



A thematic literature review of customer behavior and service quality in aesthetic coffee shops

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Abstract

This literature review presents the synthesis of the observations from 40 different studies published between 2017 and 2025 on customer behavior in aesthetic coffee shops. The review has an emphasis on Southeast Asian markets with the inclusion of comparative global baselines to understand how physical servicescapes, digital engagement, and non-physical attributes such as service quality, product quality, and perceived value interact to influence customer satisfaction and repeat patronage. The review applied a PRISMA screening process, and the synthesis suggests that while the visual aesthetics of the coffee shop and digital engagement through word-of-mouth (eWOM) are associated with initial customer attraction, sustained customer loyalty and brand credibility remain strongly dependent upon service quality, the functionality of the coffee shop layout, comfort, and perceived value. These findings highlight the necessity of combining the different dimensions of a coffee shop's physical design, digital presence, and product and service delivery to help achieve customer satisfaction and brand loyalty in today's competitive and saturated coffee shop landscape.

Keywords: *servicescape, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, digital engagement, non-physical attributes*

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1. Introduction

A significant shift in the management of coffee shop businesses has been observed over the past decades, which involved changes in the dimensions of the business model (Chen & Demirci, 2025; Chen et al., 2022; Zimmermann, 2023). The coffee shop's traditional business model of just serving food and beverages shifted to a strategic model, where coffee shops turned into a place for social events and gathering, a place where people can work remotely, and a venue where customers can express their lifestyles (Sudarman, 2023; Noaime et al., 2025; Kim & Park, 2021; Vu et al., 2025). These changes are attributed to the rising demand for coffee on a global scale, which also led to tight market competition in different commercial and urban areas (Maspul & Almalki, 2023; Servín-Juárez et al., 2021; Shu & Tisna, 2025).

To meet the demands of a saturated market, coffee shop operators began to strategically use the environmental and atmospheric designs to their advantage (Budiman & Dananjoyo, 2021; Larassati et al., 2021), rather than these aspects just sitting in the store background. In the common parlance, an "aesthetic coffee shop" refers to a food and beverage establishment that deliberately incorporates the elements of visual aesthetics and design, lighting, layout, and features that are strategically crafted and are well put together for social media sharing. These "servicescapes" are a primary focus that are intended to have an impact on customers' feelings, their sense of self, with the convenience of sharing their experience on different online platforms (Sahin & Artuger, 2023; Susanti et al., 2021).

Scholars have extensively examined how physical atmospheric attributes impact the consumers' psychological state and behavioral responses, ranging from immediate length of stay, to long-term brand trust, repeat purchase intentions, and brand patronage (Kim et al., 2020; Manojkumar et al., 2021; Sasongko et al., 2020). The act of visiting an aesthetic coffee shop has different sociological and cultural meanings. It is perceived as an act of showing lifestyle routine, or a display of a person's social status, which are all dependent on the geographical setting and customer demographics (Czarniecka-Skubina et al., 2021; Sudarman, 2023; Vu et al., 2025). The connection between the different aspects of a coffee shop, particularly the servicescapes, product and service quality, and digital presence through social media channels and online electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), influences the decision-making process of today's modern consumers (Fahlevi et al., 2023; Ge et al., 2021; Sitinjak et al., 2019). Furthermore, service delivery in Southeast Asian contexts is deeply intertwined with

both digital system quality and local socio-cultural identity (Dominguez et al., 2026; Ikalina & De La Peña, 2026).

While several studies evaluated the components of store atmosphere (Budiman & Dananjoyo, 2021), service quality (Lee & Kim, 2021), and social media traffic (Fahlevi et al., 2023), these components are studied in isolation. Past studies have broadly looked at the servicescape models (e.g., Bitner, 1992; Sahin & Artuger, 2023); however, the interaction between the components of physical environment, execution of service, and digital engagement is missing within the segment of aesthetic coffee shops. To address this gap, this review addresses two core objectives:

1. To examine the impact of the interaction between digital engagement, physical servicescape, and quality of service on a customer in meeting their satisfaction and behavioral intentions.
2. To provide coffee shop operations with practical and managerial techniques in striking a balance between the aspects of functional service delivery and aesthetic appeal to target different cultural and generational market segments.

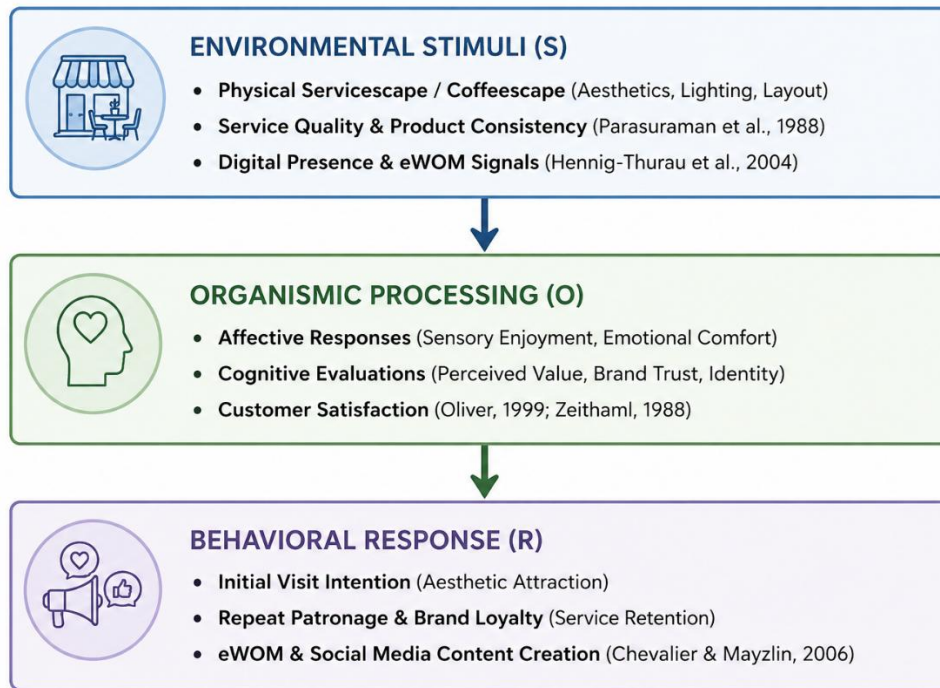
2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Servicescape and "Coffeescape" Models

The quality of an operation is explicitly seen in the physical atmosphere of a coffee shop (Baker et al., 1994; Kotler, 1973). Bitner's (1992) Servicescape model served as an inspiration for hospitality research frameworks. This model divides the physical evidence into components such as ambient conditions, layout, signs, symbols, and artifacts, as well as dining-specific adaptations such as the DINESCAPE (Ryu & Jang, 2008). Meanwhile, the coffeescape scale was introduced, as Sahin and Artuger (2023) argued that the servicescape model does not fully take into account the intricacies of specialized coffee spaces. The coffeescale further involved the dimensions of technology, the cafe layout, lighting, service staff, and visual aesthetics (Han & Ryu, 2009; Kim & Moon, 2009; Sahin & Artuger, 2023).

2.2 Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Framework

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework and environmental models are combined to explain the internal psychological processing (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974; Sasongko et al., 2020).

Figure 1*Conceptual S-O-R theoretical integration for aesthetic coffee shops*

The S-O-R framework suggests that environmental stimuli (S) such as the physical servicescape, service and product quality, and digital presence of a coffee shop trigger the organismic processing (O), like perceived value, brand trust, and emotional comfort (Karo Sekali, 2024; Li et al., 2022). These are then subsequently connected to the behavioral response (R), such as a customer's initial visit intention, repeat patronage, and positive eWOM (Chang & Spierings, 2023; Rafika, 2020).

2.3 Value-Satisfaction-Loyalty Chain

While the S-O-R framework suggests that physical stimuli (S) trigger an initial affective response (O), observations from different studies found that the physical environment alone seldom translates a customer's initial interest to long-term customer loyalty (Duman, 2020; Lee & Kim, 2021). The Value-Satisfaction-Loyalty chain mediates sustained behavioral retention (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Ge et al., 2021; Oliver, 1999). The non-physical characteristics, especially the service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1988), consistency of products, and reasonableness of price (Zeithaml, 1988), validate a customer's expectations and

form a mental framework of felt value and satisfaction, which helps in a customer's intention for repeat purchase (Astuti et al., 2021; Taufik et al., 2022).

3. Methodology

This literature review used a thematic approach to map, profile, and combine contemporary research on the servicescape of coffee shops and the behavior of their consumers. The dominant themes and variables were clustered and organized in a thematic synthesis.

3.1 Research Design and Ethical Compliance

This literature review utilized a qualitative thematic approach to identify common themes and patterns from different selections of peer-reviewed literature, which are combined and synthesized to display the relationship between store environments and customer behavior. The thematic review of literature allows for the examination of factors that have often been studied separately in the setting of hospitality research, such as the physical store environment, online presence, and service quality, and combines these findings to gain deeper understanding of coffee shops in today's coffee shop management. The synthesis of these findings explains how the appearance and atmosphere of a coffee shop affect a customer's behavior and explores the different preferences of Millennials and Generation Z; furthermore, the review also examines how a customer's initial interest is translated into long-term customer relationships through service and product delivery in different regions and cultures.

The review of this scholarly literature has brought insights from the gaps that were identified in the previous studies, and the findings provide practical suggestions for the enhancement of today's modern coffee shop management.

3.2 Systematic Search Strategy and Search Parameters

The literature search for relevant literature was conducted between July 1, 2025, and December 30, 2025. During this period, the researcher used the systematic search strategy of Boolean search to narrow or broaden the search results from five major databases that include Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Scopus, and Web of Science.

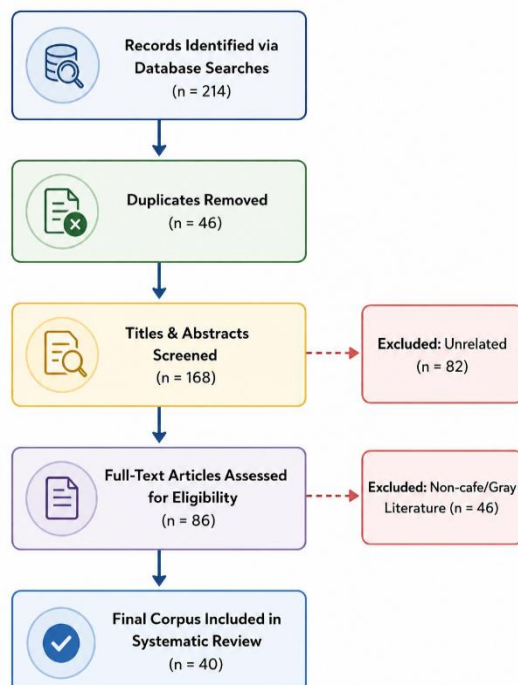
The following Boolean operators were used in the Title and Keywords fields during the search: ("coffee shop" OR "café" OR "coffee chain") AND ("aesthetic" OR "servicescape" OR "atmosphere" OR "interior design") AND ("service quality" OR "customer satisfaction" OR "customer loyalty" OR "perceived value") AND ("eWOM" OR "social media"). This framework minimized retrieval bias and covered key cross-disciplinary studies in the areas of marketing, service management, and spatial design. To supplement the approach, manual reference harvesting was performed on select review articles to surface additional relevant secondary publications. This ensures sufficient coverage of helpful insights that are important to coffee shop atmospherics, digital engagement, and factors affecting customer retention.

3.3 Study Selection and Screening Protocols

A pool of potential relevant literature for synthesis was collated from the initial search results, and an evaluation of the keywords was performed to determine their relevance to the topic. Following an explicit inclusion and exclusion protocol, the researcher removed all peripheral and non-peer-reviewed literature from the pool of results and only retained studies that were deemed relevant to the topic.

Figure 2

PRISMA flow diagram for corpus identification and screening



Inclusion Criteria: (1) an emphasis on the study of coffee shops; (2) must have undergone a peer-review process and been published between the period 2017-2025; (3) must be written using the English language; (4) relevance to the topic, particularly investigating the dimensions of physical environment, service quality, customer satisfaction, or behavior.

Exclusion Criteria: (1) non-peer-reviewed literature; (2) studies that were out of scope for the topic, like those studies that only looked at fast-food restaurants or hotel dining in general without specific cafe data.

The execution of the inclusion and exclusion strategy allowed the researcher to screen quality literature that is relevant to the topic. By eliminating all duplicate results and carefully screening the research titles and abstracts, a final sample of 40 relevant studies was included from the pool of results. The selected literature displays a strong groundwork for being the basis for understanding the relationship between coffee shop environment and customer behavior.

3.4 Data Extraction, Synthesis Coding, and Quality Appraisal

A thematic coding strategy was performed to analyze themes across the available literature to ensure that selected studies were of high quality and to ensure reliability of findings. The analysis of the study began by looking at the S-O-R Framework and Servicescape. This analysis of the existing framework allowed the researcher to look for categories such as store atmosphere, service quality, and perceived value. There are other topics that have also emerged during the analysis like eWOM and the preferences of different generations, particularly the Millennials and Gen Zs.

The quality check of the 40 selected literature assured that reliable research methods were used, concepts were measured correctly, and data analysis was correctly applied. The combination of the existing theories and the new topics that emerged confirmed the consistency of the findings with the existing theories and has allowed the discovery of new trends such as the introduction of digital technologies in the coffee shop industry and its effect on customer behavior.

3.5 Chronological and Geographic Distribution

The distribution of the selected literature from 2017-2025 is displayed in Table 1. Most of the available literature was published in 2021, with 12 (30%) out of 40 studies are published

within that year. This may be attributed to the restrictions brought by the pandemic, which made researchers interested in understanding the changes that have happened in the hospitality industry, how businesses operate and adapted during a heightened social situation, and whether customers' behavior and preferences changed as a result of these changes.

Table 1

Chronological profile of selected literature

Year	Frequency	Percentage
2017	1	2.50%
2019	2	5.00%
2020	5	12.50%
2021	12	30.00%
2022	8	20.00%
2023	5	12.50%
2024	5	12.50%
2025	2	5.00%
Total	40	100.00%

Table 2 displays the geographical distribution of the selected literature. The majority of the selected literature were from Southeast Asian countries, comprising 67.5% of the total literature selection. On the other hand, literature other regions comprise Europe (10%), the Middle East (2.5%), and North America (2.5%).

Table 2

Geographical distribution of selected literature

Region	Country	Country Freq.	Regional Total	Regional %
Asia	China	2	34	85.00%
	India	1		
	Indonesia	20		
	South Korea	4		
	Malaysia	1		
	Philippines	1		
	Thailand	4		
	Vietnam	1		
Europe	Poland	1	4	10.00%
	Romania	1		
	Turkey	2		
Middle East	Saudi Arabia	1	1	2.50%
North America	Mexico	1	1	2.50%
Total		40	40	100.00%

3.6 Keyword Analysis

The researcher clustered related keywords and examined their frequencies across 40 literature sources to identify common themes. Consistent with core findings, "Service Quality" (n=34) and "Coffee Shops" (n=33) emerged as the most frequent terms, followed by "Interior Design / Atmosphere" (n=23) and "Customer Satisfaction" (n=22).

Table 3

Primary keyword clusters across reviewed corpus

Consolidated Keyword Cluster	Frequency
Service Quality	34
Coffee Shops	33
"Interior Design (Atmosphere, Environment)"	23
Customer Satisfaction	22
Consumer Behavior	17
Customer Loyalty	15
Purchasing Behavior	9
Marketing Strategies	8
Brand Image	6
Perceived Value	6

The distribution of keywords displayed the majority of the common keywords such as “service quality” and “coffee shops” where most studies had put emphasis on understanding the experiences of customers, particularly in the dimension of service quality. However, some keywords appeared less frequently, like “brand image” and “perceived quality.”

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Service Quality, Product Consistency, and the Loyalty Chain

Evidence from the available literature pointed out that the aesthetic appearance of a coffee shop correlates strongly in attracting customers to make an initial visit; however, aesthetics alone is not sufficient to foster and build brand loyalty; it is the quality and consistency of product and service delivery that turns customers into regular patrons (Duman, 2020; Taufik et al., 2022). A coffee shop's aesthetic design also sets customer expectations. While it creates an advantage in attracting customers to make a visit, the expectations are high in the actual coffee shop experience. If the customer’s actual experience does not meet the

customer's initial expectations for the product and service quality delivery, this results in customer disappointment and negatively affects satisfaction and brand credibility (Ge et al., 2021; Karo Sekali, 2024).

Table 4

Key empirical findings on non-physical and service quality dimensions

Core Variable	Key Finding	Supporting Literature
Perceived Value	Consistent service quality validates premium pricing and meets functional expectations.	Ge et al. (2021); Mohd Al et al. (2024)
Brand Credibility	Premium environments combined with reliable service form the basis of brand trust and repeat visit intention.	Karo Sekali (2024)
E-Service Quality	Mobile application usability and digital responsiveness positively influence customer loyalty.	Nasution & Adiwijaya (2024)
Functional Responsiveness	Product consistency, order speed, and complaint management are baseline requirements for generating repeat business.	Lee (2022); Loestefani (2022)

In terms of non-physical and service quality dimensions, customer satisfaction plays a key role in linking the customer's experience and their loyalty to the brand. A coffee shop that is aesthetically pleasing to the customer does not automatically equate to customer loyalty; instead, these are contributing factors which help in making customers satisfied. The satisfaction of a customer helps in building a positive word of mouth recommendation, which is a key aspect for customers to make a return visit (Astuti et al., 2021; Sofia et al., 2020).

4.2 Consumer Patterns: Generation Z vs. Millennials

Consumer decision-making in aesthetic cafes is moderated by generational characteristics and underlying motivation:

Generation Z Consumers: This market segment demonstrates strong hedonic and social identity motivations. A coffee shop's interior visual cues, thematic lighting, and "instagrammable" layouts that allow them to express themselves and their identity affect Gen Z's purchasing decisions (Budiman & Dananjoyo, 2021; Susanti et al., 2021).

Millennial Consumers: This market segment, on the other hand, has two identified reasons for selecting a coffee shop. (1) Millennials appreciate an aesthetically pleasing coffee shop, and (2) they also put importance on the functional features that are available in the coffee shop, which may include a comfortable seating arrangement, accessibility to power outlets, and a place fitting to perform their remote work duties (Chang & Spierings, 2023; Sitinjak et al., 2019).

An understanding of these generational differences allows coffee shop operators to create a coffee shop layout that is multi-functional and caters to the needs of both Generation Z and Millennial market segments simultaneously. By combining the visual aesthetics for Generation Z and a functional and ergonomic work environment for Millennials, coffee shop operators could benefit from the maximized utilization of their coffee shop. This strategy, which attends to both market needs, has the potential to enhance customer satisfaction and broaden the coffee shop's market reach.

4.3 Digital Engagement, eWOM, and Technology Integration

Marketing through eWOM was elevated by the use of social media platforms that help in shaping a customer's expectations (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Highly curated and visually appealing social media content allows customers to experience quality through a visual lens that speeds up the spread of information (Fahlevi et al., 2023; Rafika, 2020). However, synthesized findings revealed that customers who visit coffee shops for the sole purpose of taking a photo ("for the gram") have shorter lengths of stay and have low purchase intention, unless the service and product quality meet their expectations (Chang & Spierings, 2023). Furthermore, the usage of digital ordering platforms in the study of digital hospitality systems revealed that it has an impact on meeting customer satisfaction and establishing long-term customer loyalty (Dominguez et al., 2026; Nasution & Adiwijaya, 2024).

Furthermore, a smooth adaptation and implementation of technology in a coffee shop operation helps in closing the gap between the promises made by digital marketing campaigns and the customer experience in a physical store. It is evident that the use of social media creates brand awareness through eWOM and its efficiency is enhanced by the implementation of digital platforms where customers can transact and purchase digitally; and when the convenience brought by technology aligns with the physical service quality, this helps a coffee

shop in increasing customer satisfaction and helps in promoting positive behavioral intentions of customers.

4.4 Cultural Effects and Socio-Spatial Dynamics

Culture plays an important role in the coffee shop culture of each region. Evidence suggests that customers spend time in a coffee shop for different reasons that are all affected by their way of life and the place where they live. In many areas of Southeast Asia and the Middle East, coffee shops are not only a place where people gather to buy and drink coffee, it has become a setting where people meet and make new friends, create bonds with different groups of people, and express their unique lifestyle (Maspul, 2023; Maspul & Almalki, 2023; Sudarman, 2023). It is also evidenced in recent studies that local coffee shops have embedded their own local culture into their operations to create a strong connection within their local community and achieve success in attracting local customers (Ikalina & De La Peña, 2026; Vu et al., 2025).

Coffee shops have transformed beyond their traditional function of just serving coffee to their customers and have evolved into places for socializing and cultural spaces. Customers visit coffee shops not only to satisfy the need for coffee, but to see coffee shop visits as an avenue for self-expression, socializing, and engaging with local and global trends. These studies also revealed that cultural considerations must be taken into account, as countries differ and reflect various social and cultural meanings, which helps in understanding customer behavior and how they view and engage with the servicescape.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Theoretical Synthesis and Conclusion

The findings from this literature review revealed that a customer's behavior in a coffee shop setting is affected by physical and non-physical factors. The physical environment of a coffee shop is an important factor in customer satisfaction and has an impact on customers' initial intention to visit. This behavior is commonly observed among younger consumers who see coffee shops as places to socialize, express themselves, and create digital content. On the other hand, the importance of the non-physical factors is also highlighted in creating long-term relationships. While the physical appeal of a coffee shop helps with initial customer patronage, it is not sufficient to develop customer loyalty. Consistency in service and product quality,

along with the ability to attend to customer needs, promotes customer satisfaction and translates it into long-term customer loyalty.

Customer satisfaction is a key component that translates overall positive customer experience into repeat visit intentions, positive recommendations through electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and brand loyalty. Similarly, the effect of digital factors in modern coffee shops; digital components, such as the use of social media in curating feeds and reviews, and eWOM, have an impact on customers' purchasing behavior and helps a coffee shop in acquiring new customers. However, in terms of the efficiency in driving customer loyalty, it is still dependent on the customer's experience. Additionally, the customer responsiveness to coffee shop environments still varies by generation and culture; therefore, these factors should be taken into account when studying customer behavior.

The literature supports the collective impact of servicescape, service quality, and digital engagement on customer satisfaction, and suggests that customer loyalty is not determined by a single factor, and despite the availability of multiple studies that looked at coffee shop environments, there is still a need for researchers to have a better understanding of the impact of service quality on customer behavior in the setting of aesthetic coffee shops. Customer retention in aesthetic coffee shops depends on an integrated framework combining physical servicescapes, operational service quality, and digital engagement. While physical aesthetics and curated store atmospheres serve as vital customer acquisition mechanisms that stimulate initial foot traffic and eWOM, they are insufficient for securing long-term brand loyalty. Sustained repeat patronage, brand trust, and customer retention remain strongly contingent upon non-physical service dimensions, including product consistency, functional layout comfort, staff responsiveness, and perceived value.

5.2 Recommendations for Practical Management

Find the balance between visual aesthetics and functional comfort: The focus of coffee shop operators should not be fully concentrated on enhancing the appearance of the coffee shop itself, but alongside all the aesthetic enhancements that are happening in the background, customer comfort and the functional needs of the customers should be considered and enhanced as well. A coffee shop must possess a visually appealing interior design to capture customers' attention. The functional features must be provided, such as comfortable seats, access to power outlets, and a place where people can work, study, and socialize.

Standardization of operational service execution: The coffee shop management should ensure the consistency of service in their operations. As an aesthetically pleasing coffee shop sets high customer expectations, ensuring the consistency of product and service delivery to match customer expectations through a standardized approach plays a key role. Standardization of coffee service operations could be achieved through the provision of standard operating procedures (SOPs) to serve as the employee guide in executing a process step. Similarly, a proper complaint handling procedure must be in place. In addition, conducting regular employee training and seminars to ensure up-to-date knowledge of internal processes and industry standards.

Alignment of digital marketing with physical reality: Digital campaigns that are shared online must always match the customers' actual physical store experience. Coffee shop operators must always practice transparency in their marketing strategies, and if these digital campaigns match what the customers feel and experience when visiting the coffee shop, this puts the business in a strong position to be trusted by customers. When this happens, the coffee shop could establish brand credibility and trust, mitigate potential customer dissatisfaction and complaints, and earn positive feedback and recommendations.

Implement market-segmented layouts: Coffee shop operators should ensure that their coffee shop meets the needs of different age groups. Different age groups have different sets of needs. For example, Gen Z customers prefer a coffee shop that is Instagram-worthy with attractive interior designs where they can socialize with friends, bond, and take photos. On the other hand, millennial customers prefer a functional workplace where they can perform remote work duties with comfortable seating and access to power outlets.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

The reviewed literature has a high concentration in the Southeast Asian market. This geographical concentration of literature limits the application of the findings and may differ in non-Southeast Asian countries. Future research should employ longitudinal tracking, experimental servicescape designs, and multi-region comparative frameworks to examine evolving consumer behavior in aesthetic hospitality spaces.

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AI Declaration

The author declares the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in writing this paper. In particular, the author used Quillbot for paraphrasing purposes. The author takes full responsibility in ensuring proper review and editing of contents generated using AI.

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