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A Study on Urbanization and Globalization Impact on Coffeehouse Culture in India

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Abstract

This study looks at how urbanization and globalization have changed coffeehouse culture in India, a country traditionally known for tea. Over the years, coffeehouses have become popular in cities, especially among middle-aged working professionals, as spaces for socializing. The research focuses on the relationship between local and international coffeehouse brands, showing how global chains have influenced the quality and atmosphere of coffeehouses in India while pushing local brands to improve. Using an online survey of 135 people from different cities, the study found that people visit coffeehouses mainly for personal reasons, valuing good coffee and a pleasant environment. While many prefer local brands, international chains have also made a mark by offering standardized experiences and adapting their menus to suit Indian tastes. The study highlights how globalization has brought positive changes to India's coffee culture but notes some gaps, such as limited responses from younger age groups and a lack of focus on price versus quality. These findings help us understand how coffeehouses have grown as social spaces in urban India and how local and international brands are shaping this culture.

Keywords: Coffee, Urbanization, Coffeehouse, Globalization, Coffeehouse Culture, Café, Urbanization, Globalization, Urbanization, Globalisation

INTRODUCTION

The study aims to explore the transformative impact of urbanization and globalization on consumer habits, particularly in the context of coffeehouse culture in India. Traditionally, India has been known as a nation of tea lovers, with the humble tea and snacks forming an integral part of daily life. Tea stalls, often small and unassuming, dotted the landscape of Indian cities and towns, serving as informal social hubs where people from all walks of life gathered to share secrets, discuss life, and exchange the latest gossip. These modest kiosks, managed by local vendors, held a significant place in Indian culture, providing more than just a cup of tea; they were spaces of connection and community.

However, the landscape of beverage preferences in India has evolved significantly, influenced by the forces of urbanization and globalization. The traditional tea culture, though still prevalent, has faced competition from the growing coffee culture, especially in urban areas. Historically, coffee consumption in India was largely confined to the southern parts of the country, where filter coffee—a blend of chicory and Arabica—was favoured. But with the rapid urbanization and economic liberalization of the 1990s, India witnessed a shift in consumer preferences. The growing middle class, with increased disposable income and exposure to global trends, began to embrace coffee as a symbol of modernity and cosmopolitan lifestyle.

This shift was further accelerated by the influx of international coffeehouse chains into India, which catered to the evolving tastes of urban consumers. The migration of the workforce from smaller towns to urban centres, coupled with the expansion of these towns into second-tier cities, created a fertile ground for the coffeehouse culture to flourish. The entry of international brands brought with it a cosmopolitan ethos, making coffeehouses a preferred destination for the urban youth. Additionally, the influence of Western television series, which often portrayed coffeehouses as trendy social spaces, contributed to making coffee culture a part of pop culture, especially among millennials and Gen Z.

This study has been designed with an intent to survey the dynamic transformation in India's beverage landscape and explore how urbanization and globalization have redefined the traditional concept of coffeehouses in India. By examining consumer habits, the study aims to

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understand the cultural shift from the nondescript tea stalls to the more stylized and globally influenced coffeehouses that now dot the urban landscape of the country.

OBJECTIVES

- To find out the age demographic of urban clientele visiting a coffeehouse.
- To know the brand preferences of the urban clientele between domestic and international brands.
- To understand the purpose of an urban clientele's visit to a coffeehouse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Dr Atul Ramgade, *Growth in Café Culture a Study on Challenges Faced by Café Chains in India* This study investigates the expansion of café culture across urban India, noting how shifting lifestyles and globalization have extended this trend from major cities to smaller towns. The growth of cafés, fuelled by rising disposable incomes and increased coffee consumption, has made them popular social venues for students, professionals, and corporate events. The research aims to identify key drivers behind the expansion of cafés in India, explore the challenges faced by café owners, and suggest potential solutions. By examining socio-cultural and economic factors, the study seeks to offer insights into the development and future direction of café culture in India.
- Kevin Affandi, Hoo Olivia Jovanka Pramono, Samuel Vincent Handjaja, Rama Febrianto, Kevin Prayogo Choiss, Handyanto Widjojo, *The Factors Influencing Contemporary Coffee Consumption in the Pandemic Era (2022):* This research aimed to identify key factors that influence contemporary coffee consumption and provide recommendations for coffee business owners in Indonesia. It explored how consumer characteristics, like gender and location, impact coffee preferences and examined the importance of factors such as taste in purchasing decisions. The study found that taste is the most significant factor driving coffee consumption, with males consuming more coffee than females. Recommendations for business owners include maintaining consistent taste, considering gender differences, and improving the delivery experience to survive post the Pandemic has also been mentioned. The research also highlighted areas for future studies to better understand the contemporary coffee market.
- Praveen Gupta, Ankita Nagpal and Diksha Malik, *Case study on Starbucks: Global brand in emerging markets (2018)* This case study explores Starbucks' global expansion journey, particularly the challenges encountered in emerging markets. It investigates the differences between global and multinational expansion strategies, the ongoing debate between standardization and localization, and the importance of socio-cultural considerations in international marketing. Additionally, the study addresses the complexities of leadership succession in multinational corporations. The case also examines Starbucks' acceptance and growth in India compared to China. In India, the brand had to adjust its snack offerings and beverage menus to align with local tastes. This strategic adaptation showcases Starbucks' efforts to integrate into diverse cultural landscapes, enhancing its market presence in India.
- Robinson, Teresa. (2014). Café Culture in Pune: Being Young and Middle Class in Urban India. This study examines the rise of café culture among young middle-class adults in post-liberalization Pune, India. It documents how globalization and consumerism reshaped social practices like friendship, dating, and self-presentation. Rather than simply imitating the West, youth adapted global influences to fit local traditions, balancing individual aspirations with family obligations. In doing so, they redefined Indian middle-class identity and contributed to India's evolving role in a globalized world.
- Tarannum Manjul, India's *Coffee Culture Steams Ahead: A Tale of Espresso Dominance (2023):* This article explores the rapid growth of the coffee market in India, particularly highlighted on National Espresso Day. It examines the increase in coffee consumption, the rising popularity of unconventional flavours and high-quality experiences, and India's emerging role as a significant player in the global coffee market. This writing also highlights a shift towards gourmet and specialty coffees, reflecting a more sophisticated consumer and India's growing influence in global coffee trends.

- Uma V. P. Shrivastava, *A Study on the Customer Satisfaction from Indian Coffee House – in Jabalpur City (2014)* This research explores how globalization and economic changes have increased disposable income, enhancing lifestyle and expanding the market for products and services. It notes a rise in dining out and snacking, with the Indian Coffee House (ICH) in Jabalpur standing out as a preferred venue. The study evaluates customer satisfaction at ICH through secondary data on consumption trends and primary research including customer and staff feedback. Findings highlight consumption patterns, satisfaction levels, and comparisons with other food providers in Jabalpur.
- Krishnendu Ray and Tulasi Srinivas, *Curried Cultures: Globalization, Food, and South Asia* explores how globalization has shaped food and culture in South Asia, particularly focusing on the movement of food and the impact of these changes. The book examines the complex ways in which food, as a cultural marker, moves across borders and shapes perceptions of South Asian cultures, both within the region and internationally.
- Jennifer Ferreira and Carlos Ferreira, *Challenges and opportunities of new retail horizons in emerging markets: The case of a rising coffee culture in China*, This study explores how economic growth and a rising middle class have created opportunities for retail expansion in emerging markets. In China, the coffee shop industry has grown rapidly as coffee becomes a lifestyle choice for urban consumers. Global brands have adapted by localizing offerings and using digital tools, while domestic competitors innovate with tech-driven models. Success in such markets relies on cultural understanding, flexibility, and digital engagement.
- Jennifer Ferreira, *Café nation? Exploring the growth of the UK café industry*, this paper examines the rapid growth of the UK café industry, which has become a major part of the retail sector with over 18,800 outlets and a projected 27,000 by 2020. It highlights how cafés have reshaped high streets and contributed to a broader 'café society' in the UK. The article identifies economic resilience, changing consumer habits, and varied café types as key drivers of this expansion. It also emphasizes the need for deeper research into cafés as both commercial and social spaces, and their roles in community interaction and urban transformation.
- Lucas de Vasconcelos Teixeira, *Chapter 14: The consumption of experiences in specialty coffee shops*, this chapter encapsulates the rise of gourmet coffee shops within the third wave of coffee consumption, focusing on São Paulo as a case study. The third wave emphasizes specialty coffee, ethical sourcing, and artisanal quality, distinguishing itself from earlier waves centred on mass production and branded uniformity. Literature on experiential marketing and the experience economy highlights how these spaces offer more than a product—they create meaningful, immersive experiences. Drawing on flânerie as a method, the study reveals that for many, these coffee shops are valued as cultural and social environments, not just places to consume coffee.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Data for the study was gathered through an online survey conducted via Google Forms. The questionnaire was designed to capture perceptions, behaviours, and experiences related to specialty coffee consumption, particularly in the context of third-wave coffee shops. It was distributed digitally to a diverse pool of respondents across various age groups, professions, and urban centres in India, targeting primarily the urban clientele who are more likely to engage with contemporary coffee culture. A total of 135 responses were collected, with participants providing their insights by completing the questionnaire. This method allowed for efficient data collection across geographical locations, contributing to a broader understanding of how experiential coffee consumption is perceived and practiced in the Indian urban context.

The survey results indicate that the percentage of female respondents is higher at 58.1%, compared to 41.9% for male respondents.

Analysis: Female respondents dominate the survey, indicating a higher engagement or interest among women in coffeehouse culture.

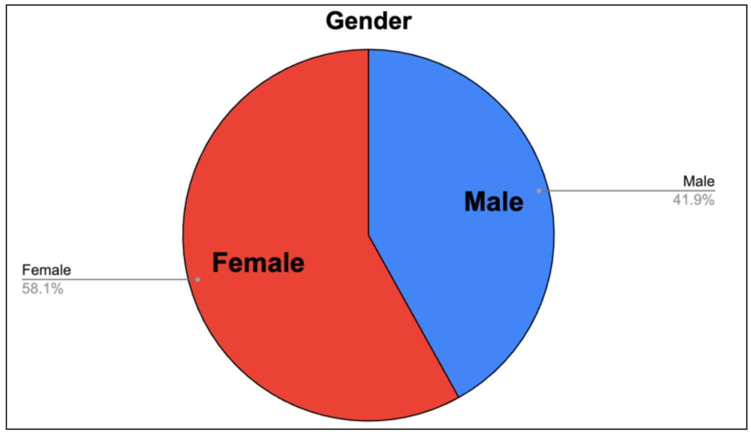


Fig. 1 : Gender

The demographic chart shows that the majority of respondents are in the 36-45 age group, making up 27.2% of the total. This is followed by the 46-55 age group at 25%, and those aged 56 and above at 23.5%. Respondents in the 26-35 age group constitute 13.2%, while the 18-25 age group has the smallest representation at 11%.

Analysis: The coffeehouse consumer base skews older, with 75.7% above 35 years of age. This suggests that third-wave or specialty coffee shops may appeal more to mature adults, possibly due to disposable income and lifestyle preferences.

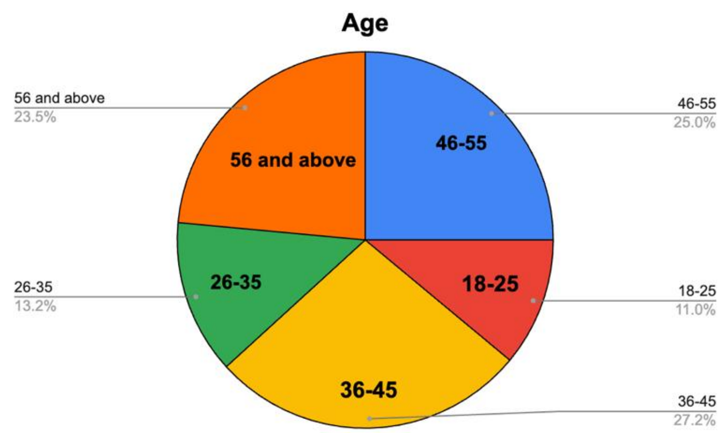


Fig. 2: Age

A significant majority of the survey respondents, 63.2%, are working professionals, while 16.2% identify as homemakers. Entrepreneurs make up 13.2% of the participants, and students constitute the smallest group at 7.4%.

Analysis: The dominance of working professionals points to coffeehouses being frequented by the urban, employed demographic—likely seeking comfort, ambiance, or networking spaces. Minimal student participation may reflect cost sensitivity or different consumption habits.

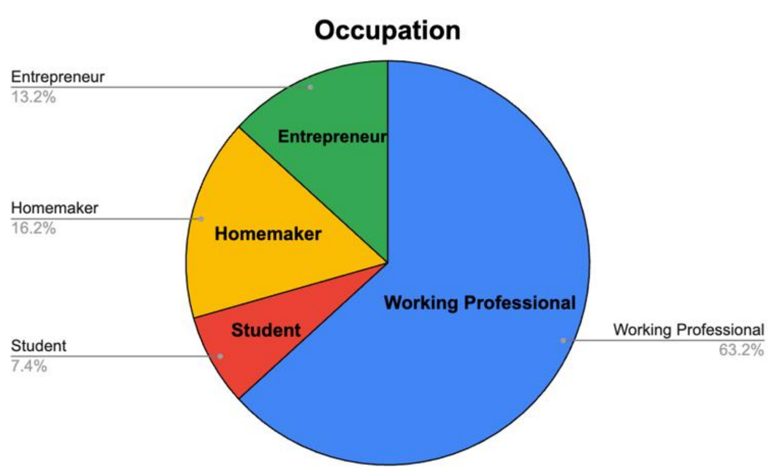


Fig. 3: Occupation

The majority of respondents are from the Western region, encompassing Goa, Gujarat, and Maharashtra, making up a substantial 60.3%. This is followed by the Eastern region at 19.1%, the Northern region at 14.7%, and finally, the Southern region, which contributed the fewest responses at 5.9%.

Analysis: Western India (especially Maharashtra) emerges as a hub for café culture, possibly due to cities like Mumbai and Pune leading the third-wave movement. The regional skew also affects findings, suggesting strong coffeehouse presence and acceptance in this zone.

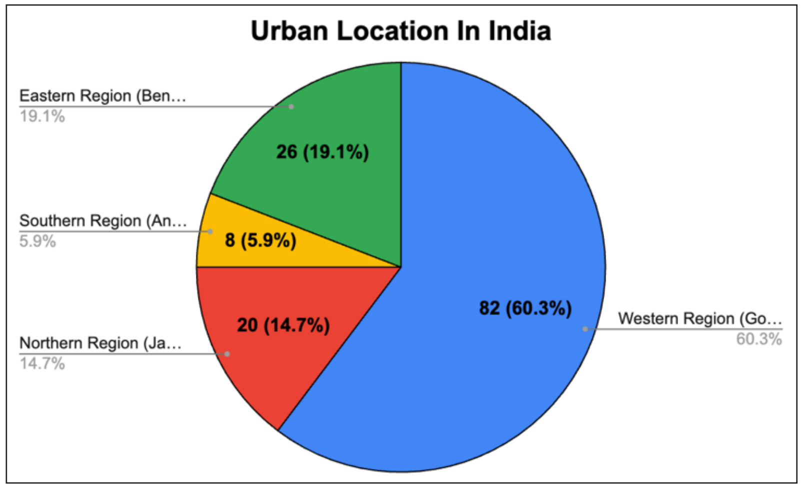


Fig. 4 : Urban Location in India

Nearly 43% of respondents indicated that they rarely visit coffeehouses, making it the most common response. This is followed by 30% who visit monthly, 20% who visit weekly, and just 3.7% who frequent coffeehouses daily. Only 2% reported never visiting a coffeehouse.

Analysis: A significant portion of respondents visit coffeehouses infrequently, indicating that while coffeehouse culture exists, it is more of an occasional indulgence than a daily routine for most urban consumers.

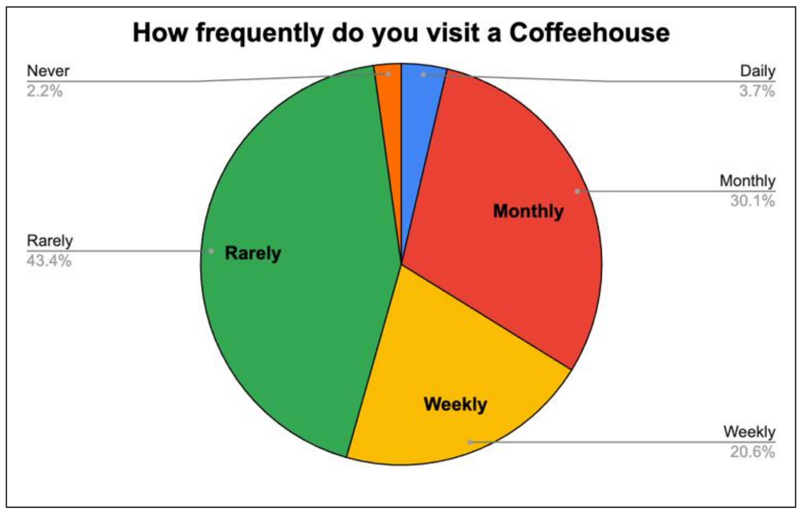


Fig. 5: How Frequently Do You Visit a Coffeehouse?

It was a close contest between coffee quality, which was preferred by 32% of respondents, and ambience, favoured by 31.6%. The remaining preferences were divided between proximity to work, price, and, lastly, brand reputation, which was the least favoured choice at 6.6%.

Analysis: Consumers prioritize **quality and atmosphere**, showing that third-wave coffeehouses must balance artisanal products with immersive environments. Branding alone is not a major draw.

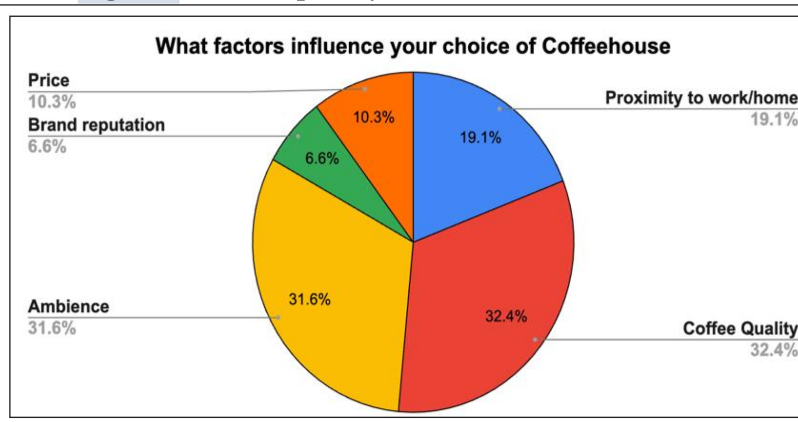


Fig. 6: What Factors Influence Your Choice of Coffeehouse?

At 52.2% more than half of the respondents expressed no preference, while 33.6% opted for local brands, and only 14% preferred international brands.

Analysis: Over half the respondents are open to either type, but a clear preference for local over international brands exists. This may be driven by authenticity, personalization, or support for Indian enterprises.

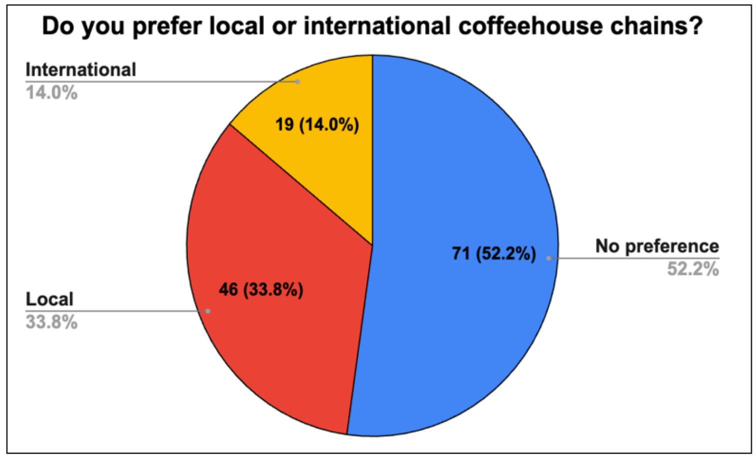


Fig. 7: Do You Prefer Local or International Coffeehouse Chains?

The vast majority of respondents, 88.2%, cited personal reasons, while the remaining chose business-related reasons.

Analysis: Coffeehouses serve predominantly as leisure or social spaces, with limited use for work-related meetings, although the latter may still be an emerging function in urban settings.

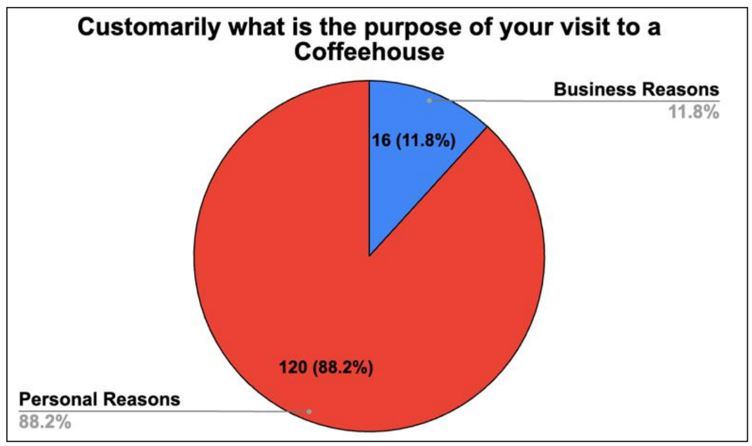


Fig. 8: Customarily What is the Purpose of Your Visit to a Coffeehouse ?

The majority of survey responses were 'Yes,' at 49.3% followed by 'No,' with 'Maybe' being the least selected option at 22.8%.

Analysis: International chains influence nearly half the respondents' choices, suggesting strong brand awareness and aspirational value, especially in urban India.

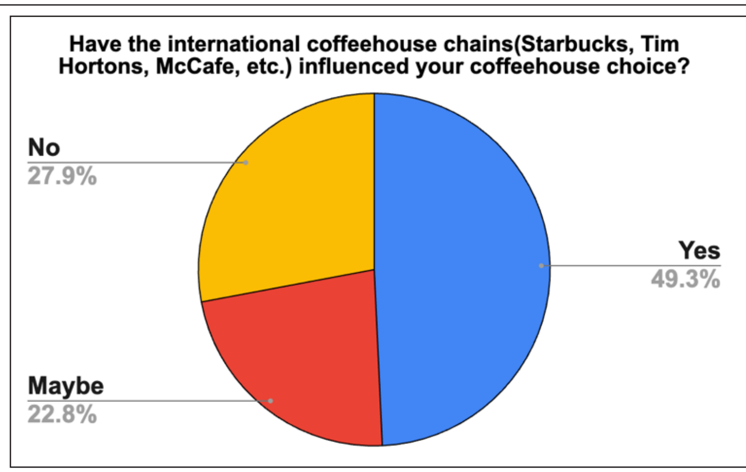
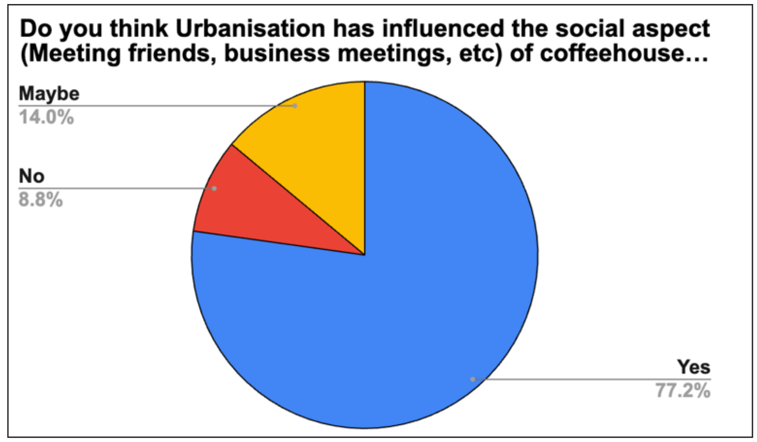
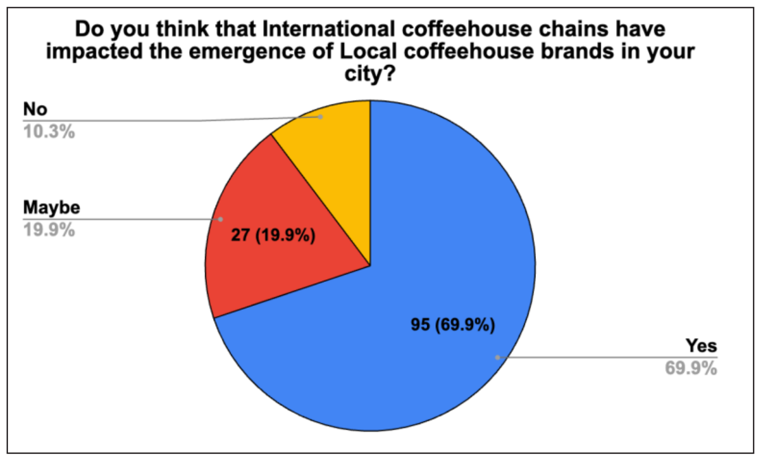
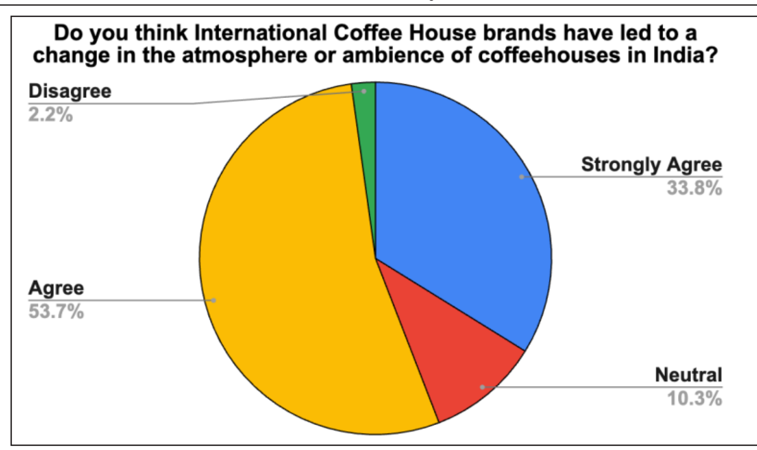


Fig. 9: Have the International Coffee Chains Influenced Your Coffeehouse Choice?

The majority of respondents, 77%, answered 'Yes' to this question, while 8.8% responded with 'No'. *Analysis:* Urbanization is widely seen as a driver of coffeehouse culture, indicating that infrastructure, lifestyle shifts, and exposure to global trends are shaping consumer behaviour.	 **Fig. 10: Do You Think Urbanisation has Influenced the Social Aspect of Coffeehouse Culture in India?**
In response to this question, a significant 69.9% answered affirmatively, while only 10.3% said 'No,' and 19.9% remained neutral, responding with 'maybe.' *Analysis:* Most respondents believe international brands have encouraged the growth or evolution of local coffeehouses—possibly by raising quality benchmarks or creating market demand.	 **Fig. 11: Do You Think that International Coffeehouse Chains Have Impacted the Emergence of Local Coffeehouse Brands in Your City?**
This question saw an above-average number of respondents agreeing, with 33.7% strongly agreeing. A small portion of the remaining responses were split between neutral and disagree. *Analysis:* International chains are recognized for influencing ambience standards, contributing to the standardized, globalized coffeehouse aesthetic now visible in many Indian cafés.	 **Fig. 12: Do You Think International Coffee House Brands Have Led to a Change in the Atmosphere or Ambience of Coffeehouses in India?**

The majority of respondents were split between 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree' on this question, with only a small percentage providing negative responses, and a few leaning towards a neutral stance.

Analysis: The majority of respondents agree that international coffeehouse brands have led to a standardized café experience in India, marked by uniform ambience, service, and menu styles. While this consistency offers familiarity, it may also reduce the uniqueness of local coffeehouses. A small portion of neutral or negative responses suggests limited variation in perception.

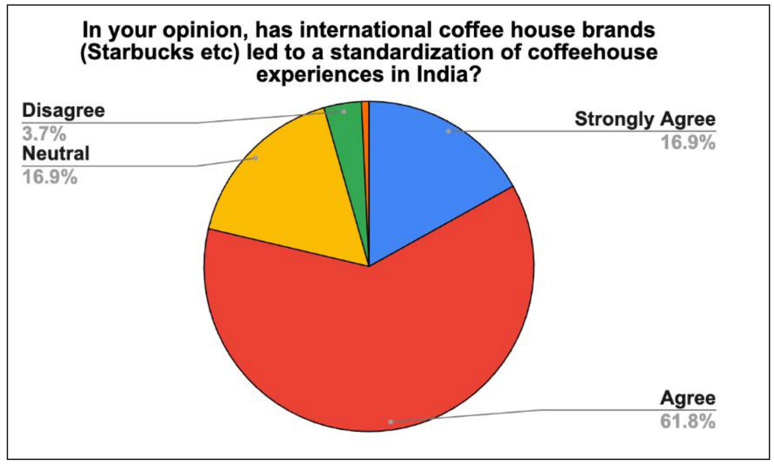


Fig. 13: In Your Opinion, Has International Coffeehouse Brands (Starbucks etc) led to a Standardization of Coffeehouse Experiences in India?

Over 58.6% of respondents answered affirmatively to this question, while 20.6% said 'No,' and the remaining 22.8% responded with 'Maybe.

Analysis: A majority of respondents observed cultural adaptations by international coffeehouse chains, indicating that brands are tailoring offerings to local tastes—such as regional flavours or menu items. The presence of 'No' (20.6%) and 'Maybe' (22.8%) responses suggests that while localization is evident, it may not be consistent or prominent across all outlets.

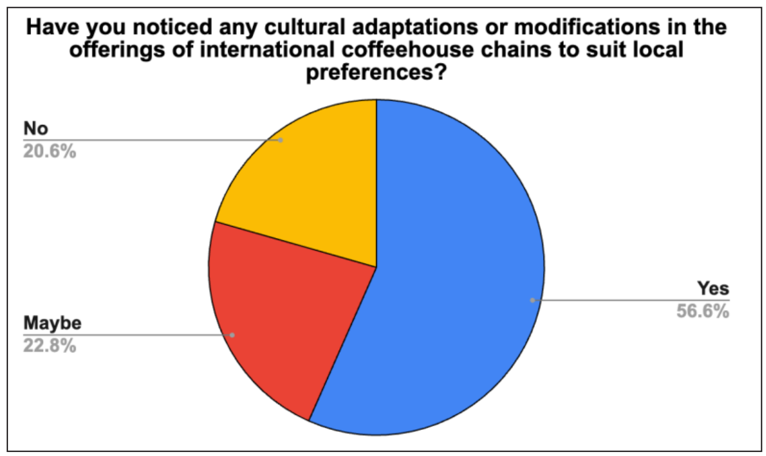


Fig. 14: Have You Noticed Any Cultural Adaptations or Modifications in the Offerings of International Coffeehouse Chains to Suit Local Preferences?

73.5% of respondents believe that international coffeehouse brands have positively influenced the coffeehouse culture in India, while only 6.6% disagreed. The remaining 19.9% opted for a neutral stance.

Analysis: The data indicates that a large majority (73.5%) of respondents perceive international coffeehouse brands as having a positive influence on the evolution of coffeehouse culture in India. This reflects their role in introducing global standards, improved ambience, premium offerings, and a more social and lifestyle-oriented café experience. Overall, the analysis reveals that international brands are largely credited with **modernizing** the café scene in India, though a small number of consumers remain cautious about their broader cultural impact.

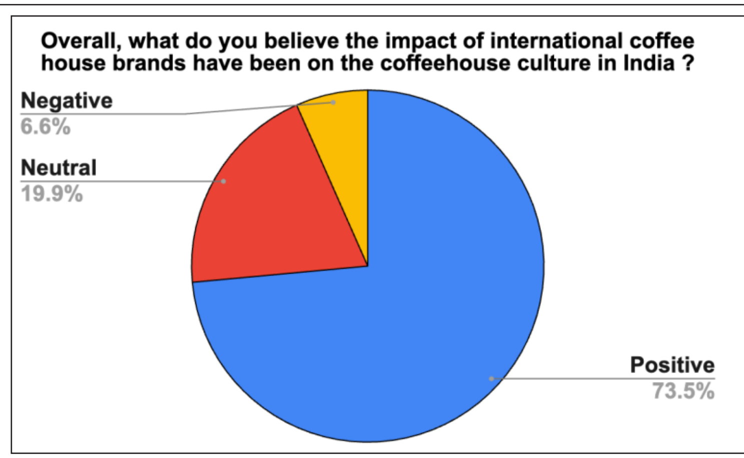


Fig. 15: Overall, What Do You Believe the Impact of International Coffeehouse Brands Have Been on the Coffeehouse Culture in India?

Key Findings

- *To understand the purpose of an urban clientele's visit to a coffeehouse.*

  The findings indicate that most respondents frequent coffee shops primarily for personal rather than professional or business-related reasons. When it comes to selecting a particular coffee shop brand, respondents showed nearly equal weightage between two key factors: the ambience of the establishment and the quality of the coffee served. This suggests that both atmosphere and product excellence are crucial in influencing customer choice. In terms of visit frequency, the responses revealed notable variation. A significant portion of participants stated that they visit coffee shops only on rare occasions, implying that for many, such visits are not a routine activity. Following this, nearly 30% reported visiting on a monthly basis, indicating a moderate level of engagement with coffee shop culture. In contrast, only a very small segment—just 3.7% of respondents—identified as daily visitors, suggesting that habitual, everyday patronage of coffee shops is relatively uncommon among the surveyed group.

- *To find out the age demographic of urban clientele visiting a coffeehouse.*

  The analysis presented in Fig. 2 indicates that a significant portion of the respondents fall within the 36–45 age bracket, comprising 27.2% of the total sample. This makes it the most represented age group in the study. Following closely are individuals aged 46–55, who account for 25% of respondents, and those aged 56 and above, making up 23.5%. Together, these three categories represent a clear majority, suggesting that middle-aged and older adults form the core customer base of urban coffeehouses. In contrast, the younger age groups are less prominently featured. Respondents aged 26–35 make up just 13.2% of the sample, while the youngest cohort—those between 18–25 years—accounts for only 11%. This noticeable drop-off among younger age groups may reflect different lifestyle preferences, financial considerations, or alternative social habits that make coffeehouse visits less frequent among younger individuals. In terms of occupation, the data shows a clear dominance of working professionals, indicating that this demographic is most engaged with the coffeehouse scene, possibly due to their disposable income, lifestyle choices, or work-related habits such as informal meetings or remote work. By comparison, there is relatively lower participation from homemakers, entrepreneurs, and students, which may point to differing priorities, schedules, or economic constraints within these groups.

- *To know the brand preferences of the urban clientele between domestic and international brands.*

  The survey responses provide several valuable insights into the evolving coffeehouse culture in India. A notable finding is that a slight majority of respondents—52.2%—did not express a strong preference when choosing between local and international coffeehouse brands. This neutrality suggests a growing openness among consumers, who may prioritize factors such as convenience, ambience, or quality over the origin of the brand itself. However, among those with a clear preference, 33.6% favoured local brands, significantly outnumbering the 14% who preferred international ones. This tilt towards local coffeehouses may be attributed to factors such as affordability, regional flavours, cultural familiarity, or a sense of community often associated with homegrown establishments.

  When it comes to the broader social impact of urbanization, an overwhelming 77% of respondents agreed that it has reshaped the role of coffeehouses in Indian cities. This reflects a perceived transformation in how these spaces are used—not just as places to drink coffee, but as important social hubs for conversation, work, relaxation, and informal gatherings. It also suggests that coffeehouses are becoming more deeply embedded in the fabric of urban social life.

  In terms of ambience, perceptions regarding international coffeehouse brands are somewhat divided but lean towards consensus. A combined 87.4% of respondents either agreed (53.7%) or strongly agreed (33.7%) that international chains have changed the traditional coffeehouse atmosphere. This could point to the introduction of standardized interiors, global aesthetics, or more commercialized experiences compared to the informal and often personalized vibe of local cafés.

Nonetheless, a smaller segment of respondents remained neutral or disagreed, indicating that not everyone perceives such changes uniformly.

Furthermore, cultural adaptability appears to be recognized among international chains. More than 58.6% of respondents acknowledged that these brands have made efforts to tailor their offerings to local tastes and cultural sensibilities—be it through menu items, décor, language use, or festive promotions. Yet, a portion of the sample remained uncertain or did not perceive such adaptations, possibly due to a lack of engagement with or awareness of these efforts.

Overall, the data paints a picture of a dynamic coffeehouse landscape in India. While local brands continue to enjoy strong support, especially among those with distinct preferences, international chains are clearly making inroads by adapting to local culture and influencing the way coffeehouses are experienced. Urbanization is a key driver of these changes, redefining coffeehouses as multifunctional spaces that blend global trends with Indian social realities.

CONCLUSION

The findings reveal significant insights into urban coffeehouse clientele and their behaviours. Most respondents visit coffeehouses for personal rather than business reasons, with coffee quality and ambience being the top decision-making factors. However, visit frequency varies, with the largest group visiting rarely, followed by monthly visitors, and only a small fraction frequenting coffeehouses daily.

The primary age demographic for coffeehouse patrons is middle-aged individuals, particularly those in the 36-45 age group, followed by 46-55 and 56+ age groups. Younger age groups are underrepresented. The occupation data further reinforces this, with a dominant share of working professionals, while homemakers, entrepreneurs, and students make up a smaller portion.

Regarding brand preferences, more than half of respondents do not have a strong inclination toward either local or international coffeehouse brands. However, a notable proportion favours local brands over international ones. The influence of urbanization on coffeehouse culture is widely recognized, with a majority believing it has impacted social interactions in these spaces. Additionally, a considerable number of respondents perceive international brands as having influenced the ambience of coffeehouses, with many acknowledging cultural adaptations to cater to local tastes.

In summary, urban coffeehouse culture in India is shaped by personal visits, middle-aged working professionals as the dominant demographic, a preference for local brands, and the evolving influence of international coffeehouse chains in terms of ambience and cultural adaptations.

Limitations

In terms of limitations, this study was constrained by its demographic reach. Specifically, it lacked representation from a broader audience, particularly individuals within the 26 to 35 age group, whose perspectives on the influence of international coffee chains on local coffeehouse brands among urban clientele may differ from those of other age groups. This demographic is crucial for understanding market trends and consumer behaviour, and their inclusion could have provided a more comprehensive analysis.

Furthermore, the study did not delve into the quality versus price debate, despite the majority of respondents indicating a preference for quality over cost. And it warrants further exploration to understand the potential for market growth and capitalisation through the offering of high-quality coffee.

Suggested Findings for further research are as follows:

- Exploring coffee culture's penetration and acceptance in smaller cities.
- Investigate how online food delivery and digital payment apps are influencing coffeehouse visits and consumption patterns.
- Conduct targeted studies on the underrepresented younger demographic (18-25 years), focusing on how affordability, lifestyle, and peer influence shape their choices.
- Assess the impact of coffeehouse culture on other traditional social spaces, like tea stalls or local eateries.

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