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Brewing a Healthier Future: The Revolutionary Impact of Specialty Coffee on Sugar Consumption in Al Qassim, Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

This study investigates the culture of specialty coffee and the habit of not adding sugar to coffee, focusing on its impact on sensory perception, public health, and cancer prevention. The study utilizes a qualitative method, conducting in-depth interviews with industry professionals in Saudi Arabia. It covers the journey of specialty coffee from its origin in Jazan, stressing the preservation of distinct flavors and qualities. The study also discusses the potential health advantages of lowering sugar intake through specialty coffee, taking into account geographical variations in sugar consumption trends and the availability of specialty coffee. The necessity of targeted initiatives and policies to promote sugar-free coffee options is underlined. The study also investigates the link between sugar avoidance, cancer prevention, and pertinent theoretical frameworks. Baristas' and coffeepreneurs' opinions reflect a common awareness of the sensory experience and the need of keeping the distinctive flavors of specialty coffee. Overall, the study demonstrates the potential of sugar-free specialty coffee to benefit public health and develop a healthy culture.

Keywords: Public health, specialty coffee, sugar avoidance, sensory perception, sugar consumption

Abstrak

Studi ini menyelidiki budaya kopi spesial dan kebiasaan tidak menambahkan gula ke dalam kopi, dengan fokus pada dampaknya terhadap persepsi sensorik, kesehatan masyarakat, dan pencegahan kanker. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan melakukan wawancara mendalam terhadap para profesional industri di Arab Saudi. Ini mencakup perjalanan kopi spesial dari asalnya di Jazan, menekankan pelestarian rasa dan kualitas yang berbeda. Studi ini juga membahas potensi manfaat kesehatan dari menurunkan asupan gula melalui kopi spesial, dengan mempertimbangkan variasi geografis dalam tren konsumsi gula dan ketersediaan kopi spesial. Pentingnya inisiatif dan kebijakan yang ditargetkan untuk mempromosikan pilihan kopi bebas gula digarisbawahi. Studi ini juga menyelidiki hubungan antara penghindaran gula, pencegahan kanker, dan kerangka teori terkait. Pendapat para barista dan coffeepreneur mencerminkan kesadaran bersama akan pengalaman indrawi dan perlunya menjaga cita rasa khas dari kopi spesial. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini menunjukkan potensi kopi spesial bebas gula memberikan manfaat bagi kesehatan masyarakat dan mengembangkan budaya sehat.

Kata Kunci: Kesehatan masyarakat, kopi spesial, penghindaran gula, persepsi sensorik, konsumsi gula

INTRODUCTION

Specialty coffee has grown not only as a popular beverage, but also as a cultural phenomenon emphasizing appreciation for the complexities of coffee flavors and origins (Maspul, 2023; Cherrier, 2007). One facet of this coffee culture is that no sugar is added to the brew, allowing fans to savour the true flavor of single-origin roasts. This approach has gained popularity among specialty coffee lovers, raising awareness about the need of maintaining the distinct flavors derived from well farmed coffee beans (Teuber, 2010; Carroll *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, the impact of sugar intake on public health has motivated researchers to investigate the relationship between specialty coffee, sensory perception, and policy formulation. The purpose of this paper is to critically examine existing research on these themes, with a particular emphasis on the theories and implications for public health policy in Saudi Arabia through the lens of specialty coffee.

Meanwhile, two significant theories are at work in the context of specialty coffee and public health policy: Globalization and Cultural Adaptation theory and the Health Belief Model (HBM). Globalization acts as a catalyst for information exchange in the specialty coffee sector, allowing customers globally to access and appreciate the distinct flavors of coffee, particularly Arabica beans from Saudi Arabia's Jazan region (Crane, 2016; Kim 1988; Champion & Skinner, 2008). This hypothesis explains how global demand for specialty coffee and sensory perception contribute to the coffee value chain. Furthermore, Cultural

Adaptation theory explains how consumers adapt their existing coffee culture to adopt specialty coffee while recognizing and appreciating the sensory experience it provides.

Public health policy is critical in addressing sugar consumption habits and the health hazards associated with them (Hu, 2013; Byers *et al.*, 2001). Geographical studies can help us understand the prevalence of excessive sugar consumption and its impact on health outcomes (Goran *et al.*, 2013). Policymakers can identify places where promoting sugar-free coffee options might have a major influence on public health by evaluating sugar consumption patterns as well as the availability and accessibility of specialty coffee. Understanding the distribution of specialty coffee shops and coffee-producing regions aids in the targeting of treatments and policies aimed at reducing sugar intake and improving health outcomes.

In Saudi Arabia, where specialty coffee has grown in popularity in recent years, there is a chance to use the country's distinct coffee culture to boost public health. Individuals can make healthier choices and potentially reduce their risk of obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease by encouraging the consumption of specialty coffee with no added sugar. Integrating theoretical frameworks such as the Health Belief Model (HBM) into public health programs raises knowledge of the health hazards of excessive sugar consumption and encourages behavior change. Policymakers can affect individuals' attitudes and intentions toward consuming healthier beverages by promoting the health benefits of enjoying sugar-free specialty coffee and offering education on the risks of high sugar intake.

As a result, the purpose of this work is to critically review existing studies in Saudi Arabia on the relationship between specialty coffee, sensory perception, and public health. By investigating Globalization and Cultural Adaptation theories, as well as the Health Belief Model (HBM), we can get insights into how specialty coffee can be used to enhance public health and inform the development of tailored interventions and policies. Understanding the viewpoints of important stakeholders in the specialty coffee sector, such as baristas and coffeepreneurs, would provide vital insights into the culture of specialty coffee and its potential impact on public health in Saudi Arabia.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach, conducting in-depth interviews with barista, coffee roasters and coffeepreneurs in Al Qassim, Saudi Arabia. Participants were selected based on their experience in the specialty coffee industry and their knowledge of sugar consumption in coffee beverages. The interviews focused on their perspectives

regarding the importance of avoiding sugar in specialty coffee, its impact on sensory perception, and the implications for public health in cancer prevention.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Cultural Appreciation of Specialty Coffee in Al Qassim

In the Al Qassim region, specialty coffee has evolved from a mere beverage to a deeply established cultural phenomenon. The inhabitants of Al Qassim have developed a deep appreciation for the unique flavors and smells that each cup of specialty coffee brings. This cultural respect may be seen in how Al Qassim residents avoid adding sugar to their coffee, allowing the natural aromas of single-origin roasts to show through (Zakidou *et al.*, 2021; Maspul & Almalki, 2023).

The cultural love for specialty coffee is strongly anchored in the region's history and legacy, according to interviews with baristas, coffee roasters, and coffee businesses in Al Qassim. For ages, coffee has been a significant aspect of Saudi Bedouin culture. The inhabitants of Al Qassim have carried on this heritage by embracing specialty coffee and its emphasis on retaining the unique qualities of single-origin roasts (Maspul & Almalki, 2023).

Al Qassim's cultural regard for specialty coffee extends beyond a predilection for unsweetened coffee. It reflects the rigorous expertise that goes into crafting specialty coffee (Maspul, 2022). Each stage of the coffee-making process is revered, from the farmers who meticulously cultivate the coffee plants to the skilled artisans who roast and brew the beans. This cultural appreciation extends to consumers who cherish each sip of specialty coffee, appreciating the varied flavors generated from the region's particular terroir (Maspul & Almalki, 2023).

The number of coffee shops and roasteries in Al Qassim demonstrates the cultural relevance of specialty coffee. Al Qassim has evolved as a hotspot for specialty coffee culture, with a noteworthy presence of 170 such outlets (Maspul, 2022a). These establishments are not simply locations to drink a cup of coffee, but also places where enthusiasm for specialty coffee is fostered and celebrated. Al Qassim's coffee community aggressively promotes education and awareness about specialty coffee, hosting events, conferences, and cupping sessions to educate coffee enthusiasts and expand their grasp of the art.

Awareness and Recognition of Specialty Coffee in Al Qassim

There has been a significant increase in the awareness and recognition of specialty coffee in Al Qassim in recent years. Coffee fans and connoisseurs have begun to embrace the region's varied assortment of specialty coffee beverages. Al Qassim residents have

grown to appreciate the great quality and distinct features of specialty coffee, whether it is the powerful and intense flavors of espresso or the nuanced and delicate notes of filter coffee (Maspul & Almalki, 2023).

One feature that distinguishes specialty coffee is its dependence on single-origin roasts. Each batch of coffee beans is derived from a specific geographic region, allowing consumers to enjoy the distinct flavors and fragrances associated with that origin. This emphasis on single-origin roasts has piqued the interest of Al Qassim coffee aficionados, leading to a rising awareness for the intricacies and complexity that various coffee locations have to offer (Maspul, 2022).

Furthermore, the specialty coffee community in Al Qassim is becoming increasingly conscious of the importance of drinking coffee without added sugar. This insight is consistent with the global effort to reduce sugar consumption and prioritize healthy beverage options. Coffee enthusiasts in Al Qassim can fully enjoy the intricacies and complexities that make each cup of specialty coffee distinct by experiencing the natural tastes of specialty coffee without the addition of sugar.

Specialty coffee is recognized and appreciated in Al Qassim beyond the bounds of coffee cafes and roasteries. Coffee enthusiasts are sharing their newfound knowledge and experiences with others, and it has become a topic of debate among friends and relatives. This increased awareness and recognition of specialty coffee not only enriches Al Qassim's coffee culture, but also contributes to a larger understanding and appreciation of coffee as an art form.

Theoretical Framework: Health Belief Model

The Health Belief Model (HBM) is a theoretical framework for understanding people's attitudes and behaviors regarding sugar consumption and specialty coffee. The HBM states that an individual's perceived susceptibility to a health condition, the perceived severity of that condition, the perceived benefits of engaging in a certain behavior, and the perceived barriers to adopting that behavior all influence their health-related behavior (Mikhael, 1981; Champion & Skinner, 2008).

Individuals who are aware of the possible health hazards associated with high sugar intake, such as an increased risk of chronic diseases, may see themselves as vulnerable to these disorders in the context of specialty coffee drinking without added sugar. They may also overestimate the severity of certain illnesses. As a result, individuals may identify the advantages of drinking specialty coffee without added sugar, such as savoring the unique

flavors of single-origin roasts while lowering their overall sugar intake. However, there may be impediments to adopting this practice, such as taste preferences or societal standards.

The HBM is responsible for the increased knowledge and recognition of specialty coffee in Al Qassim. Individuals see the benefits of exploring and experiencing specialty coffee as they gain information about the distinct flavors and fragrances obtained from single-origin roasts. This impression of benefits, combined with a growing awareness of the potential health hazards connected with added sugar, leads people to seek out sugar-free specialty coffee options.

Furthermore, the impact of social and cultural variables cannot be underestimated. The cultural respect for specialty coffee in Al Qassim, combined with the presence of a strong coffee community, supports the adoption of habits associated with sipping specialty coffee without sugar. Individuals' attitudes and behaviors toward specialty coffee drinking are shaped by social norms such as refraining from adding sugar to preserve the authentic flavors (Bandura, 1986; Zimmerman, 1989).

Finally, Al Qassim's cultural awareness and regard for specialty coffee has transformed it into a deeply established cultural phenomenon. The growing knowledge and acceptance of specialty coffee, as well as the emphasis on drinking coffee without added sugar, show a shift in views and habits within the coffee community. The Health Belief Model can assist explain the motivations and perceptions that drive people's decisions about specialty coffee consumption without sugar by taking into account aspects including perceived susceptibility, severity, advantages, and barriers. As Al Qassim continues to embrace specialty coffee, it cements its position as a major destination for coffee connoisseurs looking for one-of-a-kind and excellent coffee experiences.

Sensory Perception in Specialty Coffee

The journey of specialty coffee begins at the origin, and Jazan, a region in Saudi Arabia known for its high-quality Arabica coffee, plays a significant role in the coffee value chain. The unique climate, elevation, and soil conditions in Jazan create the ideal environment for cultivating premium coffee beans with distinctive flavors. As Arabica coffee is harvested in Jazan, it undergoes a meticulous process that involves picking ripe cherries, carefully sorting and processing the beans, and drying them to preserve their quality. This attention to detail ensures that the coffee maintains its inherent flavors and characteristics, crucial for specialty coffee production (Maspul, 2022).

From Jazan, the Arabica coffee beans travel through the coffee value chain, passing through various stages such as milling, exporting, and importing. During these stages, coffee

producers, exporters, and importers collaborate to preserve the unique qualities of the coffee beans and maintain their traceability (Maspul & Almalki, 2023). Once the coffee beans reach the global market, specialty coffee consumers play a vital role in the value chain. They seek out and appreciate the distinct flavors and sensory experiences that specialty coffee offers. The sensory perception of specialty coffee, as highlighted by studies like Bhumiratana *et al.* (2011), becomes an essential factor in the consumption process. Specialty coffee enthusiasts value the nuances and complexities of flavors that arise from the unique coffee origins, including Arabica beans from Jazan.

The theories of Globalization and Cultural Adaptation also come into play in the coffee value chain. Globalization facilitates the exchange of specialty coffee knowledge, allowing consumers worldwide to access and appreciate the unique flavors of Arabica coffee from Jazan. Cultural Adaptation theory explains how consumers adapt their existing coffee culture to embrace specialty coffee, appreciating the sensory experience it offers. The Coffee Value Chain, from Arabica coffee production in Jazan to global specialty coffee consumption, represents a dynamic process involving multiple stakeholders, each contributing to the final product. The cultivation and preservation of unique flavors at the origin, combined with the global demand for specialty coffee and the appreciation of sensory perception, shape the journey of Arabica coffee from Jazan to the cups of specialty coffee enthusiasts worldwide.

Public Health Implications

Sugar consumption has long been associated with a range of adverse health outcomes, including obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases. However, there is potential for specialty coffee, when enjoyed without added sugar, to contribute to improvements in public health. A systematic review and meta-analysis conducted by Nishida *et al.* (2004) revealed that reducing sugar intake was linked to a lower risk of developing chronic diseases. By avoiding the addition of sugar to specialty coffee, individuals can reduce their overall sugar consumption, potentially mitigating the risk of these health conditions.

Geographical studies play a crucial role in understanding the implications of sugar consumption on public health and the potential benefits of specialty coffee. It is essential to consider regional and cultural variations in sugar consumption patterns and the geographical distribution of chronic diseases associated with excessive sugar intake when examining the impact of sugar on health outcomes. The comprehensive review conducted by Malik *et al.* (2010) highlighted the detrimental effects of high sugar intake, emphasizing its association with increased risks of obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases. These

health conditions are a global concern, but their prevalence varies across different regions and populations.

Geographical studies provide valuable insights into worldwide variations in sugar consumption patterns. Countries with high consumption of sugary beverages and processed foods tend to have a higher burden of obesity and related diseases (Calvert, 2016). Understanding these geographical disparities enables the development of targeted public health interventions and policies aimed at reducing sugar intake and improving health outcomes. Specialty coffee, when enjoyed without added sugar, presents an intriguing avenue for promoting public health. By appreciating the unique flavors and nuances of specialty coffee, individuals can enjoy the beverage without the need for additional sweeteners. This can contribute to a reduction in overall sugar consumption, potentially mitigating the risk of chronic diseases.

Furthermore, geographical studies can explore the availability and accessibility of specialty coffee. Understanding the distribution of specialty coffee shops and regions known for coffee production can help identify areas where promoting sugar-free coffee options could have a significant impact on public health. By encouraging the consumption of specialty coffee without added sugar, individuals can make healthier choices and potentially reduce their risk of obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases.

In conclusion, reducing sugar consumption is crucial for improving public health. Specialty coffee, consumed without added sugar, offers a promising solution in this regard. Geographical studies provide insights into sugar consumption patterns and the distribution of specialty coffee, allowing for targeted interventions and policies to address excessive sugar intake. Embracing sugar-free specialty coffee empowers individuals to prioritize their well-being and fosters a culture of healthier choices within their communities.

Cancer Prevention and Sugar Avoidance

Dietary factors play a significant role in cancer prevention, and high sugar consumption has been identified as a key contributor to cancer risk. In a prospective cohort study conducted by Malik *et al.* (2019), a positive association was found between high sugar intake and an increased risk of specific types of cancer. The practice of avoiding sugar in specialty coffee aligns with efforts to prevent cancer by reducing overall sugar intake in individuals' diets. Those who prioritize sugar avoidance in specialty coffee may contribute to a healthier lifestyle and potentially decrease their risk of developing cancer.

Understanding the underlying mechanisms and effects of sugar consumption and specialty coffee can be framed within relevant theories. Two theories that provide insights

in this context are the Sugar-Sweetened Beverage (SSB) theory and the Health Belief Model (HBM). The SSB theory suggests that excessive consumption of sugary beverages, including certain coffee drinks with added sugar, can lead to negative health outcomes. It posits that high sugar intake from beverages contributes to increased caloric intake, weight gain, and the development of chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases (Wang & Chen, 2022). By reducing sugar intake, particularly from sugar-sweetened beverages, individuals may potentially mitigate the risk of these health conditions.

The Health Belief Model (HBM) offers insights into individual perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors related to health. In the context of sugar consumption and specialty coffee, the HBM helps explain how individuals perceive the risks associated with sugar intake and make decisions regarding their coffee preferences (Koch *et al.*, 2005). Factors such as perceived susceptibility to chronic diseases, perceived severity of health consequences, and perceived benefits of reducing sugar intake can influence individuals' choices to opt for sugar-free specialty coffee.

According to the HBM, interventions that increase awareness of the health risks associated with sugar consumption, provide information on the benefits of reducing sugar intake, and enhance self-efficacy in making healthier choices can lead to behavior change (Bussing *et al.*, 2012). Messages emphasizing the health benefits of enjoying specialty coffee without added sugar, along with education on the risks of excessive sugar consumption, can influence individuals' attitudes and intentions toward consuming sugar-free beverages.

By integrating these theories into the study of public health implications and specialty coffee consumption, researchers can develop targeted interventions and policies. Such interventions may focus on raising awareness, promoting behavior change, and creating supportive environments that facilitate the consumption of sugar-free specialty coffee. By utilizing theoretical frameworks, public health programs and initiatives can be designed to effectively address concerns related to sugar intake and encourage individuals to make healthier choices.

Perspectives of Baristas and Coffeepreneurs

In-depth interviews were conducted with barista coffee roasters and coffeepreneurs to understand their perspectives on the matter. The interviews revealed a shared understanding among industry professionals regarding the sensory experience and the importance of preserving the authentic flavors of specialty coffee. Participants emphasized that avoiding sugar in coffee allows consumers to fully appreciate the complexity and unique

characteristics of single-origin roasts. They also highlighted the potential positive impact on public health that comes with reducing sugar consumption through specialty coffee.

The literature reviewed further supports the notion that consuming specialty coffee without added sugar enhances sensory perception, promotes public health, and aligns with cancer prevention efforts. By prioritizing sugar avoidance, specialty coffee enthusiasts contribute to a cultural shift that values the authenticity and complexity of flavors found in single-origin roasts. However, it is important to note that additional research is needed to explore the long-term health effects of sugar avoidance in specialty coffee and its potential implications for public health.

The findings from this study provide compelling evidence that avoiding sugar in specialty coffee has significant benefits for both sensory perception and public health. By refraining from adding sugar, single-origin coffee can be enjoyed in its true form, allowing the unique characteristics of each roast to shine through. Moreover, reducing sugar consumption through specialty coffee consumption can contribute to cancer prevention efforts and help address other health issues associated with excessive sugar intake.

The perspectives shared by barista coffee roasters and coffeepreneurs in Al Qassim highlight their positive view on avoiding sugar in specialty coffee. They believe that by abstaining from sugar, the authenticity and complexity of flavors in single-origin coffee are preserved. Additionally, they recognize the negative implications of excessive sugar consumption for public health, including an increased risk of cancer. Overall, the findings suggest that avoiding sugar in specialty coffee is not only a matter of taste preference but also has broader implications for sensory enjoyment and public health. By embracing this practice, individuals can fully appreciate the intricate flavors of specialty coffee while contributing to a healthier lifestyle.

Figure 1. Perspectives, Key Points, and Strategies for Sugar-free in Specialty Coffee

Perspective	Key Points
Sensory Experience	Avoiding sugar allows consumers to fully appreciate the complexity and unique characteristics of single-origin roasts.
	By refraining from adding sugar, the authenticity and complexity of flavors in specialty coffee are preserved.
	Specialty coffee enthusiasts who prioritize sugar avoidance contribute to a culture that appreciates the authenticity and complexity of flavors in single-origin roasts.

Public Health Impact	Reducing sugar consumption through specialty coffee consumption has potential positive impacts on public health.
	Excessive sugar consumption poses negative implications for public health, including an increased risk of cancer.
	Specialty coffee without added sugar aligns with cancer prevention efforts and promotes a healthier lifestyle.
Research Opportunities	Further research is needed to investigate the long-term health effects of sugar avoidance in specialty coffee.
	The potential implications of sugar avoidance in specialty coffee for public health should be explored in more depth.
Advantages and Benefits	Enhanced sensory perception: Specialty coffee without added sugar allows for a more nuanced and heightened flavor experience.
	Healthier beverage choice: By avoiding sugar, specialty coffee becomes a healthier alternative to sugary drinks, reducing the risk of obesity and related health issues.
	Increased appreciation for coffee origins: Sugar avoidance encourages a focus on the distinct characteristics of single-origin roasts, promoting an understanding and appreciation for the diverse coffee-growing regions and their unique flavors.
	Support for local coffee industry: By prioritizing specialty coffee without sugar, consumers contribute to the growth and sustainability of local coffee producers and artisans, supporting the community's economy and fostering a sense of pride in local coffee culture.
Strategies for Sustainability	Education and awareness campaigns: Educate the community about the benefits of specialty coffee without added sugar and raise awareness about the negative health effects of excessive sugar consumption.
	Collaboration with local coffee businesses: Partner with coffee shops, roasters, and retailers to promote and offer specialty coffee options without sugar.
	Menu diversification: Encourage coffee shops to offer a variety of sugar-free specialty coffee options, highlighting the unique flavors and profiles of different single-origin roasts.
	Engage with health and wellness organizations: Collaborate with health-focused organizations to promote the health benefits of sugar avoidance in

specialty coffee and establish partnerships that support and sustain this practice.

Community events and workshops: Organize coffee tastings, workshops, and events that showcase the sensory experience and educate the community about the art of appreciating specialty coffee without added sugar.
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CONCLUSION

With its emphasis on conserving flavors and eliminating added sugar, specialty coffee culture has enormous potential for benefiting public health and impacting policy in Saudi Arabia. Policymakers can harness the sensory experience of specialty coffee to encourage healthier choices and minimize sugar intake by utilizing ideas like Globalization and Cultural Adaptation, as well as the Health Belief Model (HBM). A culture of sugar-free specialty coffee can be developed through focused initiatives and the viewpoints of baristas and coffeepreneurs, contributing to enhanced public health outcomes and the prevention of chronic diseases. Specialty coffee has the ability to transform both the coffee experience and an individual's well-being, making it an exciting avenue for good change.

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