

**A PROJECT WORK ON  
UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF AMBIENCE IN SHAPING  
CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN CAFES OF POKHARA**

**BY**

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of the requirements for the degree of  
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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the project work report entitled "**Understanding the Role of Ambience in Shaping Customer Experience in Cafes of Pokhara**" submitted for the BHM is my original work and the Project Work Report has not formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, or other similar titles.

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Seema Pun

July, 2026

## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the Project Work titled " **Understanding the Role of Ambience in Shaping Customer Experience in Cafes of Pokhara**" submitted by **Seema Pun (23150265)** for the partial fulfilment of the requirements of BHM embodies the Bonafide work done by her under my supervision.

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Suresh Raj Adhikari

Supervisor, Project Work

July, 2026

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Thankyou

Seema Pun

BHM 6<sup>th</sup> Semester

NTHMC

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

The hospitality industry has undergone remarkable transformation over the past few decades due to changing customer lifestyles, globalization, urbanization, and evolving consumer preferences. Among various hospitality businesses, cafés have become increasingly popular as social, recreational, and experiential spaces where people gather not only for food and beverages but also for relaxation, social interaction, entertainment, work, and study. In modern society, cafés are no longer viewed merely as places to consume coffee or snacks; instead, they are considered important social environments that provide emotional comfort and memorable experiences to customers. As customer expectations continue to rise, café businesses are focusing more on creating attractive and comfortable environments to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. The concept of ambience has become one of the most important aspects in the hospitality and service industry. Ambience refers to the physical and sensory characteristics of a service environment, including lighting, music, aroma, color, cleanliness, seating arrangement, temperature, decoration, and overall atmosphere.

These environmental factors influence customers' emotions, moods, perceptions, and behaviors. Kotler (1973) introduced the concept of “atmospherics” and explained that the physical environment of a business can significantly affect consumer purchasing decisions and emotional responses. Similarly, Bitner (1992) developed the concept of “servicescape,” which explains how physical surroundings influence customer behavior and service experiences. According to Bitner, environmental dimensions such as spatial layout, design, and ambient conditions create psychological responses that affect customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. Several international researchers have highlighted the importance of ambience in shaping customer experience. According to Wakefield and Blodgett (1996), environmental elements such as aesthetics, layout accessibility, and cleanliness directly influence customer excitement and satisfaction in leisure service settings. Similarly, Ryu and Jang (2008) found that restaurant ambience significantly affects emotional responses and customer behavioral intentions.

The phenomenon of customer experience has gained increasing attention in recent years because businesses now recognize that customer satisfaction depends not only on product quality but also on emotional and psychological experiences. Pine and Gilmore (1999) argued that modern economies have shifted toward an “experience economy,” where customers value memorable experiences more than material products or services alone. In the context of Nepal, café culture has expanded rapidly, especially in urban and tourist areas. Increasing urbanization, changing lifestyles, social media influence, and tourism development have contributed to the growth of cafés across major cities. Among Nepalese cities, Pokhara has become one of the most vibrant centers for café culture. Pokhara is a major tourist destination known for its natural beauty, lakes, mountains, and hospitality services. The city attracts both domestic and international tourists throughout the year, creating opportunities for the growth of cafés and restaurants. Many cafés in Pokhara are uniquely designed to provide scenic views, peaceful atmosphere, cultural themes, live music, and aesthetic environments that appeal to customers. Café owners are investing in ambience-related factors to differentiate themselves in a highly competitive market.

The increasing number of themed cafés around Lakeside and other urban areas of Pokhara demonstrates the growing importance of ambience in attracting customers. Nepalese researchers have also examined customer satisfaction and hospitality services in recent years. According to Adhikari (2018), service quality and physical environment significantly influence customer satisfaction in Nepalese restaurants and cafés. A study conducted by Poudel (2021) highlighted that tourists visiting Pokhara prefer cafés with comfortable atmosphere, aesthetic decoration, and peaceful surroundings. These findings indicate that ambience plays an important role in shaping customer experiences within the Nepalese hospitality industry. Despite growing interest in café ambience and customer experience, there are still limited studies specifically focused on cafés in Pokhara. Customer expectations regarding ambience are continuously changing due to social media trends, tourism development, and modernization. Customers now prefer cafés that offer visually appealing spaces, relaxing atmosphere, and opportunities for social interaction and online engagement. In Pokhara, cafés are increasingly competing through ambience-related features such as lake-view seating, artistic interiors, lighting effects and cozy environments.

However, not all cafés may fully understand which aspects of ambience most strongly influence customer satisfaction and revisit intention. This creates a practical problem for café owners seeking to improve customer experience and business performance. Additionally, limited research has examined the experiences of both local customers and tourists within Pokhara's café environment. There is also insufficient empirical evidence regarding how ambience contributes to customer satisfaction, loyalty, and repeat visits in the café industry of Pokhara. Therefore, this study seeks to address these research gaps by examining the role of ambience in shaping customer experience in cafés of Pokhara. The study aims to understand how various ambience-related factors influence customer satisfaction, comfort, emotions, and revisit intentions. It also intends to provide insights into customer expectations and preferences regarding café environments. The findings of this research may help café owners, hospitality managers, and tourism stakeholders improve service environments and create better customer experiences. Furthermore, the study contributes to the academic literature related to ambience, servicescape, and customer experience within the Nepalese hospitality context.

Furthermore, the rapid growth of digital media and platform-driven tourism has reshaped customer expectations regarding atmospheric design. Modern café visitors often evaluate a venue's physical space through a visual lens, seeking photogenic interior elements, artful presentation, and comfortable layouts that can be shared across social networks. In Pokhara, where natural scenery and relaxed lifestyle dynamics already define the broader tourism appeal, café ambience acts as a bridge between the city's outdoor natural aesthetic and its indoor hospitality experience. When café operators successfully synchronize physical elements (such as lighting, furniture, and spatial layout) with sensory factors (such as acoustics, olfactory cues, and climate control), they create environments that foster deep emotional attachment and repeat visits. However, while the commercial significance of café ambience is widely recognized, the precise mechanisms through which specific atmospheric components influence customer perceptions, emotional states, and long-term loyalty remain insufficiently explored within Pokhara's unique socio-cultural and economic landscape. As competition among hospitality venues continues to intensify, a comprehensive empirical investigation into café ambience becomes necessary.

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

In recent years, cafés in Pokhara have become more than just places for food and beverages; they have evolved into social, recreational, and work-oriented spaces where customers seek comfort, relaxation, and memorable experiences. Among the various factors influencing customer satisfaction, café ambience including lighting, music, interior design, cleanliness, seating arrangement, aroma, and overall atmosphere plays a significant role in shaping customer perceptions and behaviors. Although several international studies Mary Jo Bitner (1992) Service industries, Line and Hanks (2019) Hotels in Spain have examined the relationship between ambience and customer satisfaction in restaurants and hospitality businesses, limited research has been conducted specifically in the café context of Pokhara. Existing studies in Nepal mainly emphasize service quality, food quality, or customer satisfaction in general hospitality settings, while insufficient attention has been given to ambience as an independent factor affecting customer experience.

Furthermore, there is a lack of localized research addressing how cultural preferences, tourism influence, and the unique social environment of Pokhara shape customer expectations regarding café ambience. Another significant research gap is that previous studies often treat ambience as a single general concept rather than examining its individual dimensions such as lighting, music, décor, spatial layout, and cleanliness separately. As a result, café operators lack practical insights into which specific ambience elements should be prioritized to improve customer experience and competitive advantage. Furthermore, existing studies often fail to capture the nuanced perspectives of Pokhara's diverse consumer demographic. While international tourists may prioritize aesthetic charm, local views, and atmospheric escapism, domestic youth and remote workers often require functional spatial layouts, comfortable seating, and low acoustic interference.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

1. How does cafe ambience influence customer experience in café of pokhara?
2. What improvement in ambience can cafes make to enhance customer experience?
3. How do customers perceive the overall atmosphere of cafes in Pokhara?

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

- To examine the different elements of ambience present in cafés of Pokhara
- To analyze the influence of ambience on customer experience in cafés of Pokhara
- To assess the impact of ambience on customer satisfaction and revisit intention in cafés of Pokhara.

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it helps to understand the importance of ambience in influencing customer experience in cafés of Pokhara. In the modern hospitality industry, customers seek not only quality food and beverages but also a comfortable, attractive, and memorable environment. By examining how different elements of ambience such as lighting, music, interior design, cleanliness, seating arrangement, and overall atmosphere affect customers' feelings and satisfaction, the study provides valuable insights into customer behavior and expectations within café settings. The findings of this study will be beneficial for café owners and managers in Pokhara. The research can help them identify the environmental factors that most strongly influence customer satisfaction and revisit intentions. Understanding these factors may support café businesses in improving their physical environment, enhancing service quality, attracting more customers, and maintaining competitiveness in the growing café industry. The study may also encourage café operators to invest more strategically in ambience-related aspects to create positive and unique customer experiences.

Academically, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge related to ambience, customer experience, and the hospitality industry. There are limited studies focusing specifically on cafés in the Nepalese context, particularly in Pokhara. Therefore, this research helps fill the existing research gap and provides a reference for future researchers interested in customer behavior, servicescape, café culture, and hospitality management. The study may also support students and scholars in conducting further research on similar topics in different locations and service sectors. Furthermore, the study is significant because it highlights the relationship between physical environment and customer emotions, perceptions, and behavioral intentions.

## **1.6 Literature Review**

This literature review examines existing scholarly work on customer experience, café ambience, sensory marketing, environmental psychology, and consumer behavioral responses within hospitality and tourism-oriented café settings. The review is organized into three major themes: the physical and sensory dimensions of café ambience, the psychological and emotional responses of customers toward café environments, and the strategic role of ambience in customer satisfaction, loyalty, and competitive positioning. By synthesizing international hospitality theories with emerging localized studies from Nepal and tourism-centered urban economies, this review establishes a conceptual foundation for understanding how café ambience shapes customer experiences within the rapidly evolving café culture of Pokhara.

### **1.6.1 Literature Review Framework**

The literature on customer experience in hospitality and food service industries highlights ambience as one of the most influential environmental factors affecting customer perceptions, emotions, and behavioral intentions. The concept of ambience originates from environmental psychology and servicescape theory, which emphasize the influence of physical surroundings on customer behavior. Kotler (1973) introduced the concept of atmospheric marketing and argued that the physical environment of a service setting significantly influences customers' emotional responses and purchasing decisions. According to Kotler, elements such as lighting, music, color, scent, temperature, and interior design create an atmosphere that can attract customers and shape their experiences. The study established that consumers often respond more strongly to environmental cues than to the actual product being offered. Building on this foundation, Bitner (1992) developed the Servicescape Model, which explains how physical surroundings affect customers and employees in service organizations. Through a conceptual analysis of service environments, Bitner identified three major dimensions of servicescape: ambient conditions, spatial layout and functionality, and signs, symbols, and artifacts. The findings suggested that these dimensions directly influence customer satisfaction, emotions, and future behavioral intentions. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) proposed the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, which explains how environmental stimuli affect an individual's emotional state and subsequent behavior.

Their study demonstrated that pleasant environments generate positive emotions such as pleasure and arousal, leading customers to spend more time and engage more actively within service settings. This framework has been widely applied in hospitality and café research. Turley and Milliman (2000) reviewed numerous studies on atmospheric effects in retail and hospitality settings and found that environmental factors significantly influence customer attitudes, purchase intentions, and overall satisfaction. Their review categorized atmospheric variables into external variables, general interior variables, layout and design variables, point-of-purchase variables, and human variables. Han and Ryu (2009) examined the relationship between physical environment, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intentions in restaurant settings. Using quantitative analysis, they found that attractive interior design, comfortable seating arrangements, and pleasant ambient conditions positively influenced customer satisfaction and increased revisit intentions. The study highlighted ambience as a strategic tool for customer retention. In the Nepalese context, tourism growth and urban lifestyle changes have contributed to the rapid expansion of café culture in cities such as Pokhara. Cafés have evolved beyond food and beverage outlets into social, recreational, and work-oriented spaces.

However, most existing studies focus on food quality, service quality, and customer satisfaction, while limited attention has been given to the role of ambience in shaping customer experiences within Nepali cafés. The existing literature indicates that ambience contributes significantly to customers' emotional responses, perceived value, satisfaction, and loyalty. Nevertheless, there remains a lack of empirical studies specifically examining how various dimensions of ambience influence customer experience in cafés located in Pokhara. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring customers' perceptions of café ambience and its role in shaping their overall experience. Within Nepal's rapidly modernizing socio-economic landscape, café culture has undergone significant transformation, particularly in urban and tourist hubs like Kathmandu and Pokhara. As highlighted by Adhikari (2024, 2025), both functional cues (such as layout and convenience) and humanistic/mechanic atmospheric cues serve as key determinants of customer satisfaction and loyalty in Nepalese food service businesses. Pokharel (2025) further reinforced that physical design elements like lighting, layout efficiency, and ambient balance exert a direct impact on customer evaluations across Nepalese dining establishments.

## **1.6.2 Review of Key Empirical Themes**

To build an integrated understanding of how ambience shapes customer experiences in cafés, this section expands upon the major empirical themes identified in the literature review framework.

### **1.6.2.1 Physical and Sensory Dimensions of Café Ambience**

Academic literature consistently demonstrates that physical surroundings strongly influence customer perceptions within hospitality environments. Kotler (1973) established that atmospheric design acts as a strategic marketing mechanism capable of shaping consumer emotions and purchasing behavior. Similarly, Bitner (1992) argued that service environments communicate symbolic meanings regarding quality, professionalism, comfort, and brand identity. Within café settings, ambience encompasses multiple sensory dimensions including lighting, temperature, music, scent, cleanliness, furniture arrangement, décor, spatial layout, and visual aesthetics. Ryu and Jang (2008) found that ambient conditions significantly influence customer comfort and emotional satisfaction during dining experiences. In Pokhara's rapidly expanding café culture, physical ambience has become increasingly commercialized as cafés compete to differentiate themselves within tourism-heavy marketplaces. Scenic rooftop seating, Himalayan-themed décor, artistic murals, indoor plants, and cozy lighting arrangements are frequently used to create emotionally appealing and visually distinctive customer environments.

Many cafés intentionally integrate local cultural symbolism and natural aesthetics to align with Pokhara's tourism identity as a peaceful leisure destination. Furthermore, sensory ambience increasingly intersects with digital culture. Sharma (2024) observed that visually attractive café environments significantly influence social media engagement among urban youth consumers. Customers frequently prioritize cafés offering aesthetically pleasing interiors suitable for photography, content creation, and online social sharing. Alongside physical design, sensory atmospherics—specifically acoustic engineering and olfactory management—play a decisive role in shaping customer perception. Research by Aprilia and Suryani (2020) highlights that background music style and volume significantly regulate customer mood and conversational comfort. Soft instrumental, acoustic, or lo-fi soundscapes promote relaxation and concentration, whereas excessively loud or chaotic commercial music causes sensory overload.

### **1.6.2.2 Psychological and Emotional Customer Responses**

Environmental psychology literature emphasizes that customers emotionally interpret hospitality spaces rather than merely consuming physical products. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) demonstrated that environmental stimuli trigger emotional states such as pleasure, excitement, calmness, or discomfort, which subsequently influence behavioral decisions. Within cafés, emotional responses are shaped through both conscious and subconscious sensory experiences. Soft music, natural lighting, comfortable seating, and relaxing scents may create feelings of calmness and psychological relief, while loud environments, cramped seating, or poor ventilation may produce stress and irritation. Wakefield and Blodgett (1994) established that positive atmospheric conditions enhance customer excitement and emotional engagement, encouraging customers to remain within hospitality environments for longer durations. In tourism-oriented café spaces such as Pokhara's Lakeside area, ambience frequently contributes to emotional escapism, allowing tourists and local consumers to temporarily disconnect from routine pressures and immerse themselves within aesthetically relaxing environments.

Additionally, cafés increasingly function as multifunctional social environments rather than traditional beverage-serving establishments alone. Students, freelancers, travelers, and young professionals often use cafés for studying, social networking, creative work, meetings, or leisure relaxation. Consequently, emotional comfort and environmental functionality become central determinants of customer satisfaction. In urban tourist environments like Pokhara, cafés increasingly function as social "Third Places" a concept originally formulated by Ray Oldenburg (1989) to describe informal public gathering places distinct from the domestic home ("first place") and the structured workplace ("second place"). Modern café patrons utilize these third places for diverse activities including social networking, remote corporate work, academic study, and personal relaxation. Consequently, emotional comfort is closely tied to spatial functionality. When cafés provide supportive infrastructure—such as spacious seating arrangements, personal privacy zones, accessible power sockets, and stable Wi-Fi—customers experience high emotional satisfaction and productivity. Conversely, cramped seating density, high acoustic noise, and poor climate control induce emotional friction, stress, and spatial frustration, prompting immediate exit.

### **1.6.2.3 Ambience, Customer Loyalty, and Competitive Advantage**

The final empirical theme emerging from the literature addresses the direct strategic relationship between atmospheric design, customer retention, and long-term brand loyalty. In an increasingly saturated hospitality market, food and beverage offerings can be easily replicated by competitors. The literature further indicates that ambience directly influences customer retention, revisit intention, and brand loyalty. Han and Ryu (2009) concluded that restaurant atmosphere positively affects customer satisfaction and long-term loyalty behaviors. Customers who emotionally connect with hospitality environments are more likely to revisit establishments and recommend them to others. In Pokhara's competitive café industry, ambience increasingly serves as a strategic differentiating factor. Because food and beverage offerings can often be replicated by competitors, cafés rely heavily on unique environmental experiences to establish brand identity and customer attachment. Positive ambience also contributes to digital reputation management. Satisfied customers frequently share café experiences through online reviews, photographs, travel blogs, and social media platforms, indirectly influencing broader consumer perceptions. In tourism-driven economies, these digital representations significantly affect business visibility and customer acquisition. However, maintaining ambience consistency presents significant operational challenges.

Seasonal tourism fluctuations, rising rental expenses, maintenance costs, and evolving consumer expectations create pressure for continuous reinvestment into environmental aesthetics and customer comfort. Café operators must therefore balance financial sustainability with the growing demand for immersive experiential environments. Furthermore, in modern tourism economies, customer loyalty and brand reputation are heavily mediated by digital platforms. Jaishi (2025) and Sapkota (2025) note that online review attributes, digital photos, and travel blogs heavily influence customer destination choices and restaurant selections in Pokhara. Satisfied customers who experience superior café ambience routinely share their experiences through social media platforms and online travel review sites, generating organic marketing that attracts both domestic youth and international tourists. Therefore, strategic investment in café ambience not only drives immediate customer satisfaction on-site but also sustains the business's long-term digital visibility and competitive positioning.

### **1.6.3 Literature Gap**

Existing scholarship on hospitality and customer experience has extensively explored restaurant service quality, customer satisfaction, and tourism behavior at broad institutional levels. However, limited research specifically investigates how café ambience shapes customer experience within emerging urban tourism economies such as Pokhara. Most existing studies emphasize generalized service quality dimensions while overlooking the deeper emotional, sensory, and psychological impacts of café environments on customers. Furthermore, localized research examining Pokhara's rapidly evolving café culture remains significantly underdeveloped, particularly regarding how aesthetic design, sensory stimuli, digital culture, and tourism-oriented ambience collectively influence customer perceptions and behavioral responses. Existing Nepalese hospitality literature also rarely explores how social media-driven café consumption patterns interact with ambience expectations among domestic youth and international visitors. This study addresses these empirical gaps by focusing specifically on the role of ambience in shaping customer experience within Pokhara's café sector. By integrating environmental psychology theories with localized hospitality dynamics, this research provides a human-centered understanding of how sensory and atmospheric elements influence emotional satisfaction, customer attachment, revisit intention, and overall experiential consumption within contemporary café culture.

### **1.7 Research Methodology**

The research methodology section outlines the systematic operational framework, scientific design, and analytical techniques employed to investigate the role of ambience in shaping customer experience in the cafés of Pokhara. To capture both measurable relationships and nuanced human experiences, this research relies on a structured qualitative-phenomenological approach embedded within a descriptive research framework. By detailing the research design, participant selection, sampling methods, data collection tools, analytical procedures, ethical considerations, and delimitations, this section establishes the academic rigor, empirical reliability, and logical validity of the entire study.

### **1.7.1 Research Design**

This study adopts a descriptive and quantitative research design to investigate the role of ambience in shaping customer experience in cafés of Pokhara. The quantitative approach is appropriate because it enables the researcher to collect measurable data from café customers and analyze the relationship between ambience and customer experience. The descriptive design facilitates a systematic understanding of customers' perceptions regarding various ambience-related factors within café settings.

### **1.7.2 Population and Participants**

The target population of this study comprises customers visiting cafés located in Pokhara Metropolitan City. The participants include individuals who have recently visited cafés and have sufficient experience to evaluate the ambience and overall customer experience.

The respondents must meet the following criteria:

- Must be at least 18 years of age.
- Must have visited a café in Pokhara within the last six months.
- Must be willing to participate voluntarily in the study.
- Must have experienced the café environment directly.

### **1.7.3 Sampling Technique**

The study employs convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in hospitality and consumer behavior research. Customers available at selected cafés during the data collection period will be approached and requested to participate. A sample size of approximately 150–250 respondents will be considered sufficient to obtain reliable and meaningful results regarding customer perceptions and experiences.

### **1.7.4 Data Collection Methods**

The primary method of data collection consists of in-depth, semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews are widely utilized within the phenomenological framework because they grant participants the absolute freedom to explain their lived experiences, environmental preferences, and

sensory perceptions openly, while providing a flexible guide to keep the empirical conversation tightly focused on the core research questions.

An interview guide will be prepared with open-ended field questions specifically targeting the following operational areas:

- **Background Information:** Motivation for visiting cafes, primary activities performed (work/leisure), and frequency of visits.
- **Physical and Visual Culture Experiences:** Handling layout configurations, navigating lighting and color schematics, and dealing with seating ergonomics or conversational privacy.
- **Sensory Atmospherics:** Impact of background music selection, olfactory coffee identity versus kitchen odor contamination, and seasonal ventilation comfort.
- **The "Third Place" and Digital Integration:** The psychological toll of finding functional workspace infrastructure, the pressure to seek out photogenic "Instagrammable" corners, and the impact of online business reviews on venue selection.
- **Place Attachment Dynamics:** Personal sanctuary definitions, reliance on favorite cafes for emotional unwinding, and brand loyalty intentions in response to competitive shifts.

### **1.7.5 Data Analysis Procedure**

The transcribed data will be systematically analyzed using thematic analysis embedded within a phenomenological framework. This process converts raw data into meaningful interpretive concepts through the following structured steps:

**1. Transcription:** Transcribe all audio interview recordings and open-ended text responses into clean, verbatim data sheets to preserve the full structural meaning of what the participants stated.

**2. Familiarization:** Read through the transcripts several times to achieve deep cognitive familiarity with the narratives.

**3. Horizontalization:** Highlight significant individual statements, repeated ideas, and emotionally strong phrases that directly relate to interior design, sensory inputs, and place attachment.

**4. Reduction:** Group similar codes and meaningful statements together into distinct, isolated meaning units.

**5. Thematic Development:** Cluster the meaning units into broader themes and sub-themes, specifically aligning the empirical text with the core research questions regarding physical layouts, sensory dynamics, and social constructions.

**6. Phenomenological Integration:** Interpret the final themes by synthesizing the participants' actual words with modern hospitality atmosphere concepts and existing localized tourism literature.

#### **1.7.6 Ethical Considerations**

This study will follow standard ethical principles throughout the research process. Participants will be informed about the purpose and objectives of the study before data collection, and their participation will be entirely voluntary. Informed consent will be obtained from each respondent, and they will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants will be maintained by not disclosing their personal identities, and all collected information will be used solely for academic research purposes.

#### **1.7.7 Delimitations of the Study**

This study is limited to customers visiting selected cafés within Pokhara Metropolitan City. It focuses specifically on examining the role of café ambience in shaping customer experience. The research considers only customers' perceptions regarding ambience-related factors such as lighting, music, interior design, cleanliness, seating arrangement, and overall atmosphere. Other factors influencing customer experience, such as food quality, pricing, and service quality, are beyond the primary scope of this study.

#### **1.7.8 Limitations of the Study**

The findings of this study may be limited because data will be collected using convenience sampling from selected cafés in Pokhara, which may not fully represent all café customers. The study relies on respondents' self-reported perceptions, which may be influenced by personal preferences and temporary moods. Additionally, time and resource constraints may limit the number of cafés and participants included in the research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **FINDINGS**

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study on "Understanding the Role of Ambience in Shaping Customer Experience in Cafes of Pokhara." The findings are derived from qualitative data collected from nine frequent cafe patrons, remote workers, and digital nomads through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaire responses. In alignment with rigorous qualitative phenomenological inquiry, this chapter focuses entirely on uncovering the subjective lived experiences, personal meanings, and sensory perspectives shared by the participants within the cafe spaces of Pokhara. The thematic analysis and reduction of the raw data transcripts produced three finalized major themes: Physical Environment, Spatial Configurations, and Visual Comfort; Sensory Atmospheric, Auditory Dynamics, and Olfactory Engagement; and The Social Construction of the "Third Place" and Digital Aesthetization. Each main theme is unfolded systematically through relevant sub-themes, descriptive narration, and supporting direct participant quotations. To preserve absolute confidentiality and protect the participants' privacy, all patrons are identified with pseudonyms and the names of their respective cafe venues have been completely anonymized.

#### **2.1 Theme 1: Physical Environment, Spatial Configurations, and Visual Comfort**

The first major theme emerging from the data captures the immediate physical and tangible design frameworks that dictate the consumer experience within Pokhara's cafe landscape. Participants articulated that their overall satisfaction, psychological comfort, and length of stay are heavily mediated by structural variables such as interior lighting, layout density, seating furniture ergonomics, and the architectural connection to Pokhara's natural landscape.

##### **2.1.1 The Impact of Lighting and Color Schematics on Emotional Comfort**

A critical finding was the profound emotional influence of visual parameters, specifically interior illumination and interior color palettes. Participants noted that independent cafes frequently utilize lighting strategies to consciously manipulate mood, shifting between bright, high-energy settings and warm, low-intensity golden hours that encourage relaxation.

Bimal, a regular Patron at Lakeside Roast Cafe shared "I specifically avoid cafes that use harsh, clinical white fluorescent lights. It feels like an office or a hospital, not a place to unwind. In Pokhara, the cafes that succeed are the ones using soft warm lighting, exposed Edison bulbs, and earth-toned walls. When the weather outside becomes gloomy or rainy during the monsoon, entering a cafe with warm light instantly reduces my anxiety and makes me want to sit for hours."

### **2.1.2 Spatial Density, Seating Ergonomics, and Conversational Privacy**

The internal layout configuration plays a vital role in determining customer comfort, particularly regarding the trade-off between maximizing business table capacity and providing private conversational spaces. Overcrowded, poorly spaced seating arrangements systematically dismantle customer comfort and lead to cognitive overload.

Prerna, a customer at Phewa Vista Bistro revealed "Many new cafes in the Lakeside area crowd their tables together to fit as many customers as possible. It completely ruins the experience. If I can hear every single word the person at the next table is whispering, I feel exposed and uncomfortable. I prefer cafes that invest in high-quality, ergonomic wooden chairs or plush sofas, and spread their seating out so that you have distinct zones of conversational privacy."

### **2.1.3 Architectural Glocalization and Scenic Integration**

Consistent with Pokhara's unique status as a montane tourism hub, participants heavily emphasized the structural integration of natural scenery such as panoramic views of the Annapurna range or Phewa Lake into the venue design. Successful operations actively merge indoor aesthetics with outdoor vistas to generate a unified, localized experience.

Sanjiv, a patron at Mountain Brew Hub pointed "The layout of a cafe in Pokhara cannot exist in a vacuum; it must speak to the natural environment outside. Cafes that incorporate wide glass brick windows, open-air balconies, and minimalist indoor plant life create a beautiful sense of peace. It links the indoor coffee culture directly to the majestic mountain valley outside, making the physical space feel infinite rather than restrictive."

## **2.2 Theme 2: Sensory Atmospherics, Auditory Dynamics, and Olfactory Engagement**

The second major theme concerns the profound sensory and intangible atmospheric forces that unconsciously shape customer evaluations of a cafe space. Workers and patrons alike note that consumer experiences swing significantly based on auditory balancing, the preservation of authentic olfactory markers, and thermal regulation amidst Pokhara's volatile seasonal microclimates.

### **2.2.1 Acoustic Engineering vs. Sonic Chaos: The Role of Background Music**

A core driver of customer comfort or irritation is the auditory environment on the cafe floor. When venues fail to manage sound levels or select inappropriate genres, the resulting acoustic friction causes immediate dissatisfaction and drives customers to leave prematurely.

Maya, a customer at Lakeside Retreat Cafe said "The choice of music can completely make or break a cafe session. During the peak tourism season, some cafes blast high-tempo commercial pop music, which creates a chaotic, hurried environment. It clashes with the relaxed energy people seek in Pokhara. The venues that get it right play soft lo-fi, acoustic, or traditional instrumental tracks at a volume where you can speak normally without straining your throat."

### **2.2.2 Olfactory Identity: The Commercial Power of Freshly Brewed Aroma**

Participants highlighted the critical importance of a clean, coffee-dominant olfactory environment. The sensory authenticity of a space is compromised when competing kitchen smells contaminate the primary dining floor.

Deepak, a regular at Bean & Leaf Sanctuary claimed "The first thing that greets you when you walk into an authentic cafe should always be the rich, intoxicating aroma of freshly ground espresso. That smell acts as an immediate psychological trigger that sets your expectations. If a cafe has a poorly ventilated open kitchen that floods the seating area with the greasy smell of fried food or spices, it instantly shatters the elite cafe identity and ruins the sensory purity of the experience."

### **2.2.3 Thermal and Ventilation Comfort Amidst Seasonal Weather Shifts**

The physical sensation of temperature regulation serves as a critical, unexamined hygiene factor in shaping customer retention. Pokhara's intense summer

humidity and chilly winter mornings require cafes to possess adaptive thermal management systems to ensure sustained customer dwell time.

Sita, a patron at Annapurna View Cafe added "Pokhara's weather is highly unpredictable, shifting rapidly from heavy downpours to intense tropical heat. If a cafe lacks adequate ceiling ventilation or air conditioning during the humid months, it becomes a claustrophobic, sweaty space where it is impossible to relax. Proper airflow and stable indoor temperatures are invisible when they work perfectly, but the moment they fail, your entire experience is ruined regardless of how good the coffee tastes.

### **2.3 Theme 3: The Social Construction of the "Third Place" and Digital Aesthetization**

The third theme identifies the sociological roles that modern cafes fulfill for the contemporary consumer in Pokhara, mapping how structural designs facilitate distinct social interactions, satisfy digital identity pressures, and drive long-term place attachment.

#### **2.3.1 Remote Work, Academic Friction, and Functional Ambience**

For the growing demographic of digital nomads, remote corporate professionals, and university students in Pokhara, the cafe has evolved into a functional "third place" bridging the gap between the domestic household and the formal workplace. This transformation requires the provision of specific infrastructural amenities built directly into the ambience.

Ramesh, a patron and Student at Central Valley Grind said "I don't just visit cafes for a beverage, I visit because I need an environment that fosters productivity. For student-workers and remote professionals, the presence of stable high-speed Wi-Fi, accessible power outlets at every table, and a quiet working zone is absolutely mandatory. If the ambience becomes too chaotic with loud large-group party seating, it creates severe friction for those of us trying to focus, forcing us to search for quieter, more professional alternative spaces."

#### **2.3.2 The Imperative of "Instagrammable" Spaces and Algorithmic Consumer Satisfaction**

Grounding the contemporary experience in hyper-visualized digital culture, participants noted that modern consumers face intense internal and social pressure to

document their lifestyles on algorithmic platforms like Instagram and TikTok. Consequently, the visual ambience must provide photogenic hotspots to secure customer validation and positive online reviews.

Arjun, a visitor at Lakeside Boho Lounge added "In today's market, a cafe must be beautiful on a screen to attract the younger crowd. Owners intentionally design specific corners with neon signs, macramé wall hangings, chic minimalism, or stylized plate presentation. We consciously look for these aesthetic backdrops to take photos for social media. The visual ambience itself has become a core product that we consume, purchase, and broadcast online to define our personal style."

### **2.3.3 Emotional Attachment, Place Attachment, and Long-Term Patronage Intentions**

Ultimately, the cumulative interaction of positive physical, sensory, and social atmospheric factors generates deep psychological place attachment, transforming casual first-time visitors into highly loyal brand advocates.

Gita, a regular patron at Old Town Roasters claimed "When a cafe hits the perfect sweet spot of soothing music, cozy seating, beautiful lighting, and warm service, it stops being a commercial store and becomes a personal sanctuary. You form a genuine emotional attachment to the space. Even if a new venue opens up down the street with cheaper prices, I will always return to my regular spot because the specific peace and comfort I feel here cannot be easily replicated elsewhere.

## **2.4 Summary**

In summary, the empirical findings across all three themes demonstrate a profound structural interconnectedness between atmospheric curation and the overall human experience within Pokhara's cafe sector. The consumer journey is systematically defined by a layered framework of spatial and sensory variables, where the initial physical layouts, ergonomic structures, and visual lighting setups establish the primary boundaries of personal comfort. This foundational layer is heavily amplified by sensory atmospherics, requiring careful management of soundscapes, olfactory markers, and thermal comforts to shield visitors from chaotic external disruption.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **3.1 Conclusion**

This study explored the role of ambience in shaping customer experiences in the cafes of Pokhara, focusing on the structural designs, sensory atmospherics, and social transformations that define modern gastronomy spaces for contemporary patrons. The empirical findings reveal that the internal environment of Pokhara's cafe sector plays a profound role in driving consumer behavior, psychological comfort, and overall satisfaction. The study demonstrates that visual and physical variables such as warm lighting configurations, ergonomic furniture, layout spacing, and the deliberate architectural integration of Pokhara's montane views—serve as the vital foundation for positive consumer impressions, directly determining how long a customer chooses to stay within the space. Furthermore, the research highlights that intangible sensory atmospherics function as critical determinants of venue performance. Customers actively respond to acoustic engineering, where low-volume acoustic or ambient music balances social intimacy, and to olfactory management, where the preservation of a dominant coffee aroma reinforces the space's premium identity.

Additionally, with the modern evolution of these venues into "third places" for remote work, study, and digital lifestyle self-presentation, a cafe's visual photogenic quality ("Instagrammability") and its digital infrastructure (high-speed Wi-Fi and power accessibility) have become essential components of the core service product. Ultimately, when an independent cafe successfully aligns its physical design, sensory environment, and functional amenities, it fosters deep psychological place attachment, transforming casual visitors into highly loyal brand advocates and securing commercial stability within a highly competitive tourism market. Finally, the study highlights a profound sociological shift in how modern consumers utilize café environments. Cafés in Pokhara have evolved beyond simple food and beverage outlets into vital "third places" and hyper-visual digital spaces. For remote professionals and students, functional ambient amenities such as accessible power outlets, reliable high-speed Wi-Fi, and designated quiet zones are mandatory prerequisites for productivity.

### 3.2 Recommendations

Based on the lived experiences and spatial priorities highlighted by the participants, the following recommendations are suggested for cafe operators and hospitality designers within Pokhara's gastronomy sector:

1. **Dynamic Spatial Zoning:** Cafe operators should move away from high-density, crowded floor plans and instead implement intentional spatial layout zoning. Setting aside distinct areas for focused remote work (equipped with ergonomic seating, individual lighting, and easily accessible power sockets) separate from open-air social lounges will minimize spatial friction between different customer groups.
2. **Acoustic and Olfactory Quality Management:** Venues must establish strict internal standards for their sensory environment. This includes installing sound-absorbing materials and training staff to maintain background music at non-intrusive levels, alongside investing in commercial extraction hoods to prevent heavy kitchen grease and cooking odors from overwhelming the main dining floor.
3. **Architectural Glocalization:** Future cafe developments should maximize Pokhara's natural advantages by using wide floor-to-ceiling glass windows, open terraces, and indoor green spaces. Blending localized, sustainable raw materials (such as local stone and timber) with minimalist modern aesthetics will strengthen place identity and increase appeal for international and domestic tourists alike.
4. **Adaptive Climate Control:** Given Pokhara's seasonal weather variations, operators must invest in climate control infrastructure. Ensuring excellent cross-ventilation during the high-humidity monsoon season and providing warm indoor heating options during chilly winter mornings will improve customer dwell time and generate consistent year-round revenue.
5. **Implement Operational Sustainability and Green Ambience Strategies:** Integrate Eco-Friendly and Biophilic Elements: Café operators should incorporate sustainable indoor plant arrangements, natural lighting maximizers, and eco-friendly furnishings into their physical design. Incorporating biophilic design—such as living plant walls, indoor water features, and natural ventilation channels—not only enhances visual aesthetics and air quality but also aligns with the growing preference among modern environmentally conscious tourists and local patrons for sustainable, nature-connected hospitality spaces

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## **APPENDIX**

### **INTERVIEWED QUESTIONS**

#### **Section A: Demographic and Experience Background**

- Please tell me a bit about yourself. How old are you, what is your primary occupation, and how frequently do you visit cafes in Pokhara?
- What are your main reasons for spending time in cafes (e.g., socializing, remote working, relaxation, studying)?
- On average, how long do you stay per visit, and do you usually visit alone or in groups?

#### **Section B: Physical Environment, Layout, and Visual Comfort**

Can you describe the visual elements (such as lighting style, color choices, and decorations) of your favorite cafe in Pokhara? How do these elements make you feel when you enter?

- How does table layout and spacing affect your comfort? Have you ever left a cafe because it felt too crowded or lacked privacy?
- How important is it for you to have a view of Pokhara's natural scenery (like the lake or mountains) while sitting inside a cafe?

#### **Section C: Sensory Atmospheric (Sound, Smell, and Temperature)**

- How does the type and volume of background music influence your ability to relax, talk, or work in a cafe?
- What kind of odors do you notice most when entering a cafe, and how does the smell of food versus coffee alter your view of the establishment?
- Can you think of an experience where poor ventilation or uncomfortable indoor temperatures ruined your visit?

#### **Section D: The Modern Cafe as a "Third Place" and Digital Space**

- What specific features (like Wi-Fi speed, power outlets, or seating options) must a cafe have to make you highly productive?
- When choosing a cafe, how much are you influenced by its "Instagrammability" or how photogenic its interior design looks online?
- Do you feel that taking photos of the cafe ambience adds value to your overall experience as a customer?

## **Section E: Place Attachment and Loyalty**

- What is the single most important atmospheric element that transforms a casual cafe visit into a deeply memorable personal experience?
- Why do you remain loyal to your favorite cafe, and what structural or environmental changes would cause you to switch to a competitor?

## **QUESTIONNAIRE**

### **1. General Background**

- What is your age group?
- What is your gender?
- How many days per week do you visit cafes in Pokhara?
- What is your primary purpose during a cafe visit (Socializing / Remote Work / Leisure)?

### **2. Physical Design and Comfort Factors**

- How do you rate the performance of local cafes in balancing functional workspace design with social seating options?
- In what ways does the use of warm golden lighting compared to cold white light change the time you are willing to spend inside a cafe?
- Do you feel that high table density and close seating limits your sense of personal space and conversational privacy?

### **3. Sensory Environment and Atmospheric**

- How do you react when a cafe plays loud commercial music instead of soft acoustic or instrumental genres?
- Does the smell of fried food or strong kitchen spices make you perceive a cafe as less premium or less authentic?
- How does your satisfaction drop if a cafe fails to maintain proper air conditioning or ventilation during Pokhara's humid summer months?

#### 4. Digital Culture and Place Attachment

- What is the main problem you face when trying to work or study in a local cafe (e.g., lack of power outlets, unstable Wi-Fi, or noisy crowds)?
- How much does the desire to take aesthetic photos for social media guide your choice of which cafe to visit?
- Does a welcoming, comfortable atmosphere matter more to you than the price and taste of the menu items when deciding to become a regular customer?