

PUBLIC CATERING SERVICES OF A CAFE – A WAY OF HUMAN INTERACTION

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***Abstract.** The paper analyzes the role of the café as a public catering space and as a medium for social interaction, highlighting the importance of the services offered in creating a complex experience for consumers. The café is not only a place for consuming specific drinks and products, but also becomes a framework for communication, socialization and exchange of ideas, adapted to the requirements of contemporary society. By studying the components of food services – product quality, staff competence, ambiance and customer relationship – the paper emphasizes how they contribute to satisfying the emotional and social needs of consumers. It also analyzes the evolution of the café concept, from the traditional function of a meeting place to the modern dimension of a cultural and community space. In conclusion, the public catering services offered by a café can be considered not only an economic activity, but also a form of human interaction that supports social cohesion and the diversity of interpersonal relationships.*

***Key words:** public catering services; social interaction; emotional and social needs; cultural and community space.*

INTRODUCTION

Foodservices represent one of the most dynamic segments of the hospitality industry, as they combine the economic dimension of service provision with the social and cultural dimension of human interaction. In a world marked by digitalization, speed and continuous changes in consumer behavior, food spaces – especially cafes – are becoming more than simple places of consumption: they are transformed into spaces of communication, socialization and collective experience [2,4,5].

The cafe, as a particular form of foodservice establishments, has established itself over time as a symbol of urban sociability. According to Minciu [8], these establishments offer not only products – drinks, snacks or sweet dishes – but also a setting for relaxation, conversation and reflection. In the coffee shop space, the act of consumption takes on a relational dimension: the customer does not just buy the coffee, but the experience that accompanies it – the ambiance, the atmosphere, the dialogue with the staff, and the feeling of belonging to a place.

Băltărețu [1] emphasizes that in public catering, service cannot be separated from the person who provides it, as the human component is essential for the perception of quality. In a café, this dimension is amplified: the relationship between the barista and the customer, the way of serving, nonverbal communication and attention to detail become defining factors of consumer satisfaction. Here, human interaction becomes the core of the consumption experience [3,7].

Also, from a sociological perspective, the café has always been a space of social cohesion and cultural exchange, a place of free dialogue and meetings between people with diverse interests and identities [9,11,12]. Today, these traditional functions are being redefined in relation to new consumer trends: the orientation towards artisanal products, personalized experiences, sustainability and social responsibility [4,15].

Economically, public catering services make an important contribution to local development, by creating jobs, stimulating local production and strengthening the image of

the community. According to Stănciulescu [10], catering establishments are not only profit centers, but also social actors, actively participating in shaping consumer behavior and promoting cultural values.

Modern cafes combine urban aesthetics with hospitality values and new consumer demands – comfort, authenticity, sensory experiences. They become places where interpersonal relationships are regenerated through simple gestures: a greeting, a smile, a conversation over a cup of coffee. These interactions create an invisible network of social ties that go beyond the commercial purpose of the activity.

This paper aims to analyze the public catering services of a café from the perspective of human interaction, highlighting how the serving process, the atmosphere and the behavior of the staff contribute to building a social and emotional experience for the consumer. In this regard, the research has the following objectives:

- identifying the specific characteristics of the services offered in a café;
- analyzing the behavior of the staff and the impact of the interaction on customer satisfaction;
- highlighting the role of the ambiance and communication in the relationship between staff and the consumer;
- formulating directions for improving catering services from the perspective of human relations.

Therefore, the study has a double stake: on the one hand, economic, by analyzing the efficiency of catering services, and on the other hand, human, by understanding the emotional and social dimension of consumption in a café. As Weaver [13] notes, modern tourism and hospitality can no longer be reduced to economic transactions, but must be viewed as processes of cultural and social interaction between people.

Thus, the research contributes to the understanding that a café is, first and foremost, a place of people – a space where services, products and human interactions combine to create an authentic hospitality experience.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The purpose of the work was to evaluate customer perceptions of a cafe's public catering services and the role of human interaction (ambiance, staff behavior, communication).

As specific objectives, we set out to measure overall satisfaction; evaluate the dimensions of service (promptness, friendliness, competence, atmosphere); identify factors that influence the intention to return/recommend

The study was a quantitative, cross-sectional one, based on a self-administered/face-to-face questionnaire, applied to customers of the Moncafe cafe in Lugoj during the period February-May 2025, covering 2 weekends, to a sample of 350 people.

The target population consisted of customers of the cafe, aged ≥ 18 years, who consumed at least one product on the day of application.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The history of the coffeehouse is closely linked to the spread of coffee consumption around the world and the evolution of social customs associated with it. Originating in the Middle East, coffee began to be widely consumed in Yemen in the 15th century, initially used for religious purposes and to stimulate alertness during prayers [14]. The first proper coffeehouses appeared in the cities of Mecca and Constantinople in the 16th–17th centuries, as places for conversation, reading, and the exchange of ideas [6]. The spread of coffeehouses in Europe was rapid, with the expansion of Ottoman trade and sea routes.

Around 1650, the first European coffeehouse is attested in Oxford, followed by the opening of similar establishments in London, Paris, and Vienna. These spaces quickly became centers of socialization, information, and urban culture, frequented by intellectuals, merchants, and artists [14].

In the 18th century, the coffeehouse became a representative social institution of the modern city. In Vienna, it became a symbol of refinement, and in Paris – a center of literary and political life, where Enlightenment ideas were debated. English coffeehouses, known as penny universities, were places where, in exchange for a cup of coffee, one could find out the news, discuss business, and even learn new things [5].

In Romania, the first coffee shops appeared in the second half of the 17th century, in Bucharest and Iași, with the oriental and commercial influences coming from the Ottoman Empire [9]. In the 19th century, they became representative spaces of urban life, frequented by writers, politicians and artists. Famous coffee shops such as the “Capșa Cafe” in Bucharest or the “Café Central” in Vienna became true cultural landmarks, associated with dialogue, creation and freedom of expression [8].

Nowadays, the coffee shop has retained its function as a social space, while adapting to modern consumer trends. Contemporary coffee shops combine tradition with innovation: they offer artisanal products, coworking spaces and multisensory experiences, while maintaining their social role as a place of meeting and communication [15].

Thus, from the first oriental places to modern cafes, their history reflects the evolution of human relationships, urban culture and people's desire to share ideas, emotions and experiences in a familiar and warm setting.

Most of the respondents are those who come to the cafe daily, followed by customers who visit the cafe several times a week frequently. Only one respondent told us that this was his first visit to the cafe taken into the study (Figure 1).

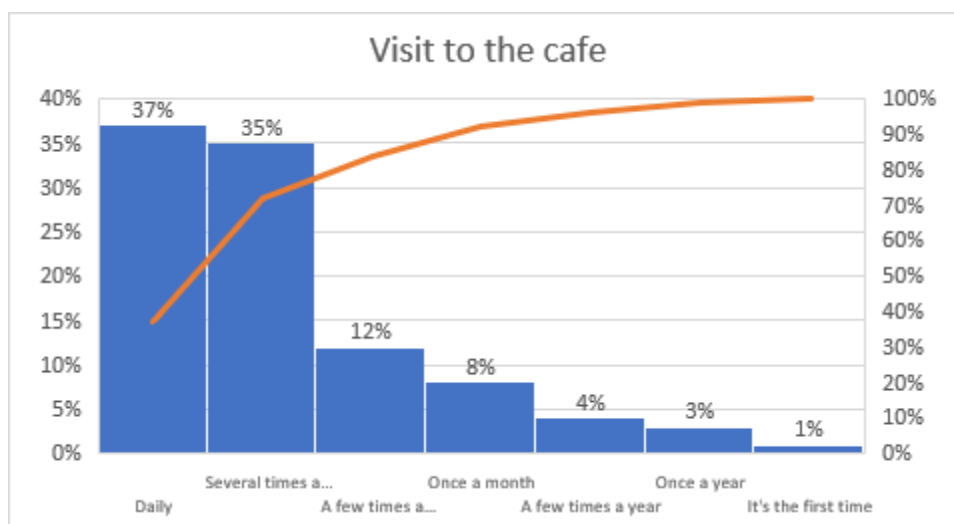


Figure 1. Visit to the cafe

Source: data obtained from processing the questionnaire

All the people interviewed unanimously agreed that the attitude of the café staff is appropriate, the staff being extremely kind, prompt, communicative and pleasant, eager to satisfy all customer requirements, making serving customers a pleasant, fast and compliant activity (Figure 2).

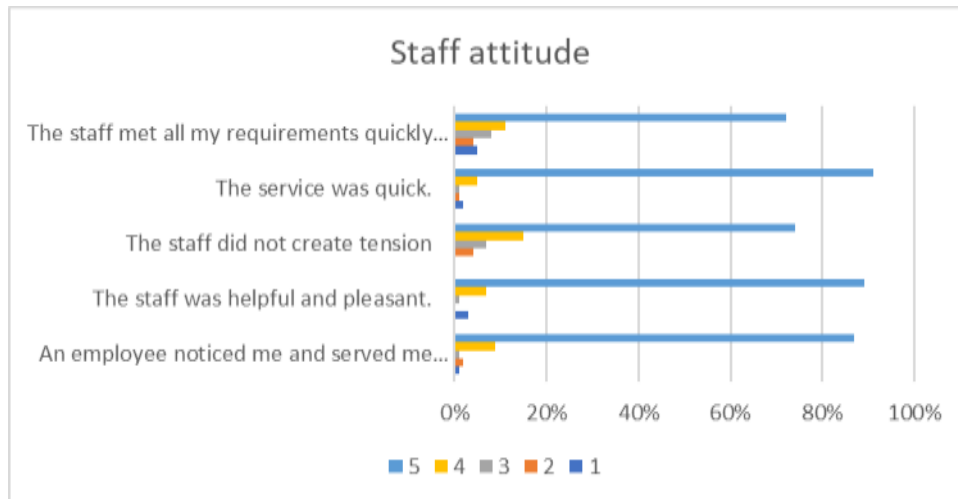


Figure 2. Staff attitude

Source: data obtained from processing the questionnaire

The main attribute in choosing a café is the prices it charges, followed by the quality and speed of service and the very pleasant and welcoming ambience of the place, attributes chosen by over 90% of those interviewed. Equally important are the quality and taste of the dishes served, along with the menu offered by this café, with respondents to these two attributes falling between 82 and 89%. Not without importance but with a lower level of appreciation (78%) was the internet connection which, at certain times, left much to be desired (Figure 3).

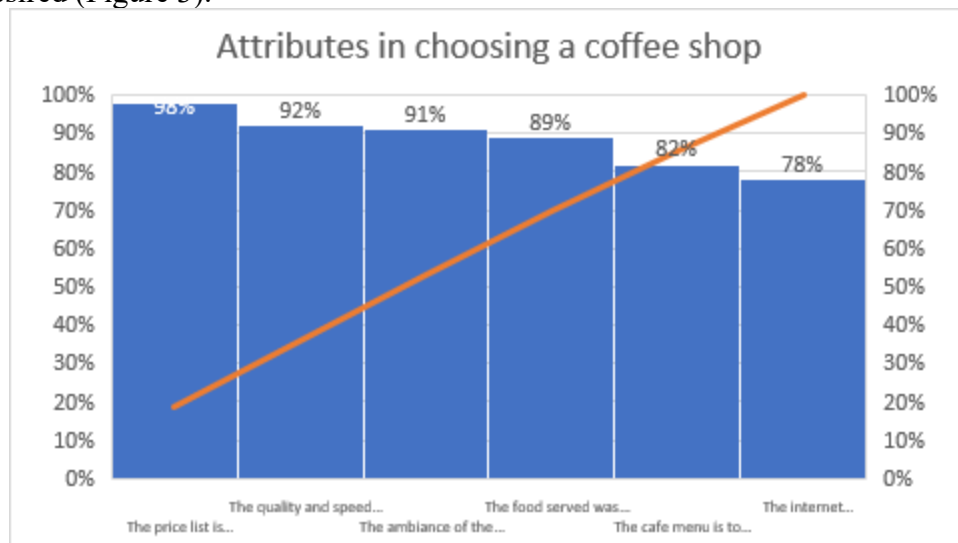


Figure 3. Attributes in choosing a coffee shop

Source: data obtained from processing the questionnaire

Regarding the evaluation of the services that the café offers to its customers, they were asked to give grades from 1 to 5 where 1 represents unsatisfactory and 5 excellent. As can be seen from figure 3.10, the level of satisfaction, contentment with regard to the services offered is extremely satisfactory (Figure 4).

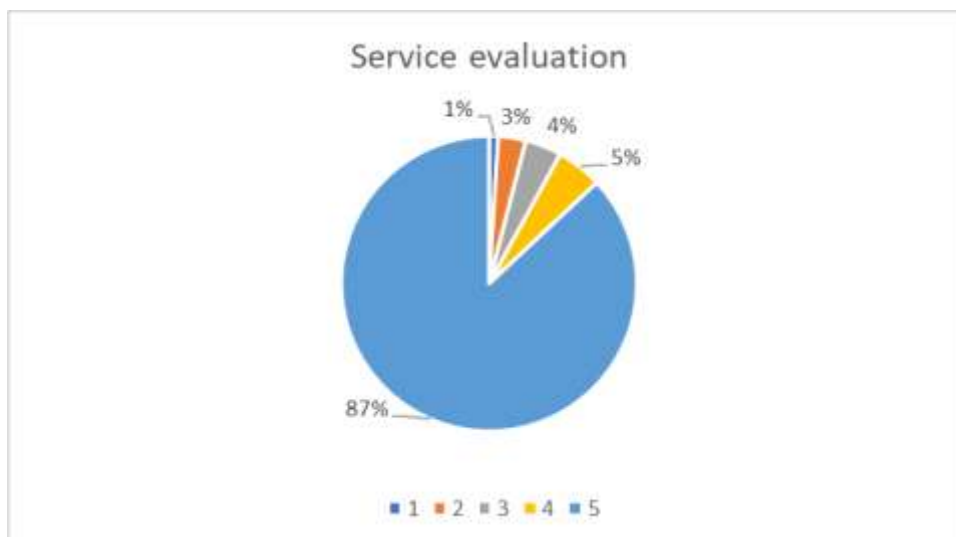


Figure 4. Service evaluation

Source: data obtained from processing the questionnaire

Unanimity can also be observed in terms of recommending the cafe to friends, family, and acquaintances, with 98% of respondents stating that they would and will recommend the cafe (Figure 5).

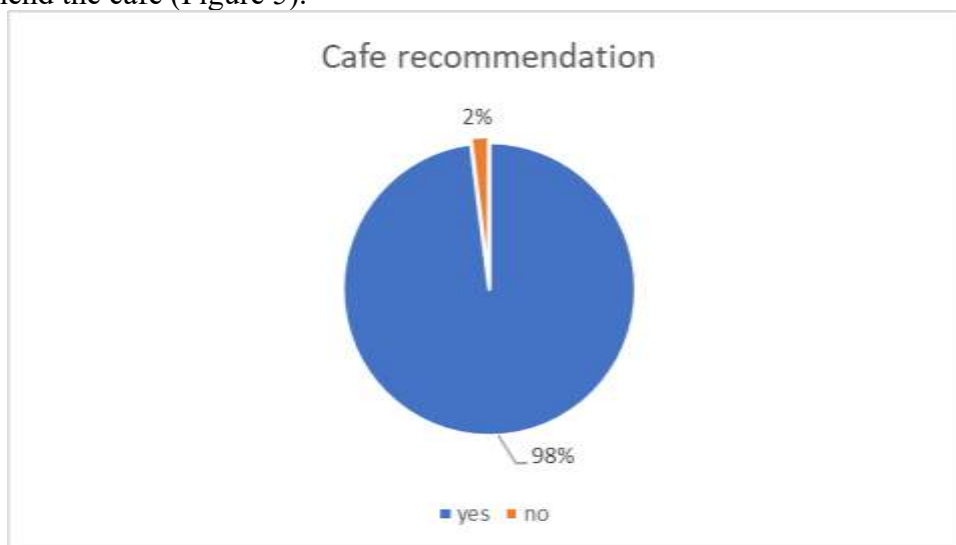


Figure 5. Cafe recommendation

Source: data obtained from processing the questionnaire

Regarding the gender of those interviewed, we can observe a certain balance from this point of view, taking into account that the location is one that is quite aimed at families (Figure 6).

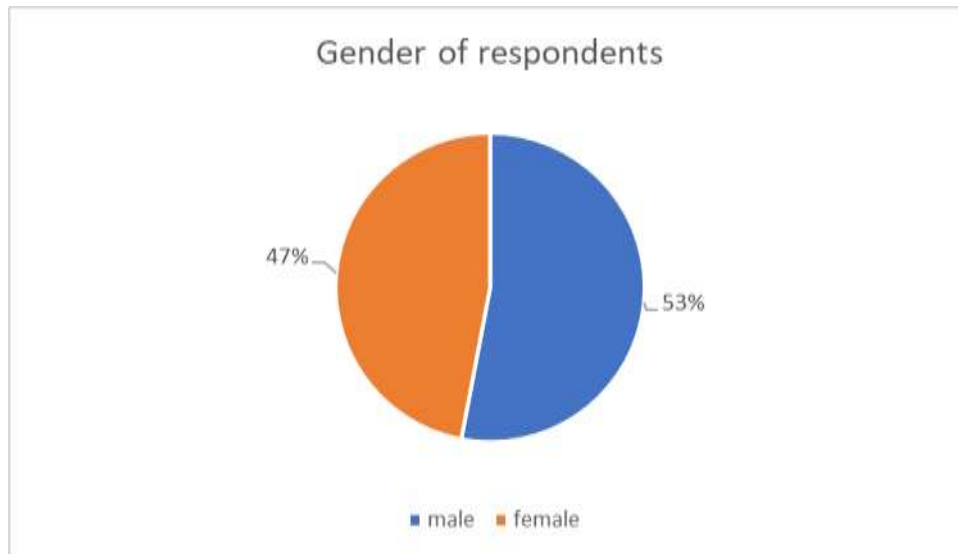


Figure 6. Gender of respondents

Source: data obtained from processing the questionnaire

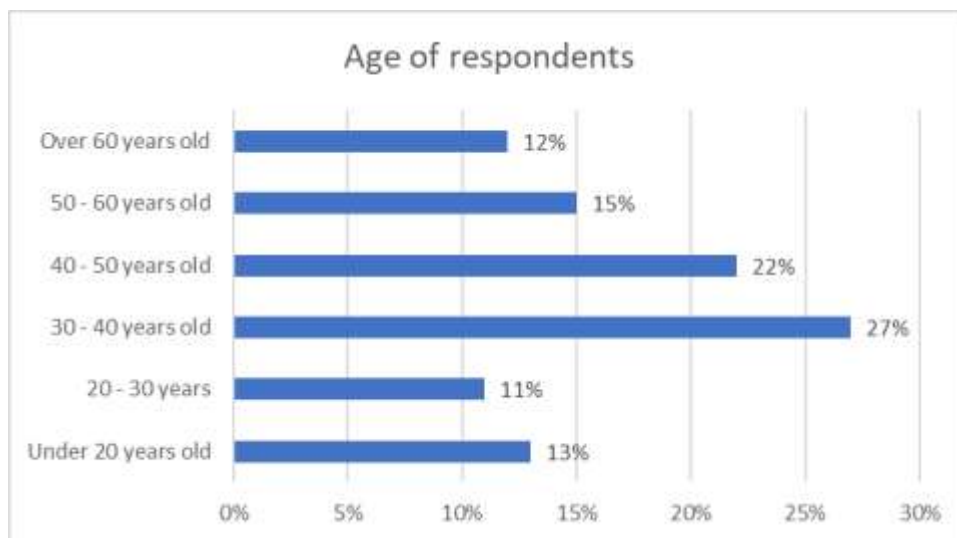


Figure 7, Age of respondents

Source: data obtained from processing the questionnaire

Most of those who frequent the cafe fall into the 30-40 age group, followed by those between 40-50, mature people with families and responsibilities (Figure 7).

CONCLUSIONS

Opening a coffee shop business can be an excellent opportunity for both entrepreneurs at the beginning of their careers and those who have previously worked in the HoReCa field. Such a business is relatively easy to organize and the Romanians' appetite for coffee makes it extremely opportune, because coffee sales have an upward trend, consuming various high-quality coffee-based drinks, prepared with professional machines, drinks that have a special taste. In this field, organizing a business is quite simple, within the reach of any type of entrepreneur, regardless of whether they have experience or not. Taking into account the fact that modern life, the one of today, is an active life and people are constantly on the move, coffee has become, without a doubt, the

favorite drink of active people, providing energy and delighting, to the same extent, the olfactory buds through the numerous subtle aromas offered by the countless variants of drinks prepared with the help of coffee beans.

Three variants currently available to entrepreneurs, through the high chances of success we can say that three stand out:

- Coffee to go, the concept that is based on selling coffee preparations to those customers in a hurry, who do not have the time to sit for a while to enjoy their favorite drink. This type of small cafe has certain advantages such as the need for a small space to organize the business, less expensive equipment, a small number of employees serving the location. However, in order to have the expected success, the business must be located in areas with a large influx of buyers and the fact that there are no spaces arranged for customers who want to drink coffee sitting down is a big disadvantage.

- Coffee shop, a medium-sized café that can serve several dozen customers at the same time. Setting up such a space is expensive in terms of the related furniture and equipment, as more employees are needed at the same time, however, the business has the advantage of being able to serve several types of drinks as well as other products, such as pastries, breakfast, juices.

- Thematic café, a business that is more difficult to organize, its effort will not only be directed towards serving coffee-based drinks but also towards creating and arranging a luxurious space, with a tailored design, which represents a certain theme. Many customers prefer to drink coffee in attractive, relaxing places, a space that takes them out of the atmosphere of big cities, at least for a while. Quite high expenses are required for setting up these spaces, but the financial effort is worth it considering that the prices of the drinks that will be served at the location will be much higher.

Entrepreneurs who want to get involved in a business of this type will have to pay special attention to the use of elements in order to create the appropriate atmosphere:

- style, the café requiring a unified arrangement: classic, modern, traditional, rustic style.

- colors chosen according to style: cheerful colors, shades of stainless steel for the modern style and neutral colors for the classic style, which will not disturb the eye.

- respect for the theme and design and for the furniture, which must be comfortable, not to disturb movement.

- take into account the decorative role of lighting, the level of brightness must be chosen carefully, to the liking of customers and decorative lamps should be used.

- choosing decorations in line with the theme that has been implemented.

- the role of music in the location will be that of relaxation, it being chosen in such a way that it is to everyone's liking

- in the months with pleasant temperatures, the terraces are the favorite space of customers. Terraces that can be used by a large number of customers are recommended, such as gardens full of greenery, and if such terraces cannot be arranged, a few tables can be placed on the sidewalk in front of the cafe, following Parisian fashion, which requires the approval of the city hall.

Opening a coffee shop can be a good idea and opportunity for entrepreneurs, a way to offer high-quality services and develop a profitable business.

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