

# Exploring Workforce Dynamics: An In-Depth Analysis of Employee Turnover and Retention in the Saudi Arabian Café Sector


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## ABSTRACT

Employee turnover is a vital management concern in the hospitality industry. The present study seeks to enrich theoretical and empirical literature by finding employee factors associated with employee turnover and retention in the context of the coffee shop industry. High staff turnover may impose challenges, including hiring and training new staff and losing organisational expertise and cohesiveness. Yet, managers must cater to the policies and procedures they might apply to attract and retain staff. Unfortunately, research on turnover intentions and retention in the hospitality industry, especially coffee shops, is scarce. By investigating the issue qualitatively, our study hopes to bridge this gap. A qualitative semi-structured interviews were used for data collection and analysis. Employees from coffee shops in Jeddah City, Saudi Arabia, were recruited and interviewed using five questions from the literature. These interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically, and themes drawn serve as the basis for findings on opinions set by employees in coffee shops on the matter of remaining or leaving their current job. 13 participants employed in coffee shops participated in the study, a thematic analysis of these interviews was conducted, and 12 themes were drawn and discussed. Insight into what makes these employees leave or remain is majorly linked in their opinion to pay and incentives, flexible working hours, employee voice and input, work environment, and interest in coffee being the driving force and key motivator. Therefore, management can pay attention to maintaining a positive working environment, incentivise their employees, allow employee involvement in shaping how the business works, and emphasise their passion for coffee.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The hospitality sector has long experienced challenges with employee retention and turnover (Dermody, 2002; Choudhury & McIntosh, 2013; Park & Min, 2020). Over the years, numerous attempts were made to explain why the hospitality sector, especially job roles and functions in businesses such as cafes, typically have such challenges. Moreover, high levels of employee turnover, irrespective of the industry sector, represent a significant problem for organisations (Grotto *et al.*, 2017). Data suggests that certain industry sectors experience higher levels of turnover than others. Still, as a broad threshold, anything above 15% turnover is meant to result from significant challenges within an organisation or industry (Hom *et al.*, 2019).

Generally, staff turnover has grown over the last five years, from 15.7% in 2014 to 19.9% in 2018. According to the 2018 Turnover Report, the hospitality industry had the highest employee turnover rate of all industries at 31.8%, followed by 20.4% for healthcare personnel and 20% for manufacturing employees (Salarycom, 2018).

Business Wire (2022) indicates that the market for coffee in Saudi Arabia was worth an estimated US\$1575.5 M in 2021, forecast to rise to over US\$2220.7 M by 2028. The report also identifies that the takeaway market and consumption of coffee outside of the home is a significant growth trend. Therefore, increasing demand for coffee implies increased demand for cafes in Saudi Arabia, leading to increased demand for staff. However, few studies have examined staff turnover and

retention in cafes in Saudi Arabia or the hospitality sector in Saudi Arabia more broadly (Islam & Assiri, 2019). Accordingly, this study aims to investigate the factors contributing to employee turnover and employee retention within the cafe sector in Saudi Arabia.

Farrukh *et al.* (2020) highlighted that there are often hidden costs associated with high levels of employee turnover, such as loss of organisational knowledge, additional training costs, and lowered employee morale and engagement, for those employees that remain within the organisation and are expected to carry out training work for their new colleagues. Given that the hospitality sector represents a rising contribution to Saudi Arabia's economy, it is valuable to investigate this issue to understand what encourages employees to remain and drives them to leave. The contribution of this study is that it provides fresh insights into this challenge, with specific reference to cafes in Saudi Arabia.

This research addresses factors associated with employee turnover and retention within cafes in Saudi Arabia. Other sub-questions address: (1) the retention factors within the cafe industry and (2) the turnover factors within the cafe industry.

Therefore, our objectives for this study are:

1. To identify factors related to high employee turnover in the cafe industry in Saudi Arabia
2. To suggest effective management practices to tackle this issue within Saudi Arabia

The significance of the research is that it gathers insights directly from employees in a novel cultural setting (Saudi Arabia) to understand employee perspectives of working in the industry concerning turnover and retention factors.

The paper structure is as follows: the next chapter will review the relevant literature on employee turnover and retention within factors within the hospitality sector. Then, the methodology chapter discusses the qualitative approach and the semi-structured interviews for data collection. Next, the Findings chapter is followed by the Discussion. Finally, the last chapter is the conclusions and practical recommendations.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review focuses on factors relating to employee turnover and employee retention, concentrating on aspects contributing to employee turnover and retention in the cafe sector. Sparse evidence exists looking at employee turnover and retention within Saudi Arabia, but some studies do exist on this subject and have been critically reviewed. The literature incorporated within this review has been identified using a structured research approach to trace the literature's development over time.

### 2.1. Factors Relating to Employee Turnover

Employee turnover is defined as "the number of temporary employees leaving their job before their specified contract end date." It can be voluntary when an employee decides to leave or involuntary when the employer terminates the contract (Iqbal, 2010; Holtom *et al.*, 2008). This paper focuses on voluntary turnover.

Multiple studies exist which examine factors relating to employee turnover. These include a lack of satisfaction with job role (Foote, 2004), lack of training and development opportunities (Ramlall, 2004), lack of control over the day-to-day work (Sobaih *et al.*, 2011), and lack of organisational socialisation (Frye *et al.*, 2020). It can thus be reasonably argued that irrespective of industry sector, common themes on high levels of employee turnover can be derived from organisations failing to accommodate recommended good practices in terms of activities which encourage employee retention.

However, it is simplistic to suppose that employee turnover is purely related to the antithesis of retention factors. Instead, more complex factors emerge, evidencing that outside of structural conditions in the workplace, i.e., organisational practices, there can also be aspects such as employee communication with one another and line managers (Dermody *et al.*, 2004; Han, 2020). More recently, recognition of the role of emotional labour in hospitality and customer-facing roles, mainly when employees are subject to unwarranted verbal abuse or maltreatment from customers (Al-Hawari *et al.*, 2020).

### 2.2. Factors Relating to Employee Retention

Employee retention is "the activities by organisations to ensure employees remain within the workforce" (Phillips & Connell, 2004). The opposition to employee turnover is employee retention. Similarly, multiple studies have identified that good practice in employee retention is likely to include several factors, such as employees having autonomy over their working day (Brown *et al.*, 2015), being recognised for their contribution (Taylor, 2002), procedural justice and fairness in an organisational contexts (Foote, 2004), and having an intellectually interesting or challenging work (Park & Kim, 2019). From a socialisation perspective, studies also evidence that when employees have a strong sense of affective commitment organisation, i.e., social bonds, this can also be a retention factor.

It is essential to recognise that retention factors can substantively outweigh other poor organisational practices which might otherwise lead to employee turnover (Han, 2020). For example, colleagues may be very supportive of one another. Even if employees dislike practical aspects of the job, such as having no control over their shift patterns, they may still have strong social bonds that encourage them to remain at work. Frye *et al.* (2020) suggest that a novel aspect of employee retention research is the sense of employees choosing to stay in a job they dislike because of practical factors beyond the controlling interest of the organisation. This aspect is not often investigated but may be a valuable explanation for why employees remain in a job which they dislike in all other respects.

### 2.3. Employee Turnover and Retention in the Hospitality Sector

Looking specifically at employee turnover and retention in the hospitality sector, treated as a proxy for the cafe segment for this review, Choudhury and McIntosh (2013) adopted a novel perspective looking at small cafes in New Zealand and the deliberate strategy to employ students in

a cyclical basis. Rather than actively attempting to retain students in these situations, cafe owners fully accepted the transient nature of the work and instead focused on attracting new students each season. This perspective proved effective for smaller cafe owners, as they concentrated on what they could control rather than what they could not. The interpretation would also be consistent with the more recent studies regarding the convenient nature of work for students or others working in low-skilled roles (Han, 2020).

Brown *et al.* (2015) identified that one of the critical issues likely to mean that employees remain in the industry is that they are generally passionate about the industry sector. Brown *et al.* (2015) identified the value of highly motivated employees using a qualitative approach to understand employee motivation. Park and Min (2020) used a meta-analytic approach to identify antecedents of turnover factors in the hospitality setting, finding that, consistent with many other studies, there are high turnover rates often caused by stress and poor customer treatment. However, they also identified that cultural factors might act as a mediating variable, indicating that employees from certain cultures were more inclined to remain in post. This aspect is essential and explored further in the study concerning Saudi Arabia.

### 3. METHODS

This inductive research study uses semi-structured interviews that allow informants to share their experiences and will enable us to comprehend their perspectives on the issue (Strauss, 1987). The concept of “understanding,” which served as the basis for our research plan, is best attained through a qualitative technique that aims to capture comprehensive information (Ragin, 1999). When doing qualitative research, researchers believe face-to-face interviews are incomparable (Johnson *et al.*, 2021). In qualitative research, the interview aims to collect rich, in-depth data by investigating how participants assign meaning to the themes, experiences, and phenomena (Johnson *et al.*, 2021). Our interviews were face-to-face interviews, acknowledged as the conventional standard for conducting interviews in qualitative data because it allows for the better and clearer gathering of information from the interviewees and allows for more customised and inviting conversations (Irvine, 2011). Due to their employment, the participants preferred a face-to-face interview. Conducting other types of interviews, such as focus groups or interviews by post, would not be beneficial since it would not allow participants to elaborate with liberty on the matter or would be deprived of interactive questioning given the nature of these other methods (Park & Min, 2020). The study’s sample population was employees working in cafés: supervisors, baristas, and cashiers. The interview is constructed as an open-ended questions-based interview designed to elicit answers based on the interviewee’s experience. As this is an inductive study, the researcher kept open to the idea that respondents may have diverse backgrounds and perspectives from working in Saudi cafés and whether they believe the HR procedures are crucial to their decision to stay with an employer or leave. HR

TABLE I: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What motivates you to work in this job?
What characteristics of café attract you to work in this job?
What are the most tiring factors in your job?
Why do some café staff quit their job?
Why do you still work in this job?

Note: These questions serve as the basis for gathering themes to be highlighted and discussed to answer why employees retain or leave in café shop businesses. This should enable an insider’s view into the challenges of retention and turnover from an employee’s perspective.

procedures here are not explored, although they remain essential in employee turnover/retention. Therefore, the study focuses exclusively on employees’ perspectives on the study question (Han, 2020). We conveniently sampled our participants through reach-outs to many cafes in the city of Jeddah, through flyers, emails, contacts, and by interviewing the ones who matched the recruitment requirement: at least three months of employment (trial period), working in cafes with responsibilities including barista, cashier and salesperson and supervisor, to ensure that the employee has at least passed the set trial period of three months and that both the employee and employer are happy to remain in the business and, therefore, could elaborate on the matters studied effectively. Potential bias is expected in convenience sampling. However, limited by the timeframe set for this study, other methods such as selective sampling and broad sampling, more than one city or region, might have contributed to the validity of the study but would take more time to gather (Etikan *et al.*, 2016) as well as the fact that the participants were selected because they met the locational and occupation criteria outlined in the study question. Convenience sampling is a cost-effective and widely accessible method that relies on the desire to participate (Etikan *et al.*, 2016). Semi-structured one-to-one interviews were conducted with the participants with a list of unified questions used (Dermody *et al.*, 2004) for all participants, seeking factors that influence job retention/satisfaction and employee turnover (intention to leave), shown in Table I.

### 4. RESULTS

Thirteen participants were interviewed one-to-one for this study. The duration of the interview lasted for a minimum of 30 minutes and a maximum of 50 minutes. The participants were all employees in local coffee shops, with responsibilities in management, tellers, or baristas. The ages of the participants varied from 23 to 37 years. All participants have been working in coffee shops for at least two years. The demographic information can be seen in Table II.

As shown in Table III, themes from each question gathered from the interviews are listed. Each question was asked to participants, and they relayed points highlighted by many of them as contributing factors/themes in their answers.

TABLE II: RESPONDENT'S DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Participant	Education	Job title	Age
1	Secondary school	Barista/Cashier	29
2	Secondary school	Supervisor/Cashier	25
3	Secondary school	All	33
4	Secondary school	Barista/Cashier	32
5	Secondary school	Barista/Cashier	28
6	Secondary school	Cashier/Supervisor	23
7	College	All	26
8	Secondary school	Sales	37
9	Secondary school	All	23
10	Secondary school	Barista	28
11	Secondary school	Cashier and Barista	30
12	College	Barista	35
13	Secondary school	All	24

TABLE III: PARTICIPANTS THEMES

Themes highlighted from each question from participants' answers
1. What motivates you to work in this job? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interest in coffee</li> <li>• The abundance of job opportunities in the sector</li> </ul>
2. What café characteristics attract you to work in this job? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social aspect</li> <li>• Flexible working hours</li> <li>• Learning new skills on the job</li> </ul>
3. What are the most tiring factors in your job? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long working hours</li> <li>• Night-shift hassle</li> <li>• Negative customer experience</li> </ul>
4. Why do some café staff quit their job? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better job opportunities elsewhere</li> <li>• Better pay</li> <li>• Lack of communication/administration issues</li> </ul>
5. Why do you still work in this job? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work environment</li> </ul>

The results of each theme are as follows:

### 1. What motivates you to work in this job?

- Interest in coffee

Most participants described being fond of working in coffee shops as a motivation to seek/remain in this job. For example, participant 3 said, "... I love coffee, and I am very passionate about it ...". Participant 4 said, "I love coffee so much ...". Also, participant 7 said, "... I worked in this work part-time when I was still studying. I am also passionate about coffee. I used to go to the cafe and love to sit in it every day, and maybe this is the reason for choosing this job." Therefore, it can be assumed that being in a workplace where workers are passionate about its products might increase their enjoyment and add to the sentimental value and occupational attachment to the job (Pollack et al., 2020).

- The abundance of job opportunities in the sector

Many participants in this study have mentioned this aspect as the driving force behind choosing to work in this sector. Participant 2 said, "... the market growth in cafes resulted in an increased growth in opportunity for employment," another said, "The most available job in the market (coffee

shops) due to the widespread opening of restaurants and cafes ...". Participant 8 said, "... the only available job in the market that suits my level of education." Participant 13 said, "... the number of cafes is very high, and job offers are also higher; I have more chance to be hired in this job than any other kind of job because I am still studying and this job is temporary and fits my qualifications."

### 2. What characteristics of café attract you to work in this job?

- Social aspect

On this matter, participant 1 said, "... I am a social person, and I love to meet people and talk to them...", Participant 2 said, "... I love meeting people and talking about their day, especially customers who come every day" also, participants have expressed positive satisfaction of working with customers in the workplace, participant 3 said: "... I like to meet a different kind of people every day and working in the café offers the opportunity to meet many people ...", participant 7 said: "... In the beginning, I had a fear of meeting people, how would I deal with different types of people, nervous, upset, but now I love to meet people, talk to them, and change their mood ..."

- Flexible working hours

Flexible working hours are one of the main attractions of this particular job. Participant 1 said, "Flexible working hours for me as a student is important, and I found in this job ...". Participant 2 added "... flexible working hours are so important for me, especially as a student I can pick whether to work at morning shift or evening shift." Also, participant 13 added, "... flexible working hours what made me apply for this job am a student, and I need a work that offers two shifts.", similarly participant 9 said, "... we can choose what shift we want and time-off from work. As a student I need this flexibility in the work to balance the time between my work and my college." Finally, participant 11 said, "... we are allowed to turn up late, and we are given the shifts we want and time off from work."

- Learning new skills on the job

On this, participant 4 said, "I am trying to learn and gain experience about the café industry because I am planning to open my own business," also participant 5 mentioned that "every time I move from one café to another, I learn something new, in the beginning, I was working as a cashier, and then I tried to learn about different types of coffee such as brewing and speciality coffee and then to work as double position gave me lots of experience." Participant 6 also explained that "I learned how to control myself with rude customers and how to act so calm when they are arguing" participant 9 has a similar experience saying that "in the beginning, I used to have fear when talking to people but know its enhanced my communication skills," also participant 10 "I learned how to overcome communication barriers with other people this job offered me new skills to overcome this issue."

### 3. What are the most tiring factors in your job?

- Laborious working hours

Participant 9 said on the matter, "... we stand for long hours, but some days when the café is not busy, the work is less. Flexible working hours might cause us to work more than 20 hours; we do night shift and then the next day morning shift." Participant 10 said, "We stand for long hours by the end of the day, I cannot feel my leg..." Also, participant 4 added, "Cafes are bustling, and so do the work at the café very exhausting." Furthermore, participant 3 said, "... very exhausting job long working hours especially if the café is very famous and always busy." Coffee shops are social businesses, meaning they go through high/low commercial seasons, e.g., Christmas, new-year, etc. Ramadan month on the Islamic calendar is considered a commercial high season for many businesses, including coffee shops. On this, participant 6 said, "... Work is very stressful, especially in Ramadan, as we stand on our feet all the time from the crowds," and participant 13 added that "... working hours considered long but not every day, some days when it is not busy in the café the working hours are convenient, but in some occasions such as Ramadan it is very tiring."

- Night-shift hassle

Night shifts could be challenging in nearly all occupations, particularly the service industry. Employee safety, nightly transportation to and from work and effects on familiar responsibilities are among the challenges night shifts might cause. On the matter, participant 5 said, "... night shifts are so hard for me I can't stay with my family, and sometimes I face harassment from customers because I am a woman..." participant 8 said, "... I don't get the chance to see my kids before bedtime."

- Negative customer experience

Participants explained how adverse interactions with customers might negatively affect their job satisfaction or the choice to remain on the job. For example, participant 4 said: "... some customers are rude when they talk to us, also they raise their voice on us for something we did right just to take something for free..." Participant 6 said "... one customer had a problem with me and wanted to fire me and she sent an email to the administration explaining what happened and I was scared I might get fired (sic), given that I was new and had no experience (sic), so they did not fire me from work (sic), they deducted my salary and only gave me a warning..." Participant 7 said "... of course I meet many rude customers and in the beginning it was I bit frustrating," participant 8 when asked about this particular matter and whether it is crucial in performing related duties said "of course this job will make you meet different type of people and you need to be ready to deal with them," participant 10 added "... rude customers are part of job, we meet them frequently and they (hurt) us sometimes but we should also not forget that customers are always right and we want them to be happy to come again."

### 4. Why do some café staff quit their job?

- Better job opportunities elsewhere

Participant 3 said on the matter, "... the bonuses somehow are tough to obtain the monthly target is so frustrating, and sometimes we can't obtain it." Participant 4 said, "We have no incentive programme..." Participant 5, when asked about the matter, said, "Career progression is slow, and I hope I can find a café that offers a career ladder with good promotions and salary." Participant 11 said, "... there isn't much room for self-improvement in the café industry. The maximum you can get is a manager." Also, participant 8 said, "... there is no incentives programme in this company, and it slows my career progression. Raises happened every two years if we completed the targets required and gained enough experience." Many of these workers are in these jobs for better income whilst they are working on gaining training in other sectors or studying for higher degrees. Remaining in this job for them is conceptually temporary, and the conditions of the employment, chances of career development, incentives or raises, are not a significant concern to them; Participant 9 said in this regard, "... this job has no career development at all, and when I get my bachelor's degree I won't stay here for sure." Participant 12 also said, "... My plan is to finish college as soon as possible and move on from here and quit. I'm thinking about starting my café." Participant 13 also said, "... I am looking forward to finishing college and looking for a better job; I am studying law, and when I finish college this year, I will try my best to find a better job and start my new career." These are common prospects in this particular sector; however not all participants share a similar point of view, participant 6 shared a different opinion saying "I have the opportunity to raise my salary and my position I started as a cashier and now am a supervisor" and participant 7 said, "I'm more engaged with the work now, as it also came with a pay rise."

- Better pay

We asked our participants for their opinions on this matter. How it shapes what they think of their job and how pay can influence their decision to remain or seek another job opportunity, participant 1 said, "... due to the many factors and corona one of them I cannot ask in this situation for a rise or increase in my salary I need to be more understanding. Yes, the salary is not that much!! But I need to be more understanding." Participant 2 complained of "... low salary compared to standard of living," whilst participant 3 said, "Salaries in the café industry are considered quite low compared to other jobs. Many leave their job because their salary can't afford the monthly expenses." Also, participant 4 complained that "... salary is not enough compared to our standard of living. If I am planning to get married, I can't stay in this job due to the low salary." Participant 12 shared that "... I am 35 years old. I still did not start my married life. I still live with my parents. I cannot afford to pay the rent or to buy a car, and my salary is very low compared to the standard of living." In contrast, participant 10 said on the matter "our salary cannot cover most of our expenses." Participant 11 chimed saying "I think working in cafe or restaurant always going to be at lower of a salary which cannot make some people live off. Although I am above the minimum wage, I still can't afford to pay my expenses." These points of view are omnipresent in this

sector; however, the industry is known for relying on part-time job offerings and a considerably low salary nearing the minimum wage. Therefore, the financial offering is limited, and this is understood and expressed by some of the participants. Participant 5 said, “Salaries are average. I don’t see it as a major factor of turnover as long as I feel comfortable working in the café.” Also, participant 6 said, “My salary is considered somehow suitable to some extent, but with promotion and bonus, it may increase.” Participant 9 shared, “My salary is considered somehow suitable to some extent, but with promotion and bonus, it may increase.” Participant 13 thinks of his job as a temporary job, saying, “It is known that part-time jobs offer low salary, and I see this job as the starting point, and I have been in this job for two years and am looking forward to finishing my college and apply for a different job.”

- Lack of communication/administration issues

Participant 1 said on this, “No cooperation when the problem happens; I can’t explain if the branch manager made a mistake no one believed me; instead, they transferred me to another branch with a lower position.” Participant 3 said, “lack of consideration when we benefit the café and disrespecting us in front of customers for things, we did right.” In contrast, participant 4 added, “management does not respond to our inquiries I requested much time to move to another branch closer to my home and that why I still can’t come on time to my work.” Participant 5 commented on the administration’s lack of communication, saying, “The management do not cooperate with us; we stand for long hours behind the bar, and we asked for chairs to sit; they refused and said our job requires us to stand only.” Participant 6 also added that “our branch manager was commanding us instead of guiding us, and it was so irritating us.” Also, participant added to this notion by saying, “they transferred me from this branch on short notice and without communicating with me if the other branch close to my home on contrary the branch is far from, and I need to pay more expensive to reach it like transportation as an example.” Decision-making especially when selecting employees for promotions or bonuses can be unfair at times, as participant 7 said “promotion and raises should be based on Efficiency and productivity, not linked to close relationship or past dispute which is unfair to work hard and others not they got raise, and I don’t get it. I worked in different positions and got the training to perform different tasks. With my experience, efficiency, and productivity, I will get a promotion and raise.” Employee voice is also considered elemental to the success of any commercial establishment. Coffee shops are no exception. Participant 12 elaborates, “I am a barista, which is considered higher position I might reach in the coffee shop but still my salary did not change from a very long time, no incentives, even if they offered it, I can’t hit the target. Also, as a barista, every time I suggest some new drinks to boost sales, they don’t see it as important because it did not come from the branch manager. The branch manager and I are not well, and he always refuses my suggestions. Overall, we as employees have made good contributions in the coffee shops; hearing our voice is important.” Also, participant 13 added that “. . . (the) administration did not hear the story from my side they

*just kept saying customers always right, you should learn how to deal with them, am still new, and they should give me the support I need instead of a warning and deducting from my salary. We should be heard the cafe would not operate if we weren’t there; we are part of this place.”* On the other hand, a supportive management team that ensures new employees know what to expect on the job and what is expected of them tends to have better employee commitment outcomes. This is further explained by Participant 11, saying, “The administration discusses with us what we want, and we also understand what they expect from us. This makes us feel pleased and treated fairly.”

## 5. Why do you still work in this job?

- Work environment

The work environment can be a place of career and skills nourishment or a discouraging business to perform duties, and most participants expressed a positive working environment. For example, participant 1 said, “Our work environment is based on collaboration between the staff; we help each other always.” Also, participant 6 added, “The way we deal with each other is free from hatred or envy. On the contrary, it is based on cooperation and respect”. Participant 9 also stated that “teamwork is the most important element to retain in work. Team that is based on helping each other especially when I need a replacement.” The close interaction between employees in a café shop setting could explain the need for a functioning work environment, and their duties are varied and naturally, group work and sharing responsibilities and allowing space for nurturing skills has many rewards and could contribute to employee satisfaction regardless of other factors that might be involved with satisfaction.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The study aims to elaborate on coffee shop employees’ perspective on essentially what makes them leave/remain in their current job and what essential factors influence this decision. 13 participants engaged and gave their opinions on various aspects and related ideas, some of which are their passion for coffee, their joy in working in this sector and the hourly flexibility and work environment. They also elaborated on the downsides of working in coffee shops, challenges with the social exposure the job entails, as well as dealing with management and employer instructions and job requirements. The pay was also a critical point, along with the need for being allowed to develop and tone their skills on the job.

Motivation generally can arise innately or be acquired through inspiration from the workplace (Fishbach & Woolley, 2022). Many participants have mentioned interest in coffee as a great motivator to keep at the job. Also, the demand for jobs in coffee shops gave participants a better perspective and job security, knowing that other opportunities were available in case they needed to leave; therefore, there was no need to remain if the working conditions were not suitable for them and they are not bound to their present job due to job scarcity or lack of other opportunities in the sector (Dermody et al., 2004).

Occupational joy is a contributor to motivation. Enjoying one's occupation has been suggested to positively affect duties and responsibilities (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For example, job enjoyment might refer to the establishment being in a popular area, good pay, and good management support, having the appropriate innate/acquired skills needed for the job at hand, developing skills on the job/job development, and working hours that are flexible (Choy & Kamoche, 2021).

Coffee shops appeal to many job seekers due to their social atmosphere and the popularity of coffee as a beverage. In addition, its pay is also considered reasonable, its working hours are mainly flexible, and the skills required for the job are ubiquitous; therefore, it attracts job seekers, particularly those seeking a part-time job such as students or those with limited skills in the job market. Also, there are many job opportunities in this particular sector due to the expansion of demand for coffee shops in Saudi Arabia (Maspul, 2022).

Besides the development of the oil industry, the rapid growth of certain coffee outlets, such as coffee shops in Saudi Arabia, indicates that coffee is now an increasing trend that can contribute to the local economy too (Maspul *et al.*, 2022). This has created job opportunities in the sector that are still high since the demand is growing each year (AlHarbi, 2022). Moreover, the nature of this particular job is attractive, especially for job seekers looking for temporary or part-time jobs to support their incomes, and also because, naturally, the skill set it needs is omnipresent and acquired through simple training and mentoring.

Specific coffee shop characteristics determine whether employees remain or leave. For example, the social aspect of the coffee shop and whether it is in a reachable location with facilities around it or if the shop offers flexible working hours or allows for skill development are influential (Trevor, 2001; Yang, 2008).

Directly dealing with customers and being socially exposed to positive or negative experiences is suggested to be influential in continuing to perform or having intentions to leave this particular job. For example, certain employees in coffee shops could have harmful interactions with customers, and this might have a negative impact on their job satisfaction, whereas if employees express a favourable basis of interaction with customers, whether because of better personal social skills or better workplace support or a better constructed transactional basis (i.e., self-service, or computerised purchases), those employees could have a better outcome when measuring job satisfaction (Brown *et al.*, 2015).

Coffee shops are usually serviced on a shift-time basis; employees are meant to cover working hours throughout the week or month since some coffee shops are open for 12 hours daily. This enables employees to select times when they can provide service to the establishment and are free to choose the working hours that best suit their daily schedule. This aspect is one of the attractive perks of coffee shop employees. It is a must since many of them consider this job part-time and are studying concurrently or considering it while they land a better job.

Learning new skills on the job can be an excellent tool for recruiting new employees and beneficial for employees

as they gain new skills that could reflect positively on their performance. Therefore, the need to allow for learning opportunities is constantly sought, especially for low experienced employees in coffee shops or those who need to work on their social skills and commercial attitudes (Ghani *et al.*, 2022).

Coffee shops can be demanding; customers expect their orders to be served on time, and many coffee shops provide seating areas and other customer retention services (Wi-Fi connection, television, and other means of entertainment). This makes some coffee shops busy during most opening times and adds strain on employees to perform their duties efficiently. In addition, at other times, employees might be required to work consecutive shifts adding further pressure.

Interviewees described how interacting with customers has its virtues and shortcomings; it can be a positive additive to the job criteria and similarly can be a nuisance. Having good social skills might contribute to this theme; however, variations in this regard could influence how employees deal with challenges of this nature (Pettijohn *et al.*, 2008).

Employees' jobs in this volatile sector are vulnerable to changing conditions, wages are variable, and employment terms fluctuate depending on the economic and commercial status quo and regulation changes, among other factors (Williams & Horodnic, 2019). Participants have shared their reasons for considering leaving their jobs to seek better opportunities in different cafes, and this might be due to higher jobs with better pay in cafes being scarce or incentives, or lack of them, being hard to achieve or not constructed in a way that could be beneficial for employees. Therefore, this particular theme is mainly guided by subjective needs and interpretations of employees and how they perceive or hope their career should be. Employers, however, could pay more attention to this by catering to employees' career aspirations and goals to retain them, especially ones how to add value to their employee capital (Park & Min, 2020).

Wage is probably a main concern for any employee in any sector. Pay is critical when seeking job opportunities and for employers seeking to fill occupation vacancies. Meeting pay needs can be a tactile choice of balancing how much an employer needs to pay against what they require of their employees (McDonald & Solow, 1992). Wage, in general, is a vital point in any job; in this sector, it influences remaining significantly, especially for those who have more experience and can handle many responsibilities; however, some might look at it as a temporary job that could earn them extra income and not consider it as their primary source. Depending on what the job means to them, they can decide whether to remain (Choudhury & McIntosh, 2013).

Lack of communication with management is synonymous with any job career, how much involvement is required by staff in decision-making and better communication when resolving conflict or issues in the work field (Choudhury & McIntosh, 2013).

Even though the work environment matter is multifaceted, affected by pay or communication with management or the nature of the duties and responsibilities

as aforementioned, participants have highlighted how the work environment can be crucial in remaining on the job. This is somewhat understandable since teamwork is highly influenced by how the business runs as a whole, how responsibilities are shared, and how daily interactions between staff are conducted (Moncarz *et al.*, 2009).

## 6. CONCLUSION

Employee turnover/retention is considered one of the most significant challenges facing the hospitality industry. The literature review focuses on factors relating to employee turnover and retention, concentrating on aspects contributing to employee turnover and retention in the hospitality sector. As a result, many studies have been conducted on employee retention methods and practices in the hospitality industry. However, few studies have focused on small hospitality firms such as coffee shops (Morrissey, 2022). Moreover, many studies have been conducted on developed countries' hospitality industry. However, few studies have been done on developing countries like Saudi Arabia (Hom *et al.*, 2017).

Therefore, this study aimed to identify factors associated with employee turnover/retention in coffee shops. A qualitative analysis was conducted to gain more insights into the main argument. The current study found that employees will likely remain in their current job if they have a personal interest in coffee culture, can manage social construct challenges, work flexible hours and are enabled to learn new skills on the job and are fairly paid. Also, employees expressed that working long hours or night shifts more regularly, having negative customer experience or lack of management support, better pay elsewhere, or an undesirable work environment can inevitably make them consider leaving their job, supporting coffee shop employees to gain more skills, and paying them fairly. This study has carefully considered selected studies looking at employee turnover and retention levels in the hospitality sector. There has been a high degree of consistency within and between the papers concerning the factors prompting turnover, with some novel aspects identified in terms of what might support retention in the hospitality sector, specifically in coffee shops (Choudhury & McIntosh, 2013; Hom *et al.*, 2017).

### 6.1. Practical Implications

Retention recommendations highlighted in this study could help alleviate some of the pressures coffee shop owners/managers face with the workforce in Saudi Arabia; given the naturalism of qualitative research, opinions expressed are verbatim and could help with better retention rates. The current study revealed several effective management strategies to retain employees, including fair wages, a flexible work schedule, a pleasant work environment, autonomy in decision-making, proper treatment, and good communication. In addition to these strategies, this research outcome can help the hospitality industry reduce the industry's temporary character. So, although more study is necessary to validate these findings, it is proposed that other small enterprises can use the recommended strategies.

### 6.2. Limitations Further Study

There are some limitations to this study. First, this study was conducted in one city, Jeddah. Further research could have benefited from recruiting employees from other areas to achieve a more holistic answer to the research question. Second, this study uses one method to collect data (interviews). Further research can benefit from using a standardised questionnaire or scoring system for the importance of the questions or relevancy that might have contributed to the study's validity and reliability. Third, interviews in the study were conducted with coffee shop employees. Future research can also interview managers/owners who could have added value to the findings to have a broad perspective of challenges facing retention/turnover in this sector. Fourth, the small sample size for this study was limited and from a single geographic region. However, a bigger sample size could have added to the accuracy of this study; however, due to time limitations, it could not be achieved. Future research can increase the sample size from different geographical locations in Saudi Arabia.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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