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**PREFERENCES, PERCEPTION, AND PICK-UP ORDER:
UNPACKING SOCIAL PERCEPTION AND CAFÉ
PREFERENCES IN URBAN PADANGSIDIMPUAN****Haniful Pasca Pulungan^{1*}, Sinar Indra Kesuma¹, Satia Negara
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20222, Indonesia*Correspondence E-Mail: hanifulpasca@gmail.comDOI: <https://doi.org/10.30598/baileofisipvol3iss1pp155-170>**ABSTRACT**

Amid the rise of café culture in urban Padangsidimpuan, this study examines how socio-economic preferences influence coffee-shop selection, particularly for pick-up orders. A cross-sectional survey involving 312 respondents—selected through stratified random sampling—captured consumer motivations via Likert-scale questionnaires, covering taste satisfaction, ambience, digital convenience, and perceptions of price fairness. Data were analyzed using factor analysis and partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). The results indicate that taste satisfaction ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.001$) and app-based convenience ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$) are the strongest predictors of café choice. Ambience contributes indirectly by fostering the intention to share experiences on social media. Segment analysis shows that pick-up customers prioritize convenience nearly twice as much as dine-in patrons, signaling a shift in consumption logic within Indonesia's secondary cities. These findings extend consumption theory into the realm of secondary urbanization and highlight the role of lifestyle, taste, and digital habitus in shaping emergent consumer publics. This research contributes to the sociology of economic life and offers policy insights for strengthening the local creative economy.

Keywords: Coffee-Shop Preferences, Digital Habitus, Pick-Up Order Behavior, Secondary Cities, Urban Consumption

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the rise of café-hopping culture has not only become a hallmark of major cities like Jakarta, Bandung, and Yogyakarta but has also spread to secondary cities such as Padangsidimpuan in North Sumatra. This shift does not merely reflect the expansion of consumption spaces, but also indicates emerging patterns in consumer decision-making—particularly concerning technology-based services such as app-based ordering and pick-up systems (Francisca Ratna Ardanari et al., 2024; Thampi & Priya, 2023). In this city, which was previously associated more with traditional social spaces such as local coffee stalls (warung kopi), a growing variety of modern cafés now offer more than just beverages—they provide ambience, identity, and digital efficiency.

This phenomenon does not occur in a vacuum. Suprpto et al. (2024) reported a significant 18.7% increase in the culinary and beverage sector in urban Padangsidimpuan over

the past two years. In line with this, Harahap et al. (2024) noted a 24.3% rise in the use of food-ordering applications, reflecting an urban lifestyle that is increasingly practical and digitally connected. Yet behind these numbers lies a fundamental question: What truly drives people's preferences when choosing cafés in a city like Padangsidimpuan? Is it merely the taste of coffee? Or are there deeper sociological dimensions at play—such as lifestyle, social perception, or even strategies of self-image construction?

Previous research has identified various factors influencing consumer preferences in selecting dining or drinking venues. For instance, Chang & Spierings (2023), Mohammad & Kamran (2023), and Wiastuti et al. (2024) have shown that taste satisfaction, service quality, and atmosphere are key determinants of customer loyalty in the café industry. Meanwhile, T. Kim & Yun (2019) and T. Wu et al. (2021) emphasized the role of convenience in using food-ordering apps within modern urban contexts. Other studies—by Lee et al. (2023), Reyt et al. (2022), and Tran et al. (2020)—have highlighted the significance of fair price perception in influencing revisit intentions. Research by J. Kim & Kim (2020), Männistö et al. (2020), and Pane & Khaliqi (2022) also revealed how social media plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions of a venue's quality, even before the consumer visits in person.

In Indonesia, Safitri et al. (2025) found that visual aesthetics and photo opportunities were major attractions for young people in Yogyakarta's café scene. Harahap et al. (2024), in a study on Medan, underlined how digitalization has become a strategic adaptation for business actors to meet the expectations of digital-native generations. Additionally, studies by Chang & Spierings (2023), Sulistyawati et al. (2024), and Yun & Kim (2019) have traced how the narrative of "local coffee" serves as a cultural instrument reinforcing the identity of the emerging middle class in developing cities. Similar conclusions were drawn by Tao & Kim (2022) and Thampi & Priya (2023), who saw café consumption as a form of taste expression and social affiliation.

From a sociological perspective, Wilterdink (2017) has long emphasized the relationship between taste and social class as a form of cultural reproduction. This approach has been utilized by researchers such as Bae & Jeon (2022), Gastélum-Chavira et al. (2024), and Hu et al. (2023) to understand lifestyle consumption within the context of modernity. In Southeast Asia, studies by Choudhary et al. (2021), Haktanir & Gullu (2024), and Tran et al. (2020) show that Indonesian youth often engage in symbolic consumption—including café selection—as a means of constructing personal identity. This tendency is reinforced by findings from Lee et al. (2023), who observed that café choices are frequently perceived as representations of an emerging digital habitus.

However, most of these studies remain concentrated in major urban centers, operating under assumptions of mature digital infrastructure and culture. In a secondary city like Padangsidimpuan, the landscape differs significantly. Café options may be fewer, but such limitations make consumer decisions more strategic, selective, and meaningful. Furthermore, there is a noticeable gap in research specifically exploring how app-based pick-up services—valued for their efficiency—are developing beyond metropolitan areas and influencing local

consumer decision-making. This is especially relevant when linked to middle-class dynamics, the transformation of social spaces, and everyday technology use.

This is where the present study finds its relevance. In this rarely explored context, we can trace subtle but significant social changes—how taste, price, digital convenience, and social image intertwine in a seemingly simple decision like buying coffee. When these dimensions are examined within a local setting that deviates from mainstream narratives, new opportunities arise to reinterpret consumption theories that have thus far been developed primarily based on major urban centers.

This study aims not only to identify consumer preference patterns in café selection and pick-up service usage in Padangsidimpuan, but also to frame these patterns within a broader sociological context—demonstrating how everyday acts of consumption reflect class, lifestyle, and digital habits in secondary urban societies. In doing so, this research contributes to the social sciences and humanities by bridging everyday practice with deeper social structures. It also provides a foundational perspective for developing creative economy policies that are more context-sensitive and grounded in a nuanced sociological understanding of local consumer behavior.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design seperti dalam pandangan Männistö et al. (2020), Strang (2025), and T. Wu et al. (2021). In a cross-sectional approach, data are collected once at a single point, enabling the researcher to capture prevailing attitudes, preferences, and behaviours without the confounding effects of temporal change. The quantitative orientation facilitates statistical generalization from a structured sample to the larger population of coffee-shop patrons in Padangsidimpuan, allowing the strength and significance of hypothesized relationships to be tested objectively. Guided by extant theory, we propose the conceptual model in Figure 1.

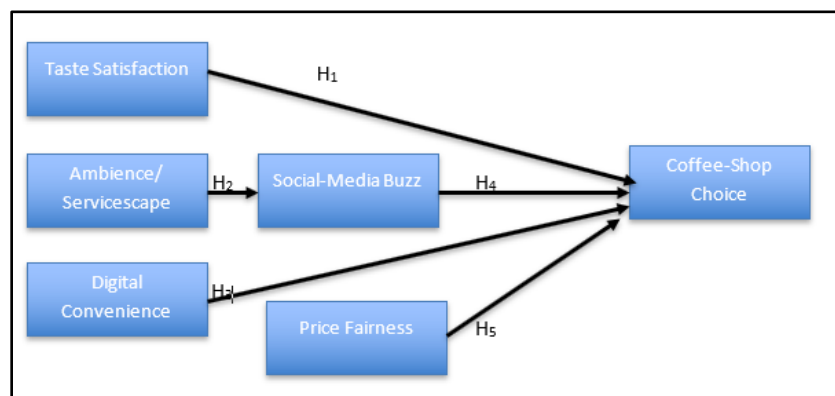


Figure 1 The Conceptual Models
 Source: Research Data Processing Results(2025)

The choice of Padangsidempuan as the research location is not incidental. Although it is not a major urban center, the city exhibits a compelling development in its urban consumption landscape. There are 27 registered cafés spread across several districts, most of which have adopted app-based ordering systems. With the growth of the middle class and increasing digital penetration, Padangsidempuan represents a fitting social laboratory for observing how consumers negotiate between taste, price, convenience, and lifestyle in their everyday decisions.

The target population comprises all café customers who made beverage purchases in Padangsidempuan within the past month. To ensure broad representation, stratified random sampling was employed, with strata based on geographic areas (city center, northeast, southwest) and primary service type (dine-in vs. pick-up). This method was chosen to avoid sampling bias toward a particular service mode and to reflect the diversity of customer profiles. With a $\pm 5\%$ margin of error and 95% confidence level for an unknown population proportion, the minimum required sample was 300 respondents. A total of 332 questionnaires were randomly distributed using an intercept approach to customers exiting cafés (dine-in) or waiting at the pick-up counter. After screening for data completeness, 312 valid responses were obtained, yielding a response rate of 94%.

Respondent profiles showed that the majority were young adults, with a mean age of 24.9 years ($SD = 6.8$). More than half were female, and most were either currently pursuing or had completed tertiary education. Notably, about 41% of respondents reported more frequent use of the pick-up option, emphasizing the role of digital convenience in the local consumption landscape. Demographic and behavioral characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic and Behavioral Characteristics of Coffee-Shop Patrons in Padangsidempuan

Characteristic	Category / Statistic	n (312)	%
Age	Mean (SD)	24.9 (6.8) yrs	—
Gender	Female	168	53.8 %
	Male	144	46.2 %
Education level	Tertiary (in progress or completed)	178	57.1 %
	Senior secondary or below	134	42.9 %
Primary service mode	“Mostly pick-up” customers	128	41.0 %
	“Mostly dine-in” customers	184	59.0 %

Source: Research Data Processing Results(2025)

The research instrument was a self-developed questionnaire in Indonesian, pre-tested with 30 respondents to ensure clarity and readability. The questionnaire covered several constructs, including taste satisfaction, café ambience, digital convenience, price fairness, and social media influence—each measured using a 5-point Likert scale. All items demonstrated acceptable preliminary reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha values ranging from 0.76 to 0.87, as

shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Instrument Development

Construct	Example item	No. of items	α (pilot)	Scale
Taste satisfaction	"The coffee flavour meets my expectations."	4	0.84	1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree
Ambience/servicescape	"The interior design is visually appealing."	4	0.81	5-point Likert
Digital convenience	"Ordering via app saves me time."	4	0.87	5-point Likert
Price fairness	"Prices are reasonable for the quality offered."	3	0.79	5-point Likert
Social-media buzz	"I often share photos from this café on social media."	3	0.76	5-point Likert
Choice indicator	"This is my first-choice coffee shop." (binary: 1 =yes, 0 =no)	1	—	Yes/No

Source: Research Data Processing Results(2025)

To ensure content validity, the instrument draft was reviewed by two marketing academics and one food and beverage industry practitioner. Minor adjustments were made based on their feedback. Data collection was conducted from April 1 to May 15, 2025. Interviewers approached every third customer leaving the café (for dine-in) or waiting for their order (for pick-up). After obtaining informed consent, respondents filled out the questionnaire either in printed form (65%) or via a Google Form link (35%). To encourage participation, each respondent received a free espresso voucher as a token of appreciation.

Data validation and reliability testing were conducted thoroughly. The collected data were processed using SPSS 28 and SmartPLS 4. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed using principal-axis factoring with Promax rotation to identify latent structures, retaining factors based on eigenvalues > 1 and item loadings ≥ 0.50 (KMO = 0.81; Bartlett's test $p < 0.001$). The measurement model was then evaluated using composite reliability (> 0.70), average variance extracted (AVE > 0.50), and heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT < 0.85). Structural relationships were tested using bootstrapping with 5,000 samples, assessing the significance of paths between constructs ($p < 0.05$). As a robustness check, a binary logistic regression analysis was conducted to validate the SEM results, with significant outcomes indicated by Nagelkerke R^2 values and a favorable Hosmer–Lemeshow test (Al-Momani et al., 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Validity of Perceptions and Preferences: Testing the Psychometric Quality of the Instrument

Before assessing the structural relationships within the conceptual model, a critical preliminary step involves ensuring that the measurement instrument accurately captures the dimensions of café customer perception and preference, both validly and reliably. To that end, this study follows a standard two-stage procedure commonly employed in latent construct-based quantitative research: exploratory factor analysis (EFA) followed by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using partial least squares (SmartPLS). This approach not only offers an initial structural understanding of the psychological dimensions under investigation, but also helps prevent misinterpretation due to invalid instrumentation (Reyt et al., 2022; Thampi & Priya, 2023).

The first stage involved EFA using principal-axis factoring and Promax rotation. Of the 18 items distributed across five main constructs, the analysis revealed a clean five-factor structure, explaining 68.4% of the total variance—well above the 50% threshold typically used in social science research (Rahman & Muktadir, 2021). The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) value of 0.81 indicates excellent sampling adequacy, while Bartlett’s test of sphericity yielded significant results ($\chi^2(190) = 2350.7$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting the correlation matrix was suitable for factor analysis.

The EFA results were then confirmed through measurement model analysis in SmartPLS to assess internal consistency, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and potential multicollinearity among indicators. A summary of diagnostic results is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Summary of Measurement-Model Diagnostics

Construct	No. of Items	Loading Range	Composite Reliability (ρ_c)	AVE	Cronbach’s α	VIF (max)
Taste Satisfaction	4	0.75 – 0.87	0.90	0.68	0.86	1.92
Ambience / Servicescape	4	0.70 – 0.83	0.85	0.60	0.80	2.14
Digital Convenience	4	0.72 – 0.86	0.88	0.65	0.84	1.88
Price Fairness	3	0.62 – 0.78	0.82	0.56	0.77	1.64
Social-Media Buzz	3	0.71 – 0.84	0.86	0.66	0.80	1.18

Keterangan: KMO = 0.81; Bartlett $\chi^2(190) = 2350.7$, $p < .001$; total variance explained = 68.4 %; SRMR = 0.046. All HTMT ratios = 0.29–0.78 (< 0.85), maximum cross-loading = 0.27.

Source: Research Data Processing Results(2025)

All constructs demonstrated composite reliability values ranging from 0.82 to 0.90 and Cronbach’s alpha coefficients between 0.77 and 0.86—exceeding the conventional 0.70 threshold recommended by Izah et al. (2023). This suggests that each indicator group consistently represents its intended construct.

Convergent validity was also confirmed, with average variance extracted (AVE) values ranging from 0.56 to 0.68, surpassing the 0.50 minimum threshold (Bhatt, 2020). This indicates

that more than half of the variance in each indicator is accounted for by its latent construct rather than measurement error.

To assess discriminant validity, the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) approach was used. All HTMT values remained below the conservative 0.85 threshold, ranging from 0.29 to 0.78—indicating that the five dimensions measured are statistically distinct and non-overlapping (Azahra et al., 2024; Bayindir & Çalışkan, 2022). Furthermore, variance inflation factor (VIF) values for all items were well below the critical value of 3.3, confirming the absence of harmful multicollinearity.

Interpreting Coffee Consumption Logic: Structural Model Results in Padangsidempuan's Urban Landscape

With a valid and reliable psychometric instrument confirmed, the next step in the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach is to examine the strength of relationships among constructs in the structural model. The goal is to determine the extent to which consumer preference factors—such as taste satisfaction, digital convenience, price fairness, café ambience, and social media buzz—collectively explain café choice decisions in the city of Padangsidempuan.

The analysis revealed a reasonably strong explanatory capacity, with the coefficient of determination (R^2) reaching 0.46 and an adjusted R^2 of 0.45. This suggests that 46% of the variance in café choice can be explained by the five preference factors, a substantial figure in behavioral consumer research—indicating the model captures key drivers of local customer behavior, even if external influences remain.

To test the strength and significance of each path, a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was conducted. Results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4 Structural Model Results

Path	β	t	p	f^2
Taste → Choice	0.33	5.87	< 0.001	0.19
Digital Convenience → Choice	0.28	5.11	< 0.001	0.15
Price Fairness → Choice	0.14	2.32	0.021	0.04
Ambience → Choice	0.06	1.05	0.294	—
Ambience → Social-Media Buzz	0.41	8.64	< 0.001	0.20
Social-Media Buzz → Choice	0.12	2.15	0.032	0.02

Source: Research Data Processing Results(2025)

From the table, it is evident that three main predictors have a significant direct influence on the decision to choose a café. First, satisfaction with the taste of coffee ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.001$) is the most influential factor, reflecting that flavor remains the main axis in beverage consumption, even in a context increasingly driven by digital and lifestyle orientations. Second, digital convenience, particularly in the use of ordering applications ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$),

reinforces the argument that efficiency is now both a rational and symbolic consideration in urban consumer choices. Third, price fairness also shows a significant effect ($\beta = 0.14$, $p = 0.021$), although its contribution is smaller, it still reflects consumer sensitivity to the economic value of each transaction (Chen, 2019).

Interestingly, café ambiance does not directly affect café choice ($\beta = 0.06$, $p = 0.294$), but it has a notable indirect influence through the construct of social media buzz. This mediation path is confirmed through the indirect effect ($\beta_{\text{indirect}} = 0.05$, $p = 0.038$), indicating that café ambiance—with attractive interior design or Instagrammable visuals—encourages consumers to share their experiences on social media, which in turn influences their (or others') café decisions. This represents a form of mediation referred to as complementary mediation, in which the mediating variable strengthens an initially weak or non-significant direct relationship (Grabowsky et al., 2017).

Judging from the level of influence on consumers' decisions to choose a café in Padangsidimpuan, a practical hierarchy can be established that reflects the strength of each factor's contribution. At the top is satisfaction with taste, proven to be the main driver with a moderate but most dominant effect ($f^2 = 0.19$). Authentic flavors aligned with local preferences seem to be the main benchmark in shaping customer loyalty and choices. Closely following is digital convenience—such as ease of ordering via apps and contactless payment systems—with an almost equally strong impact ($f^2 = 0.15$). This reflects society's adaptation to an increasingly digitized lifestyle. Price fairness ranks next; although its contribution is relatively small ($f^2 = 0.04$), it remains significant, showing that consumers still consider economic value in their decisions. Meanwhile, café ambiance does not directly influence decisions but plays a hidden role by encouraging the intention to share experiences on social media ($f^2 = 0.02$).

The structural model used indicates adequate statistical feasibility. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value of 0.046 is well below the recommended threshold of 0.08 for PLS-SEM models, indicating a low level of residual mismatch (Ibrahim et al., 2021). Meanwhile, the d_{ULS} value of 0.62 is also within the recommended range. Furthermore, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) value of 0.89—although slightly below the ideal threshold of 0.90—is still considered acceptable given the model's complexity and the number of indicators involved.

Dual Realities in Consumer Experience: Pick-Up versus Dine-In Preferences

In the evolving coffee consumption landscape in Padangsidimpuan, two main customer experiences are showing very different dynamics: the pick-up mode, which relies on digital efficiency, and the traditional dine-in experience, which offers a venue atmosphere. To empirically capture this difference, this study employed the Partial Least Squares Multi-Group Analysis (PLS-MGA) approach—a non-parametric method that allows for comparison of path coefficients between two groups. By comparing 128 pick-up customers and 184 dine-in customers, and using 5,000 bootstrapped permutations to estimate p-values, the analysis revealed significant differences in the influence of digital preferences on café choice.

As shown in Table 5, digital convenience proves to be the most striking differentiator between segments. For pick-up customers, the path from digital convenience to café choice reached a coefficient of $\beta = 0.42$ —more than double the effect seen in dine-in customers ($\beta = 0.18$). This difference is statistically significant ($p_{\text{diff}} = 0.008$), confirming that for pick-up users, queue speed, app navigation ease, and accuracy of estimated time of arrival notifications are key determinants shaping their decisions. Conversely, for dine-in customers, digital features serve only as a service complement, not a deciding factor.

Nevertheless, taste satisfaction remains a universal foundation in determining customer loyalty. No significant differences were found between the two groups regarding the influence of taste on choice ($\beta_{\text{pick-up}} = 0.31$; $\beta_{\text{dine-in}} = 0.34$; $p_{\text{diff}} = 0.612$), indicating that flavor remains a non-negotiable value—whether for customers enjoying their coffee on-site or taking it away. Likewise, price fairness shows relatively small but comparable effects in both segments ($\sim\beta = 0.14$), indicating that perceptions of economic value remain important once expectations for taste and convenience are met.

Interestingly, the explained variance of the model for pick-up customers reaches 52%, while for dine-in customers it is only 39%. This indicates that the five preference dimensions used in this study better explain the decision logic of mobile customers compared to those who prefer to enjoy coffee on-site. It is likely that the dine-in experience involves additional unmeasured cues, such as seating comfort or social interaction—dimensions that are more hedonic and emotional compared to the utilitarian orientation of pick-up customers.

Table 5 Results Analysis of Pick-up versus Dine-In Segments

Path	$\beta_{\text{pick-up}}$	$\beta_{\text{dine-in}}$	p_{diff}
Digital Convenience → Choice	0.42	0.18	0.008
Taste → Choice	0.31	0.34	0.612
Price Fairness → Choice	0.13	0.15	0.752
R ² (Choice)	0.52	0.39	—

Source: Research Data Processing Results (2025)

These findings carry concrete managerial implications. First, for cafés targeting the pick-up segment, enhancing app performance becomes essential. A seamless digital experience—from ordering to pick-up—can offer a significant competitive advantage. Second, maintaining high taste standards remains non-negotiable, as flavor plays an equal role in both segments. Third, promotional strategies should be tailored: while discounts or bundling may work across segments, time-efficiency perks such as priority lanes may be more effectively targeted at pick-up users.

From a theoretical perspective, the divergence in the influence of digital convenience strengthens the argument for the duality of utilitarian and hedonic preferences in service choices

(Khalikussabir & Waris, 2021; Mayhoub & Rabboh, 2022). When physical interaction is minimized, as in pick-up services, efficiency becomes the top priority. However, for dine-in experiences, more emotional and contextual elements such as ambiance, seating design, or social interaction likely contribute to behaviors not yet fully explained by the current model. Future research may consider adding variables such as seating comfort, social proximity, or brand community attachment to improve the model's explanatory power in the context of dine-in coffee consumption (J. Kim & Kim, 2020; T. Kim & Yun, 2019).

Ensuring Model Robustness: Robustness Test through Logistic Regression

To verify that the findings in the structural model (PLS-SEM) were not merely the result of the estimation method used, this study conducted a robustness test using a binary logistic regression analysis approach. In this model, the dependent variable was coded as 1 for the first-choice coffee shop and 0 for other cafés, in order to capture consumers' explicit preference for a particular coffee shop. This procedure follows the recommendation of Hair et al. (2022) to test the consistency of findings using a more conventional statistical approach.

The model converged after six iterations, with all diagnostic indicators showing model feasibility. The Nagelkerke R^2 value of 0.43 is close to the 46% variance explained in the PLS model, providing strong evidence that the two approaches lead to aligned conclusions. The analysis results are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6 Logistic-Regression Results (N = 312)

Predictor	B	SE	Wald z	p	Odds Ratio (e^B)	95 % CI for OR
Taste Satisfaction	0.33	0.07	22.5	< 0.001	1.39	1.20 – 1.62
Digital Convenience	0.28	0.06	20.0	< 0.001	1.32	1.16 – 1.51
Price Fairness	0.11	0.05	5.1	0.024	1.12	1.01 – 1.25
Ambience / Servicescape	0.06	0.06	1.0	0.315	1.06	0.95 – 1.19
Social-Media Buzz	0.10	0.05	3.9	0.048	1.10	1.00 – 1.22
Constant	-3.14	0.46	46.8	< 0.001	0.04	—

Keterangan: Nagelkerke R^2 = 0.43; Hosmer–Lemeshow $\chi^2(8)$ = 7.88, p = 0.44; overall classification accuracy = 78 %.

Source: Research Data Processing Results(2025)

The logistic regression results reaffirm the predictive strength hierarchy found in the PLS-SEM model. Taste satisfaction remains the strongest predictor of choosing a primary coffee shop, with an odds ratio of 1.39. This means that every one-unit increase in taste perception increases the likelihood of a café being selected as the consumer's first choice by 39%, controlling for other factors. This advantage reinforces the essential role of taste as the anchor of customer loyalty, in line with findings from Suprpto et al. (2024) and Wiastuti et al. (2024).

The factor of digital convenience also shows significant predictive power (OR = 1.32), underscoring the importance of intuitive applications, real-time status updates, and ease of ordering within the digital consumption ecosystem. This is especially relevant in the context of

post-pandemic consumer behavior transformation, which increasingly values efficiency and service autonomy (Harahap et al., 2024). Perceived price fairness exerts a smaller yet still meaningful impact ($OR = 1.12$), supporting the literature that transactional value remains a rational consideration once baseline expectations are met (Gong et al., 2024). In contrast, ambience does not show a statistically significant direct effect ($p = 0.315$), while social-media buzz is on the borderline of significance ($p = 0.048$), strengthening the argument that the influence of spatial atmosphere is more indirect and mediated through the drive to share experiences online.

The stability of results across the two analytical approaches confirms the credibility of the findings. Not only do the two main predictors—taste and digital convenience—consistently emerge as the key drivers of preference, but the results also affirm that these are not artifacts of a particular statistical technique. This provides external validation for the conceptual model built in this study, reinforcing its practical and theoretical implications in understanding consumer behavior at local coffee shops undergoing rapid digital transformation.

Blending Taste, Technology, and Aesthetics: A Discussion on the Dynamics of Consumer Choices for Coffee Shops in Padangsidempuan

The research findings regarding coffee-shop choice highlight the significance of taste satisfaction as a primary determinant of consumer behavior, with a direct effect coefficient of $\beta = 0.33$. This aligns with previous studies conducted, particularly in North Sumatra, where taste was found to be the most critical factor influencing customer satisfaction and loyalty, even when controlling for other factors such as ambience and servicescape (Choudhary et al., 2021; Mayhoub & Rabboh, 2022). This observation reinforces the idea that despite the visual appeal of “Instagrammable” cafés, the intrinsic quality of the drink remains foundational to customer decision-making.

The data further indicates that the digital convenience associated with mobile ordering apps plays a pivotal role, reflected by a coefficient of $\beta = 0.28$ overall and an increased impact of $\beta = 0.42$ among customers who utilize such services to pick up their orders. This finding reinforces the transition in consumer preferences, as recent literature emphasizes that time savings and the ease of the mobile ordering process can be as critical as sensory experiences like taste in influencing repeat patronage. Contemporary insights suggest that utilitarian aspects of service, such as reduced waiting times and effortless transactions, have taken precedence over earlier considerations of ambience and brand symbolism as significant triggers for hedonic consumption (Bae & Jeon, 2022; Haktanir & Gullu, 2024).

While price fairness positively influences coffee shop Choice ($\beta = 0.14$), its role appears less pronounced compared to sensory pleasure and digital convenience. This pattern reflects principles of utilitarian-hedonic consumption theory, which posits that once a baseline value is achieved, experiential attributes tend to drive marginal utility more effectively (J. Kim & Kim, 2020). Interestingly, the study found that while ambience does not directly influence coffee shop

choice, it does have a significant indirect effect through the mechanism of social-media buzz. This suggests that atmospheric design contributes more to creating shareable experiences that resonate with social identity, particularly among digitally-savvy Generation Z consumers inclined to document their experiences online (Grabowsky et al., 2017; Mohammad & Kamran, 2023; Tao & Kim, 2022). The complex interplay of taste, digital convenience, and social engagement underscores the necessity for coffee shop owners in Padangsidempuan to adapt their strategies. This includes focusing on enhancing taste quality while streamlining ordering processes through mobile apps, all while recognizing the role of atmospheric design in crafting experiences that captivate consumers within a social media context.

The theoretical implications derived from the variance analysis in coffee-shop choice provide significant insights into consumer behavior in Indonesia. The findings indicate that utilitarian factors (namely, taste, convenience, and price) alongside hedonic and social elements (specifically, ambience-mediated social buzz) account for 46% of the Variance in shop selection. This proportion is notably higher than the 35%–40 % range reported in earlier studies that did not incorporate digital convenience as a construct (Gastélum-Chavira et al., 2024). This enhancement in Variance underscores the necessity of integrating technology-enabled service encounters into traditional preference models to reflect contemporary consumer choices in coffee shops accurately.

The mediated pathway observed from ambience to choice complements existing servicescape theory. Rather than solely being an affective dimension, “Instagrammability” can be positioned as a distinct mechanism for social signalling, enabling consumers to showcase their experiences online. This aligns with the evolving nature of consumer interactions in service environments, particularly emphasizing the collective identity formation fostered by shared social media moments (Khaeriyah & Nurasia, 2024; C.-K. Wu et al., 2024). Previous research has indicated that while sensory and experiential qualities are crucial for customer satisfaction, the role of social media in amplifying these experiences is increasingly prominent (Ibrahim et al., 2021).

Moreover, the increased emphasis on digital convenience, indicated by the significant effects of mobile ordering features, highlights a paradigm shift in consumer valuation. Although vital, traditional factors such as taste and ambience are now being re-weighted in importance when juxtaposed against the utilitarian benefits of speed and ease of access that mobile apps provide (Chen, 2019; Hu et al., 2023). The impact of convenience, particularly in an era where customers prioritize contactless transactions and reduced wait times, signifies an essential evolution in market dynamics and consumer expectations. Integrating digital elements into the coffee-buying experience alters the landscape of consumer decision-making, suggesting that coffee shop proprietors need to rethink their strategies. Businesses can enhance their market positions by accommodating these new consumer demands, particularly among the digitally active Generation Z. This necessitates balancing high sensory quality and leveraging technology to maximize customer convenience and engagement (T. Kim & Yun, 2019; Lee et al., 2023; Yun & Kim, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussions in this study, it can be concluded that consumer preferences for cafés in the urban area of Padangsidempuan are substantively shaped by a combination of taste-related values and digital accessibility, particularly in the context of pick-up order services. Taste satisfaction emerged as the dominant factor influencing consumer choices, reaffirming the essential role of sensory quality within the local socio-economic preference structure. However, application-based convenience showed a nearly equivalent level of influence, especially among users of pick-up services, indicating a transformation in consumption values toward more practical and automated orientations. The role of ambience—traditionally viewed as a central element in lifestyle consumption—now functions more as a catalyst for social engagement through digital media. This reflects how the digital habitus of younger generations is actively reconstructing the meaning of place and social interaction. Thus, this study not only addresses how preferences and perceptions influence café selection but also reveals a broader shift in the structure of consumption in Indonesia's secondary cities—from symbolic-visceral logics toward utilitarian-circulatory rationalities. In doing so, it extends the theoretical scope of consumption studies and offers a conceptual contribution to understanding how lifestyle and technology co-shape the public sphere of consumption within the context of non-metropolitan urbanization.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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