Influencing Customer Patronage	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank (Based on Mean)
Promotion	3.0419	0.67032	3
Service Quality	4.4347	0.50156	1
Physical Environment	4.3646	0.46599	2
Customer Patronage	4.3472		

Result of the regression analysis (Table 3) concluded the presence of a significant relationship (0.015) between physical environment, service quality, promotion and customer patronage of a specialty coffee outlet. The R-square was 0.557 while the adjusted R-square was 0.552, implying approximately 55% of the variance in customer patronage of a specialty coffee outlet is explained by physical environment, service quality and promotion.

For H1 there was a positive relationship of 0.000 between service quality and customer patronage of specialty coffee outlet with a standardized beta-value of 0.252. Lukiyana & Pratama's study (2023) has affirmed the significance of service quality in driving customer patronage. By delivering exceptional service, professional appearance, reliable service, responsiveness, assurance and empathy, customers are provided with a positive and satisfying experience. Collectively, all 5 dimensions of service quality demonstrates an understanding of customer needs and preferences towards specialty coffee. Delivering holistic service quality would potentially deliver positive overall impression of the establishment, which can increase the likelihood of patronage (purchase intention and purchases) (Kabir, 2023).

Physical environment was significant at 0.000 with a standardized beta-value of 0.517 demonstrating the strongest influence on customer patronage, thus supporting H2 where physical environment positively influenced customer patronage of specialty coffee outlet. These findings are consistent with (Bitner, 1992) who postulated that physical environment shapes customer perceptions and behaviours of a service setting which in turn forms customers impressions of the service and ultimately their patronage. Interior design, ambiance, lighting, spatial layout, visually attractive wall decorations, color scheme, appealing paintings or pictures, pleasing background music, enticing aroma, cleanliness and neatness outlet are collectively capable of driving coffee outlet patronage. Luu & Westh (2023), echoed that physical environment holds great importance in driving customer patronage as it significantly influences customer's perception and experiences, hence creating a favorable impression of the outlet. An inviting and pleasant business environment, can attract and retain customers, leading to increased patronage and potential growth (Kandampully et al., 2023).

Consequently, H3 was supported where promotion garnered a positive significant relationship of 0.000 and a standardized beta-value of 0.175 with customer patronage of specialty coffee outlet. Promotions serve as a catalyst for stimulating customer purchase interest and motivating them to consider patronizing the coffee outlet and completing their purchase (Mohammad & Windasari, 2022). Both traditional and social media can effectively reach out to potential customers, create awareness, and arouse curiosity on their offerings (Kulkarni & Longani, 2022, Atito et al., 2023). Satisfied customers with positive experiences are likely to share their experiences with friends, family, and colleagues, acting as brand ambassadors and driving additional customers to visit the outlet.

Table 3: Regression Analysis between Salient Factors Driving Customer Patronage and Customer Patronage

Item	Standardized Coefficients Beta	(t)	Significance (p)
Promotion	0.175	4.472	0.000*
Service Quality	0.252	5.089	0.000*
Physical Environment	0.517	10.291	0.000*
R-square			0.557
Adjusted R-square			0.552
F-value			124.440
p-value			0.015

Note: * p-value <0.05

CONCLUSION

To sum, this study has affirmed that the physical environment has had the greatest impact on customer patronage of a specialty coffee outlet, followed by service quality and promotion. As such, it is essential that specialty coffee outlets strategize to optimize the effect of their store's physical environment specifically interior design, ambiance, lightings and spatial layout to drive patronage. Collectively they create a warm and inviting atmosphere making customers feel comfortable and relaxed. A positive ambiance could influence their mood and contribute to their perception of quality, ultimately shaping their overall experience leading to increased patronage. Customers patronize specialty coffee outlets for a variety of reasons namely to savor a range of offerings, socialize, relax and rejuvenate to name a few. As such the physical environment must be conducive to complement their patronage.

It is recommended that specialty coffee outlets sought professional touch to enhance their interior design, wall decoration, colors, paintings, ambiance, background music, aroma, environment, lighting, spatial layout, and seating arrangement. Spatial layout encompassing arrangement of seating areas, counter space, and overall flow within the outlet must be thoughtfully planned to provide customers with sufficient space to move around comfortably. This also includes options for individuals and groups, to cater to various customer preferences and promote social interaction which can enhances their overall experience, leading to increased patronage. This would in turn drive long-term profitability, growth and sustainability of the specialty coffee outlet. For the continuous betterment of the Malaysian premium coffee industry, future research should focus on product preference and innovation, specifically on coffee bean origin preference, coffee packaging preference as well as milk alternatives for coffee. Flavor experimentation too could uncover new varieties of coffee that can be offered to outlet visitors. In addition, further study could examine emerging trends such as demand for instagrammable cafes and experiences, as well as healthier plant based or functional coffee. The integration of premium coffee into consumer's daily life too merits further investigation.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Nooraini, M. and Irme Rafhan, I conceived and planned the survey instrument. Irme Rafhan, I, Ammar Yasir, M and Wan Hafiz Aizuddin, W.Y. pre-tested the questionnaire, carried out the survey and data preparation. Nooraini, M., Irme Rafhan, I., Ammar Yasir, M. and Wan Hafiz Aizuddin, W.Y. contributed to the interpretation of the results. Nooraini, M. took the lead in writing the manuscript. Siti Zaleha was responsible to edit and format the paper and ensure all are orderly for submission. All authors provided critical feedback and helped shape the research, analysis and manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATION

I/We certify that the article is the Authors' and Co-Authors' original work. The article has not received prior publication and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. This research/manuscript has not been submitted for publication, nor has it been published in whole or in part elsewhere. We testify to the fact that all Authors have contributed significantly to the work, validity, and legitimacy of the data and its interpretation for submission to Jurnal Intelek.

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