

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SERVICE THROUGH SME BUSINESS DIAGNOSTICS: CUSTOMER-ORIENTED STRATEGY FOR A COFFEE AND SNACK SHOP IN KUALA LUMPUR

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ABSTRACT

International community service can connect academic knowledge with the immediate needs of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) operating in multicultural urban settings. This article reports a Corporate Social Innovation (CSI) activity conducted by a team from Universitas Pembangunan Nasional “Veteran” Jakarta in collaboration with Universiti Kuala Lumpur at a coffee and snack shop in the lobby of Regalia Residence, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The activity aimed to identify the partner’s operational and marketing challenges, interpret customer-behavior patterns, and formulate feasible customer-oriented recommendations. A participatory business-diagnostic approach was applied through pre-visit desk research, a one-day field visit, direct observation, semi-structured conversations with the owner and staff, informal customer interactions, photographic documentation, and thematic analysis. The diagnostic process identified four interrelated issues: dependence on fluctuating lobby traffic, the need to serve both residents and short-stay visitors, limited differentiation in a competitive food-and-beverage environment, and underutilized customer-retention and digital-promotion opportunities. The service team translated these findings into a practical strategy package comprising time-based menu planning, a simple loyalty mechanism, low-cost digital content, distinctive menu development, and collaboration with residence management. The principal output was a context-specific set of recommendations and a shared understanding of the shop’s market position; however, the short engagement did not permit measurement of post-implementation business outcomes. The activity demonstrates that international community service can create reciprocal learning and actionable value when recommendations are grounded in partner dialogue, local observation, and realistic resource constraints.

Keywords: MSME empowerment; consumer behavior; business diagnostics; customer oriented strategy;

INTRODUCTION

Micro, small, and medium enterprises contribute to employment, service innovation, and the vitality of urban communities. Their resilience is especially important in mixed-use residential and hospitality environments, where demand is shaped by resident routines, visitor turnover, tourism cycles, and nearby competition. In such settings, business performance depends not

only on product quality but also on the ability to interpret changing customer needs, manage menus, use location advantages, and respond quickly to operational uncertainty (Lai et al., 2021; Trupp et al., 2024). Community service in higher education provides a practical route for translating management concepts into solutions that partners can assess and adopt. In an international setting, the process also creates cross-cultural learning: students and lecturers encounter a business ecosystem outside their home country, while the partner gains an external perspective on everyday challenges. This orientation distinguishes community service from research conducted solely to generate academic findings. The central concern is a mutually useful process of identifying needs, discussing alternatives, and producing feasible outputs for the partner.

The community partner in this activity was a coffee and snack shop located in the main lobby of Regalia Residence, Kuala Lumpur. Its location creates access to two overlapping segments: long-term residents seeking convenience and repeat service, and short-stay visitors seeking accessible food and beverages. The lobby also functions as a circulation point and informal social space. Accordingly, ambience, interpersonal interaction, convenience, and menu suitability may jointly influence patronage (Omar & Ab Rashid, 2023).



Figure 1. Community partner's business setting in the main lobby of Regalia Residence, Kuala Lumpur. Source: CSI team documentation.

The preliminary diagnosis indicated that the shop possessed a strategic location and a varied product display, but also faced variable traffic outside peak periods and competition from alternative food-and-beverage outlets. The original activity documentation further indicated opportunities to strengthen repeat purchasing, digital visibility, menu distinctiveness, and collaboration with residence management. These needs formed the basis of the service activity. This article therefore aims to describe the international community-service process, present the business diagnosis developed with the partner, and formulate practical customer-oriented strategies appropriate to a small coffee and snack business. The article contributes an applied model for short-duration international engagement: observe the context, listen to the partner, organize evidence into priority issues, and convert the diagnosis into manageable

recommendations. It does not claim causal improvement in sales or customer loyalty because no post-intervention measurement was conducted.

METHODS

Program Design and Partner

The activity formed part of the Corporate Social Innovation (CSI) program, an experiential community-engagement initiative that places students in direct contact with real business environments. The UPNVJ team conducted the activity in Kuala Lumpur in an international collaborative context involving Universiti Kuala Lumpur. The coffee and snack shop was selected purposively because its lobby-based model provided a relevant case for applying consumer-behavior, service-management, and small-business strategy concepts. The immediate beneficiaries were the owner and operational staff, who received an external business diagnosis and strategy options. Student participants were secondary beneficiaries through field-based and cross-cultural learning. Residents and visitors constituted prospective indirect beneficiaries if the recommendations were later implemented and improved service relevance or convenience.

Table 1. Participatory Business-Diagnostic Stages

Stage	Activity
Preparation	Desk research on the Regalia Residence business environment and development of observation and interview prompts.
Field observation	A one-day visit to examine location, customer movement, product display, service interactions, and apparent demand patterns.

Partner dialogue	Semi-structured conversations with the owner and staff regarding business history, daily operations, customer preferences, competition, and constraints.
Customer insight	Informal interactions with customers to understand preferences and service experience; no personally identifying information was collected.
Synthesis	Thematic grouping of notes and photographs into location, customer, menu, promotion, retention, and partnership themes.
Recommendation	Translation of the diagnostic themes into low-cost, staged actions suitable for the partner's scale and resources.

Data Analysis and Quality Boundaries

The team used descriptive thematic analysis rather than inferential statistics. Field notes, interview points, observations, and visual documentation were compared to identify recurring issues and opportunities. Triangulation across owner or staff explanations, direct observation, and customer interactions strengthened the practical diagnosis. The recommendations were then assessed against three criteria: relevance to the identified issue, affordability for a small business, and feasibility within routine operations.

The activity was exploratory and service-oriented. It involved a single site and a one-day visit; the available documentation did not include a baseline sales series, a structured customer sample, a validated pre-test/post-test instrument, or longitudinal monitoring. Consequently, numerical impact claims are intentionally avoided. Photographs are used only to document the setting, team engagement, and product or menu context.



Figure 2. CSI team during the international community-service field activity. Source: CSI team documentation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Partner Needs and Business Diagnosis

The diagnostic process produced four central findings. First, location was simultaneously the shop's strongest asset and a source of vulnerability. Placement in the lobby provided convenience and visibility, but demand depended heavily on occupancy, guest movement, resident routines, and time of day. This pattern suggests that the shop should not treat all operating hours as a single market period. Second, the partner served customers with different visit frequencies. Residents offered the possibility of repeat patronage and relationship building, while tourists and business travelers were more likely to value immediate convenience, clear product information, and easy-to-select bundles. A single undifferentiated offer could therefore miss opportunities in both segments.

Third, the visible selection of pastries, sandwiches, snacks, and beverages supported convenience but did not automatically create differentiation. Menu management in small restaurants requires continuous attention to item relevance, customer response, operational simplicity, and profitability (Lai et al., 2021). Distinctive combinations or signature items can help customers remember the shop without requiring a complete menu redesign.



Figure 3. Sandwich and snack display observed at the partner location. Source: CSI team documentation.

Fourth, customer-retention and digital-promotion practices represented underused opportunities. The partner's physical catchment was concentrated around the residence, making targeted and inexpensive communication potentially more appropriate than broad paid promotion. A simple loyalty approach could focus on residents, while concise digital content could help visitors recognize the shop, opening hours, popular items, and current offers.

Table 2 Strategy Package Developed Through the Service Activity

Diagnosed issue	Recommended action	Initial implementation	Suggested indicator
Variable traffic by time of day	Time-based offers	Create a limited breakfast bundle and an afternoon/evening snack bundle; review uptake weekly.	Units sold per bundle and sales by time block.
Two customer segments	Segmented service message	Emphasize convenience and clarity for visitors; recognize and reward repeat residents.	Repeat visits and customer comments.
Limited differentiation	Signature or rotating item	Test one distinctive product or locally relevant combination at a time.	Trial-item sales, waste, and repurchase.

Weak retention mechanism	Simple loyalty program	Use a stamp card or low-complexity digital record with a clear, affordable reward.	Enrollment, redemption, and repeat-purchase rate.
Limited digital visibility	Low-cost content routine	Post menu highlights, operating information, and short promotions using consistent visuals.	Reach, inquiries, profile visits, and offer redemptions.
Untapped residence network	Management collaboration	Discuss resident promotions, event refreshments, or lobby activations with residence management.	Number of joint activities and attributable transactions.

The package emphasizes small tests rather than simultaneous large changes. For example, the shop could begin with one breakfast bundle and one loyalty mechanism, record results for several weeks, and retain only the options that fit demand and operational capacity. This learning cycle reflects strategic adaptability: small firms benefit when practices are configured around their specific environment rather than copied as isolated “best practices” (Williams et al., 2020). Digital promotion should support, rather than distract from, the shop’s location-based strength. Content can focus on practical information today’s available items, a simple bundle, opening hours, and a recognizable location cue. If digital tools are adopted, their value lies in strengthening the customer journey and making offers visible; technology alone does not guarantee a competitive advantage (Huang et al., 2022).

Community Service Outputs and Reciprocal Learning

The tangible output of the activity was a structured partner diagnosis and an actionable set of recommendations linked to observable issues. The service team organized dispersed field information into six decision areas: time-based demand, segmentation, differentiation, retention, digital visibility, and institutional partnership. This conversion from observation to prioritized action is the main immediate contribution of the short engagement. The activity also generated reciprocal learning. The partner obtained an external perspective grounded in management concepts, while the team learned that consumer behavior in a multicultural residential-tourism setting cannot be interpreted through assumptions alone. Dialogue with the owner, staff, and customers was necessary to connect theory with operating realities. The international setting added sensitivity to language, customer diversity, and the need to avoid

transferring strategies without local adaptation. The available evidence supports a claim of diagnostic and educational value, not a claim of improved revenue or long-term competitiveness. Such outcomes depend on partner adoption, consistent implementation, and follow-up measurement. This distinction is important for credible community-service reporting: outputs produced during the activity should be separated from outcomes that can only be verified after implementation.

Sustainability and Follow-Up Plan

To sustain the program, the recommendations can be implemented through a simple plan do review cycle. The partner selects one or two actions, records basic indicators, reviews results after an agreed period, and adapts or discontinues the action. A follow-up team can provide a one-page monitoring sheet and conduct an online review with the partner. If resources permit, future activities should add a baseline period, a brief customer questionnaire, item-level sales data, and a follow-up assessment. These additions would allow the team to evaluate changes in repeat visits, sales by time block, promotion response, and customer satisfaction more rigorously.

CONCLUSION

The CSI activity reframed a coffee and snack shop's everyday operational challenges as an international community-service opportunity. Through observation, partner dialogue, customer interaction, and thematic synthesis, the team identified a business model shaped by a strategic lobby location, two different customer segments, variable traffic, menu-differentiation needs, and limited retention and digital-promotion mechanisms. The resulting

strategy package proposed time-based offers, segmented service messages, signature or rotating items, a simple loyalty program, low-cost digital content, and collaboration with residence management.

The strongest immediate result was not a verified increase in business performance, but a context-specific diagnosis and a set of feasible actions that the partner could test. The experience also strengthened students' ability to apply management knowledge in a multicultural setting. Future international community-service cycles should extend the engagement, formalize partner validation, collect baseline and follow-up indicators, and document which recommendations are adopted. Such continuity would enable the program to move from a useful diagnostic intervention toward measurable and sustainable MSME empowerment.

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