

Understanding Consumer Coffee Preferences: The Influence of Social and Psychological Factors in Bandar Sri Damansara, Malaysia

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Abstract: This study delves into the burgeoning coffee-drinking culture in Malaysia, which has experienced significant growth, particularly among urban residents. The surge in coffee consumption is attributed to a complex interplay of social and psychological factors, motivating this research to investigate their impact on consumer preferences. Conducted in Bandar Sri Damansara, Kuala Lumpur - a locale renowned for its dense concentration of coffee establishments - the study employed questionnaires to gather data from 124 respondents. Utilising SPSS 21.0, the collected responses underwent rigorous descriptive analysis and Pearson correlation to unravel patterns and relationships between variables. The findings underscored several key insights into how social dynamics and psychological influences shape consumer behaviours towards coffee. Discussions centred on elucidating these findings vis-à-vis the study's objectives, unravelling nuanced connections between demographic characteristics, social interactions, and individual psychological traits with coffee consumption patterns. The study's implications extend to stakeholders within the coffee industry, offering actionable insights into market trends and consumer preferences in urban Malaysian settings. By focusing on Bandar Sri Damansara, the study provides localised insights and contributes to broader discussions on urban coffee cultures in Malaysia. Ultimately, this research enhances our understanding of the multifaceted drivers behind the rising trend of coffee consumption in urban environments, emphasising the pivotal roles played by social influences and individual psychological factors in shaping contemporary consumer preferences and behaviours in coffee consumption.

Keywords: Coffee, preference, social, psychological, purchasing behaviour

Introduction

The coffee-drinking culture goes way back to the early 1500s in Ethiopia, which was later popularised through merchant trading (Marshall, 2021). Malaysia, which has historically been known as a tea-drinking country during the British colonisation era, saw the practice of drinking coffee recently as becoming more common, especially among young people and workers (Lee, 2014). In 2021 and 2022, approximately 800,000 60kg bags of coffee were expected to be consumed in Malaysia (Raimondo, 2022). To support the local coffee-drinking demand, Malaysia began producing coffee beans, commonly Robusta and Liberica, where 2.1 million bags of coffee weighing 60kg were produced in 2018 (Ignatius, 2022).

The increase in coffee beverage consumption in Malaysia has been attributed to several factors, including urbanisation and a hectic lifestyle (Ignatius, 2022). Chains and independent cafés also changed how Malaysians consume coffee beverages in public. Many coffee shops offer various coffee

beverages, and their numbers are proliferating because of the culture (Ignatius, 2022). While the visual appearance of the coffee beverage itself likely plays some role in setting consumer expectations, the way the coffee bean is extracted also has a noticeable influence on the consumer's choice of coffee brew (Glöss et al., 2013).

Although much research on coffee has been published (Glöss et al., 2013; Maguire & Hu, 2013; Kang et al., 2022), there is still room for additional knowledge of research primarily related to coffee drinking habits, methods of coffee infusion, coffee amount consumed, and additive use in coffee are differentiated between countries and population. The available results in this study refer to the topic in a different context. Therefore, this paper aims to fill this research gap by highlighting the impact of psychological and social factors on consumer coffee preferences.

Literature Review

Coffee drinking preference

Coffee drinking in Malaysia has become more common, especially among young consumers, due to the hectic lifestyle and working trends (Kanjanaorn & Lee, 2017). The uprise of speciality coffee shops, which promote new trends of artisanal roasting with several types of roasting profiles being developed (namely espresso roasting, filter roasting, Scandinavian roasting and Italian roasting) contributes to the drinking trend among consumers (Schenker & Rothgeb, 2017). Certain types of consumers are particular to different degrees of roasting the coffee beans that are used to brew the coffee, which is then reflected in the colour of the beverage, going from caramel to black, and which is associated with distinct flavour profiles (Bhumiratana et al., 2011; Dmowski & Dąbrowska, 2014) and preferences (Kang et al., 2022).

Some consumers prefer certain sets of quality beans to make their coffee drinks, whereas beans that do not meet their standards are considered defective or of low quality, which is not preferred (Sunarharum et al., 2021). Culture also influences preferences (whether hedonic or utilitarian) due to the product-extrinsic factors of coffee (Maguire & Hu, 2013).

Role of coffee shops

Coffee shops in the past were known as 'Kopitiam' and were frequented by older generations (Ignatius, 2022). Over time, based on locality in urban areas, the role of coffee shops or cafés as a place to enjoy drinking coffee has evolved to become more sophisticated (Henriksen et al., 2013). Scambler (2013) defined coffee shops and cafés as places to develop ties with people and places and potentially develop a sense of community. Blokland (2017) later concurred that these places represent a platform where individuals can experience public familiarity. There is also a negative take on the role of coffee shops across the centuries (Zukin, 2010) and sites of new consumption practices for the middle class (Ardekani & Rath, 2017). Interest in learning more about coffee beverages allows business owners to share knowledge with those interested in speciality coffee, from conducting classes on different brewing methods to latte art and coffee cupping (Ferreira et al., 2021). Coffee shops represent spaces for multiple opportunities but also "constitute the very heart of urbanism today" (Stenseth, 2013).

Social and psychological factors

Subjective norms have significantly impacted consumers' marketing attitudes and intentions (Soroa-Koury & Yang, 2010). Social status represents a person's place in a social group based on wealth, education, and occupation, and the choice of product or brand closely relates to social position and role (Lautiainen, 2015). Social learning theory and diffusion theory highlight the role of interpersonal connections and exchange of information in behaviour change (Rogers, 1995), where the clarity of adoption to new things is reduced by informational influence, thus making it a significant conformity factor (Baron & Byrne 2000).

Ajzen (1991) defined subjective norm as the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behaviour by the individual. Consumers have been found to act consistently with social norms and are more likely to accept normative influences from social circles (Hashim, Md Kassim, & George, 2017). Family, role and status, and reference groups are crucial social factors that affect consumer purchasing decisions (Perreau, 2014). Consumers act differently depending on their behaviour, way of life, or habits to those of the reference group, which typically consists of numerous smaller groups made up of members of the consumer's family, close friends, neighbours, work groups, or other associations (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010; Khan, 2006). Lautiainen (2015) mentioned that a person's values, development, and personality are shaped by the environment they are raised in, including social interactions, society, and politics. Previous research suggested that the family environment creates impressions of businesses, products, and consumer behaviours (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010; Khan & Khan, 2008). Hashim, Md Kassim, and George (2017) also mentioned that Malaysian consumers are likely to develop purchasing tendencies from mobile advertising if they perceive that it has become a social norm among their peers, which leads to acceptance of the advertisement and positively influences intention to purchase the product or service (Hashim, Md Kassim, & George, 2017).

Psychological factors, namely motivation, perception, learning, and beliefs and attitudes, also impact a buyer's decisions or preferences (Lautiainen, 2015). The sense of recognition or belonging changes a need into a motive, which can intensify to the point where it propels the person to seek fulfilment (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). Kilbride and Newton (2017) stated that culture plays a significant role in influencing consumer behaviour. They later defined consumer culture as a social arrangement in which markets serve as a medium for relationships between lived culture and social resources and between meaningful ways of life and the resources on which they depend (Kilbride & Newton, 2017). Lase et al. (2019) defined coffee consumption location or shop as a type of restaurant that sells coffee, tea, cakes, and occasionally sandwiches and small meals. The theory assumption is that maximising wants and needs outweighs their money. They later related coffee shops with purchasing decisions and stated that consumers will try to maximise product usefulness or satisfaction (Lase et al., 2019). Nibret and Ayalew (2020) concurred that consumers will usually select the least expensive product of a similar nature, which in this case is the coffee offered by different coffee shops or cafés or promotional efforts made by coffee brands.

Biel et al. (2010) highlighted that the study of habitual consumption, which is inspired by the observation that most decisions made in daily life are a repetition of previous behaviour rather than conscious choices, is similar to the case of coffee consumption patterns. Sabio & Spers (2020) concurred that coffee consumption patterns and preferences are no exception. Consumers have feelings about specific brands or products of coffee they like, which may be feelings largely independent of beliefs; yet, sometimes, these sensations are founded on beliefs (Bosco & Moses, 2023). Some consumers associate coffee drinking with health advantages that have been proven to boost one's energy and enhance various mental functions, including memory, mood, vigilance, energy levels, reaction speeds, and overall cognitive performance (Demura et al., 2013). Interest in learning more about coffee beverages is derived from feelings that are picked, arranged, and interpreted to create a meaningful global picture that is stimulated by three perceptual mechanisms that provide people with the potential to develop various perceptions, namely selective attention, selective distortion, and selective holding (Lautiainen, 2015). Learning shows how experience leads to changes in a person's behaviour, where when individuals are put in a similar circumstance as before, they can get feedback that will help them change their behaviour (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010).

Methodology

Research design

This research paper focuses on the quantitative approach to gaining and analysing data descriptively using SPSS 21.0 for mean and correlation effects. Simple random sampling was used for online data collection from consumers patronising coffee shops or cafés in the research locality.

Population and sample

The research was conducted in Bandar Sri Damansara due to the vast number of coffee shops and cafés in the locality. The G-power application was used to pinpoint the sample required for the research using a 90% confidence level and 5% marginal error. Out of the 267 sample sizes required, 124 total responses were collected and tabulated for descriptive analysis and correlation, which was an acceptable range of 46% for an online survey conducted (Wu, Zhao, & Fils-Aime, 2022).

Research instrument

The research instrument was divided into three sections: Section A for demographic profile, Section B for social factors, and Section C for psychological factors. Each question used a five-point Likert scale ranging from ‘Strongly Agree’ (5) to ‘Strongly Disagree’ (1). The instrument was checked and approved for reliability with Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients for all constructs exceeding Nunnally’s (1978) proposed threshold of 0.7; thus, it can be used in the research.

Findings and Discussion

Based on the mean scores tabulated, the reference group significantly impacted consumer coffee preference (M:4.08), followed by role and status (M:3.92). However, the reference group also scored the lowest mean (M:3.70) when asked whether in-depth information about coffee was gained from friends. This shows that consumers involved in the survey were influenced by friends to purchase certain types of coffee beverages but that they did not expect to get in-depth knowledge about coffee from them. This notion concurs with the fact that group influence significantly affects purchase intention where clarity of adoption to new things is reduced by informational influence, thus making it a major factor of conformity (Baron & Byrne 2000). Groups (social networks, television, influential, books) influence the young generation in Malaysia and change their culture, behaviour and purchase intention as they adapt to other cultures (Fon et al., 2008). Income level is attributed to purchasing coffee beverages (M:3.92). This is the case of a study which indicated that consumer sensitivity to price when buying organic or speciality coffee could be 15-30 per cent more expensive than conventionally produced coffee (Pelsmacker et al., 2005). Family factors (M:3.81, M:3.83) concurred with the fact that one’s preference level could be influenced and closely related to the nature and culture of one’s family (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010; Khan & Khan, 2008). Table 1 shows the measurement items related to social factors.

Table 1. Social Factors Influencing Decision to Purchase Coffee Beverages

Item		N	Mean	SD
1	My family are coffee lovers.	124	3.81	1.138
2	My first exposure to coffee was from a member of my family.	124	3.83	1.080
3	I gained more in-depth information about coffee from friends around me.	124	3.70	1.104
4	Most of my friends have bought coffee.	124	4.08	0.984
5	I will buy specialty coffee beverages if I have extra money.	124	3.83	1.117
6	I will buy specialty coffee beverages more often if I have higher income.	124	3.92	1.091

Table 2. Psychological Factors Influencing Decision to Purchase Coffee Beverages

No.	Statement	N	Mean	SD
1	I often buy coffee before starting work in the morning.	124	3.39	1.221
2	Drinking coffee even once has become my daily routine.	124	3.50	1.193
3	Coffee product reviews and feedback are one of the reasons for my coffee selection.	124	3.54	1.258
4	I often identify promotions, offers and even discounts.	124	4.00	1.089
5	I was intrigued to try a new coffee product displayed on a billboard.	124	3.65	1.090
6	Viral coffee products have piqued my interest in buying coffee.	124	3.75	1.116
7	The repetition of buying coffee in daily life has become one of my habitual activities.	124	3.60	1.175
8	My body will feel weak and lethargic without coffee.	124	3.46	1.328

The psychological factor found that promotions, offers and discounts are a motivational push for consumers' coffee preferences (M= 4.00). Active reviews about certain coffee beverages could be a factor that pushes purchasing decisions (M:3.54). The habitual act of purchasing and consuming coffee (M:3.60) daily, as stated by Biel et al. (2010), suggests that most decisions made in daily life are a repetition of previous behaviour rather than a conscious decision. Consumers may also have feelings about brands or other coffee products they like (M:3.46), which may be feelings largely independent of beliefs. However, these sensations are sometimes founded on beliefs (Bosco & Moses, 2023). Consumers involved in the survey were also intrigued to try new coffee products displayed on billboards (M:3.75) as part of a learning experience.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Analysis

Factors	Family Influence	Reference Group	Role and Stat.	Perception	Motivation	Learning	Attitude and beliefs	Purchase Decision
Family Influence		.640**	.406**	.488**	.495**	.490**	.516**	.720**
Reference Group			.563**	.476**	.551**	.592**	.581**	.793**
Role and Stat.				.634**	.586**	.567**	.412**	.754**
Perception					.666**	.566**	.469**	.777**
Motivation						.702**	.612**	.843**
Learning							.685**	.842**
Attitude and belief								.782**

The Pearson correlation conducted reported motivation as the highest factor that influences consumers' coffee purchasing preferences (p-value .843), particularly when it relates to promotions and offers (M:4.00). This highlights the importance of price in coffee purchasing and that coffee is still a relatively undifferentiated commodity where consumers are generally willing to pay higher prices for speciality coffee (Pelsmacker et al., 2005).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the profound impact of social and psychological factors on consumer coffee preferences contextualised within the specific locality of Bandar Sri Damansara, Malaysia. As evidenced by the research conducted (Morris, 2013; Luciano et al., 2005; Hsu & Wung, 2005), these preferences are intricately shaped by varying social interactions and individual psychological motivations. The data analysis reveals a significant correlation between consumer coffee purchasing preferences and social and psychological factors. This concurred with the notion that consumers have been found to act consistently with social norms and are more likely to accept normative influences from social circles (Hashim, Md Kassim, & George, 2017), namely family, role and status, and reference groups which in time affect consumer purchasing decisions (Perreau, 2014). Psychologically, consumers tend to gravitate towards cost-effective options, such as the variety of coffee drinks available across different coffee shops and cafés in the area (Nibret & Ayalew, 2020). Thus, understanding these dynamics is crucial for coffee retailers and marketers aiming to attract and retain customers in competitive environments.

Suggestions for Future Research

By recognising the influential role of promotions and pricing strategies, businesses can better tailor their offerings to meet consumer expectations and preferences. Moreover, this study highlights the need for further exploration into localised consumer behaviour to refine marketing strategies and enhance consumer satisfaction in the coffee industry from the managerial implications for coffee establishments' point of view. It may help managers to rethink marketing strategies, including those that impact psychological distance, a subjective feeling experienced by customers, on online platforms as well, to influence preference for coffee and thereby increase revenues.

Co-Author Contribution

There is no conflict of interest in writing this article. Special thanks to all authors for their contributions throughout the project administration, conceptualization, methodology, funding, and write-up process.

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