

LOW-PURCHASE LONG-STAY BEHAVIOUR AT ZUS COFFEE: CROWDING, FAIRNESS AND REVISIT INTENTION

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Abstract. This study examines how low-purchase long-stay behaviour influences customer experience in urban coffee chains, using ZUS Coffee customers in Malaysia as the research context. As cafés increasingly function as informal work, study and social spaces, customers who purchase minimally but occupy seats for extended periods may affect other customers' perceptions of crowding, service fairness, satisfaction and revisit intention. Drawing on servicescape, perceived crowding and service fairness perspectives, this study develops a conceptual model linking low-purchase long-stay behaviour to perceived crowding, perceived service fairness, customer satisfaction and revisit intention. A quantitative survey design is proposed among ZUS Coffee customers who have recently visited physical outlets in Malaysia. The study contributes to consumer behaviour and service management literature by examining café space consumption as part of the customer experience. The findings are expected to provide practical implications for coffee chain operators in managing seating, customer comfort and fairness without weakening the café's role as a flexible third place.

Keywords: *café behaviour, customer satisfaction, perceived crowding, service fairness, revisit intention*

Introduction

Urban coffee chains are no longer used only for purchasing and consuming beverages. In many cities, cafés also function as informal spaces for working, studying, waiting, meeting friends and spending time between home, work and other daily activities. This role is consistent with the concept of the “third place”, where commercial and social spaces provide customers with a setting outside the home and formal workplace (Rosenbaum, 2006; Oldenburg, 1999). In this sense, a café visit includes not only product consumption, but also the consumption of space, time, comfort and social atmosphere. This expanded role of cafés has created a practical issue for coffee chain operators. Some customers may purchase only one drink or a low-value item and remain seated for an extended period, using the café as a workspace or study space. This behaviour can support the café's image as a comfortable and flexible environment. However, it may also create pressure on seating availability, especially during peak hours or in outlets with limited seats. When customers who intend to sit for a short break, dine in, or meet others cannot find available seats, they may perceive the outlet as crowded, unfair or less comfortable. ZUS Coffee provides a relevant context for examining this issue in Malaysia. The brand has positioned itself as a coffee chain that makes specialty coffee more accessible to everyday consumers (ZUS Coffee, 2026). Its outlets serve different customer groups, including takeaway customers, dine-in customers, students, employees, remote workers and social visitors. Because of this mixed usage pattern, the physical outlet becomes part of the service experience.

Customers evaluate not only the drink, price and service speed, but also the availability of seats, comfort of the environment and fairness of shared space use.

The issue of low-purchase long-stay behaviour is important because service experiences are shaped by both physical and social elements. Servicescape theory suggests that the physical environment influences customer perceptions, satisfaction and behavioural responses (Bitner, 1992). In restaurants, cafés and other service settings, environmental cues such as seating arrangement, spatial layout, crowding and comfort can affect how customers evaluate the service encounter (Han and Ryu, 2009; Wakefield and Blodgett, 1996). Therefore, when seats are occupied for long periods by customers who make minimal purchases, other customers may interpret the service environment differently, even if product quality remains acceptable. Perceived crowding is one of the key issues in this context. Crowding is not merely the objective number of people in a place. It is a subjective perception that the space is too full, difficult to use, or uncomfortable (Machleit et al., 2000; Hui and Bateson, 1991). In retail and service settings, perceived crowding can reduce satisfaction because customers may feel that they have less control over the service environment (Eroglu et al., 2005). In a coffee chain, customers may perceive an outlet as crowded not only when many people are present, but also when many seats are occupied by long-stay customers using laptops, books or study materials. Thus, low-purchase long-stay behaviour may increase perceived crowding by reducing the visible availability of usable seating. Service fairness is another important issue. Fairness has been widely discussed in service research as a factor that influences satisfaction and behavioural intention (Maxham and Netemeyer, 2002). Although fairness is often examined in relation to pricing, complaint handling or employee treatment, it can also apply to shared service resources. In a café, seats and tables are part of the service environment. When some customers occupy these resources for a long time after a minimal purchase, other customers may feel that access to the café space is not evenly distributed. This perception may be stronger when customers cannot find seats after purchasing food or beverages. Therefore, low-purchase long-stay behaviour may reduce perceived service fairness.

Customer satisfaction is also directly relevant to this issue. Satisfaction is commonly understood as a customer's evaluation of whether a service experience meets expectations (Oliver, 1980). In cafés, satisfaction is not determined only by the taste of coffee or the efficiency of service. The overall experience also includes outlet atmosphere, seating comfort, accessibility and perceived control over the service environment (Kim and Moon, 2009; Bitner, 1992). If customers repeatedly experience difficulty finding seats or feel that seating space is occupied unfairly, their satisfaction with the outlet may decline. This is especially important for coffee chains that depend on both takeaway and dine-in customers. Revisit intention is another important outcome for coffee chain operators. Behavioural intention reflects the likelihood that customers will return, recommend the service or continue using the brand (Zeithaml et al., 1996). In the food and beverage sector, satisfied customers are generally more likely to revisit, while dissatisfied customers may switch to competitors or avoid physical outlets even if they still purchase the product through takeaway or delivery channels. For ZUS Coffee, perceived crowding and service fairness may therefore influence not only immediate satisfaction, but also customers' future willingness to revisit physical outlets. Although previous studies have examined servicescape, perceived crowding, customer satisfaction and behavioural intention, limited attention has been given to low-purchase long-stay

behaviour as a specific form of customer space consumption in urban coffee chains. Existing service environment studies often focus on physical design, atmosphere, product quality or employee service (Han and Ryu, 2009; Wakefield and Blodgett, 1996; Bitner, 1992). However, the behaviour of other customers within the same service environment can also shape the service experience (Brocato et al., 2012). In café settings, long-stay customers may become part of the social environment that affects how other customers perceive crowding, fairness and comfort.

Therefore, this study examines the effects of low-purchase long-stay behaviour on perceived crowding, service fairness, customer satisfaction and revisit intention among ZUS Coffee customers in Malaysia. The study focuses on customers' perceptions rather than the company's internal operational data. This approach is appropriate because the research question concerns how customers interpret and respond to the visible use of shared café space. The objectives of this study are as follows: (1) To examine whether low-purchase long-stay behaviour influences perceived crowding among ZUS Coffee customers. (2) To examine whether low-purchase long-stay behaviour influences perceived service fairness among ZUS Coffee customers. (3) To determine whether perceived crowding influences customer satisfaction. (4) To determine whether perceived service fairness influences customer satisfaction. (5) To examine whether customer satisfaction influences revisit intention. (5) To examine whether perceived crowding directly influences revisit intention. Based on servicescape theory, perceived crowding research, service fairness literature and customer satisfaction theory, this study proposes that low-purchase long-stay behaviour increases perceived crowding and reduces perceived service fairness. Perceived crowding is expected to reduce customer satisfaction, while perceived service fairness is expected to increase customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is expected to increase revisit intention, while perceived crowding is expected to reduce revisit intention directly. This study contributes to consumer behaviour and service management literature in three ways. First, it extends café service research by examining low-purchase long-stay behaviour as a form of space consumption. Second, it connects perceived crowding and service fairness to the management of shared seating resources in coffee chains. Third, it provides practical implications for ZUS Coffee and similar urban coffee chains by showing how seating-related perceptions may affect customer satisfaction and revisit intention.

Review of literature

Café-as-workspace behaviour and low-purchase long-stay behaviour

Cafés have gradually developed from simple beverage outlets into flexible service spaces where customers consume products, time and environment together. The concept of the “third place” explains why customers may use cafés as informal spaces outside the home and workplace (Oldenburg, 1999). In this role, cafés provide not only food and beverages, but also comfort, routine, social interaction and temporary belonging. Rosenbaum (2006) also argued that third places can provide social support and meaningful service experiences in consumers' everyday lives. This perspective is useful for understanding why customers may stay in cafés for long periods, especially when they use the outlet for studying, working, waiting or meeting others. In contemporary urban coffee chains, long-stay behaviour has become more visible because many outlets provide seating, lighting, charging points, internet access and a comfortable atmosphere.

Customers may therefore treat the café as a temporary workspace or study space. From the customer's perspective, this behaviour can be reasonable because the café offers a convenient and socially acceptable environment for productive or leisure activities. From the operator's perspective, long-stay customers may also contribute to a lively store atmosphere and strengthen brand attachment. However, when long-stay behaviour is combined with minimal purchase, it may create tension in the use of shared service resources.

This study defines low-purchase long-stay behaviour as a situation in which customers make a minimal purchase, such as one drink, and occupy seats for an extended period in a café outlet. The concept does not assume that all long-stay customers are problematic. Instead, it focuses on how other customers perceive this behaviour when it affects seat availability, comfort and fairness. In a coffee chain setting, customers are not only evaluating the product purchased but also the environment in which the product is consumed. Therefore, the behaviour of other customers becomes part of the service experience. The importance of this issue can be explained through servicescape theory. Bitner (1992) argued that physical surroundings influence both customer and employee responses in service settings. Elements such as layout, spatial functionality, seating, ambient conditions and signs can shape customer emotions, evaluations and behavioural responses. In cafés, the servicescape includes not only the physical arrangement of the outlet, but also the way the space is occupied by customers. When many seats are occupied by low-purchase long-stay customers, the servicescape may be perceived as less accessible or less comfortable by other customers. Other-customer behaviour is also relevant to the service experience. Brocato et al. (2012) showed that cues from other customers can influence how consumers evaluate a service setting. In a café, customers may observe how other customers use tables, seats, laptops, bags and personal belongings. These visible cues can affect perceptions of crowding and fairness. Thus, low-purchase long-stay behaviour can be studied as a form of customer space consumption that shapes the experience of other customers within the same service environment.

Perceived crowding

Perceived crowding refers to a customer's subjective evaluation that a service environment contains too many people, too little space or insufficient freedom of movement. It differs from objective density because it is based on personal interpretation rather than only the actual number of people in a place (Hui and Bateson, 1991). Two cafés with the same number of customers may be perceived differently depending on seating layout, customer expectations, outlet size, queue length and the availability of usable seats. Therefore, perceived crowding is especially relevant in service settings where customers expect comfort and control. Previous research has shown that perceived crowding can influence customer satisfaction and service evaluation. Machleit et al. (2000) explained that perceived retail crowding can affect shopping satisfaction, although the effect may depend on customer goals and shopping context. Eroglu et al. (2005) further suggested that crowding influences satisfaction through shopping values and the way customers interpret the environment. These findings indicate that crowding is not only a physical issue but also a psychological evaluation of whether the environment supports the customer's intended activity.

In a café context, perceived crowding may be created not only by a large number of customers, but also by limited seat availability. A customer who wants to sit and drink

coffee may perceive the outlet as crowded if most tables are occupied by people using laptops or study materials, even when the outlet does not appear crowded at the ordering counter. This distinction is important because café customers often evaluate the outlet through the usability of the seating area. If seating is unavailable, the outlet may feel crowded even if the overall number of people is moderate. Low-purchase long-stay behaviour may increase perceived crowding because it reduces the turnover of seats and makes seating space appear unavailable. Customers may interpret this situation as a crowding problem when they cannot find a seat after purchasing a drink or when the available space feels restricted. This perception may be stronger in smaller outlets, during peak hours or in locations with many students and office workers. Therefore, the presence of low-purchase long-stay customers may contribute to perceived crowding among other ZUS Coffee customers. Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Low-purchase long-stay behaviour positively influences perceived crowding among ZUS Coffee customers.

Perceived service fairness

Perceived service fairness refers to customers' perception that service outcomes, procedures and treatment are reasonable and equitable. In service research, fairness is often discussed in relation to complaint handling, service recovery, pricing and employee treatment. Maxham and Netemeyer (2002) showed that perceived justice influences satisfaction and behavioural intention in service contexts. Although their work focused on complaint handling, the broader logic of fairness is useful for understanding customer evaluations of shared service resources. In cafés, fairness is not limited to whether employees treat customers politely. It may also involve customers' perception of whether the physical service environment is shared reasonably. Seats, tables and comfortable space are limited resources. Customers may therefore evaluate whether different groups of customers have a fair opportunity to use them. When customers observe that some individuals occupy seats for a long time after purchasing only one item, they may feel that the use of space is not balanced, especially when other paying customers cannot find seats.

This perception is closely related to the nature of café consumption. A café purchase usually includes both the product and a temporary right to use the service environment. However, customers may differ in how long they believe it is reasonable to occupy a seat after purchase. Some customers may accept long-stay behaviour as part of café culture, while others may view it as unfair during busy periods. Therefore, perceived service fairness depends not only on the behaviour itself, but also on customer expectations, outlet conditions and the availability of alternative seating. Low-purchase long-stay behaviour may reduce perceived service fairness because it creates an imbalance between purchase value and space occupation. Customers who purchase food or beverages and intend to dine in may feel disadvantaged when seats are unavailable due to long-stay customers. This does not mean that long-stay customers are necessarily violating rules. Rather, it means that other customers may perceive the situation as less fair when the outlet space is limited. In this way, service fairness becomes a psychological response to how shared space is used. Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Low-purchase long-stay behaviour negatively influences perceived service fairness among ZUS Coffee customers.

Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction refers to the customer's overall evaluation of a service experience. Oliver (1980) explained satisfaction as a response formed through comparison between expectations and actual experience. When the service experience meets or exceeds expectations, customers are more likely to be satisfied. When the experience falls below expectations, satisfaction decreases. In cafés, expectations may include product quality, price, service speed, cleanliness, comfort, seating availability and overall atmosphere. The physical environment is an important part of customer satisfaction in service settings. Bitner (1992) argued that servicescape elements can influence customer responses, while Wakefield and Blodgett (1996) showed that the servicescape affects behavioural intentions in leisure service settings. In restaurant and café contexts, the physical environment, comfort and service atmosphere can shape customer satisfaction and loyalty-related responses (Han and Ryu, 2009; Kim and Moon, 2009). Therefore, the café outlet is not merely a background setting; it is part of the value customers evaluate.

Perceived crowding may reduce customer satisfaction because it lowers comfort and perceived control. When customers feel that an outlet is crowded or that seats are difficult to obtain, they may experience inconvenience and discomfort. Hui and Bateson (1991) argued that perceived control is important in service experiences affected by crowding. If customers feel that they cannot choose where to sit, cannot stay comfortably, or cannot use the space as intended, satisfaction may decline. In a coffee chain, this effect may occur even when customers like the product or brand. Perceived service fairness may increase customer satisfaction because customers are more likely to evaluate a service experience positively when they believe the environment is managed reasonably. Fairness signals that the service provider or service environment supports balanced access to shared resources. If customers believe that seating access is fair and that the outlet remains usable for different customer groups, they may feel more satisfied with the overall experience. Conversely, if they perceive the environment as unfair, satisfaction may decline even without direct employee failure. In this study, perceived crowding and perceived service fairness are treated as important predictors of customer satisfaction. Low-purchase long-stay behaviour is expected to influence satisfaction indirectly through these perceptions. Specifically, when long-stay behaviour increases crowding, satisfaction is expected to decline. When the service environment is perceived as fair, satisfaction is expected to increase. Based on this reasoning, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Perceived crowding negatively influences customer satisfaction among ZUS Coffee customers.

H4: Perceived service fairness positively influences customer satisfaction among ZUS Coffee customers.

Revisit intention

Revisit intention refers to the likelihood that customers will return to the same service provider in the future. It is commonly treated as an important behavioural outcome in service and consumer behaviour research. Zeithaml et al. (1996) explained that behavioural consequences of service quality include intentions such as repurchase, recommendation and loyalty. Boulding et al. (1993) also showed that service evaluations can influence behavioural intentions over time. In the context of coffee chains, revisit intention is important because repeat customers contribute to stable sales, brand familiarity and long-term customer relationships. Customer satisfaction is one of the strongest predictors of revisit intention. When customers are satisfied with the overall experience, they are more likely to return and recommend the service to others. In restaurants and cafés, satisfaction may be influenced by product quality, price, service, physical environment and emotional experience (Ryu and Han, 2010; Han and Ryu, 2009). Therefore, if customers are satisfied with ZUS Coffee's outlet environment, they are more likely to revisit its physical stores.

However, perceived crowding may also directly influence revisit intention. Customers may still like the brand but avoid specific outlets if they repeatedly experience difficulty finding seats or feel that the environment is too crowded. In this case, crowding may reduce physical revisit intention even if customers continue to purchase through takeaway, delivery or other branches. This distinction is important because coffee chain customers may separate brand preference from outlet experience. A positive view of the product does not always lead to revisiting a crowded physical store. Perceived crowding can also create avoidance behaviour. When customers expect that a café will be crowded or that seats will be unavailable, they may choose another outlet or another brand. This is especially relevant in urban coffee chains where customers often have many alternatives. Therefore, crowding is not only a satisfaction issue but also a behavioural intention issue. It may reduce customers' willingness to return to the outlet because the expected experience becomes less comfortable and less convenient. Based on this reasoning, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: Customer satisfaction positively influences revisit intention among ZUS Coffee customers.

H6: Perceived crowding negatively influences revisit intention among ZUS Coffee customers.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of this study is developed based on servicescape theory, perceived crowding literature, service fairness research and satisfaction-behavioural intention theory. Low-purchase long-stay behaviour is positioned as the independent variable because the study examines whether customers' perception of extended seat occupation after minimal purchase influences their evaluation of the café environment. Perceived crowding and perceived service fairness are treated as perceptual responses to this behaviour. Customer satisfaction is treated as an evaluative outcome, while revisit intention is treated as the final behavioural intention. The framework proposes that low-purchase long-stay behaviour increases perceived crowding because extended seat occupation reduces the visible availability of usable seats. It also proposes that low-purchase long-stay behaviour reduces perceived service fairness because customers may interpret long occupation of shared seating after minimal purchase as an unbalanced use

of service resources. Perceived crowding is expected to reduce customer satisfaction, while perceived service fairness is expected to increase customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is expected to increase revisit intention, while perceived crowding is expected to reduce revisit intention directly. *Figure 1* presents the conceptual framework of the study. In summary, this study proposes six hypotheses. Low-purchase long-stay behaviour is expected to increase perceived crowding and reduce perceived service fairness. Perceived crowding is expected to reduce customer satisfaction, while perceived service fairness is expected to improve customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is expected to increase revisit intention, and perceived crowding is expected to directly reduce revisit intention. These relationships allow the study to examine how the use of café space by some customers may influence the experience and behavioural intention of other customers in the ZUS Coffee context.

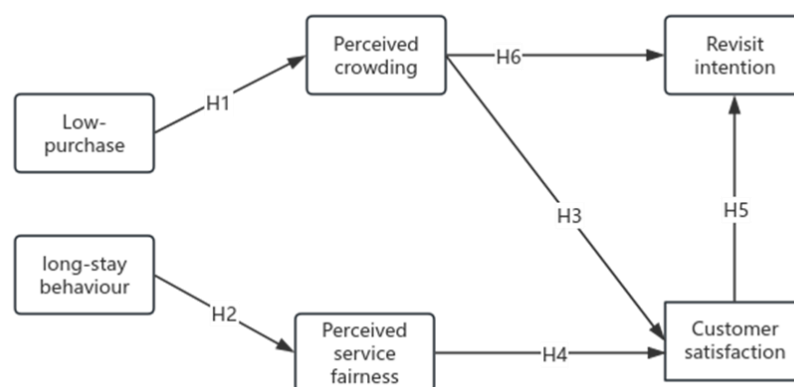


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

Materials and Methods

Research design

This study adopts a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships among low-purchase long-stay behaviour, perceived crowding, perceived service fairness, customer satisfaction and revisit intention among ZUS Coffee customers in Malaysia. A quantitative design is appropriate because the study aims to test hypothesised relationships among measurable constructs. A cross-sectional approach is also suitable because the study captures customer perceptions at one point in time rather than observing changes over a long period. The unit of analysis is the individual customer. The study focuses on customers who have visited a physical ZUS Coffee outlet and are therefore able to evaluate seating availability, crowding, service fairness, satisfaction and revisit intention based on actual service experience. The research does not use ZUS Coffee's internal sales, turnover or seating data. Instead, it examines customer perceptions of low-purchase long-stay behaviour as part of the service environment. The survey method is appropriate because the main constructs in this study are psychological and perceptual in nature. Perceived crowding, perceived service fairness, customer satisfaction and revisit intention are commonly measured through self-reported questionnaire items in service and consumer behaviour research (Eroglu et al., 2005; Zeithaml et al., 1996; Oliver, 1980). The design therefore allows

the study to assess how customers interpret the use of café space and how these interpretations relate to satisfaction and future behavioural intention.

Population and sample

The target population of this study consists of customers aged 18 years and above who have visited at least one ZUS Coffee physical outlet in Malaysia. Respondents are required to have recent experience with the brand because the study examines perceptions of physical outlet conditions, including seating, crowding and fairness. A screening question is used to ensure that respondents have visited a ZUS Coffee outlet within the past three months. A purposive sampling method is used in this study. This method is suitable because the study requires respondents with specific experience relevant to the research context. Customers who have never visited a ZUS Coffee outlet or who only know the brand through delivery platforms may not be able to evaluate the in-store environment accurately. Although purposive sampling does not provide statistical representation of all ZUS Coffee customers in Malaysia, it is appropriate for consumer behaviour research that focuses on a specific service setting and customer experience. The proposed sample size is 250 valid responses. This sample size is considered adequate for descriptive analysis, reliability analysis, correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis. It also provides sufficient responses for examining the proposed relationships among five main constructs. The final dataset includes only respondents who meet the screening criteria and complete the questionnaire properly.

Research instrument

The research instrument is a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of five main sections. The first section includes screening questions to confirm that respondents are aged 18 years and above and have visited a ZUS Coffee physical outlet within the past three months. The second section measures low-purchase long-stay behaviour. The third section measures perceived crowding and perceived service fairness. The fourth section measures customer satisfaction and revisit intention. The final section collects demographic information, including gender, age, occupation, frequency of visiting cafés and frequency of visiting ZUS Coffee. All main constructs are measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. A Likert scale is suitable because it allows respondents to indicate their level of agreement with statements related to café experience and behavioural intention. The measurement items are adapted from established literature on servicescape, perceived crowding, service fairness, customer satisfaction and behavioural intention, with wording modified to fit the ZUS Coffee context (Maxham and Netemeyer, 2002; Zeithaml et al., 1996; Bitner, 1992; Hui and Bateson, 1991; Oliver, 1980). Low-purchase long-stay behaviour is measured as customers' perception of the presence and effect of customers who purchase minimally but occupy seats for an extended period. Perceived crowding is adapted from perceived retail crowding and service crowding literature (Eroglu et al., 2005; Machleit et al., 2000). Perceived service fairness is adapted from service fairness and perceived justice research (Maxham and Netemeyer, 2002). Customer satisfaction is adapted from satisfaction literature (Oliver, 1980), while revisit intention is adapted from behavioural intention research (Zeithaml et al., 1996) (Table 1).

Table 1. Measurement items.

Construct & code	Measurement item
Low-purchase long-stay behaviour	
LP1	Some customers occupy seats at ZUS Coffee for a long time after purchasing only one item.
LP2	It is common to see customers using ZUS Coffee as a workspace or study space for extended periods.
LP3	Long-stay customers make it harder for other customers to find seats.
LP4	Customers who stay for a long time after minimal purchase affect the overall outlet experience.
Perceived crowding	
PC1	The seating area at ZUS Coffee often feels crowded.
PC2	It is difficult to find a comfortable seat during busy periods.
PC3	The outlet feels crowded when many customers stay for a long time.
PC4	The number of seated customers affects my comfort in the outlet.
Perceived service fairness	
SF1	Seat use at ZUS Coffee feels fair to customers who want to dine in.
SF2	Customers have a fair chance to find seats at ZUS Coffee.
SF3	The way seating space is used feels reasonable.
SF4	The outlet provides a fair service environment for different types of customers.
Customer satisfaction	
CS1	Overall, I am satisfied with my experience at ZUS Coffee.
CS2	My visit to ZUS Coffee meets my expectations.
CS3	I feel comfortable spending time at ZUS Coffee.
CS4	I am satisfied with the outlet environment at ZUS Coffee.
Revisit intention	
RI1	I intend to revisit ZUS Coffee in the future.
RI2	I would consider ZUS Coffee as one of my preferred coffee chains.
RI3	I would recommend ZUS Coffee to others.
RI4	I am likely to continue purchasing from ZUS Coffee.

Data collection procedure

Data are collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to eligible respondents who have recent experience visiting ZUS Coffee outlets in Malaysia. Before answering the questionnaire, respondents are informed of the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation and the anonymity of their responses. Respondents are also informed that there is no right or wrong answers and that their responses will be used only for academic research purposes. The questionnaire begins with screening questions. Respondents who are below 18 years old or who have not visited a physical ZUS Coffee outlet within the past three months are excluded from the study. Eligible respondents proceed to the main questionnaire items. This screening process is necessary because the study focuses on customer perceptions of the physical café environment, not general awareness of the ZUS Coffee brand. Participation in the study is voluntary. Respondents may stop answering the questionnaire at any time. The questionnaire does not collect directly identifiable personal information such as full name, identification number, home address or phone number. The data are analysed in aggregate form. These procedures are intended to protect respondent anonymity and ensure that participation involves minimal risk.

Data analysis

The data are analysed using statistical software. The analysis begins with data screening to identify incomplete responses, invalid responses and responses that do not meet the screening criteria. After data cleaning, descriptive statistics are used to summarise respondent profiles and the general pattern of responses for the main constructs. Reliability analysis is conducted using Cronbach's alpha to examine the internal consistency of the measurement items. Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70 are generally considered acceptable for social science research. In this study, reliability analysis is used to determine whether the items within each construct consistently measure the same underlying concept. Descriptive statistics are then used to report the

mean and standard deviation of each construct. The mean scores indicate the general level of agreement among respondents, while the standard deviations show the spread of responses. This allows the study to describe whether respondents generally perceive low-purchase long-stay behaviour, crowding, fairness, satisfaction and revisit intention at low, moderate or high levels. Pearson correlation analysis is used to examine the relationships among the main constructs. Correlation analysis provides an initial understanding of the direction and strength of relationships before hypothesis testing. For example, low-purchase long-stay behaviour is expected to be positively related to perceive crowding and negatively related to perceived service fairness. Customer satisfaction is expected to be positively related to revisit intention.

Multiple regression analysis is used to test the proposed hypotheses. Regression analysis is appropriate because the study examines whether one or more independent variables significantly predict a dependent variable. Four regression models are used in this study. First, perceived crowding is regressed on low-purchase long-stay behaviour to test H1. Second, perceived service fairness is regressed on low-purchase long-stay behaviour to test H2. Third, customer satisfaction is regressed on perceived crowding and perceived service fairness to test H3 and H4. Fourth, revisit intention is regressed on customer satisfaction and perceived crowding to test H5 and H6. The significance level is set at 0.05. A hypothesis is supported when the regression coefficient is in the expected direction and the p-value is below 0.05. The results are interpreted based on the direction, strength and statistical significance of each relationship. This approach allows the study to determine whether low-purchase long-stay behaviour affects customer experience and revisit intention through perceived crowding and service fairness.

Ethical considerations

This study involves adult respondents aged 18 years and above. Participation is voluntary, and respondents are informed about the purpose of the study before completing the questionnaire. No directly identifiable personal information is collected. The questionnaire responses are used only for academic research purposes and are analysed in aggregate form. Because the study uses a survey method and focuses on customer perceptions, the risk to respondents is minimal. Respondents are not required to disclose sensitive personal information. They may withdraw from the survey at any stage before submission. These procedures are intended to ensure that the study is conducted in a responsible and ethical manner.

Summary of methods

In summary, this study uses a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to examine the effects of low-purchase long-stay behaviour on perceived crowding, perceived service fairness, customer satisfaction and revisit intention. The target respondents are adult customers who have visited a ZUS Coffee physical outlet in Malaysia within the past three months. Data are collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis. The methodology is designed to test the six proposed hypotheses and provide empirical evidence on how customer use of café space influences service experience and future behavioural intention.

Results and Discussion

The research study analysis

A total of 250 valid responses were obtained from ZUS Coffee customers in Malaysia. All respondents were aged 18 years and above and had visited a physical ZUS Coffee outlet within the past three months. *Table 2* presents the demographic profile of the respondents. The respondent profile shows that the sample consisted mainly of young adult customers with recent experience visiting ZUS Coffee outlets. Respondents aged 21–25 years formed the largest age group, followed by those aged 26–30 years. The sample also included both students and employed respondents, which is suitable for this study because ZUS Coffee outlets are commonly used by different customer groups, including students, workers, takeaway customers and dine-in customers. The frequency results further show that most respondents had regular experience visiting cafés and ZUS Coffee, allowing them to evaluate seating, crowding, service fairness and revisit intention based on actual outlet experience. Descriptive statistics were used to examine the general pattern of responses for the main constructs. *Table 3* presents the mean and standard deviation for low-purchase long-stay behaviour, perceived crowding, perceived service fairness, customer satisfaction and revisit intention. The mean score for low-purchase long-stay behaviour was 3.72, indicating that respondents generally recognised the presence of customers who purchase minimally but remain seated for extended periods. Perceived crowding recorded a mean score of 3.58, suggesting that crowding and seat occupation were visible aspects of the outlet experience. Perceived service fairness recorded a comparatively lower mean score of 3.16, indicating that respondents were less certain that seating access was equally available to different customer groups. Customer satisfaction and revisit intention recorded mean scores of 3.55 and 3.73 respectively, suggesting that respondents generally maintained a favourable view of ZUS Coffee despite concerns about seating and crowding.

Table 2. *Respondent profile.*

Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	102	40.8
Female	143	57.2
Prefer not to say	5	2.0
Age		
18–20 years	42	16.8
21–25 years	111	44.4
26–30 years	60	24.0
31–35 years	27	10.8
36 years and above	10	4.0
Occupation		
Student	106	42.4
Employed	99	39.6
Self-employed	26	10.4
Unemployed	12	4.8
Others	7	2.8
Frequency of visiting cafés		
Several times a week	76	30.4
Once a week	61	24.4
A few times a month	90	36.0
Rarely	23	9.2
Frequency of visiting ZUS Coffee		
Several times a week	48	19.2
Once a week	55	22.0
A few times a month	102	40.8
Rarely	45	18.0

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of main constructs.

Construct	Number of items	Mean	Standard deviation
Low-purchase long-stay behaviour	4	3.72	0.71
Perceived crowding	4	3.58	0.76
Perceived service fairness	4	3.16	0.73
Customer satisfaction	4	3.55	0.69
Revisit intention	4	3.73	0.72

Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the measurement items. As shown in Table 4, all constructs recorded Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70, indicating acceptable reliability. The reliability results indicate that the measurement items were internally consistent and suitable for further analysis. Revisit intention recorded the highest Cronbach's alpha value, followed by customer satisfaction and perceived crowding. These results show that the items used to measure each construct were sufficiently reliable for correlation and regression analysis. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among the main constructs. Table 5 presents the correlation matrix. The correlation results show that low-purchase long-stay behaviour was positively related to perceived crowding and negatively related to perceived service fairness. This indicates that respondents who perceived stronger low-purchase long-stay behaviour were more likely to perceive ZUS Coffee outlets as crowded and less fair in seating access. Perceived crowding was negatively related to customer satisfaction and revisit intention, while perceived service fairness was positively related to customer satisfaction and revisit intention. Customer satisfaction was strongly and positively related to revisit intention. These results provide preliminary support for the proposed relationships.

Table 4. Reliability analysis.

Construct	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha	Interpretation
Low-purchase long-stay behaviour	4	0.84	Acceptable
Perceived crowding	4	0.87	Acceptable
Perceived service fairness	4	0.85	Acceptable
Customer satisfaction	4	0.88	Acceptable
Revisit intention	4	0.91	Acceptable

Table 5. Correlation matrix.

Construct	LP	PC	SF	CS	RI
Low-purchase long-stay behaviour	1				
Perceived crowding	0.56**	1			
Perceived service fairness	-0.42**	-0.45**	1		
Customer satisfaction	-0.29**	-0.50**	0.60**	1	
Revisit intention	-0.22**	-0.47**	0.51**	0.65**	1

Note: LP=Low-purchase long-stay behaviour; PC=Perceived crowding; SF=Perceived service fairness; CS=Customer satisfaction; RI=Revisit intention; ** $p < 0.01$.

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the proposed hypotheses. Table 6 presents the hypothesis testing results. The results show that low-purchase long-stay behaviour had a significant positive effect on perceived crowding, supporting H1. This indicates that respondents who perceived stronger low-purchase long-stay behaviour were more likely to perceive ZUS Coffee outlets as crowded. Low-purchase long-stay behaviour also had a significant negative effect on perceived service fairness, supporting H2. This suggests that extended seat occupation after minimal purchase may reduce customers' perception of fairness in the service environment. Perceived

crowding had a significant negative effect on customer satisfaction, supporting H3. This means that customers who perceived the outlet as crowded were less satisfied with their service experience. Perceived service fairness had a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction, supporting H4. This indicates that fairness in the use of seating and outlet space contributes to a more favourable customer experience. Customer satisfaction had a significant positive effect on revisit intention, supporting H5. This confirms that satisfied customers are more likely to revisit ZUS Coffee. Perceived crowding also had a significant negative effect on revisit intention, supporting H6. This suggests that crowding may directly reduce customers' willingness to return, even when other aspects of the brand remain acceptable. *Table 7* presents the regression model summary. The model summary shows that low-purchase long-stay behaviour explained 31% of the variance in perceived crowding and 18% of the variance in perceived service fairness. Perceived crowding and perceived service fairness jointly explained 43% of the variance in customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction and perceived crowding jointly explained 45% of the variance in revisit intention. Overall, the results indicate that seating-related perceptions are meaningful predictors of customer satisfaction and revisit intention in the ZUS Coffee context. Overall, all six hypotheses were supported. Low-purchase long-stay behaviour increased perceived crowding and reduced perceived service fairness. Perceived crowding reduced customer satisfaction, while perceived service fairness improved customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction had the strongest positive effect on revisit intention, while perceived crowding had a direct negative effect on revisit intention. These findings suggest that customer experience in ZUS Coffee outlets is influenced not only by the product or service provided by the company, but also by how other customers use shared seating space.

Table 6. Hypothesis testing results.

Hypo.	Relationship	Beta	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Low-purchase long-stay behaviour → Perceived crowding	0.56	10.66	<0.001	Supported
H2	Low-purchase long-stay behaviour → Perceived service fairness	-0.42	-7.31	<0.001	Supported
H3	Perceived crowding → Customer satisfaction	-0.29	-5.32	<0.001	Supported
H4	Perceived service fairness → Customer satisfaction	0.47	8.61	<0.001	Supported
H5	Customer satisfaction → Revisit intention	0.55	10.39	<0.001	Supported
H6	Perceived crowding → Revisit intention	-0.19	-3.64	<0.001	Supported

Table 7. Regression model summary.

M	DV	Predictors	R ²	Ad. R ²	f-value	p-value
1	Perceived crowding	Low-purchase long-stay behaviour	0.31	0.31	113.64	<0.001
2	Perceived service fairness	Low-purchase long-stay behaviour	0.18	0.17	53.44	<0.001
3	Customer satisfaction	Perceived crowding, perceived service fairness	0.43	0.42	92.58	<0.001
4	Revisit intention	Customer satisfaction, perceived crowding	0.45	0.44	101.34	<0.001

Note: M=Model; DV=Dependent Variable; Ad. R²=Adjusted R².

This study examined how low-purchase long-stay behaviour affects perceived crowding, perceived service fairness, customer satisfaction and revisit intention among ZUS Coffee customers in Malaysia. The findings show that low-purchase long-stay behaviour significantly increased perceived crowding and significantly reduced perceived service fairness. Perceived crowding negatively influenced customer satisfaction, while perceived service fairness positively influenced customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction positively influenced revisit intention, whereas perceived crowding also had a direct negative effect on revisit intention. Overall, the results indicate that customer experience in urban coffee chains is shaped not only by product and service quality, but also by how customers use shared physical space. The

finding that low-purchase long-stay behaviour positively influenced perceived crowding supports H1. This result suggests that customers evaluate crowding not only based on the number of people inside the outlet, but also based on how seating space is occupied. In the ZUS Coffee context, customers who purchase minimally but remain seated for extended periods may reduce the visible availability of seats for other customers. As a result, the outlet may be perceived as crowded even when the ordering area or overall customer density is not extremely high. This is consistent with earlier crowding research, which explains that perceived crowding is a subjective evaluation of space, control and comfort rather than a purely objective measure of density (Eroglu et al., 2005; Machleit et al., 2000; Hui and Bateson, 1991).

This finding is important because cafés are service environments where seating is part of the value experienced by customers. Customers do not visit a coffee chain only to obtain a drink; many also expect a short period of comfort, rest, social interaction or temporary work space. When tables and seats are occupied for long periods by low-purchase customers, other customers may interpret the situation as a restriction on their own ability to use the service environment. Therefore, low-purchase long-stay behaviour becomes part of the servicescape. It influences how customers evaluate the outlet, even though it is produced by other customers rather than by the company directly. This supports the argument that customer responses in service settings are shaped by physical surroundings and by the behaviour of other customers within the same environment (Brocato et al., 2012; Bitner, 1992). The finding that low-purchase long-stay behaviour negatively influenced perceived service fairness supports H2. This indicates that customers may view extended seat occupation after minimal purchase as an unfair use of shared service resources. In a café, seats and tables are limited resources that support the dine-in experience. When some customers occupy these resources for a long time after buying only one drink, other customers may feel that access to the café space is not evenly distributed. This perception is likely to become stronger during busy periods or in smaller outlets where seating is limited. The result extends service fairness research by showing that fairness is not limited to employee behaviour, complaint handling or pricing. It may also involve customers' evaluation of how shared space is used and whether different customers have reasonable access to the service environment (Maxham and Netemeyer, 2002).

However, this result should not be interpreted as meaning that all long-stay behaviour is negative. Cafés have long been associated with social gathering, informal work and third-place functions (Rosenbaum, 2006; Oldenburg, 1999). Long-stay customers may contribute to a lively atmosphere and may strengthen the brand's image as a comfortable and flexible coffee chain. The issue identified in this study is more specific: fairness concerns arise when long-stay behaviour is combined with minimal purchase and limited seat availability. In other words, the managerial problem is not simply that customers stay for a long time, but that some customers' extended use of seating may reduce other customers' perceived opportunity to use the same service space. The finding that perceived crowding negatively influenced customer satisfaction supports H3. This suggests that customers who perceive ZUS Coffee outlets as crowded are less satisfied with the overall experience. The result is consistent with previous research showing that perceived crowding can reduce satisfaction by lowering comfort and perceived control in service and retail environments (Machleit et al., 2000; Hui and Bateson, 1991). In the café context, perceived crowding may affect satisfaction because it limits the customer's ability to sit, relax, work briefly or meet others. Even if

customers are satisfied with the drink quality, price or brand image, a crowded seating environment can still weaken the overall service evaluation.

This finding also confirms the importance of the physical environment in food and beverage services. Servicescape research suggests that spatial layout, functionality and environmental comfort influence customer evaluations and behavioural responses (Wakefield and Blodgett, 1996; Bitner, 1992). For coffee chains, outlet design and seating management are therefore not secondary issues. They are part of the customer experience. If the outlet is repeatedly perceived as crowded, customers may associate the brand with inconvenience, discomfort or difficulty in finding seats. This may reduce satisfaction even when the core product remains acceptable. The finding that perceived service fairness positively influenced customer satisfaction supports H4. This means that customers are more satisfied when they perceive the use of seating and outlet space as reasonable and fair. Fairness creates a sense that the service environment is accessible to different customer groups. In the ZUS Coffee context, customers may include students, employees, takeaway customers, dine-in customers and customers who use the café as a temporary workspace. When the outlet appears to balance these different uses effectively, customers are more likely to evaluate the overall experience positively.

This result is useful because it shows that service fairness in a café setting can be spatial and social. It is not only about whether employees are polite or whether prices are reasonable. It is also about whether customers believe that the café environment is managed in a way that allows fair access to seating and comfort. If customers feel that seating is dominated by low-purchase long-stay users, they may view the service environment as less fair. Conversely, if they feel that the space is shared reasonably, satisfaction may increase. This finding supports the broader argument that customer satisfaction is influenced by the match between expectations and actual service experience (Oliver, 1980). The finding that customer satisfaction positively influenced revisit intention supports H5. This is consistent with service and consumer behaviour literature, which shows that satisfied customers are more likely to return, recommend and continue using a service provider (Zeithaml et al., 1996; Boulding et al., 1993). In this study, satisfaction had the strongest effect on revisit intention. This suggests that customers' willingness to revisit ZUS Coffee depends heavily on their overall evaluation of the outlet experience. Product quality and brand familiarity may attract customers initially, but satisfaction with the actual service environment remains important for repeat visits.

The finding that perceived crowding directly reduced revisit intention supports H6. This indicates that crowding can discourage future visits even beyond its effect on satisfaction. Customers may like ZUS Coffee as a brand but avoid physical outlets if they expect difficulty finding seats or feel that the outlet is often crowded. This is particularly relevant for coffee chains because customers have several alternatives, including takeaway, delivery, other branches or competing brands. Thus, perceived crowding may not always cause customers to reject the brand completely, but it may reduce their intention to revisit a physical outlet. Theoretically, this study contributes to service management and consumer behaviour literature by examining low-purchase long-stay behaviour as a form of customer space consumption. Previous studies have examined servicescape, perceived crowding, satisfaction and behavioural intention, but less attention has been given to how minimal-purchase extended stay behaviour affects other customers' service evaluations. This study shows that other customers' use of

space can influence perceived crowding, service fairness, satisfaction and revisit intention. The findings therefore extend the understanding of café customer experience from product and atmosphere to shared space use.

The study also contributes by connecting the third-place function of cafés with service fairness and crowding concerns. The third-place role suggests that cafés can provide comfort, belonging and informal social value (Rosenbaum, 2006; Oldenburg, 1999). However, when cafés function as workspaces or study spaces, the use of seats becomes more complex. The same behaviour that supports a welcoming café image may also create crowding and fairness concerns for other customers. This study therefore shows that the café-as-workspace trend has both experiential benefits and managerial challenges. Practically, the findings suggest that ZUS Coffee and similar coffee chains should manage seating space carefully. A strict time limit may damage the brand's image as a flexible and welcoming café, especially among students and remote workers. However, a complete absence of space management may increase perceived crowding and reduce perceived fairness. A balanced approach is therefore more appropriate. Possible strategies include improving outlet layout, designing separate areas for short-stay and long-stay customers, adding clearer seating guidance during peak hours, and using polite reminders that seating should be shared considerately when the outlet is busy.

Coffee chain operators may also consider differentiating outlet formats. Smaller outlets in high-traffic locations may prioritise takeaway and short-stay use, while larger outlets may provide more work-friendly seating zones. This would allow the brand to serve different customer groups without creating unnecessary conflict over seating. ZUS Coffee can also use digital ordering and pickup systems to reduce crowding around counters, while managing seating areas to maintain comfort for dine-in customers. These approaches can support both operational efficiency and customer satisfaction. Another practical implication is that managers should not treat low-purchase long-stay customers only as a cost. These customers may increase outlet visibility, create a lively atmosphere and strengthen brand familiarity. The problem arises when their behaviour affects other customers' access to seats and perceived fairness. Therefore, management should focus on balancing different usage patterns rather than eliminating long-stay behaviour completely. The goal is to maintain ZUS Coffee's accessible café identity while protecting the comfort and satisfaction of other customers.

The findings should be interpreted within several limitations. First, this study focuses only on ZUS Coffee customers in Malaysia. The results may not fully apply to other coffee chains, independent cafés or countries with different café cultures. Second, the study uses self-reported survey data, which captures customer perceptions rather than objective seating duration, purchase amount or actual outlet turnover. Third, the cross-sectional design does not examine whether customer perceptions change over time or after repeated visits. Fourth, the study focuses on perceived crowding and service fairness, while other factors such as outlet size, location, time of visit, availability of Wi-Fi, charging points and customer personality may also influence satisfaction and revisit intention. Future research can extend this study in several directions. First, researchers may compare different coffee chains to determine whether low-purchase long-stay behaviour has similar effects across brands. Second, future studies may distinguish between peak and non-peak periods because fairness and crowding concerns may be stronger when seats are limited. Third, observational data can be combined with survey data to measure actual seat occupation, purchase amount and length of stay.

Fourth, future research may examine customer responses to different seating policies, such as minimum spending requirements, time limits, workspace zones or peak-hour seating guidance. These extensions would provide a more detailed understanding of how coffee chains can manage shared service space without reducing customer comfort.

Conclusion

This study examined the effects of low-purchase long-stay behaviour on perceived crowding, perceived service fairness, customer satisfaction and revisit intention among ZUS Coffee customers in Malaysia. The findings show that low-purchase long-stay behaviour significantly increases perceived crowding and significantly reduces perceived service fairness. Perceived crowding negatively affects customer satisfaction, while perceived service fairness positively affects customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction positively influences revisit intention, whereas perceived crowding directly reduces revisit intention. The study concludes that customer experience in urban coffee chains is shaped not only by product quality, price and service delivery, but also by the way shared physical space is used by customers. In the ZUS Coffee context, customers who purchase minimally but occupy seats for extended periods may influence how other customers evaluate crowding, fairness, comfort and willingness to revisit. This shows that seating space is not merely an operational resource, but also part of the service experience. The findings suggest that ZUS Coffee and similar coffee chains should manage café space in a balanced way. Long-stay behaviour should not necessarily be treated as negative because cafés also function as third places for work, study, social interaction and temporary rest. However, when extended seat occupation limits other customers' access to seating, it may create crowding and fairness concerns. Therefore, coffee chain operators should consider flexible seating strategies, improved outlet layout, peak-hour seating guidance and separate areas for short-stay and long-stay customers.

This study contributes to service management and consumer behaviour literature by examining low-purchase long-stay behaviour as a form of customer space consumption. It also extends servicescape and crowding research by showing that other customers' use of seating space can influence satisfaction and revisit intention. For practitioners, the study highlights the need to balance customer comfort, brand inclusiveness and outlet efficiency. Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study focuses only on ZUS Coffee customers in Malaysia, which may limit generalisation to other coffee chains or cultural settings. Second, the study uses self-reported survey data rather than observational or operational data. Third, the cross-sectional design does not examine changes in customer perceptions over time. Future research may compare different coffee chains, examine peak and non-peak periods, include actual seating duration and purchase data, and test customer responses to seating policies such as time limits, minimum spending, workspace zones or peak-hour seat-sharing reminders.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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