

MORE THAN COFFEE: HOW EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING SHAPES CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AMONG MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract: *Experiential marketing has become increasingly important in shaping consumer evaluations within competitive food and beverage markets. In Malaysia, the rapid growth of local premium coffee brands has intensified competition, encouraging café operators to create memorable experiences that extend beyond functional product attributes. Despite its growing importance, empirical evidence on how experiential dimensions influence customer satisfaction among young Malaysian consumers remains limited. This study examines the effects of sensory experience, affective experience, and intellectual experience on customer satisfaction among university students within the Malaysian premium coffee shop context. A quantitative research design was employed using a structured questionnaire administered to undergraduate students from the Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). Using purposive sampling, data were collected from 300 respondents and analysed using IBM SPSS through descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and multiple regression analysis. The findings indicate that sensory, affective, and intellectual experiences significantly and positively influence customer satisfaction. Among these dimensions, affective experience emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by sensory and intellectual experiences. The results suggest that university students evaluate premium coffee shop experiences not only through sensory attributes but also through emotional engagement and cognitive stimulation. This study contributes to the experiential marketing literature by providing empirical evidence from the Malaysian premium coffee sector and offers practical insights for café operators seeking to enhance customer satisfaction through experience-driven strategies.*

Keywords: *experiential marketing, customer satisfaction, premium coffee shop, sensory experience, affective experience, intellectual experience*

Introduction

The Malaysian coffee industry has experienced notable transformation over the past decade, progressing from traditional kopitiam culture towards an increasingly competitive landscape shaped by specialty and premium coffee establishments. This structural evolution reflects broader shifts in consumer lifestyles, urban consumption patterns, and the growing demand for experience-oriented offerings within food and beverage markets (dos Santos Gomes, de Oliveira, & Silva, 2023; Thomas, Rahman, & Lee, 2021). The proliferation of local premium coffee brands such as ZUS Coffee, Kopi Saigon, Gigi Coffee, and Richiamo Coffee has intensified market competition, requiring café operators to differentiate themselves through strategies that extend beyond functional product attributes. Contemporary consumers increasingly evaluate consumption encounters based on experiential value, where emotional, sensory, and symbolic benefits shape overall perceptions of service quality and satisfaction (Schmitt, 2009; Schmitt, Brakus, & Zarantonello, 2009).

Among contemporary consumer segments, university students represent an increasingly important market for premium coffee operators. Young consumers frequently patronise cafés not only for beverage consumption but also for studying, socialising, conducting group discussions, and engaging in leisure activities. As a result, coffee shops increasingly function as experiential spaces where consumers seek emotional fulfilment, sensory enjoyment, and meaningful social interactions. Thomas et al. (2021) further observed that younger Malaysian consumers demonstrate a growing preference for experience-oriented café environments that provide value beyond functional product attributes. Consequently, understanding how experiential dimensions influence satisfaction among university students has become increasingly relevant for both researchers and practitioners.

For premium coffee operators, customer satisfaction remains a critical indicator because satisfied customers are more likely to revisit, recommend the café to others, and develop long-term attachment towards the brand (Oliver, 1980). Prior Malaysian studies have predominantly emphasised functional determinants of satisfaction, including product quality, service efficiency, and physical environment attributes (Muhamad Fadzli, Anuar, & Ferdian, 2023). While these factors remain important, researchers have paid less attention to the experiential aspects of consumption, even though premium coffee operators increasingly compete by creating memorable and emotionally engaging customer experiences.

Experiential marketing theory provides a relevant conceptual foundation for understanding these dynamics by proposing that consumption experiences comprise multiple psychological dimensions, notably sensory, affective, and intellectual responses (Schmitt, 2009). Empirical investigations conducted in regional contexts indicate that experiential factors may exert meaningful influence on satisfaction-related outcomes (Meeprom & Kokkhangplu, 2025). Nevertheless, variations in cultural context, consumer expectations, and market maturity necessitate context-specific examination.

Although experiential marketing has received considerable scholarly attention, Malaysian studies have largely focused on functional determinants of customer satisfaction, such as product quality, service quality, and physical environment attributes (Muhamad Fadzli et al., 2023). As local premium coffee brands continue to expand across Malaysia, understanding the role of experiential dimensions has become increasingly important. However, existing studies provide limited insight into whether sensory, affective, or intellectual experiences play a more influential role in shaping customer satisfaction among young consumers.

Accordingly, this study examines the relationships between sensory, affective, and intellectual experiential dimensions and customer satisfaction among undergraduate students from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). Given the growing popularity of premium coffee shops among university students, this study offers valuable insights into the factors that shape their evaluations and experiences. Understanding how sensory, affective, and intellectual elements influence consumer responses may help coffee operators create more meaningful customer experiences while contributing to ongoing discussions on experiential marketing in emerging café markets.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Local Premium Coffee Context

The growth of local premium coffee brands represents a significant development within the Malaysian food and beverage industry. The expansion of brands such as ZUS Coffee, Kopi Saigon, Gigi Coffee, and Richiamo Coffee reflects evolving consumer preferences towards specialty beverages and experience-oriented café environments. These establishments typically position themselves within the affordable premium segment, emphasising not only beverage quality but also brand identity, service design, and experiential attributes. Prior research suggests that contemporary café competition increasingly extends beyond functional product characteristics towards the orchestration of holistic consumption experiences (Schmitt, 2009; Thomas et al., 2021).

Local premium coffee brands are particularly relevant for experiential consumption analysis because they integrate sensory appeal, emotional engagement, and symbolic value propositions. Unlike traditional coffee outlets that primarily compete on price and convenience, premium oriented cafés frequently leverage ambience, visual presentation, and service interaction to influence consumer evaluations. This shift aligns with experiential marketing theory, which posits that consumers assess offerings based on multidimensional experiential encounters rather than purely utilitarian benefits (Schmitt et al., 2009).

The increasing emphasis on experiential differentiation among local premium coffee brands suggests that customer evaluations may be influenced by more than functional product attributes alone. As consumers become increasingly experience-oriented, understanding how specific experiential dimensions contribute to customer satisfaction becomes essential. Within this context, customer satisfaction serves as an important outcome variable through which the effectiveness of experiential marketing strategies can be evaluated. Consequently, local premium coffee brands provide an appropriate context for examining how experiential marketing dimensions influence customer satisfaction among contemporary consumers.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction remains a foundational construct within marketing and consumer behaviour literature. Oliver (1980) conceptualised satisfaction as a cognitive and affective evaluation arising from the comparison between prior expectations and perceived performance. Within service dominated environments, satisfaction reflects a holistic assessment incorporating both tangible and intangible elements of the consumption encounter. Meeprom and Kokkhangplu (2025) further characterise satisfaction as a sense of fulfilment derived from consumers' evaluations of experiential and functional attributes.

In café consumption contexts, satisfaction represents the consumer's overall evaluative response to product quality, service interaction, and environmental stimuli. Empirical evidence consistently indicates that customer satisfaction exerts a significant influence on post consumption behaviours, including loyalty formation, advocacy, and repurchase intention. Meeprom and Kokkhangplu (2025) reported that customer satisfaction significantly predicted both advocacy behaviour and repurchase intention among specialty coffee consumers. Similarly, Muhamad Fadzli et al. (2023) demonstrated a strong positive association between satisfaction and revisit intention within Malaysian coffee shop environments.

Within university student populations, customer satisfaction may be particularly important because satisfied students are more likely to revisit cafés for studying, social interaction, and leisure activities. Given the growing role of cafés as multifunctional spaces among young consumers, understanding the factors that contribute to satisfaction remains a relevant research concern.

Beyond its direct behavioural implications, satisfaction also functions as a critical evaluative mechanism through which consumers integrate experiential and functional perceptions. Satisfied consumers are more likely to engage in positive word of mouth communication and maintain repeat patronage patterns, both of which contribute to long term business sustainability (Oliver, 1980; Muhamad Fadzli et al., 2023). Given its theoretical centrality and empirical robustness, customer satisfaction is appropriately positioned as the dependent variable in this study.

Sensory Experience

Sensory experience refers to the stimulation of consumers' senses during product interaction and consumption. Experiential marketing theory conceptualises sensory responses as perceptual reactions arising from visual, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile cues encountered within the consumption environment (Schmitt et al., 2009). Within coffee consumption contexts, sensory experience is typically associated with taste, aroma, flavour, and visual presentation, which collectively shape evaluative judgments. Meeprom and Kokkhangplu (2025) operationalised sensory experience in specialty coffee environments through dimensions including taste perception, fragrance, flavour intensity, and visual appeal.

In premium café settings, sensory stimuli function as critical evaluative inputs that influence consumers' immediate perceptions of quality and overall experience. Carvalho and Spence (2018) demonstrated that sensory perceptions of coffee, particularly aroma and hedonic evaluation, may be influenced by seemingly peripheral design elements such as cup shape. Similarly, Muhamad Fadzli et al. (2023) identified product quality attributes, notably taste and freshness, as significant determinants of customer satisfaction within Malaysian coffee shop environments. These findings suggest that sensory cues play a fundamental role in shaping consumer evaluations.

Sensory rich service environments have also been associated with enhanced satisfaction outcomes. Chen and Lin (2020) reported that café environments characterised by strong sensory attributes positively influenced consumer satisfaction. Consistent with prior operationalisations, sensory experience in this study is measured using items adapted from Meeprom and Kokkhangplu (2025), capturing perceptual evaluations related to aroma, taste, and visual impression.

Empirical evidence generally supports the existence of a positive relationship between sensory experience and satisfaction related constructs. Meeprom and Kokkhangplu (2025) reported a significant positive effect of sensory experience on customer satisfaction among Thai specialty coffee consumers. Comparable patterns were observed by Muhamad Fadzli et al. (2023), where sensory related product attributes were closely associated with satisfaction evaluations. Collectively, these findings indicate that sensory stimuli serve as primary evaluative mechanisms in consumption assessment. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Sensory experience is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Affective Experience

Affective experience encompasses the emotional responses, moods, and feelings elicited during consumption encounters. Experiential marketing theory posits that affective reactions represent central evaluative components influencing consumers' perceptions of value and satisfaction (Schmitt, 2009). Within café environments, affective experience may be shaped by interpersonal interaction, ambient conditions, and symbolic meanings associated with the consumption setting. Meeprom and Kokkhangplu (2025) conceptualised affective experience as emotional engagement arising from consumption experiences that evoke pleasure, relaxation, and emotional attachment.

Prior research indicates that emotional states significantly influence satisfaction related outcomes. Babin et al. (1994) suggested that positive affective responses enhance perceived value by reducing cognitive evaluation effort and strengthening experiential appraisal. In Malaysian café contexts, Muhamad Fadzli et al. (2023) observed that environmental and service-related attributes contributed to satisfaction and revisit intention, indirectly reflecting affective mechanisms. Premium cafés frequently emphasise ambience design, service warmth, and experiential symbolism to cultivate positive emotional responses. For younger consumers, emotional experiences may be particularly influential because café visits often serve social, recreational, and psychological functions beyond beverage consumption. Positive emotions generated through relaxation, enjoyment, and social interaction may therefore become important antecedents of customer satisfaction.

Consistent with prior empirical findings, Meeprom and Kokkhangplu (2025) identified a significant positive relationship between affective experience and customer satisfaction. Emotional engagement within specialty coffee settings was found to enhance satisfaction evaluations, highlighting the importance of affective processes. In line with theoretical expectations and empirical support, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Affective experience is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Intellectual Experience

Intellectual experience refers to cognitive engagement, curiosity stimulation, and reflective thinking arising from consumption encounters. Experiential marketing literature conceptualises intellectual responses as mental processes activated when consumers engage in evaluative reasoning, problem solving, or knowledge acquisition (Schmitt, 2009). Within specialty coffee contexts, intellectual experience may involve curiosity regarding bean origin, brewing techniques, pricing evaluation, or symbolic meanings associated with premium consumption.

The development of third wave coffee culture has intensified the cognitive dimension of coffee consumption. dos Santos Gomes, de Oliveira, and Silva (2023) argued that specialty coffee environments increasingly integrate educational and symbolic elements that encourage cognitive involvement. Adhi and Yunus (2022) further observed that barista narratives and knowledge sharing practices enhance consumers' perceived value. Thomas et al. (2021) reported that younger Malaysian consumers demonstrate growing interest in meaningful and knowledge enriching café experiences.

Despite these mixed findings, intellectual experience remains theoretically relevant within experiential marketing literature because cognitive stimulation may enhance consumers' engagement with brands and consumption activities (Schmitt, 2009). Furthermore, university students, particularly those enrolled in business-related programmes, may be more receptive to intellectually stimulating experiences due to their exposure to innovation, branding, entrepreneurship, and critical thinking activities. Consequently, it is reasonable to expect that intellectual experience contributes positively to customer satisfaction within the present study context. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Intellectual experience is positively related to customer satisfaction.

Methodology

Population and Sampling Procedures

This study focused on undergraduate students enrolled in programmes offered by the Faculty of Business and Management at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). University students were chosen because they represent an active consumer group that frequently visits premium coffee shops and is highly exposed to contemporary consumption trends. Data were collected from 300 students using self-administered online and offline questionnaires. The data collection process was conducted over a two-week period in October 2025.

A purposive sampling approach was used to ensure that respondents were relevant to the study. To participate, respondents had to meet four criteria. First, they had to be undergraduate students currently pursuing a bachelor's degree. Second, they had to be at least 18 years old. Third, they must have visited a local premium coffee shop, such as ZUS Coffee, Richiamo, Kopi Saigon, or Gigi Coffee, at least once within the previous six months. Finally, they had to be enrolled in a programme under the Faculty of Business and Management at UiTM.

These criteria helped ensure that respondents had recent and direct experience with premium coffee shops, allowing them to provide informed responses regarding their experiences and satisfaction. The use of purposive sampling was considered appropriate because only respondents who met the study requirements and possessed relevant experience were included in the survey.

Measurement of the theoretical construct

The survey questionnaire consisted of five sections, labelled Sections A to E. The items used to measure sensory experience (SE), affective experience (AE), intellectual experience (IE), and customer satisfaction (CS) were adapted from established instruments used in previous studies. To ensure suitability for the current research context, several items were refined while maintaining their original meaning. In total, 20 items were used to measure the four study

constructs. The measurement scales for SE, AE, IE, and CS were adapted from Meeprom and Kokkhangplu (2025) and Nur Hanani Afifah et al. (2023).

Section E gathered respondents' demographic information, including gender, age, state of residence, and frequency of visits to premium coffee shops. All construct items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). This scale was selected because it allows respondents to indicate the extent of their agreement with each statement and is widely used in behavioural and marketing research to measure attitudes, perceptions, and experiences (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Results

The analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 30. We begin with the presentation of respondents' demographic profiles, followed by the reliability analysis of the measurement scales. Subsequently, multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the influence of SE, AE and IE on CS. The results are presented and discussed according to the objectives of the study.

Demographic Profiles Result

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. A total of 300 undergraduate students from the Faculty of Business and Management at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) participated in this study. In terms of gender, the majority of respondents were female, representing 65.0% ($n = 195$) of the sample, while male respondents accounted for 35.0% ($n = 105$). This indicates that female students constituted a larger proportion of the study participants.

Regarding age, most respondents were between 22 and 23 years old, accounting for 42.0% ($n = 126$) of the sample. This was followed by respondents aged 20 to 21 years old, who represented 39.0% ($n = 117$). Respondents aged above 24 years old constituted 13.0% ($n = 39$), while those aged 18 to 19 years old represented the smallest group at 6.0% ($n = 18$). With respect to UiTM branch campuses, the majority of respondents were from UiTM Melaka, comprising 38.0% ($n = 114$) of the sample. This was followed by UiTM Selangor at 19.0% ($n = 57$), UiTM Kedah at 17.0% ($n = 51$), UiTM Johor at 15.0% ($n = 45$), UiTM Negeri Sembilan at 6.0% ($n = 18$), and UiTM Kelantan at 5.0% ($n = 15$).

In terms of coffee café visitation frequency, most respondents reported visiting premium coffee cafés between one and three times, accounting for 68.0% ($n = 204$). Respondents who visited coffee cafés four to six times represented 21.0% ($n = 63$), while 6.0% ($n = 18$) reported visiting more than ten times. The smallest group consisted of respondents who visited coffee cafés seven to nine times, representing 5.0% ($n = 15$). Overall, the respondent profile suggests that the sample was predominantly female, aged between 20 and 23 years old, mainly from UiTM Melaka, and generally visited premium coffee cafés between one and three times.

Table 1: Demographic Profiles Result

Categories		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	105	35
	Female	195	65
Age	18-19 Years Old	18	6.0
	20-21 Years Old	117	39.0
	22-23 Years Old	126	42.0
	Above 24 Years Old	39	13.0
	Old		
UiTM Branch	Negeri Sembilan	18	6.0
	Johor	45	15.0
	Melaka	114	38.0
	Selangor	57	19.0
	Kedah	51	17.0
	Kelantan	15	5.0
Frequency Visit	1-3 Times	204	68.0
Coffee Cafe	4-6 Times	63	21.0
	7-9 Times	15	5.0
	More Than 10 Times	18	6.0

Reliability Results

The reliability of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. As shown in Table 2, all constructs recorded values above the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2018), ranging from 0.903 to 0.935. These results indicate a high level of internal consistency among the measurement items. Therefore, all items were considered reliable and retained for further analysis.

Table 2: Reliability Result

Variables	Cronbach Alpha	No. of Items
Sensory Experience	0.924	5
Affective Experience	0.903	5
Intellectual Experience	0.903	5
Customer Satisfaction	0.935	5

Multiple Regression Result

Multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the effects of sensory experience (SE), affective experience (AE), and intellectual experience (IE) on customer satisfaction (CS). The results show that the regression model was statistically significant ($F = 274.894$, $p < 0.001$). The model also demonstrated strong explanatory power, with an R value of 0.858 and an R^2 value of 0.736. This indicates that 73.6% of the variation in customer satisfaction can be explained by the three experiential dimensions included in the model.

Among the predictors, affective experience emerged as the strongest contributor to customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.371$, $p < 0.001$), followed by sensory experience ($\beta = 0.342$, $p < 0.001$) and intellectual experience ($\beta = 0.191$, $p = 0.002$). The findings suggest that students' satisfaction with premium coffee shops is influenced not only by sensory elements such as taste, aroma, and ambience, but also by the emotions and cognitive engagement generated during their visits.

Overall, the results highlight the importance of creating meaningful sensory, emotional, and intellectual experiences for customers. However, emotional experiences appear to play the most influential role in shaping satisfaction within the premium coffee shop context.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Result

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	0.697	0.123		5.663	<0.001
Sensory	0.350	0.066	0.342	5.330	<0.001
Affective	0.347	0.057	0.371	6.117	<0.001
Intellectual	0.179	0.058	0.191	3.053	0.002

a. Dependent Variable: Satisfaction

b. F value: 274.894; Sig. <0.001

c. R Value: 0.858

d. R-Square Value: 0.736

Discussion

Sensory Experience and Customer Satisfaction

The findings revealed that sensory experience has a significant positive influence on customer satisfaction. Therefore, H1 was supported. This result suggests that customers who perceive favourable sensory stimuli, such as appealing aroma, taste, flavour, and visual presentation, are more likely to experience higher levels of satisfaction when visiting local premium coffee shops.

This finding is consistent with Schmitt's (2009) experiential marketing theory, which proposes that consumers evaluate products and services through sensory stimulation derived from visual, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile cues. In premium coffee shop settings, sensory elements represent important evaluative inputs that shape consumers' perceptions of quality and overall consumption experiences. The result also supports the findings of Meeprom and Kokkhangplu (2025), Muhamad Fadzli et al. (2023), and Chen and Lin (2020), who reported that sensory-related attributes significantly influence customer satisfaction in café environments.

A possible explanation may be attributed to the characteristics of the respondents in this study, who were predominantly undergraduate students aged between 20 and 23 years old. Students frequently utilise premium coffee shops not only for beverage consumption but also as spaces for studying, completing assignments, conducting group discussions, and socialising with peers. During peak academic periods, students often spend several hours in coffee shops while preparing assignments and examination materials. Under such circumstances, environmental cues such as aroma, seating comfort, lighting, and background music become highly noticeable and may shape their overall evaluations of the café experience.

Affective Experience and Customer Satisfaction

The findings indicated that affective experience has a significant positive influence on customer satisfaction. Therefore, H2 was supported. Moreover, affective experience emerged as the strongest predictor of customer satisfaction among all experiential marketing dimensions examined in this study.

This finding supports Schmitt's (2009) proposition that emotional responses constitute a central component of experiential consumption and significantly influence customer evaluations. The finding is also consistent with Meeprom and Kokkhangplu (2025), Babin et al. (1994), and Muhamad Fadzli et al. (2023), who emphasised the importance of emotional engagement in shaping customer satisfaction.

The strong influence of affective experience may be explained by the profile of the respondents, who were university students belonging predominantly to Generation Z. Unlike older consumers who may primarily focus on product functionality, younger consumers often seek experiences that provide emotional fulfilment and psychological comfort. For many UiTM students, premium coffee shops function as a "third place" between home and university, where they can relax, escape academic pressures, interact with friends, and engage in personal activities.

Interestingly, the findings suggest that coffee consumption among university students is no longer solely product driven. For many respondents, premium coffee shops appear to function as emotional spaces where they can temporarily disconnect from academic demands and social pressures.

Intellectual Experience and Customer Satisfaction

The findings revealed that intellectual experience has a significant positive influence on customer satisfaction. Therefore, H3 was supported. This result suggests that customers appreciate experiences that stimulate their curiosity, thinking, and cognitive engagement when visiting local premium coffee shops.

The finding is consistent with Schmitt's (2009) experiential marketing framework and is supported by dos Santos Gomes et al. (2023), Adhi and Yunus (2022), and Thomas et al. (2021), who suggested that contemporary coffee consumers increasingly value meaningful and knowledge-enriching consumption experiences. The significance of intellectual experience may be particularly relevant to the characteristics of the respondents in this study, who were undergraduate students enrolled in the Faculty of Business and Management.

As university students, respondents are generally exposed to critical thinking, creativity, innovation, and continuous learning activities throughout their academic programmes. Consequently, they may be more receptive to intellectually stimulating experiences compared to other consumer groups. For example, students may appreciate learning about coffee origins, brewing techniques, sustainability initiatives, unique business concepts, or innovative product offerings introduced by local premium coffee brands. As business students, they may also be more observant of branding strategies, marketing campaigns, store concepts, and customer engagement initiatives implemented by coffee chains such as ZUS Coffee, Richiamo, Gigi Coffee, and Kopi Saigon. These cognitive and knowledge-based experiences may contribute positively to their overall satisfaction.

This finding may reflect the educational background of the respondents. As business students, they are regularly exposed to concepts related to branding, innovation, entrepreneurship, and customer experience management. Consequently, they may pay greater attention to how coffee brands communicate their value propositions and differentiate themselves in a highly competitive market.

Theoretical Implication

This study contributes to the experiential marketing literature by providing empirical evidence on the relative importance of sensory, affective, and intellectual experiences in shaping customer satisfaction within the Malaysian premium coffee context. Consistent with Schmitt's (2009) experiential marketing framework, the findings demonstrate that experiential dimensions significantly influence customers' evaluations beyond functional product attributes. The study therefore reinforces the theoretical proposition that consumers assess consumption experiences through multiple experiential channels, including sensory, emotional, and cognitive responses.

Furthermore, the findings extend existing experiential marketing literature by highlighting the dominant role of affective experience in influencing customer satisfaction among university students. While experiential marketing theory acknowledges the importance of sensory, affective, and intellectual dimensions, the present study demonstrates that emotional experiences exert the strongest influence on satisfaction within the premium coffee shop context. This suggests that emotional engagement may play a more critical role than sensory and cognitive stimulation when young consumers evaluate their café experiences.

The study also contributes to the growing body of knowledge on experiential consumption among younger consumers in emerging café markets. Unlike previous studies conducted in different cultural and market contexts, the findings provide context-specific evidence from Malaysia and demonstrate that intellectual experience remains a significant determinant of customer satisfaction among university students. This suggests that experiential dimensions may operate differently across consumer segments and market environments, thereby supporting the need for contextualised applications of experiential marketing theory.

An interesting observation from the present study is that affective experience emerged as the most influential experiential dimension despite the product-centric nature of coffee consumption. This finding suggests that customer satisfaction within premium coffee settings may be driven more strongly by emotional value than by product attributes alone.

Limitations of the Study

Like most empirical studies, this study has several limitations. First, the respondents were limited to undergraduate students from the Faculty of Business and Management at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). Although this group is relevant to the study context, their views may not fully represent students from other faculties, universities, or consumer groups. Students from different academic backgrounds or age groups may evaluate premium coffee shop experiences differently.

Second, the study used a cross-sectional design, where data were collected at one point in time. This means that the study could not examine how customer satisfaction may change over time. In reality, students' expectations and preferences toward premium coffee shops may shift depending on lifestyle changes, academic workload, market trends, or new café experiences.

Finally, the study relied on a quantitative survey using self-administered questionnaires. While this approach was useful for collecting responses from a larger number of respondents, it may not fully capture the personal reasons, emotions, and stories behind students' coffee shop experiences. Future studies using interviews or mixed methods may provide a richer

understanding of how young consumers interpret and evaluate premium coffee shop experiences.

Recommendations For Future Studies

Several recommendations can be made for future research. First, future studies may include respondents from different universities, academic backgrounds, and regions in Malaysia to obtain a broader understanding of customer satisfaction in premium coffee shops. Second, researchers may examine other consumer groups, such as working adults or older consumers, to determine whether experiential marketing influences satisfaction differently across customer segments.

Future studies may also explore additional experiential marketing dimensions, such as behavioural and relational experiences, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of customer experiences. In addition, other outcome variables, including customer loyalty, revisit intention, and word-of-mouth behaviour, could be investigated. Finally, qualitative or mixed-method approaches may be used to gain deeper insights into how consumers perceive and experience premium coffee shops.

Conclusion

The growing popularity of premium coffee shops in Malaysia has transformed coffee consumption into more than simply purchasing beverages. For many university students, coffee shops have become spaces for studying, socialising, relaxing, and spending time with friends. Within this context, understanding the factors that influence customer satisfaction has become increasingly important.

This study examined the influence of sensory, affective, and intellectual experiences on customer satisfaction among undergraduate students from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). The results showed that all three experiential dimensions significantly influenced customer satisfaction, with affective experience emerging as the strongest predictor. This suggests that students place considerable value on the emotions and feelings they experience while visiting premium coffee shops, in addition to sensory attributes such as taste, aroma, and café ambience.

An interesting observation from this study is that satisfaction among university students appears to extend beyond the quality of the coffee itself. Instead, students evaluate their experiences based on how the coffee shop makes them feel, how comfortable the environment is, and how engaging the overall experience becomes. This finding reflects the evolving role of premium coffee shops as experiential spaces that fulfil both functional and emotional needs.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of creating meaningful sensory, emotional, and intellectual experiences for customers. As competition among local premium coffee brands continues to intensify, operators that successfully deliver memorable customer experiences may be better positioned to enhance satisfaction and maintain a competitive advantage in the market.

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