



# Customer Loyalty as a Mediating Mechanism between Service Environment and Revisit Intention among Generation Z Café Consumers

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## ABSTRACT

Customer loyalty has become a central strategic asset in contemporary hospitality settings, as organizations increasingly recognize that sustained patronage depends not only on immediate satisfaction but on enduring relational commitment. Despite extensive research linking service environment to revisit intention, the mechanisms through which environmental evaluations foster loyalty and subsequently translate into repeat patronage remain underexplored, particularly among Generation Z consumers in emerging urban contexts. Grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework and servicescape theory, this study examines the mediating role of customer loyalty as the relational mechanism linking service environment and revisit intention among Generation Z café consumers in Iligan City, Philippines. A quantitative research design was employed, with data collected from 500 Generation Z consumers who had actual dine-in experiences in selected cafés. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling was utilized to evaluate the measurement and structural models, given its suitability for predictive, mediation-oriented research involving latent constructs. The findings indicate that the service environment strengthens revisit intention both directly and indirectly through customer loyalty. Notably, customer loyalty serves as a meaningful mediating mechanism that translates favorable environmental evaluations into sustained revisit intentions. These results underscore that experiential design alone is insufficient unless it cultivates relational commitment. By strategically integrating holistic servicescape planning with loyalty-building initiatives, café operators can enhance customer retention and strengthen long-term competitive positioning among experience-driven Generation Z consumers.

**Keywords:** Customer Loyalty, Service Environment, Revisit Intention, Mediating Mechanism, Generation Z

**JEL Classifications:** M10, M31, L83

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The sustained expansion of café and restaurant markets has intensified competition and heightened the need for differentiation beyond core offerings such as product quality and price. In contemporary hospitality settings, the Service Environment (SE), or servicescape, has emerged as a strategic determinant of

customer evaluation and behavioral response. The servicescape encompasses ambient conditions, spatial layout, aesthetic design, and social cues that shape customers' cognitive and affective reactions during service encounters (Bitner, 1992; Baker and Cameron, 1996). Empirical research in hospitality and service management consistently demonstrates that environmental stimuli influence perceived value, satisfaction, and subsequent behavioral

intentions (Cronin et al., 2000; Wu and Liang, 2009). More recent scholarship further emphasizes that SEs remain central to experience-centric competition, particularly in industries where symbolic and emotional value increasingly drive consumption decisions (Baker et al., 2020; Lee and Chuang, 2021).

Within this competitive landscape, Generation Z café consumers represent a distinct and influential segment characterized by digital nativity, aesthetic sensitivity, and preference for socially engaging spaces. For this cohort, cafés function not merely as consumption venues but as experiential environments that facilitate socialization, academic engagement, and lifestyle expression. Evidence suggests that immersive and well-designed servicescapes enhance emotional engagement and strengthen customer–brand relationships (Kumar et al., 2019; Lee and Chuang, 2021). In hospitality contexts, atmospherics and environmental cues have also been shown to foster loyalty through enhanced customer experiences and satisfaction (Chen, 2024; Jeon et al., 2021). Despite this growing body of knowledge, the processes through which environmental perceptions are translated into sustained behavioral outcomes among young café consumers remain insufficiently clarified.

A central behavioral outcome in hospitality research is revisit intention (RI), defined as a customer’s willingness or likelihood to return to a service establishment. RI serves as a key indicator of customer retention and long-term financial sustainability (Um et al., 2006; Jang and Feng, 2007). In restaurant settings, physical environment and experiential evaluations have been shown to significantly influence revisit decisions (Ryu and Han, 2011; Yan et al., 2015). Complementary evidence from restaurant and hospitality research further links customer evaluations, brand attitudes, and satisfaction to RI (Foroudi et al., 2021; Mannan et al., 2019). However, while prior studies establish direct associations between SE and RI, the relational mechanisms that explain how environmental evaluations become repeat-patronage intentions require deeper theoretical articulation.

In this regard, Customer Loyalty (CL) represents a critical intervening construct. Loyalty reflects a deeply held commitment to repurchase or revisit a preferred service provider, accompanied by attitudinal attachment and resistance to switching (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973; Bolton et al., 2000). In hospitality contexts, SE quality influences emotional responses and satisfaction, which contribute to loyalty formation (Ryu and Han, 2011; Chen, 2024). Loyalty, in turn, has been consistently identified as a direct antecedent of RI and sustained patronage (Espinosa et al., 2018; Tajeddini et al., 2022). From a mediation perspective, loyalty frequently functions as an explanatory pathway through which service-related factors influence repeat behavioral outcomes (Nyadzayo and Khajehzadeh, 2016; Picón-Berjoyo et al., 2016).

Despite extensive scholarship on servicescapes and RI, existing research has more commonly examined direct effects rather than modeling the full mechanism linking environmental attributes, loyalty formation, and revisit behavior. While recent studies confirm that loyalty and RI are closely intertwined in hospitality services (Tajeddini et al., 2022) and that atmospherics foster

loyalty through experiential pathways (Chen, 2024), limited empirical models explicitly position CL as a mediating mechanism between SE and RI, particularly among Generation Z café consumers in emerging urban contexts. Furthermore, although RI research continues to expand across hospitality and tourism domains (Zulfiqar et al., 2024), context-specific evidence from Philippine secondary cities remains scarce. Given the rapid growth of youth-oriented cafés in cities such as Iligan, understanding how servicescape attributes translate into loyalty and repeat patronage within this demographic is both timely and necessary.

Accordingly, this study investigates CL as a mediating mechanism between SE and RI among Generation Z café consumers in selected cafés in Iligan City, Philippines. Theoretically, the study extends servicescape scholarship by moving beyond direct-effects testing and empirically specifying loyalty as a mediating pathway linking environmental stimuli to RI, in line with mediation-oriented loyalty research (Nyadzayo and Khajehzadeh, 2016; Picón-Berjoyo et al., 2016). It also contributes to RI literature by integrating environmental drivers and relational outcomes within a unified explanatory framework (Um et al., 2006; Tajeddini et al., 2022). Practically, the findings can guide café managers in designing and managing SEs that strengthen loyalty formation and stimulate repeat patronage, thereby enhancing long-term sustainability among Generation Z consumers (Chen, 2024; Espinosa et al., 2018). The study seeks to clarify how environmental attributes foster loyalty that subsequently drives RI among Generation Z café consumers.

### 1.1. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework, a dominant paradigm in environmental psychology and consumer behavior research that explains how environmental cues influence internal psychological states, which subsequently shape behavioral outcomes (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). The S–O–R model posits that external stimuli (S) activate internal organismic states (O), which in turn generate observable responses (R) (Jacoby, 2002). Over time, this framework has been extensively validated in retail, hospitality, tourism, sustainability, and digital consumption contexts, demonstrating its robustness in explaining consumer decision-making processes (Vieira, 2013; Erensoy et al., 2024; Bai and Lai, 2025; Asyraf et al., 2023). Within hospitality and tourism research, the S–O–R model has evolved to incorporate multidimensional organismic constructs, including affective, cognitive, and attitudinal states that mediate the relationship between environmental stimuli and behavioral intentions (Chen et al., 2021; Fakfare et al., 2023; Wu and Lai, 2021). The theoretical premise underlying this model suggests that behavioral outcomes are rarely triggered directly by environmental cues; instead, they are filtered through internal psychological mechanisms (Vieira, 2013; Bai and Lai, 2025). Anchored in this perspective, the present study conceptualizes SE as the stimulus, CL as the organismic mechanism, and RI as the behavioral response.

The SE is theoretically anchored in servicescape theory, which conceptualizes the physical surroundings of service settings as influential determinants of customer perceptions and behaviors

(Bitner, 1992). Servicescape encompasses ambient conditions, spatial layout and functionality, signs and symbols, aesthetic design, and social elements embedded in the service encounter. In coffee shop contexts, these attributes include lighting, music, décor, cleanliness, seating arrangement, layout convenience, and overall experiential atmosphere. Empirical research consistently demonstrates that servicescape elements significantly influence customer evaluations, emotional reactions, and subsequent behavioral intentions in hospitality environments (Jang, 2021; Liang et al., 2024; Almohammad et al., 2025). In specialty coffee shop settings, experiential dimensions of the environment have been shown to predict RIs and strengthen brand-related outcomes (Opoku et al., 2023). Moreover, green and eco-friendly servicescape practices contribute to positive brand image and loyalty among younger consumers, particularly Generation Z (Ko and Jeon, 2024; Le et al., 2022). Within the S–O–R logic, the SE functions as an external stimulus that initiates internal evaluative processes. For Generation Z café consumers characterized by high digital engagement, aesthetic sensitivity, and value-driven consumption environmental cues serve not merely as background features but as salient symbolic signals that shape brand-related perceptions and relational commitment.

In the S–O–R framework, the organism represents the internal psychological state activated by environmental stimuli. While early applications focused primarily on emotional reactions such as pleasure and arousal, contemporary research has expanded the organism component to include cognitive and attitudinal constructs such as attachment, engagement, trust, and loyalty (Kamboj et al., 2018; Mladenović et al., 2023). CL is conceptually defined as a deeply held commitment to repurchase or repatronize a preferred product or service consistently over time, despite situational influences and competitive pressures (Dick and Basu, 1994; Oliver, 1999). Loyalty encompasses both attitudinal dimensions and behavioral manifestations, including repeat patronage. Recent hospitality research affirms that environmental and experiential stimuli strengthen loyalty by fostering emotional bonds, brand attachment, and positive relational evaluations (Kim et al., 2024; Jeloudarlou et al., 2022; Amer and Rakha, 2022). In coffee shop settings, loyalty develops through consistent positive service experiences, alignment with consumer values, and perceived authenticity of the brand. Accordingly, CL operates as the organismic mechanism that internalizes environmental perceptions into enduring attitudinal commitment.

RI constitutes the response component of the S–O–R framework and reflects the consumer’s conative tendency to return to and repatronize a service establishment in the future. Behavioral intention is widely recognized as the most proximal predictor of actual behavior within the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In hospitality and tourism contexts, RI is frequently treated as a key outcome variable influenced by psychological states such as satisfaction, attachment, engagement, and loyalty (Chen et al., 2021; Opoku et al., 2023). Empirical findings consistently indicate that loyal customers exhibit stronger RI compared to non-loyal counterparts, reinforcing the theoretical assumption that attitudinal commitment precedes behavioral continuation. In competitive café markets, RI reflects not only satisfaction

but also relational continuity and preference stability. Within the present framework, RI is conceptualized as the behavioral response generated through the internalization of SE perceptions into loyalty-based commitment.

The mediating role of CL is theoretically justified by the central assumption of the S–O–R paradigm: stimuli influence behavioral responses indirectly through internal organismic processes (Vieira, 2013; Bai and Lai, 2025). Numerous empirical applications of the S–O–R model across domains including sustainability behavior, tourism decision-making, digital engagement, and green consumption have validated the mediating function of internal psychological constructs between environmental cues and behavioral outcomes (Chakraborty et al., 2024; Rivas et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2025; Upadhyay and Kamble, 2023). In hospitality settings, servicescape attributes influence affective and cognitive evaluations, which subsequently shape loyalty and behavioral intentions (Ali et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2024). Thus, while the SE may exert a direct influence on RI, the primary explanatory pathway is theorized to operate through CL as a psychological filter that stabilizes revisit decisions.

Grounded in the S–O–R framework, the proposed theoretical structure posits that SE (Stimulus) positively influences CL (Organism), which in turn enhances RI (Response). In addition to the indirect pathway, a direct effect between SE and RI is also acknowledged. However, consistent with S–O–R logic, the mediating pathway through CL is expected to provide a more comprehensive explanation of revisit behavior among Generation Z café consumers.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Service Environment and Revisit Intention

The SE represents the totality of physical and social cues that frame the consumption encounter, including ambient conditions, spatial layout, aesthetic design, and interaction context. In café settings, these cues act as salient stimuli that shape customers’ holistic evaluations, emotional reactions, and behavioral intentions, particularly RI among experience-seeking cohorts such as Generation Z. The foundational servicescape perspective argues that physical surroundings function as “silent language,” influencing approach–avoidance tendencies and future patronage decisions through both cognitive and affective routes (Bitner, 1992; Baker and Cameron, 1996). From a behavioral intention standpoint, revisit decisions are also shaped by attitudinal and perceptual factors that align with extended behavioral theories, suggesting that environmental evaluations may contribute to intention formation through cognitive appraisal processes (Abbasi et al., 2021).

Empirical literature consistently demonstrates that a favorable SE strengthens intentions to return by enhancing perceived value, satisfaction, and experiential quality. Environmental stimuli embedded in the service encounter contribute to the formation of superior customer experiences, which in turn generate satisfaction-driven competitive advantages and sustained behavioral intentions (Pei et al., 2020). Evidence indicates that

atmosphere and environmental cues are strongly associated with repurchase intention in hospitality dining formats, suggesting that customers translate pleasant environmental experiences into repeat-visit decisions (Lin and Chang, 2020; Bichler et al., 2020). Behavioral evidence derived from online reviews further supports that environmental indicators embedded in customer narratives predict restaurant RI, highlighting the role of tangible and intangible cues in driving repeat behavior (Yan et al., 2015). Beyond physical surroundings, trust-building mechanisms and social influence factors—such as electronic word-of-mouth—also contribute to RI formation, underscoring that behavioral intentions are shaped through both environmental evaluations and relational signals (Abubakar et al., 2017). Broader service and retail research similarly confirms that environmental and service-related evaluations significantly predict repurchase intentions, reinforcing the generalizability of the servicescape–revisit linkage (Chatzoglou et al., 2022).

Recent extensions further suggest that SE influences RI through dynamic experiential and recovery-oriented mechanisms. Structured and well-designed SE not only enhance positive evaluations but also serve as proactive buffers in mitigating the negative impact of service failures, thereby preserving CL and continued patronage (Khenfer and Trendel, 2025). Expanded servicescape conceptualizations emphasize that customers evaluate not only physical conditions but also social density, employee interaction, and functional convenience, which together create memorable service encounters that can translate into repeat patronage (Lee and Chuang, 2021). In cross-cultural service contexts, RI is also shaped by perceived service climate and quality perceptions arising from the encounter environment, supporting the view that environmental design and operational consistency jointly matter for return behavior (Sadeghi et al., 2017; Nazarian et al., 2023). Collectively, the literature supports the proposition that SE is a strategic determinant of RI in café consumption contexts.

H<sub>1</sub>: SE has a positive and direct influence on RI among Generation Z Café Consumers in Iligan City, Philippines.

## 2.2. Service Environment and Customer Loyalty

CL is commonly conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing both behavioral loyalty and attitudinal loyalty. In service industries, loyalty is particularly sensitive to experiential factors because consumption is inseparable from the service setting, making the environment a central input shaping loyalty formation. The servicescape perspective maintains that environmental stimuli influence customers' internal responses and reinforce relational bonds with the service provider over time (Bitner, 1992).

A growing body of hospitality research indicates that SE quality and performance are critical precursors of loyalty outcomes. Evidence from restaurant contexts suggests that physical environment elements shape diners' experiences differently for new versus repeat customers, implying that environmental cues contribute to loyalty development by stabilizing expectations and reinforcing preference structures (Ryu and Han, 2011). Similarly, findings in cruise and hotel settings indicate that service encounter performance and physical environment evaluations

generate loyalty through satisfaction, affective commitment, and novelty-based experiential responses (Lee et al., 2017). Expanded servicescape work further emphasizes that loyalty is strengthened when the environment supports both functional efficiency and emotional resonance, aligning the physical and social context with customer identity and experiential needs (Lee and Chuang, 2021).

More recent evidence highlights that atmospherics foster loyalty by enabling memorable experiences that deepen customer attachment, suggesting that the SE can trigger durable loyalty through experiential memory structures (Chen, 2024). Industry-specific work likewise shows that servicescape attributes stimulate loyalty by shaping emotional and flow experiences, which are particularly relevant to younger consumers who prioritize immersive and “shareable” consumption episodes (Jeon et al., 2021). The integration of offline and online servicescapes also suggests that contemporary loyalty formation is influenced by both physical cues and digital touchpoints that jointly produce satisfaction and repurchase tendencies, which can be interpreted as loyalty-relevant outcomes in omnichannel service settings (Ananda et al., 2023). Overall, the literature supports a robust theoretical claim that SEs function as loyalty-building infrastructures by shaping experience quality, emotional attachment, and preference stability.

H<sub>2</sub>: SE has a positive and direct influence on CL among Generation Z Café Consumers in Iligan City, Philippines.

## 2.3. Customer Loyalty and Revisit Intention

RI reflects a customer's future-oriented behavioral willingness to return, often positioned as an immediate antecedent to repeat patronage. Loyalty, in turn, represents a stronger and more enduring orientation toward the provider that includes repeat purchase propensity, resistance to switching, and advocacy. The literature consistently suggests that loyal customers exhibit higher RI because loyalty reduces perceived risk, strengthens habit and attachment, and increases switching costs—particularly in competitive café markets where offerings are easily substitutable. The conceptual distinction between loyalty and mere repeat purchasing indicates that RI is more likely when repeat behavior is reinforced by attitudinal commitment rather than situational convenience alone (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973).

Empirical studies in hospitality contexts show that loyalty significantly predicts revisitation and continued patronage. Restaurant research demonstrates that brand-related loyalty mechanisms, alongside satisfaction and image-based evaluations, are associated with customers “coming back,” indicating that loyalty functions as a behavioral stabilizer in dining decisions (Espinosa et al., 2018). Evidence from sharing-economy accommodations similarly shows that CL is intertwined with RI formation through value and self-related motivations, supporting the portability of the loyalty–revisit relationship across experience-intensive settings (Tajeddini et al., 2022). Longitudinal work further indicates that RIs are embedded within broader destination loyalty dynamics, reinforcing that loyalty is not merely an outcome but also a driver of future revisit decisions over time (Li et al., 2021).

Contemporary studies also emphasize the strategic mechanisms through which loyalty translates into repeat behavior. Relationship-based initiatives, including loyalty programs, have been shown to influence customer choice and repeat purchasing patterns, although their effectiveness may vary depending on engagement intensity and customer involvement levels (Alshurideh, 2019). Beyond individual behavior, loyalty perceptions contribute to firms' competitive positioning and sustainable business performance, particularly in hospitality industries where service differentiation is experience-based and relational in nature (Josimović et al., 2025). These findings suggest that loyalty operates not merely as a behavioral outcome but as a strategic relational asset that strengthens revisit stability.

Studies grounded in service evaluation logic also suggest that RI operates as a behavioral manifestation of loyalty-relevant attitudes, while loyalty programs and relationship mechanisms strengthen repeat purchase patterns by reinforcing preference and reducing churn. Evidence indicates that loyalty programs can shape repeat purchasing patterns, although effects may depend on self-selection and engagement intensity, which implies that loyalty is a mechanism through which RI becomes more stable (Sharp and Sharp, 1997; Meyer-Waarden and Benavent, 2009). Collectively, the literature supports a direct and positive association between CL and RI, particularly for Generation Z consumers whose café choices are often shaped by identity signaling and experiential consistency.

H<sub>3</sub>: CL has a positive and direct influence on RI among Generation Z Café Consumers in Iligan City, Philippines.

#### 2.4. The Mediating Mechanism of Customer Loyalty

The SE and RI relationship is widely recognized as indirect and mechanism-driven, because environmental cues typically influence behavior by shaping psychological and relational states that persist beyond the service encounter. CL is thus positioned as a theoretically plausible mediator that translates environmental experiences into durable repeat-visit intentions. The servicescape logic implies that favorable environmental conditions generate positive evaluations and emotional responses that reinforce attachment and commitment, which then increase the likelihood of returning (Bitner, 1992).

Mediation evidence in service and marketing research supports the view that loyalty operates as an intervening mechanism between service inputs and behavioral outcomes. Research demonstrates that RI itself can function as an intervening mechanism linking evaluative perceptions—such as perceived fairness and satisfaction—to loyalty formation, highlighting the dynamic interplay among satisfaction, RI, and loyalty in behavioral modeling (Çakici et al., 2019). This finding reinforces the broader logic that loyalty and RI operate within interconnected and sequential pathways rather than as isolated outcomes. Service loyalty research indicates that CL frequently emerges through intervening evaluative states, particularly satisfaction and relationship quality, implying that loyalty is commonly situated in indirect pathways linking service factors to behavioral intentions (Caruana, 2002; Makanyeza and Chikazhe, 2017).

Broader mediated frameworks also show that loyalty is shaped through customer relationship management quality and brand image, which then predicts downstream behavioral outcomes, reinforcing loyalty's role as a central transmission variable in consumer response models (Nyadzayo and Khajezadeh, 2016).

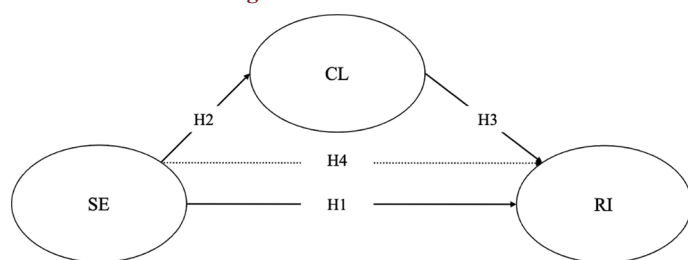
Within hospitality-related repeat behavior research, sequential and indirect pathways further support loyalty's mediating relevance. Evidence from coffee shop social media contexts demonstrates that brand-related mechanisms, including brand loyalty, transmit marketing stimuli into RI, illustrating loyalty's capacity to channel stimuli into repeat-visit outcomes (Ibrahim et al., 2021). Similarly, research indicates that customers repurchase and revisit decisions are often explained through multi-step mechanisms where loyalty-related constructs operate between experience antecedents and behavioral intention (Stylos and Bellou, 2018; Monteiro et al., 2023). These findings align with the argument that SE effects may be partially or fully realized through loyalty formation, particularly when repeated exposure to a consistent café environment builds preference stability and reduces switching tendencies (Ryu and Han, 2011).

For Generation Z café consumers, the mediating role of loyalty is especially salient because cafés increasingly function as experience platforms, where atmosphere, aesthetics, and social setting become part of identity expression and habitual routines. As a result, favorable SEs may not merely trigger one-time RIs but cultivate loyalty that sustains repeated patronage over time, thereby strengthening the indirect pathway from SE to RI through CL.

Taken together, the literature indicates that while the SE provides the experiential and contextual foundation of café consumption, CL serves as the relational mechanism that converts these encounter-based evaluations into sustained RI among Generation Z consumers. By consistently delivering favorable ambient, design, and interaction cues, cafés strengthen customers' preference, commitment, and resistance to switching, thereby amplifying the effect of the SE on intentions to return. In this sense, loyalty functions as the pivotal mediator that links momentary service encounters with longer-term patronage tendencies in the Iligan City café industry. Grounded on this synthesis, the study advances the mediating hypothesis below.

H<sub>4</sub>: CL has a mediating effect on the relationship between SE and RI among Generation Z Café Consumers in Iligan City, Philippines.

The research model presented in Figure 1 reflects a growing scholarly effort to understand revisit behavior in experience-driven service settings, particularly among Generation Z café consumers. The model proposes that the SE influences RI both directly and indirectly through CL. In doing so, it integrates environmental psychology and relationship marketing perspectives to explain how experiential stimuli are translated into sustained patronage intentions within the café industry of Iligan City, Philippines.

**Figure 1: Research model**

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research approach, utilizing a causal research design to examine the mechanisms and pathways through which SE influences RI, with CL serving as a mediating variable. The design was appropriate for testing theoretically grounded hypotheses and assessing both direct and indirect relationships among the constructs within a structured empirical framework. Mediation analysis was conducted to investigate the indirect effect of SE on RI through CL, focusing on uncovering the role of loyalty as a central relational mechanism that translates experiential evaluations into sustained behavioral intentions. This analytical approach enabled a more comprehensive understanding of how environmental stimuli within café settings shape Generation Z consumers' revisit decisions by fostering attitudinal attachment, commitment, and preference stability.

#### 3.2. Sampling and Data Collection

Based on the hypotheses, theoretical framework, and objectives of the study, a quantitative survey method was employed to collect primary data from Generation Z consumers who had actual dine-in experiences in selected cafés in Iligan City, Philippines. A purposive sampling technique was adopted to ensure that respondents met the specific inclusion criteria relevant to the study, namely: (1) belonging to the Generation Z cohort and (2) having recently dined in the participating cafés. This approach ensured contextual relevance and alignment with the research purpose, as only consumers with direct SE exposure could meaningfully evaluate SE, CL, and RI. Data collection was conducted between October and December 2025.

To facilitate access, formal request letters were submitted to café managers across more than sixteen cafés in Iligan City. One café was designated for pilot testing, while fifteen cafés were confirmed as suitable sites for the main data collection. Approval was secured from café management prior to survey administration, and the purpose and academic nature of the research were clearly communicated. The pilot test involved 30 Generation Z consumers from a café not included in the final sample to assess clarity, reliability, and content validity of the instrument; no items were removed following pilot evaluation.

For the main survey, 520 structured questionnaires were distributed in person, each accompanied by an informed consent form detailing the study's objectives, voluntary participation, and confidentiality assurances. A total of 500 completed and qualified responses were obtained, while 20 questionnaires were excluded

due to incomplete data, yielding a 96% response rate. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout the data collection and analysis process to uphold ethical research standards.

#### 3.3. Measurement

A fully adopted and standardized survey questionnaire served as the primary data collection instrument for this study. The instrument was structured into three principal sections corresponding to the core constructs of the research: SE, CL, and RI, each operationalizing a central dimension of the study's conceptual framework.

The SE construct was measured using a 20-item scale adapted from AbuThahir and Krishnapillai (2018). The instrument operationalized five key dimensions of the servicescape: decorations and artifacts (4 items), lighting (4 items), music (4 items), store layout (4 items), and cleanliness (4 items). These dimensions collectively capture the ambient and spatial elements that shape customers' environmental perceptions. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"), enabling respondents to indicate their level of agreement with each statement.

RI was measured using a four-item scale adapted from AbuThahir and Krishnapillai (2018). The items capture respondents' behavioral intentions to return to and repatronize the café in the future. Consistent with the SE measure, responses were obtained using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"), ensuring measurement consistency across constructs.

CL was assessed using a four-item scale adapted from Atsnawiyah et al. (2021). The instrument captures attitudinal loyalty tendencies, including commitment and preference toward the café. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"), ensuring consistency in scaling across all study constructs.

Given the cross-sectional design and reliance on single-source, self-reported data, the study carefully addressed the potential risk of common method bias (CMB). Consistent with established methodological recommendations, several procedural remedies were implemented to mitigate response distortion. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly assured to reduce social desirability bias. Participation was voluntary and aligned with ethical research standards to minimize evaluation apprehension. Clear, neutral, and concise instructions were provided to reduce ambiguity and response pattern bias. These procedural safeguards are recognized as effective strategies for minimizing CMB in behavioral research (Podsakoff et al., 2023).

### 4. DATA ANALYSIS

The hypothesized model was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the SEMinR

package in R. PLS-SEM was selected due to its suitability for prediction-oriented research, its robustness to non-normal data, and its ability to estimate complex models involving higher-order constructs and mediation simultaneously. PLS-SEM is particularly appropriate for research models that involve latent constructs, emphasize variance explanation, and operate under conditions of relatively small sample sizes and non-normal data distributions. The present model satisfies the methodological assumptions for PLS-SEM, including the inclusion of multiple latent variables, predictive objectives, and adequate statistical power (Hair et al., 2019).

The analysis followed the standard two-step procedure. First, the measurement model was evaluated by examining indicator loadings, internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha, rhoA, composite reliability), convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted), and discriminant validity using the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT). Second, the structural model was assessed by examining path coefficients, t-values, P-values, coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), effect sizes ( $f^2$ ), and predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ) using blindfolding.

SE was modeled as a second-order reflective construct using the repeated indicator approach. SE was composed of five first-order reflective dimensions: Decoration and Artifacts (DEC1–DEC4), Lighting (LIG1–LIG4), Music (MUS1–MUS4), Store Layout (STL1–STL4), and Cleanliness (CLE1–CLE4). All indicators of the lower-order constructs were assigned to the higher-order construct to estimate the hierarchical component model.

CL was specified as a reflective construct measured by four indicators (CL1–CL4), capturing commitment and relationship intention. RI was also modeled as a reflective construct with four indicators (RI1–RI4), representing customers' likelihood of returning.

Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was performed to assess the significance of direct, indirect, and total effects. The structural model tested the direct effect of SE on RI, the effect of SE on CL, and the effect of CL on RI. Mediation was examined by evaluating the indirect effect of SE on RI through CL, along with the corresponding total effect and variance accounted for (VAF).

#### 4.1. Measurement Model Assessment

Table 1 presents the measurement model which demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity across all constructs. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.808 to 0.928, all exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency. Composite reliability (rhoC) values ranged from 0.874 to 0.937, further confirming construct reliability. Convergent validity was generally supported, as AVE values ranged from 0.635 to 0.740 for all first-order constructs, exceeding the 0.50 criterion. Although the higher-order construct, SE, reported an AVE of 0.439, this is acceptable given its specification using the repeated indicator approach.

Factor loadings ranged from 0.572 to 0.894. Most indicators exceeded the 0.70 benchmark, demonstrating strong indicator

**Table 1: Measurement model assessment**

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE	Factor loading
SE	0.928	0.937	0.439	0.572-0.734
DEC	0.824	0.895	0.739	0.820-0.894
LIG	0.812	0.877	0.641	0.723-0.848
MUS	0.830	0.887	0.664	0.750-0.877
STL	0.808	0.874	0.635	0.740-0.828
CLE	0.859	0.904	0.702	0.816-0.858
CL	0.883	0.919	0.740	0.826-0.885
RI	0.849	0.898	0.689	0.758-0.876

reliability. A few SE indicators loaded between 0.57 and 0.69; however, these were retained because overall construct reliability and theoretical justification remained strong. Collectively, these findings confirm that the measurement model exhibits adequate internal consistency and convergent validity, providing a solid foundation for structural model assessment.

Table 2 shows discriminant validity using the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT), which is considered a more sensitive and robust assessment method in PLS-SEM. HTMT evaluates whether constructs are empirically distinct by comparing correlations across different constructs relative to correlations within the same construct.

As shown in Table 2, HTMT values among the primary structural constructs SE, CL, and RI were below the liberal threshold of 0.90. In particular, the HTMT value between CL and RI was 0.873, while the values between SE and CL (0.666) and SE and RI (0.778) remained well within acceptable limits. These findings confirm adequate discriminant validity among the key constructs in the mediation model.

Higher HTMT values were observed between SE and its first-order dimensions (e.g., SE–STL = 0.991; SE–LIG = 0.970). This pattern is theoretically expected because SE was modeled as a higher-order construct using the repeated indicator approach, which naturally results in strong associations between the higher-order construct and its lower-order components. Thus, these elevated HTMT values do not indicate discriminant validity issues but rather reflect the hierarchical structure of the model.

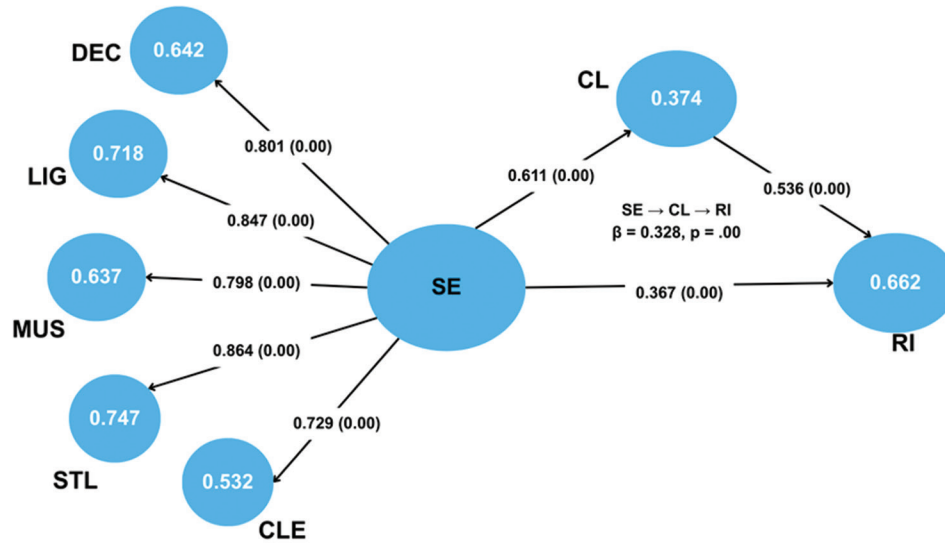
The HTMT results support the empirical distinctiveness of the main constructs (SE, CL, and RI) and confirm that the measurement model is appropriate for examining the mediating role of CL in the relationship between SE and RI.

#### 4.2. Structural Model Assessment

Table 3 presents the results of the PLS-SEM analysis with bootstrapping of 5,000 resamples, as illustrated in Figure 2, indicated that SE significantly influenced CL ( $\beta = 0.611$ ,  $t = 15.613$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), and CL, in turn, significantly predicted RI ( $\beta = 0.536$ ,  $t = 13.869$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). In addition, the direct relationship between SE and RI was also significant ( $\beta = 0.367$ ,  $t = 9.609$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), indicating that the SE independently contributes to customers' intention to revisit.

The indirect effect of SE on RI through CL was significant ( $\beta = 0.328$ ,  $t = 10.13$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). Because both the direct and

**Figure 2:** Partial least squares structural equation modeling mediation analysis plot



**Table 2: Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations**

Constructs	SE	DEC	LIG	MUS	STL	CLE	CL	RI
SE	—							
DEC	0.904	—						
LIG	0.970	0.768	—					
MUS	0.913	0.620	0.739	—				
STL	0.991	0.754	0.840	0.786	—			
CLE	0.831	0.609	0.577	0.529	0.623	—		
CL	0.666	0.649	0.613	0.502	0.637	0.469	—	
RI	0.778	0.728	0.718	0.562	0.727	0.611	0.873	—

SE: Service environment, DEC: Decoration and artifacts, LIG: Lighting, MUS: Music, STL: Store layout, CLE: Cleanliness, CL: Customer loyalty, RI: Revisit intention

**Table 3: Hypothesis testing**

Effects	Relations	$\beta$	T Statistics	$f^2$	P-value	Decision
Direct effects						
H <sub>1</sub>	SE → CL	0.611	15.613	0.596	<0.001*	Significant
H <sub>2</sub>	SE → RI	0.367	9.609	0.249	<0.001*	Significant
H <sub>3</sub>	CL → RI	0.536	13.869	0.530	<0.001*	Significant
Mediation						
H <sub>4</sub>	SE → CL → RI	0.328	10.13		<0.001*	Significant
Second-order constructs						
	DEC ← SE	0.801	36.214		<0.001*	Significant
	LIG ← SE	0.847	47.284		<0.001*	Significant
	MUS ← SE	0.798	31.275		<0.001*	Significant
	STL ← SE	0.864	66.986		<0.001*	Significant
	CLE ← SE	0.729	18.114		<0.001*	Significant
				$R^2_{CL} = 0.374 / Q^2_{CL} = 0.376$		
				$R^2_{RI} = 0.662 / Q^2_{RI} = 0.658$		

\*P<0.01

indirect effects are statistically significant, the results support a partial mediation model. This indicates that CL partially transmits the influence of SE on RI, while SE also retains a meaningful direct effect on RI.

The structural model demonstrated substantial explanatory and predictive power. RI showed an R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.662, indicating that 66.2% of its variance was explained by SE and CL. CL had an R<sup>2</sup>

value of 0.374, signifying that 37.4% of its variance was accounted for by SE. While the explanatory power for CL is moderate, the R<sup>2</sup> value for RI reflects substantial explanatory capability.

The predictive relevance (Q<sup>2</sup>) values were 0.376 for CL and 0.658 for RI, both exceeding the threshold of zero, confirming that the model demonstrates adequate to strong predictive relevance for the endogenous constructs. Effect size (f<sup>2</sup>) analysis revealed that SE exerted a large effect on CL (f<sup>2</sup> = 0.596) and a medium effect on RI (f<sup>2</sup> = 0.249). In contrast, CL had a large effect on RI (f<sup>2</sup> = 0.530). These findings suggest that SE strongly influences CL, and CL, in turn, substantially affects RI, indicating a meaningful mediating role of CL in the SE–RI relationship. Overall, the results demonstrate that the model possesses strong explanatory and predictive capabilities, with CL serving as an important mechanism through which SE enhances RI.

Figure 2 shows the measurement of the second-order construct in which SE was also validated. All first-order dimensions: Decoration and Artifacts (DEC), Lighting (LIG), Music (MUS), Store Layout (STL), and Cleanliness (CLE) loaded strongly and significantly onto SE, with path coefficients ranging from 0.729 to 0.864 and t-values ranging from 18.114 to 66.986 (all P < 0.001). This confirms the multidimensional structure of the SE construct.

As shown in Table 3 and Figure 2, the first hypothesis (H1), which tested the direct effect of SE on RI, is supported ( $\beta = 0.367$ , P < 0.001). This indicates that improvements in the SE directly increase customers' intention to revisit. The second hypothesis (H2), examining the direct effect of SE on CL, is also supported ( $\beta = 0.611$ , P < 0.001), suggesting that a favorable SE significantly enhances CL. The third hypothesis (H3), which tested the direct effect of CL on RI, is likewise supported ( $\beta = 0.536$ , P < 0.001), confirming that loyal customers are more likely to revisit.

The mediation analysis (H4) further reveals that CL partially mediates the relationship between SE and RI (indirect  $\beta = 0.328$ , P < 0.001). Since both the direct and indirect effects are significant

and the variance accounted for ( $VAF \approx 47\%$ ) falls within the partial mediation range, the findings indicate that SE influences RI both directly and indirectly through CL. This suggests that while improvements in the SE can independently drive RI, their impact is substantially strengthened when they cultivate CL.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The results reveal that SE significantly and positively influences CL ( $\beta = 0.611$ ,  $t = 15.613$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), with a large effect size ( $f^2 = 0.596$ ). This indicates that atmospheric elements which are the decoration and artifacts, lighting, music, store layout, and cleanliness are collectively play a substantial role in strengthening loyalty formation among Generation Z café consumers. The magnitude of this relationship underscores the experiential sensitivity of Gen Z customers. As a cohort characterized by visual orientation, social expressiveness, and experience-driven consumption, Generation Z is particularly responsive to immersive and aesthetically coherent environments. Environmental cues serve not only as functional attributes but also as symbolic signals of brand identity, authenticity, and emotional value (Baker and Cameron, 1996). In hospitality contexts, such cues significantly influence affective evaluation and relational attachment, thereby fostering loyalty (Pei et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2024). Moreover, the strong loadings of the first-order dimensions onto the second-order SE construct ( $0.729$ - $0.864$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) validate the multidimensional and hierarchical structure of the servicescape. This finding confirms that customers assess environmental quality holistically rather than through isolated atmospheric components. Prior research suggests that integrated environmental design exerts stronger behavioral effects compared to fragmented atmospheric interventions (Khenfer and Trendel, 2025). Thus, loyalty formation appears to be driven by the overall experiential coherence of the café environment.

The direct relationship between SE and RI is also significant ( $\beta = 0.367$ ,  $t = 9.609$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), with a medium effect size ( $f^2 = 0.249$ ). This demonstrates that environmental stimuli independently influence customers' behavioral intention to return, beyond their impact on loyalty. This finding aligns with environmental psychology literature, which posits that favorable atmospheric conditions generate approach behaviors and increase the likelihood of future patronage (Baker and Cameron, 1996). In experiential service settings such as cafés, ambiance, spatial comfort, and aesthetic appeal create immediate psychological responses that translate into revisit decisions (Pei et al., 2020; Khenfer and Trendel, 2025). The substantial explanatory power of the model for RI ( $R^2 = 0.662$ ) indicates that SE and CL jointly explain a considerable proportion of repeat patronage behavior among Generation Z consumers. This strong predictive capacity reinforces the relevance of experiential and relational variables in understanding RI within competitive urban café markets.

CL significantly predicts RI ( $\beta = 0.536$ ,  $t = 13.869$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), with a large effect size ( $f^2 = 0.530$ ). This confirms that loyalty functions as a critical driver of repeat patronage behavior in café environments. Loyal customers exhibit stronger behavioral intentions because loyalty reflects psychological commitment,

emotional attachment, and relational bonding with the brand (Alshurideh, 2019). In hospitality and service industries, loyalty has consistently been identified as a key determinant of revisit behavior, serving as a mechanism that translates positive service evaluations into sustained engagement (Çakici et al., 2019; Josimović et al., 2025). The high predictive relevance for RI ( $Q^2 = 0.658$ ) further underscores the importance of loyalty in forecasting future patronage decisions. For Generation Z café consumers in Iligan City, loyalty appears to extend beyond transactional satisfaction, encompassing lifestyle alignment, emotional resonance, and social identity expression.

The mediation analysis reveals that CL partially mediates the relationship between SE and RI (indirect  $\beta = 0.328$ ,  $t = 10.13$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). With a variance accounted for (VAF) of approximately 47%, both direct and indirect effects remain statistically significant, indicating partial mediation. This result refines the S–O–R theoretical logic by demonstrating that environmental stimuli influence behavioral intention through dual pathways. First, SE directly stimulates RI through immediate experiential responses. Second, it indirectly enhances RI by cultivating loyalty, which functions as an internal relational state (Jacoby, 2002; Asyraf et al., 2023). The partial mediation finding suggests that while environmental excellence can directly encourage repeat visitation, its long-term effectiveness is substantially amplified when it fosters psychological commitment (Kim et al., 2024). In experiential consumption contexts such as cafés, environmental quality strengthens emotional attachment, which subsequently increases the likelihood of sustained patronage (Pei et al., 2020; Çakici et al., 2019). Thus, loyalty emerges as a strategic transmission mechanism that converts experiential value into behavioral continuity.

The structural model demonstrates moderate explanatory power for CL ( $R^2 = 0.374$ ) and substantial explanatory power for RI ( $R^2 = 0.662$ ). Predictive relevance values ( $Q^2_{CL} = 0.376$ ;  $Q^2_{RI} = 0.658$ ) confirm adequate to strong predictive capability. These results indicate that the integrated experiential–relational framework effectively captures the determinants of repeat patronage among Generation Z café consumers. Within the localized context of Iligan City, where café proliferation intensifies competition, the findings carry particular relevance. The results suggest that sustainable competitive advantage is increasingly grounded in experiential differentiation and relational engagement rather than solely in product quality or pricing strategies.

Overall, the discussion reveals a coherent experiential–relational mechanism: SE functions as the strategic stimulus, CL operates as the psychological mediator, and RI represents the behavioral outcome. The findings empirically validate that well-designed café environments not only create immediate behavioral appeal but also cultivate loyalty that sustains repeat patronage over time. For Generation Z café consumers in Iligan City, RI is deeply embedded in atmospheric experience and emotional commitment. Consequently, cafés seeking long-term sustainability must integrate holistic servicescape design with loyalty-building strategies to transform experiential satisfaction into enduring customer relationships.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study examined the mediating role of CL in the relationship between SE and RI among Generation Z café consumers in Iligan City, Philippines. Anchored in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework, the findings provide compelling empirical support for the proposed mediation model. The results confirm that SE plays a critical role in shaping CL and directly influencing RI, while CL serves as a powerful determinant of customers' intention to return. More importantly, the findings establish that CL functions as a meaningful psychological mechanism through which environmental stimuli translate into behavioral intentions, operating both directly and indirectly through relational commitment.

The study further affirms the robustness of the proposed framework in explaining repeat patronage behavior among Generation Z café consumers. By conceptualizing SE as a multidimensional construct encompassing decoration and artifacts, lighting, music, store layout, and cleanliness, the research underscores the holistic and integrated nature of servicescape evaluation. Customers do not respond to isolated atmospheric elements; rather, they form overall experiential judgments that shape emotional attachment and behavioral outcomes.

Within the context of Iligan City's expanding café industry, the findings highlight that competitive advantage is increasingly rooted in experiential differentiation and relational value creation rather than purely in product-based competition. For Generation Z consumers, cafés represent more than transactional venues; they are experiential spaces that facilitate social interaction, self-expression, and lifestyle alignment. Consequently, cultivating CL through strategically designed SEs emerges as a sustainable pathway toward strengthening RI and ensuring long-term business viability in an increasingly experience-driven hospitality market.

### 6.1. Theoretical Implications

This study offers several important contributions to hospitality and service marketing theory. First, it strengthens and contextualizes the application of the S–O–R framework in emerging market café settings. By empirically demonstrating that SE (stimulus) influences CL (organism), which subsequently drives RI (response), the findings validate the sequential psychological mechanism proposed in environmental psychology and consumer behavior research (Jacoby, 2002; Asyraf et al., 2023). The confirmation of partial mediation refines the framework by showing that behavioral intention is shaped through both experiential immediacy and relational processing.

Second, the study advances servicescape literature by modeling SE as a higher-order reflective construct. The strong and significant loadings of its five dimensions confirm that customers evaluate environmental cues holistically rather than independently. This supports the argument that atmospheric elements operate synergistically to shape customer perceptions and behavioral outcomes (Baker and Cameron, 1996). The findings contribute to

contemporary discussions emphasizing integrated environmental design as a strategic marketing tool in hospitality contexts.

Third, the research extends loyalty theory by positioning CL as a mediating mechanism rather than merely an outcome variable. While prior studies have established loyalty as a predictor of repeat behavior (Alshurideh, 2019; Çakici et al., 2019), this study demonstrates its pivotal psychological function in transmitting the influence of environmental stimuli to behavioral intention. This mediation perspective enriches relational marketing theory by highlighting loyalty as a dynamic process variable within experiential consumption models.

Lastly, the study contributes to generational marketing literature by providing empirical evidence specific to Generation Z in a Philippine urban setting. Given that Gen Z consumers are highly experience-oriented, socially expressive, and digitally engaged, the strong environmental effects confirm that servicescape design holds heightened strategic relevance for this cohort (Kim et al., 2024). The findings thus bridge generational consumer behavior and servicescape theory within a localized hospitality context.

### 6.2. Practical Implications

The results offer actionable insights for café operators, hospitality managers, and local entrepreneurs in Iligan City and similar emerging urban markets. First, cafés must treat SE design as a strategic investment rather than an aesthetic enhancement. Since SE directly and indirectly influences RI, operators should prioritize integrated atmospheric planning—including cohesive décor, appropriate lighting intensity, curated music, efficient spatial layout, and uncompromising cleanliness standards. These elements collectively create immersive experiences that resonate with Generation Z consumers.

Second, environmental design should be aligned with loyalty-building strategies. Because CL partially mediates the SE–RI relationship, managers must ensure that positive environmental experiences translate into emotional attachment and relational commitment. Creating visually distinctive, “Instagrammable” spaces, incorporating local cultural identity, and fostering community-oriented atmospheres can strengthen psychological bonding and brand identification.

Third, relationship marketing initiatives should complement environmental enhancements. Digital loyalty programs, personalized engagement strategies, and interactive events can reinforce attitudinal commitment and encourage repeat patronage. Given Gen Z's digital orientation, integrating social media engagement and experiential storytelling can amplify loyalty formation and revisit behavior.

Fourth, local café owners should recognize that experiential differentiation may serve as a competitive advantage in saturated markets. In Iligan City, where café proliferation increases competition, cultivating a memorable SE that fosters loyalty can significantly enhance customer lifetime value and business sustainability.

Finally, policymakers and tourism stakeholders may also consider supporting experiential design and service quality training for small and medium café enterprises. Strengthening environmental and relational competencies among local operators can contribute to urban lifestyle branding and local tourism development.

In summary, this study demonstrates that cultivating CL through strategic SE design is a viable pathway to strengthening RI among Generation Z café consumers. By integrating experiential and relational strategies, cafés in Iligan City can achieve sustainable competitive positioning in an increasingly experience-driven hospitality landscape.

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