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Beyond Caffeine: Psychological Motives Behind Coffee Consumption Intensity and Frequency

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the psychological motivations that influence coffee intensity preference and the frequency of coffee consumption. It addresses the behavioral paradox between widespread coffee intake and the diverse underlying motives beyond caffeine stimulation. A quantitative survey was conducted with 1,513 adult respondents to measure six psychological motives – stimulation/energy, sensory pleasure/taste, relaxation, habit/daily routine, social interaction, and health benefits – using Likert-scale items. The multiple linear regression analysis was applied to assess their impact on coffee intensity preference and the frequency of coffee consumption. Sensory pleasure/taste, relaxation, and stimulation were the most strongly endorsed motives. Taste, stimulation, habit, and health benefits significantly predicted preferences for stronger coffee. The frequency of coffee consumption was primarily driven by habit and relaxation, while social interaction and taste were negatively correlated with frequency. These results suggest that coffee consumption is more emotionally and habitually driven than purely functional. This study highlights the need to consider non-functional motives in consumer and marketing strategies. Limitations include self-reported data and a lack of longitudinal insights. The study contributes to consumer behavior literature by offering an empirically grounded psychological model of coffee consumption that moves beyond biochemical and economic explanations. It underscores the emotional and

habitual dimensions of coffee use, offering insights for both academics and practitioners in consumer psychology and food marketing.

Keywords: coffee, consumer preferences, consumer behavior, consumer perception, drinking habits

JEL Classification: D03, D10

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Introduction

Coffee ranks among the most widely consumed beverages worldwide and constitutes one of the most extensively traded commodities in global markets (Bartoloni et al., 2021; Pancsira, 2022). Beyond its commercial significance, coffee holds considerable psychological and cultural importance, serving as a compelling subject for examining habitual behaviors, sociocultural practices, and the cognitive mechanisms that underlie consumer decision-making. According to recent data, the average individual consumes approximately 2.4 cups of coffee per day (Pancsira, 2022). Notably, the

global coffee trade amounts to around 177 million 60-kilogram bags annually (Ridder, 2024), illustrating a remarkable continuity in consumption patterns despite dynamic market conditions and increasing public awareness regarding health.

This apparent paradox – growing consumer preferences for quality, sustainability, and wellness-oriented products coexisting with enduring brand loyalty and price sensitivity – merits closer scrutiny (Guimarães et al., 2019; Phan & Chambers, 2016; Samoggia et al., 2020).

Literature review

The coffee industry, currently valued at an estimated \$473 billion (revenue in and out-of-home – STATISTA, 2025), thus offers an ideal context in which to explore inconsistencies between attitudes and actual behaviors in everyday consumer contexts. Concurrently, the sector faces a series of systemic challenges, including climate-related threats, disruptions to supply chains, and rapidly evolving consumer expectations (Ismoyowati et al., 2023; Pancsira, 2022; Putithanarak et al., 2022; Ridder, 2024; Samoggia et al., 2020).

Beyond its economic impact, coffee holds profound cultural and social significance across

civilizations and represents a unique phenomenon where routine, addiction, and conscious choice interact in ways that challenge standard utility maximization models. From a historical standpoint, this product has exerted a substantial cultural influence. Originating in 15th-century Yemen, where it was initially associated with religious rituals, coffee eventually diffused through the Ottoman Empire into Europe (Olejniczuk-Merta, 2024). Its proliferation was facilitated by European colonial trade networks, enabling its integration into a broad array of cultural contexts (Olejniczuk-Merta, 2024). By the early modern

period, coffeehouses had emerged as vibrant hubs of intellectual, social, and political activity (Manzo, 1993; Olejniczuk-Merta, 2024; Setiyorini et al., 2023). The industrial expansion of the 19th century catalyzed the ascendancy of Brazil and the United States in coffee production (Manzo, 1993), while the late 20th century saw global coffee chains such as Starbucks reframe coffee as a symbolic and experiential commodity (Samoggia & Riedel, 2019).

Today, coffee remains deeply embedded in sustainability and digital integration, but even more in quotidian routines and national identities – from the espresso customs of Italy to the "fika" rituals of Sweden (Cengiz & Uygur, 2022; Maciejewski et al., 2019; Quintão et al., 2017; Yngve et al., 2023). Moreover, coffee has come to occupy roles in tourism marketing, personal identity formation and other parts of human everyday life (Chang & Spierings, 2023; Chen et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2020).

Coffee has been so-far studied in different aspects. Also, the health implications of its consumption have been explored extensively. Evidence suggests that moderate intake is associated with a reduced risk of type 2 diabetes (Chaubey et al., 2019; Mitchell, 2013), cardiovascular disease (Poole et al., 2017; Talero et al., 2019), and neurodegenerative disorders (Carneiro et al., 2021; Rodak et al., 2024; Tira et al., 2023). These benefits are generally attributed to coffee's high antioxidant content, particularly its phenolic compounds (Masek et al., 2020; Šeremet et al., 2022; Vázquez-Ruiz et al., 2022). At the same time, excessive caffeine consumption may trigger adverse effects, including heightened anxiety, sleep disturbances, and pregnancy-related complications (Gökçen & Şanlıer, 2019; Thomas & Hodges, 2020). Despite the wide-

spread consumption of coffee, public comprehension of these nuanced health outcomes remains limited.

Patterns of coffee consumption are shaped by cultural, regional, and socioeconomic variables. While coffee enjoys dominance in European and American markets, tea prevails in many parts of Asia and Africa (Desilver, 2013). Preparation methods also reflect regional preferences: espresso is prevalent in Italy, filtered coffee is favored in Germany, and traditional boiling with cardamom is common in Turkey (Brommer et al., 2011; Cengiz & Uygur, 2022; Sruthi et al., 2021). Socio-economic status further stratifies consumption habits; younger, urban consumers often gravitate toward specialty coffee products (Giovane da Silva et al., 2023; Guimarães et al., 2019; Morya, 2018; Quintão et al., 2017), whereas instant coffee retains popularity in more cost-sensitive demographics (Cristovam et al., 2000; Nguyen, 2025). Emotional associations vary as well: coffee is often linked to stimulation and indulgence in Western contexts, while more cautious perceptions related to health risks are observed in certain Asian cultures (Samoggia et al., 2020; Samoggia & Riedel, 2019; Xu et al., 2022).

Behavioral research has revealed notable contradictions. While many consumers claim to support environmentally sustainable practices (Bartoloni et al., 2021; Maciejewski et al., 2019; Samoggia & Busi, 2023), actual purchasing decisions may in some cases neglect certified eco-labels (Loureiro & Lotade, 2005), although other studies show that such labels are important for consumers (Gatti et al., 2022). Cross-cultural analyses underscore the persistence of local preparation customs (Brommer et al., 2011), as well as a general appreciation for sustainable claims – albeit

with limited behavioral follow-through (Maciejewski et al., 2019; Samoggia & Busi, 2023). In Jordan, for instance, traditional preparation methods endure despite documented concerns over contamination risks, highlighting the dominance of cultural identity over rational health-related choices (Al-Fawaeir et al., 2023; Sruthi et al., 2021).

This study endeavors to examine psychological motivations for drinking coffee. Despite substantial research on the biochemical and market dimensions of coffee, several crucial gaps remain. Firstly, although regional consumption patterns are well documented (Brommer et al., 2011; Cengiz & Uygur, 2022; Ismoyowati et al., 2023; Samoggia et al., 2020; Samoggia & Riedel, 2019; Wang et al., 2024), some cognitive biases that drive consumer preferences have not been very extensively investigated. Secondly, even though the health benefits and risks of coffee are widely acknowledged (Czarniecka-Skubina et al., 2021; Poole et al., 2017; Samoggia & Riedel,

2019), there is limited exploration of the behavioral gap between health knowledge and actual consumer behavior (Auffermann, 2017; Coffeandhealth, 2016; Samoggia & Riedel, 2019). Thirdly, while marketing strategies increasingly emphasize sustainability (Merbah & Benito-Hernández, 2024; Samoggia & Busi, 2023), empirical validation of their impact on purchasing behavior remains insufficient (Bartoloni et al., 2021; Bertossi et al., 2024). Finally, though the emotional and ritualistic dimensions of coffee consumption have been frequently noted (Samoggia & Riedel, 2018, 2019; Setiyorini et al., 2023), rigorous comparative studies across cultural contexts are relatively scarce.

RQ1: By emphasizing psychological factors, this study explores how motivational factors drive habitual coffee consumption. It contributes to understanding the emotional and cognitive motivations behind daily caffeine use, with implications for mental health awareness and consumer behavior research.

Research methods

A quantitative approach was employed to investigate the psychological motivations underlying coffee consumption and their relationship with behavioral outcomes. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to a diverse sample of 1,513 adult respondents. The average age was 40.19 years (SD = 18.70). Women constituted 64.2% of the sample, while men accounted for 35.8%. Participants represented a wide range of locations, including both rural areas and urban centers of varying sizes, from towns with fewer than 5,000 residents to cities with over

500,000 inhabitants. Monthly net income levels were diverse, with respondents reporting earnings ranging from no income to over 8,000 PLN. The employment status of participants also varied: the majority were full-time employees (55.1%), but the sample also included part-time workers, students, retirees, business owners, and individuals currently unemployed or not participating in the labour force for other reasons. Detailed sociodemographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample (N = 1513)

Variable category	Response	N	% in sample
Gender	Female	972	64.2
	Male	541	35.8
Place of residence	Village / Town up to 5k	402	26.6
	Town 5k-10k	83	5.5
	Town 10k-20k	121	8.0
	Town 20k-50k	168	11.1
	Town 50k-100k	186	12.3
	City 100k-200k	151	10.0
	City 200k-500k	139	9.2
	City over 500k	263	17.4
Monthly net income	No income	162	10.7
	Below 1000 PLN	52	3.4
	1001-2000 PLN	97	6.4
	2001-3000 PLN	127	8.4
	3001-4000 PLN	289	19.1
	4001-5000 PLN	284	18.8
	5001-6000 PLN	234	15.5
	6001-7000 PLN	100	6.6
	7001-8000 PLN	59	3.9
Employment status	8001 PLN or more	109	7.2
	Employed full-time	834	55.1
	Employed part-time	175	11.6
	Business owner	27	1.8
	Self-employed	75	5.0
	Farmer	26	1.7
	Unemployed	104	6.9
	Retired	172	11.4
	Student	123	8.1
	Parental leave	27	1.8
	Not working (other reasons)	86	5.7

Source: own study.

The questionnaire included items measuring six motivational constructs related to coffee consumption: stimulation/energy, sensory pleasure/taste, relaxation, habit/daily routine, social interaction, and health-related benefits. Each construct was assessed using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("Not at all important") to 5 ("Extremely important"). Two behavioral outcomes were also measured: preferred coffee intensity and frequency of coffee consumption. Coffee intensity preference was reported on a 3-point scale (1 = "Mild", 2 = "Medium", 3 = "Strong"), while consumption frequency was assessed on a 5-point ordinal scale (1 = "I don't drink coffee", 2 = "Less than

once a week", 3 = "Once a week", 4 = "Several times a week", 5 = "Every day"). Demographic data such as gender, age, income, and coffee preferences were also collected to capture a broader profile of the respondents. The sample was diverse in terms of socio-demographic characteristics; detailed distributions are presented in Table 1. Data preprocessing and operationalization of variables were conducted using the R statistical environment. To explore the underlying structure of motivational constructs and their associations with behavioral outcomes, analyses were performed using the JASP software for structural equation modeling (SEM).

Research results

To examine the relative importance of psychological motivations for coffee consumption, a repeated measures ANOVA was conducted on the six motivational constructs: stimulation/energy, sensory pleasure/taste, relaxation, habit/daily routine, social interaction, and health-related benefits. The analysis revealed a statistically significant main effect of motivation type, $F(5,7555) = 183.04$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.108$, indicating meaningful differences in the importance attributed to different motivations. Descriptive statistics for each motivational construct are reported in Table 1. Sensory pleasure/taste emerged as the most strongly endorsed motivation ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.03$), followed by relaxation ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.01$) and stimulation/energy ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 1.09$). Social interaction ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.10$) and health-related benefits ($M = 3.34$, $SD =$

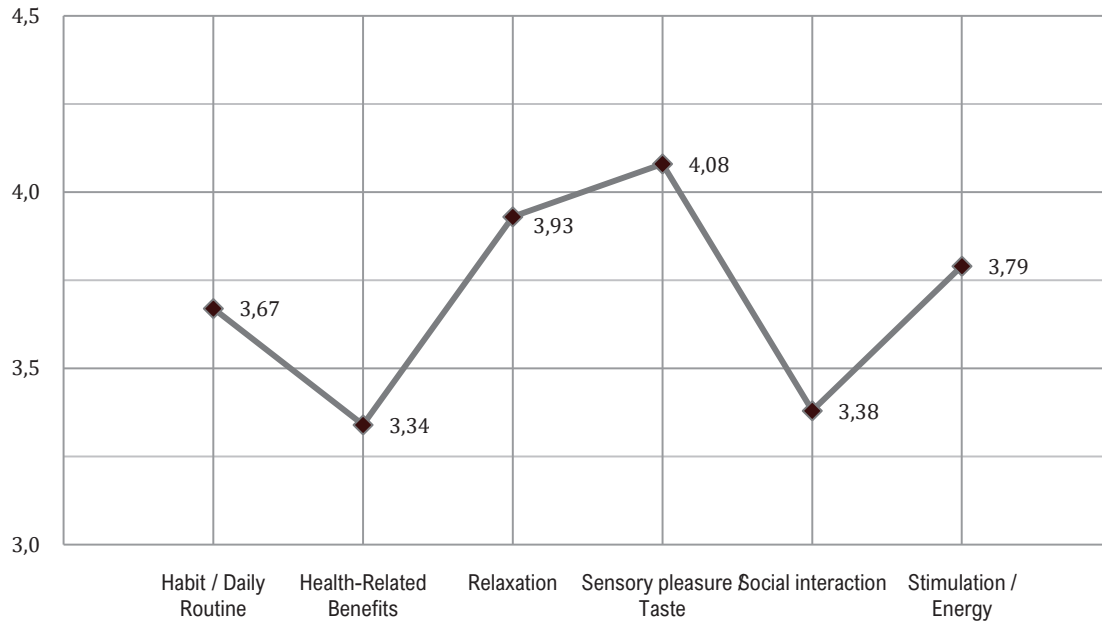
1.08) were rated as least important. Post hoc pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni correction revealed that nearly all pairwise differences between motivational constructs were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), with small to medium effect sizes (Cohen's d ranging from 0.11 to 0.69). For instance, sensory pleasure was significantly more important than social interaction (M difference = 0.70, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.66$), and stimulation/energy was rated higher than health-related benefits (M difference = 0.45, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.42$). The only non-significant difference was observed between social interaction and health-related benefits ($p = 0.263$). Together, these findings suggest a clear motivational hierarchy among coffee drinkers, where sensory experience and relaxation are prioritized over health concerns or social aspects.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for motivational constructs

Motivation	M	SD	SE	Coefficient of Variation
Sensory pleasure/taste	4.08	1.03	0.026	0.25
Relaxation	3.93	1.01	0.026	0.26
Stimulation/energy	3.79	1.09	0.028	0.29
Habit/daily routine	3.67	1.11	0.029	0.30
Social interaction	3.38	1.10	0.028	0.33
Health-related benefits	3.34	1.08	0.028	0.32

Source: own study.

Figure 1. Descriptive statistics for motivational constructs



Source: own study.

To examine the extent to which psychological motivations predict coffee-related behaviors, two multiple linear regression analyses were conducted using standardized motivational scores as predictors. The first model focused on the preference for coffee intensity (Table 3), and the second on the frequency of coffee consumption (Table 4). The regression model predicting coffee intensity was statistically significant, $F(6,1505) = 13.00$, $p < 0.001$. Sensory pleasure/taste emerged as the strongest predictor, $\beta = 0.117$, $t(1505) = 3.67$, $p < 0.001$, followed by stimulation/energy ($\beta = 0.088$, $p = 0.002$), habit/daily routine ($\beta = 0.081$, $p = 0.008$), and health-related benefits ($\beta = 0.060$, $p = 0.036$). These findings indicate that individuals who value the taste of coffee and its energizing properties, and who incorporate coffee into their routines or perceive health benefits, tend to prefer more intense brews. In contrast, relaxation and social interaction

motives were not significantly related to intensity preference. The second model, predicting the frequency of coffee consumption, also reached statistical significance, $F(6,1505) = 36.37$, $p < .001$. Here, habit/daily routine was the most prominent predictor, $\beta = 0.285$, $t(1505) = 9.75$, $p < 0.001$, indicating that regular coffee drinkers tend to consume coffee as part of their automatic, routine behavior. Relaxation was also a significant positive predictor ($\beta = 0.133$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that using coffee to unwind is associated with more frequent consumption. Interestingly, social interaction was a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -0.061$, $p = 0.025$), indicating that those who drink coffee primarily in social contexts may do so less frequently overall. Other motives, including stimulation/energy, sensory pleasure, and health-related benefits, were not significantly associated with consumption frequency in this model.

Table 3. Regression coefficients predicting coffee intensity preference

Predictor	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Stimulation / Energy	0.052	0.017	0.088	3.05	0.002
Sensory pleasure / Taste	0.073	0.020	0.117	3.67	< 0.001
Relaxation	-0.026	0.021	-0.041	-1.21	0.227
Habit / Daily routine	0.047	0.018	0.081	2.66	0.008
Social interaction	-0.012	0.017	-0.020	-0.72	0.472
Health-related benefits	0.036	0.017	0.060	2.10	0.036

Source: own study.

Table 4. Regression coefficients predicting the frequency of coffee consumption

Predictor	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Stimulation / Energy	0.031	0.019	0.045	1.63	0.103
Sensory pleasure / Taste	-0.024	0.022	-0.034	-1.10	0.272
Relaxation	0.098	0.024	0.133	4.12	< 0.001
Habit / Daily routine	0.192	0.020	0.285	9.75	< 0.001
Social interaction	-0.041	0.018	-0.061	-2.25	0.025
Health-related benefits	0.008	0.019	0.011	0.42	0.675

Source: own study.

Taken together, the findings indicate that while motivations related to taste, energy, habit, and health are associated with coffee strength preferences, frequency of consumption is most strongly driven by habitual and relaxation

motives. Although conceptually relevant, the social aspects of coffee consumption appear less predictive of behavioral patterns when other motivational drivers are taken into account.

Discussion

The present findings offer a clear picture of how six distinct psychological motives drive coffee consumption and how these motives translate into everyday behaviors. Participants reported sensory pleasure/taste as their primary reason for drinking coffee, closely followed by relaxation and then stimulation/energy, with habit, social interaction, and health-related benefits receiving comparatively lower ratings. This is consistent with prior research, which shows that sensory enjoyment and emotional comfort are among the most cited motivations for coffee consumption, and

often outweigh functional benefits like alertness (Samoggia & Riedel, 2019). This hierarchy shows that coffee is viewed as a highly enjoyable and comforting beverage – despite containing caffeine – while the energizing aspect, though still important, ranks only third among the top reasons for consumption. When considering behavioral outcomes, the motives associated with coffee intensity preference differed somewhat from those that predicted consumption frequency. Individuals who value the flavor of coffee and who have integrated coffee into their daily routines tend

to prefer a stronger brew, which is consistent with Cristovam et al., (2000) who found that individuals who prefer more intense coffee types are the ones who focus on hedonic aspects. Taste-centered motives are likely to drive the desire for a bold coffee experience, while those driven by habit may have developed a tolerance or preference for a more intense cup over time. The energy motive also played a small, but significant role in explaining intensity preference, suggesting that some people specifically choose stronger coffee for its heightened caffeine content. By contrast, relaxation as a motive did not significantly predict the strength of the coffee people enjoy, implying that, for those who drink coffee to unwind, the actual intensity may be less central to fulfilling that need. With regard to how often people drink coffee, habit and relaxation emerged as the strongest influences, suggesting that individuals who see coffee as part of their daily rhythm or as a way to decompress tend to consume it more frequently throughout the day. This is supported by Choi (2020), who found that taste and habit significantly influenced the frequency of caffeine consumption in college students, but the motivation for vigilance did not, which suggests that energy-related motives may not be the main reason for frequent coffee consumption. The fact that energy was not the reason for more frequent coffee consumption indicates that some people might simply need a single cup to achieve their desired alertness, rather than multiple cups. Meanwhile, social interaction displayed an unexpected negative relationship with frequency, indicating that when coffee is primarily

valued as a social or communal activity, it may be consumed only in specific social contexts rather than as an everyday staple. For example, Chang & Spierings (2023) find this particularly important for the millennial consumers, whose specialty coffee drinking is often associated with social identity and aesthetic experiences, more than habitual use. Also, it coincides with recent findings by Lone et al., (2024), that young adults, even though they consider energy and alertness as important motives, also cite diverse motives such as emotional regulation or routine. Overall, these patterns confirm that coffee drinking is not solely motivated by caffeine-related stimulation. Despite its well-known energizing properties, the second most important motive in this study was relaxation. This apparent contradiction may reflect the complex ways people experience coffee: it can be both a mild stimulant and a soothing ritual, especially when linked to breaks or comforting routines. Duality like this has also been documented by Samoggia & Riedel (2018) as well as Auffermann (2017). While taste and energy concerns help shape how strong one's coffee might be, it is the integration into daily life and the desire for stress relief that seem to drive heavier consumption. As Samoggia et al. (2020) found, consumers have positive emotions from coffee consumption. Consequently, understanding motivations towards it helps clarify why people approach coffee differently: some focus on flavor or habit, others use it for a pick-me-up, and many appreciate it for the moment of calm it provides despite its caffeine content.

Conclusions

This study provides a clear and thorough understanding of the psychological motivations behind coffee consumption. Although most people are motivated to drink coffee for sensory pleasure, relaxation and energy, habit plays a key role in determining the frequency of coffee consumption. These findings suggest that the role of coffee is more than just caffeine intake – for its consumers, it is a part of their daily routines, while being associated with emotional comfort, and the sheer enjoyment of the coffee experience. A strong point of this research is the large and demographically diverse sample, while it relies on multiple linear regression analyses to support the findings with solid empirical data.

Motivations influencing coffee intensity and those affecting the frequency of consumption

are differentiated in this study, highlighting the somewhat complex dynamics of how people interact with coffee. Study limitations include self-reported data, as consumers may not always recall or reflect on their behavior correctly. Further research should not only focus on psychological motives, which is the main focus of this study. This could also include less researched external influences such as social contexts or cultural habits, branding and marketing. Understanding coffee habits and habit development also remain underexplored. Similarly, future studies could incorporate real-life data or biological indicators that could further enrich the understanding of the relationship between coffee consumption, habits, rituals, mood and everyday life.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, B.B., A.Sz. and M.A.A.; methodology, A.Sz.; software, A.Sz.; validation, A.Sz.; formal analysis, A.Sz.; investigation, M.A.A. and D.B.; resources, M.A.A. and D.B.; data curation, A.Sz.; writing—original draft preparation, M.A.A., A.Sz. D.B. and Ž.M.; writing—review and editing, M.A.A., ŽM, B.B.; visualization, M.A.A.; supervision, M.A.A. and B.B.; project administration, M.A.A. and B.B., A.Sz.; funding acquisition, M.A. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript. Authorship must be limited to those who have contributed substantially to the work reported.

Declaration of competing interest

There are no financial or personal relationships with other people or organizations that could inappropriately influence (bias) our work.

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