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KOFIKALCHER: AN ITERATIVE DESIGN APPROACH TO A CAFE REVIEW PLATFORM FOR CREATIVE SPACES

¹Nor Farzana Abd Ghani, ²Rosanisah Omar & ³Mohammad Radzi Ismail

^{1,2}School of Computing, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia

³Ilham Ceramic Studio, Malaysia

¹*Corresponding author: farzana@uum.edu.my*

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ABSTRACT

In today's interconnected world, shared experiences and peer-generated recommendations play a vital role in decision-making. This paper addresses the growing need for a specialised platform that rates and reviews cafes with a focus on their creative spaces—environments designed to inspire productivity, innovation, and collaboration. Unlike typical cafe review sites that emphasise food and beverages, this platform highlights the significance of creative spaces for designers, artists, students, and other creative professionals who seek ambience, resources, and comfort to support their work. The proposed platform will feature a user-friendly website that offers tailored recommendations based on individual preferences. Users will be able to search for and filter cafes by specific criteria, such as Wi-Fi availability, quiet zones, natural lighting, seating comfort, or inspiring decor. Customised recommendation algorithms will guide users towards venues that align with their creative needs, enabling them to make informed choices about where to work, study, or collaborate. The significance of this project lies in its contribution to both the creative community and the local economy. By promoting cafes that invest in providing conducive work environments, the platform encourages the development of spaces that foster creativity, social interaction, and community growth. Future work will focus on expanding the platform's coverage to all Malaysian states, incorporating AI-driven personalisation for more accurate recommendations, and introducing interactive community features such as event listings, networking opportunities, and user-generated content. Performance enhancements—including database optimisation and mobile-first design—will ensure fast, seamless browsing. By iteratively improving both functionality and user experience, the platform aims to establish itself as the most trusted resource for discovering and evaluating creative spaces nationwide.

Keywords: creative spaces, cafe reviews, user recommendations, iteration design, web development

INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected world, sharing our thoughts and experiences with people everywhere has become an essential part of our daily lives. Through the help of social media platforms, blogs, and review websites, we can share our thoughts about everything from the latest movie releases to our best dining experiences. According to consumer research we conducted among 30,000+ global shoppers, the majority (88%) use reviews to discover and evaluate products (Byrne, 2023). It is also beneficial for businesses to enhance their performance and purchasing processes, thereby increasing their organisations' profits. Though review and rating sites have long been beneficial to restaurants and coffee shops, creative spaces should also have a designated area where people can voice their opinions and help others make decisions.

Although cafes and restaurants were once the primary focus of review platforms, the findings recommended expanding the scope to include creative spaces. As a result, the demand for these kinds of spots is growing, along with a demand for a trustworthy platform where users can share recommendations, ideas, and experiences. To encourage even more creativity and a sense of community among their customers, certain cafes that offer creative space experiences may also host events or workshops. Overall, the goal of a cafe's creative space experience is to offer an atmosphere that encourages and supports people in their artistic hobbies, whether writing, painting, or simply finding inspiration.

KofiKalcher, a web-based platform presented in this paper, embraces this concept by helping users uncover cafes that meet their creative space needs within the vicinity of three major cities in Johor. By expanding research and recommendations on such cafes in Malaysia, the website aims to promote local cafes that invest in creating spaces for remote workers, students, and creative professionals, thereby contributing to the local economy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To encourage even more creativity and a sense of community among their customers, certain cafes that offer creative space experiences may also host events or workshops based on users' preferences, which will be among the selection preferences. The goal of a cafe's creative space experience is to offer an atmosphere that encourages and supports people in their artistic hobbies, whether writing, painting, or simply finding inspiration. Users can also express their views and find cafes that suit their ambience and preferences, as well as creative spaces that are promoted. Customised recommendations for creative spaces will be given by the platform based on user preferences.

Since the introduction of the idea of space in the 80's by Oldenburg (1989), researchers have increasingly recognised the importance of surrounding one's creative space with items that inspire, motivate, and prompt one to create with greater passion (Wyatt, 2021). Art studios, maker spaces, and design studios are examples of creative spaces that have become increasingly popular in recent years. These spaces provide designers, artists, and other creative professionals with the materials, equipment, and atmosphere they require for optimal results. According to Cartwright (2017), for us, it is a physical space where people gather, work, inspire each other, learn new things, and connect.

Cafes that offer a creative space experience provide extra features and facilities that encourage inspiration and creativity. These areas frequently provide comfy seating options, lots of natural light, and a calm environment that helps with concentration. Reviews of coffee consumption alone are insufficient to convey the depth and variety of experiences that creative spaces offer. Whether you are a writer searching for the perfect metaphor, an artist looking to break creative blocks, or a creative entrepreneur ideating a new product, coffee may be just the muse you need (Roaster, 2023).

By using websites, users can browse for creative spaces based on ratings and reviews, and a list of recommended cafes is provided according to their preferences. People can find locations that meet their unique requirements, whether they want a nice view, great outdoor scenery, or slow music. To guarantee the authenticity and quality of the review and ratings, the scope includes creating a mobile-friendly design, search and browse functionality with filters and sorting options, and, obviously, a functional platform that allows users to share and access reviews and ratings of creative spaces.

While many studies address digital community building and online collaboration more generally, there is a limited body of work on integrated, multifunctional websites for physical creative spaces (Hussain et al., 2020). Most platforms prioritise either creative output visibility (e.g., Behance) or event coordination (e.g., Meetup), but seldom in a seamless environment. This gap highlights the need for a unified, user-centric web platform that supports the full creative lifecycle—from ideation and skill matching to showcasing and commercialising work.

Based on the gaps identified in existing platforms, prior study (Lu et al., 2021) and industry, the best practices suggest that an ideal creative space website should integrate some of the following features:

1. Community and Networking Tools – Member profiles, collaboration requests, skill tagging, and discussion boards.
2. Event and Workshop Management – Calendar, RSVP system, ticketing, reminders.
3. Resource Booking System – Real-time reservation for creative tools, studio spaces, or equipment.

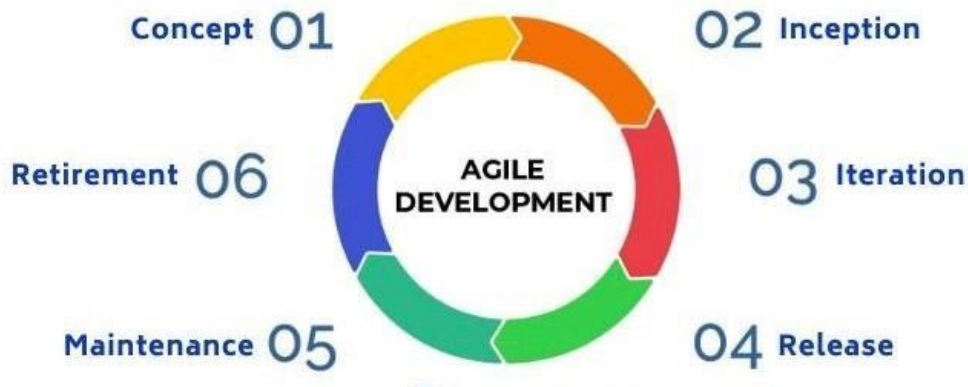
The KofiKalcher website focuses on ideation in terms of the process of generating, developing, and communicating new ideas within the creative space supported on a website.

METHODOLOGY

The website's development will follow a structured approach, progressing through distinct steps to ensure a systematic and effective process. In the context of Agile software development, iterative methodologies are essential (Sandu et al., 2022). Agile practices rely on brief cycles (sprints) that facilitate rapid prototyping and adjustments based on user feedback (Djan & Vries, 2022). This section will focus on the iteration stage to refine the design presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Agile Methodology



Source: Grauberger et al. (2023)

Understanding the website's purposes and objectives is the first step in the concept phase of the development process. It requires understanding the website's goal, target audience, proposed features and functionality, and any specific design preferences. This stage helps define the website's goal and evaluate whether the concept is sustainable before the website's creation. Next, planning the development process and exploring the requirements in greater depth are part of the conception phase. In general, questionnaires, research, and brainstorming sessions are used to gather this data. Proposed type of analysis and design diagram using a UML diagram. Prototypes of low and high fidelity may be created during this stage to illustrate the website's setup and design. They are also used to demonstrate the content, navigation flow, and overall appearance.

During the iteration phase, the job of developing a website is divided into smaller sprints or iterations. In each iteration, it may focus on creating a specific set of features and functionality. It will organise the work, carry out development, and regularly combine and test the built features. It goes under several reviews and revisions for improvement until finalised (Djan & Vries, 2022). This phase is very important for agile software development because it enables the rapid creation of software and tailoring it to customers' needs (Sandhu et al., 2022). This phase focuses on using Visual Studio Code, NetBeans, and PHP for establishing the analysis and database.

After a few iterations, the functional version of the website is deployed during the release phase. It involves finishing thorough testing, making the website ready for launch, and synchronising the work completed in each iteration. The chosen users will conduct User Acceptance Testing (UAT) as part of the testing process to determine whether the product is ready for deployment. This testing plays an important role in validating whether all business requirements are met before releasing the software for market use (Grauberger et al., 2023). Iteration not only refines existing designs but also adapts to new information or evolving requirements, which is fundamental to the Agile methodologies employed in contemporary design practices (Sandhu et al., 2022).

Moreover, once all of this is complete, the product is released into production (Djan & Vries, 2022). The website is made available to the public or a designated target audience after it is complete. Once the website

is launched, the maintenance phase starts. To guarantee the website's functionality, security, and stability, we will focus on monitoring and upgrades. During this phase, any issues or flaws found after the product's release are fixed. Then customer support is provided, and any required improvements are made in response to user feedback. In this phase, the development team provides regular support to the customer to ensure the software runs smoothly and is free of bugs (Djan & Vries, 2022).

Finally, the retirement phase occurs when the website reaches its end of life or is no longer needed. Redirecting customers to a new website or offering suitable alternatives, such as upgrading software and archiving data, are additional tasks that may be included in the retirement phase.

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

The computer system's functional components were translated from the requirements in Table 1. The next step is to visualise and model the website's requirements using relevant methodologies and tools. This project used UML to model and illustrate its requirements. The models utilised in this context include use case and sequence diagrams, as well as a class diagram that represents the application's structure.

Table 1

Functional Requirement List

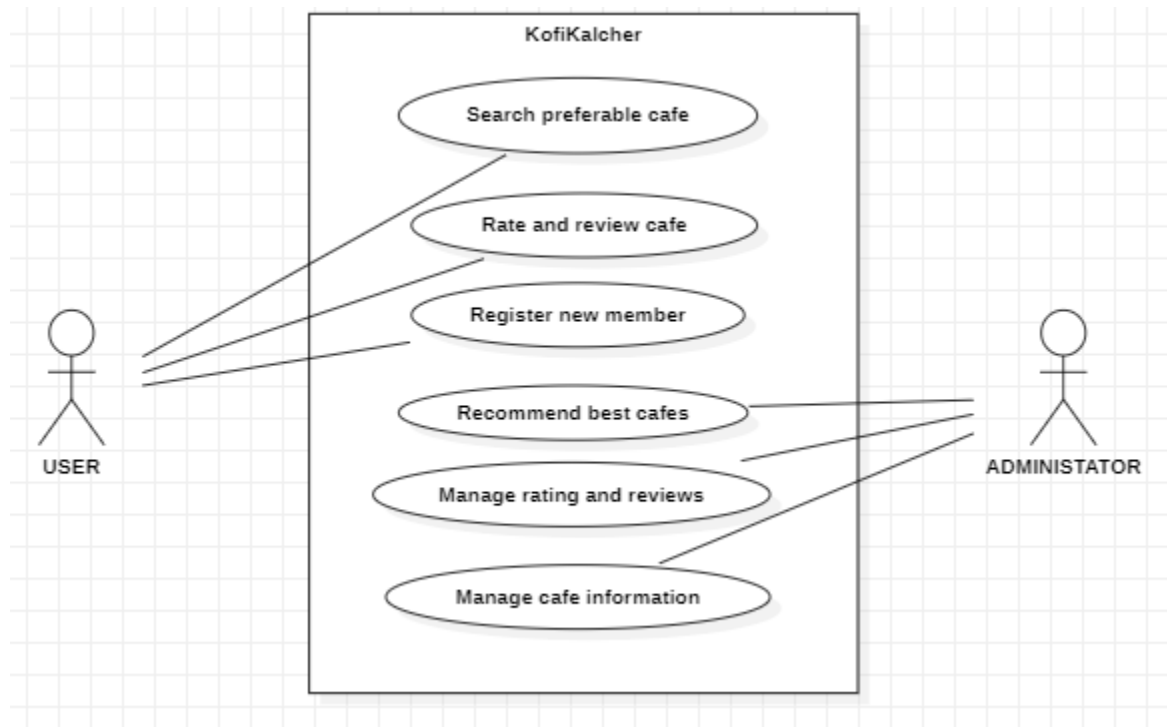
No.	Requirement ID	Requirement Description	Priority
RRS_01 Requirement 1: Search for a preferred cafe			
1.	RRS_01_01	The user chooses one or more preferences based on the options given	M
2.	RRS_01_02	The user can scroll and choose the best cafes	M
RRS_02 Requirement 2: See details of the cafe			
4.	RRS_02_01	The user can see ratings, reviews, and photos of the cafe's food and experience from previous customers.	M
5.	RRS_02_02	User can redirect to their address and social media, such as Facebook and TikTok.	M
6.	RRS_02_02	The system will display the rating and review based on the user's choice of cafe.	D
RRS_03 Requirement 3: Register a new member			
6.	RRS_03_01	The system will offer a registration form with sections for the necessary data.	M
7.	RRS_03_02	The system will provide a section where users can put their preferences about cafes.	D
RRS_04 Requirement 4: Recommend the best cafe			
9.	RRS_04_01	The system will display all the cafes based on user preferences.	M
10.	RRS_04_01	The system will list the cafes from most to least preferred.	M
11.	RRS_04_02	The system will display recommended cafes in order from highest to lowest rating.	D
RRS_05 Requirement 5: Manage rating and review			
12.	RRS_05_01	The system will display popular people and their reviews about the chosen cafes.	M

13.	RRS_05_02	The system will display the rating and overall reviews, both good and bad, about the cafes.	M
	RRS_06	Requirement 6: Manage cafe information	
14.	RRS_06_01	The system shall provide functionality to add the cafe's reservation.	M
15.	RRS_06_02	The system shall provide functionality to edit the cafe's reservations.	M
16.	RRS_06_02	The system shall provide functionality to delete the cafe's reservation.	M
	RRS_07	Requirement 7: Security issues	
17.	RRS_07_01	The website should automatically go to HOME after no action is taken for 30 minutes.	O
18.	RRS_07_01	The website will be securely encrypted to protect user privacy, including sensitive information like passwords and personal details.	M
	RRS_08	Requirement 8: Capacity	
19.	RRS_08_01	The review and rating feedback are stored in the system database.	O

To create an effective and user-friendly café recommendation system, we defined a set of needs that address multiple platform functionalities. The primary goal is to provide users with a complete and engaging experience when searching for and selecting cafes based on their preferences. Needs are prioritised and classified as required (M), desired (D), or optional (O).

Figure 2

The Use Case Diagram resulted from the list of requirements.



These standards ensure that a café recommendation system is robust and secure, providing consumers with detailed information, personalised recommendations, and effective data administration. Based on these

requirements, a UML diagram (Figure 2) has been created to represent the system's use cases and interactions.

Subsequently, the main page of the website consists of a login for the admin and user, home, coffee community, rate and review, and a login section. The filtering section of the website includes a selection of three major cities in Johor, preferences for café amenities, and a list of cafes ranked by highest rating and review (Figure 3). This feature will allow users to explore available cafes and make their choice based on the highest ratings displayed.

Figure 3

The First Iteration Design of KofiKalcher

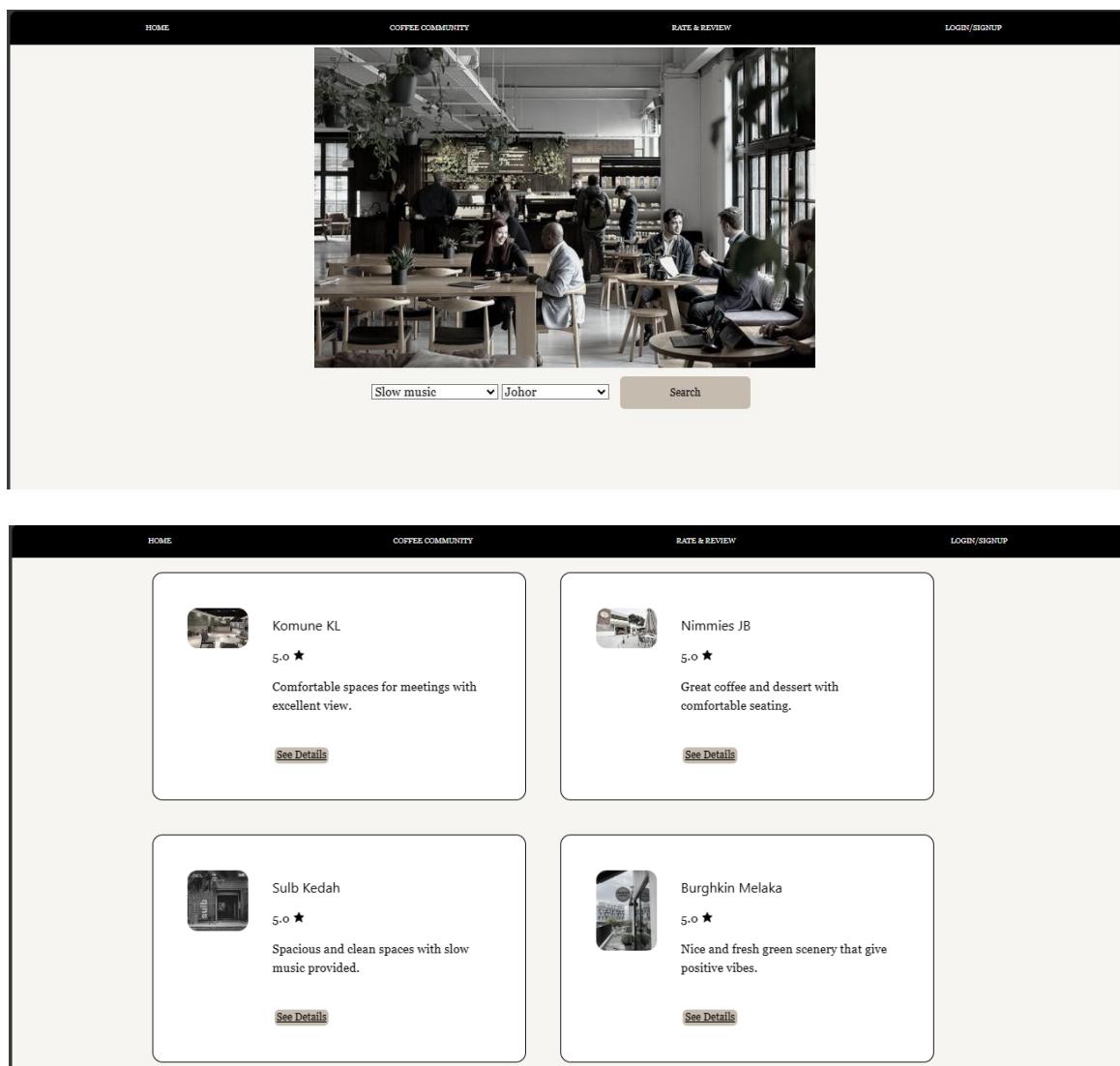


Figure 3 presents the first-iteration design of the website, with the realisation of the main features discussed in this section. The next section presents the results and analysis of the iteration design employed in this study, based on the interface's initial design.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

A total of 32 participants were recruited to complete the website evaluation questionnaire. To ensure a comprehensive evaluation, a mixed-method approach was employed. Participants were recruited through both face-to-face and online (WhatsApp) channels. Prior to completing the questionnaire, a subset of participants was given access to the website to facilitate a more informed evaluation. The participant pool exhibited a diverse age range, with representation from individuals aged 18 to over 40. The sample demographics were 21.9% male (n=9) and 79.1% female (n=23). The participant pool included 16 working professionals and 16 students.

During the evaluation, participants will navigate the website's content, exploring all sections and functionalities to assess the information architecture and the clarity of the user interface. Then, participants will be tasked with using the creative space filters based on their preferences to simulate real-world scenarios, revealing any potential shortcomings or areas for improvement in the filtering system's effectiveness. Moreover, participants will also examine the level of detail provided for each cafe listing. This could involve testing the comprehensiveness and clarity of information presented. The functionality also involves participants going through the entire reservation flow, including selecting a cafe, choosing a date and time, and completing the reservation. Evaluating this process will identify any usability issues or potential bottlenecks that could hinder user experience.

Participants will test functionality related to viewing, editing, and potentially deleting existing reservations, which may reveal shortcomings in managing reservation information. Participants will be encouraged to report any difficulties encountered during their website exploration and task completion. This feedback is crucial for identifying areas where user experience can be optimised. Finally, the questionnaire will be given for them to share their thoughts. For online participants, the presentation recording will first cover all the website's functionality, and then they will answer the questionnaire.

Table 2

The Respondents' Responses on the Design & Ease of Use of the Website

Questions	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
The system's design is clear and catches my eye.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (12.5%)	28 (87.5%)
I can use it without written instructions.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.1%)	8 (25%)	23 (71.9%)
I am clear on how to use this website.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.1%)	3 (9.4%)	28 (87.5%)
I am satisfied with how easy it is to use the website.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (12.5%)	28 (87.5%)
The system flows are smooth.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.1%)	2 (6.3%)	29 (90.6%)

Table 3

The Respondents' Responses on the Usefulness and Performance of the Website

Questions	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I can choose any cafe based on my preferences for the city.	1 (3.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (3.1%)	30 (93.8%)
I can use filters that suit my preferences when choosing cafes.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (12.5%)	28 (87.5%)
It saves me time when I use the website.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (9.4%)	29 (90.6%)
The website takes too long to load the data.	19 (59.4%)	5 (15.6%)	3 (9.4%)	2 (6.3%)	3 (9.4%)
The website takes too long to fetch my details.	20 (62.5%)	5 (15.6%)	1 (3.1%)	3 (9.4%)	3 (9.4%)

Table 4

The Respondents' Responses on the Content & Usability of the Website

Questions	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I can search for the content that I am looking for.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (18.8%)	26 (81.3%)
I can see the useful content and details on the website.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (9.4%)	29 (90.6%)
I can navigate to other pages easily.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (9.4%)	29 (90.6%)
I feel satisfied because the contents can help me achieve my goals.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (12.5%)	27 (84.4%)

I face challenges while using the website.	19 (59.4%)	5 (15.6%)	1 (3.1%)	3 (9.4%)	4 (12.5%)
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The data from the survey (Table 2-4) revealed that 12.5% of users face challenges while using the website. Regarding the selection of café preferences by city, 3.1% of users found the menu unclear. The most significant results were the loading time and the processing time of the search results, evident in around 9% of users' responses.

Next, to investigate this further and effectively address the inherent uncertainties and complexities of developmental processes, we analysed reports of difficulties encountered during website exploration and task completion. We incorporated their feedback to inform the design stage of the next iteration.

The Summary of the Respondents' Responses on the Improvement Question: "What can I do to improve your experience?"

Most participants say no and are overall satisfied with the website. A person suggested going through other cities, and another person suggested redesigning the cafe categories in the cafe details section. A person also suggested sharing this website on social media.

Evaluation of a website based on usability, content, and performance is important for several reasons. Firstly, usability evaluation helps assess how user-friendly and intuitive a website is. It focuses on factors such as ease of navigation, clear layout, and intuitive design. Questions such as "Did you face any challenges while using our website? Were you able to navigate to other pages easily?" help evaluate the website's usability. By evaluating usability, we can identify potential issues or barriers that may hinder users from interacting effectively with the website. Moreover, performance evaluation focuses on the website's technical aspects, such as loading speed, responsiveness, and compatibility across devices and browsers. Questions such as "Did it take too long to load the website?" and "Did it take too long to fetch your details on our website?" help measure website performance and ensure a smooth, seamless user experience.

The next iterative stage of the design focuses on the website's visual appeal, aesthetics, and overall layout. It assesses factors such as colour scheme, typography, imagery, and consistency in design elements. Questions such as "What could we have done better?" have been revised to "What can I do to improve your experience?" so users can share their opinions about the website. Other than that, the usefulness evaluation assesses how effectively the website meets its users' needs and goals. It assesses whether the website provides valuable and relevant information, features, or services that users are seeking. Moreover, the ease-of-use evaluation focuses on how easily users can navigate and interact with the website. An easy-to-use website reduces user frustration, encourages exploration, and increases user engagement.

Based on the findings of the website assessment, several significant adjustments have been made following the analysis of the comments. The enhancement of cafe details has included prominently

displaying cafe categories and tags, helping users better understand each cafe's features. The website also underwent a thorough re-code to fix found bugs and has been guaranteed to deliver excellent performance to address slow loading and processing times. For example, we incorporate built-in full-text search features, as demonstrated on the search/filter page (Figure 4), rather than using LIKE '%keyword%', which evidently slowed loading in the first-iteration design. Overall, considering design, usefulness, and ease of use in website evaluation ensures that the website not only looks visually appealing but also effectively provides a user-friendly experience. It helps create a positive impression, engage users, and achieve the website's desired goals.

Additionally, evaluating a website based on usability, content, and performance helps to identify areas for improvement, enhance user experience, and achieve the website's objectives effectively. It ensures that the website is user-friendly, provides valuable content, and performs optimally, leading to increased user engagement and satisfaction.

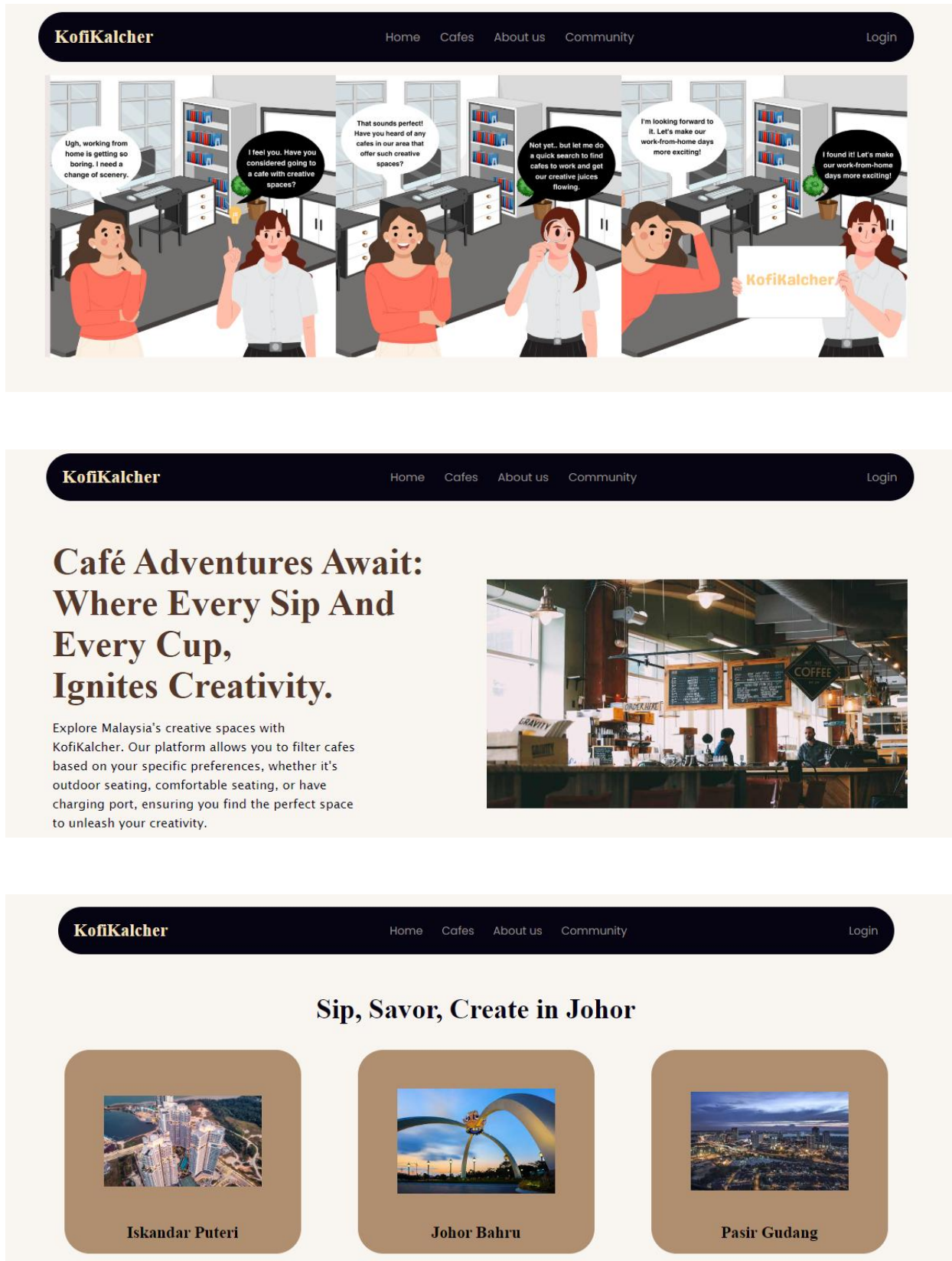
After several adjustments and refinements, the official website for KofiKalcher has been launched, offering a comprehensive platform for cafe enthusiasts (Figure 4). The site features a variety of sections, including Home, Cafes, About Us, Community, and Login, to enhance the user experience. Users are introduced to relatable scenarios, such as that of a woman tired of working from home who discovers KofiKalcher through a friend's recommendation. The website's objectives are clearly outlined (a menu of the major cities helps to navigate), focusing on providing users with an extensive list of cafes in three major cities in Johor, which are Johor Bahru, Iskandar Puteri and Pasir Gudang, helping users understand the value and purpose of the platform.

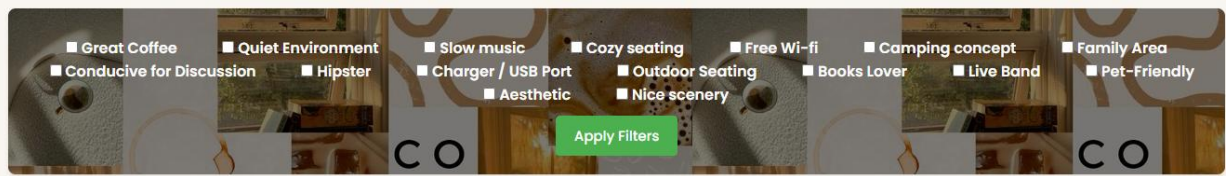
The platform allows users to filter cafes by preferences such as free Wi-Fi, pleasant scenery, and aesthetically pleasing environments, ensuring they can find the perfect spot that suits their needs. Upon selecting a cafe, users can access comprehensive details, including descriptions, addresses, social media links, categories, tags, photos, and a comments section with reviews from previous customers, to help them make informed decisions. To improve loading performance, we created indexes on columns used in WHERE, JOIN, and ORDER BY clauses to help the database quickly locate rows rather than scanning the entire table. Then, users can reserve cafes directly on the website, but only after logging in or registering, to ensure privacy and security.

Additionally, reservation history is available exclusively to registered users, providing a personalised and secure experience. The KofiKalcher website is designed to be both professional and engaging, catering to users seeking creative spaces within cafes. By offering detailed information and personalised recommendations, it enhances the overall cafe experience and fosters a community of creativity and inspiration. For example, using the website's suggested tags for each cafe will boost its visibility within the creative space community on social media. It contributes to the creative space community by supporting the ideation, generation, development, and communication of new ideas on this website.

Figure 4

The official KofiKalcher website





Cafe Adventures in Johor Bahru !



Herserlef

★ 4.8

Great Coffee, Cozy seating, Free Wi-fi, Conducive for Discussion, Charger / USB Port

Reserve



Vintage Green Cafe

★ 4.8

Great Coffee, Quiet Environment, Books Lover, Aesthetic

Reserve



Lagula

★ 4.8

Cozy seating, Free Wi-fi, Charger / USB Port, Outdoor Seating, Aesthetic

Reserve



Haru Coffee

★ 4.7

Free Wi-fi, Charger / USB Port, Aesthetic

Reserve

Cafe Details Here!

Off Day Cafe

Johor Bahru

★ 4.4

Off Day Café is a minimalist, hipster, and chill cafe serving Australian-inspired brunches, Korean-inspired desserts and Malaysian roasted coffee. Great interior design and best coffee bean roasted fresh here.

About Cafe

Opening hours: 10am to 6pm

Operating days: Sunday to Monday

📍 57, Jalan Eko Botani 3/7, 79100 Gelang Patah, Johor

📷 <https://www.instagram.com/offdaycafe/>

📘 <https://www.facebook.com/offdaycafe/>

Cafe Categories

Quiet Environment Slow music

Free Wi-fi Hipster

Charger / USB Port Pet-Friendly

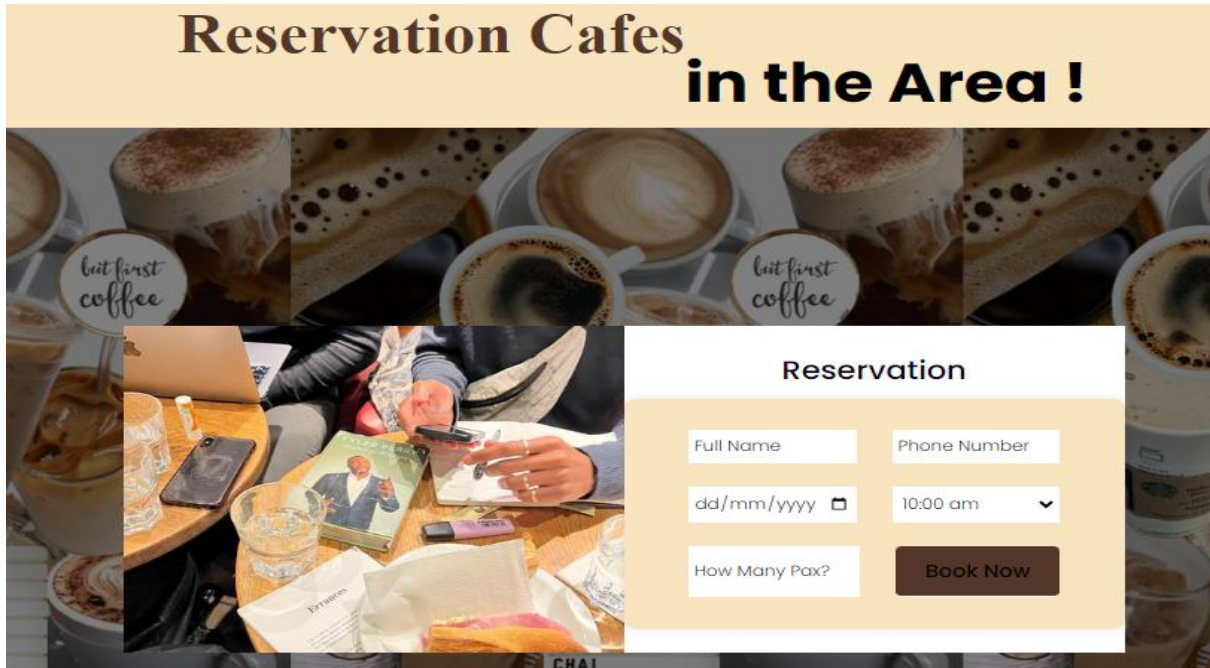
Tags

FoodPorn CafeHunting

CafeHopping CoffeeLover

ArtLover

Photos



Reservation History in the Area !

Reservation ID	Cafe Name	Full Name	Contact Number	Date	Time	Pax	Actions
38	Haru Coffee	Iqmal	052627366	2024-07-06	13:00 pm	2	Edit Delete
44	The Founders Cafe	Iqmal	01982	2024-07-25	13:00 pm	2	Edit Delete

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

The KofiKalcher platform aims to promote and enhance creative space experiences across Malaysia, starting with Johor Bahru, Iskandar Puteri, and Pasir Gudang. By offering curated recommendations based on amenities, atmosphere, and community engagement, it serves remote workers, students, and creative professionals seeking inspiring environments to work, connect, and innovate. This project adopts an iterative design approach, a cyclical process of prototyping, testing, and refining to meet evolving user needs. This aligns with Agile principles, ensuring responsiveness to feedback and continuous improvement in functionality and user experience. From a performance perspective, each iteration will focus on improving loading and processing speeds through database optimisation, efficient filtering,

caching strategies, and streamlined queries. These enhancements will deliver faster navigation, reduce waiting times, and improve overall engagement—especially for first-time visitors.

Usability testing in future cycles will ensure that the website clearly communicates its objectives. Refinements in layout, navigation, and content presentation will make it easier for users to understand the platform's value and find creative spaces suited to their needs. We suggest future enhancements include adding creative spaces from all Malaysian states and using personalised AI recommendations to tailor suggestions. More community features – enabling reviews, event sharing, and networking with a click of a button. Apart from that, for future use, performance scaling needs to be considered by optimising the infrastructure for high traffic. In terms of inclusivity, the website should meet the internationally recognised standards set by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) to ensure that websites and digital content are accessible to all users, including people with disabilities. By applying iterative design, KofiKalcher can continually refine performance, clarity, and user experience. This ensures the platform remains relevant, engaging, and impactful—supporting productivity, creativity, and community growth while contributing to Malaysia's creative economy.

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