

A Conjoint Analysis of the Preferences for Food and Beverage Pop-up Shops Among Gen Z College Students in Davao City

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the attributes influencing Gen Z college students' preferences for food and beverage pop-up shops in Davao City, where limited research exists. A mixed-methods approach was used: qualitative data from key informant interviews and focus group discussions identified relevant attributes, followed by a quantitative survey to assess preferences. The research was guided by Multi-Attribute Utility Theory, Servicescape Theory, and the 7Ps Marketing Mix. Results show ambient conditions (33.5%) as the most influential attribute, followed by product quality, service personnel, space functionality, and pricing. The findings suggest Gen Z values sensory comfort and diverse, high-quality offerings, providing practical insights for marketers and entrepreneurs designing appealing pop-up shop experiences in emerging urban areas.

INTRODUCTION

Pop-up shops have emerged as a dynamic strategy in modern retail, offering brands the opportunity to deliver immersive and exclusive experiences in temporary physical spaces. These formats allow businesses to test markets, enhance visibility, and directly engage consumers without the long-term commitment of a permanent storefront (Yu et al., 2018). Particularly in the food and beverage sector, pop-up shops have become a platform for creativity, personalization, and experiential engagement—features that strongly appeal to Generation Z (Gen Z), a digitally native and socially conscious cohort known for prioritizing authenticity, novelty, and social media-friendly experiences (Bee, 2019; MarketDial, 2023).

The global economic significance of pop-up retail is well-established, with revenues reaching \$80 billion annually and projected to climb to \$95 billion by 2025 (CapitalOne Shopping Research, 2024). Businesses see these setups as cost-efficient ways to engage their market: 80% of entrepreneurs reported their pop-up initiatives as successful, with 58% intending to launch more (Keyes, 2019). This model capitalizes on urgency and exclusivity—traits that resonate deeply with Gen Z, whose behavior is often driven by Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), aesthetic value, and shared experiences.

Gen Z consumers display a strong preference for retail environments that are interactive, socially conscious, and aligned with their personal values. According to Von Aulock (2024), 60% of Gen Z respondents favored physical retail spaces over online platforms when these spaces offered unique, immersive experiences. A growing body of research supports this, emphasizing Gen Z's demand for sustainability, affordability, and personalization across sectors (Rude, 2024; Trend Hunter, 2024). However, most studies on pop-up retail and Gen Z behavior are rooted in Western or metropolitan contexts and lack cultural specificity.

Davao City, one of the fastest-growing urban centers in the Philippines, offers a unique setting for exploring Gen Z's preferences in experiential food and beverage retail. Events like the Kadayawan Festival frequently feature pop-up shops showcasing local cuisine and products. In 2021, over 25,000 micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) were supported in Davao Region by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), indicating a vibrant environment for business innovation (Department of Trade and Industry, 2022). Despite this, limited academic research has examined how local Gen Z consumers in regional cities like Davao interact with and respond to pop-up formats.

Recent studies conducted in Southeastern Mindanao provide relevant context. For instance, Sumatra et al. (2025) found that sustainability (29.7%) and affordability (29%) were the top travel decision factors for Gen Z in Mindanao, suggesting a strong preference for eco-conscious, budget-friendly experiences. In a related study, Sumatra (2025a) reported that Gen Z students preferred online learning platforms offering flexibility, accessibility, and user-friendly design—values that can also influence offline consumption patterns. In the tourism domain, beach resort preferences among Davao-based Gen Z consumers were shaped by adventure, personalized experiences, and sustainability, indicating

that their decisions extend beyond basic cost-benefit calculations to include emotional and social components (Sumatra, 2025b).

Financial behavior studies reinforce these insights. Sumatra (2023) found that among Gen Z college students in Davao, promotional strategies and digital presence were more influential than location or convenience when choosing cooperative savings products. This finding suggests that engaging storytelling, digital marketing, and experiential design significantly influence how Gen Z perceives value, trust, and relevance – insights highly applicable to pop-up retail.

Despite these advancements, few studies have systematically examined how various attributes of food and beverage pop-up shops – such as product variety, ambient conditions, pricing, service personnel, and space functionality – interact to shape Gen Z consumer preferences. Existing literature often isolates individual factors or focuses on national-level trends without considering localized behavior. This creates a significant gap in understanding how regional youth in emerging urban centers like Davao make decisions based on complex trade-offs.

To address this research gap, the present study investigates the specific attributes that influence Gen Z college students' preferences for food and beverage pop-up shops in Davao City. By identifying the most and least preferred features and combinations, the study aims to provide data-driven insights that can inform entrepreneurs, marketers, and local government stakeholders on how to develop more effective and culturally grounded pop-up experiences for this increasingly influential consumer group.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is anchored on three theories that collectively explain the decision-making processes and experiential expectations of Generation Z in the context of food and beverage pop-up shops: the Multi-Attribute Utility Theory (MAUT), the Servicescape Theory by Mary Jo Bitner (1992), and the 7Ps Marketing Mix by McCarthy, Booms, and Bitner (1982). MAUT served as the primary theoretical lens, providing a structured foundation for understanding preference-based trade-offs. Meanwhile, Servicescape and the 7Ps Marketing Mix were employed as supporting frameworks to examine how physical environments and marketing strategies influence Gen Z's consumer behavior.

Multi-Attribute Utility Theory (MAUT)

Developed by Keeney and Raiffa (1976), the Multi-Attribute Utility Theory (MAUT) is widely used in structured decision-making processes. It evaluates how individuals make choices when faced with multiple competing attributes. This theory breaks down complex decisions into smaller attribute-based components, assigning utility scores to reflect the relative importance of each attribute (Wallenius et al., 2008). MAUT is particularly effective when paired with conjoint analysis, which was used in this study to quantify preferences and trade-offs among pop-up shop attributes (Green & Srinivasan, 1990).

In this research, MAUT helped identify and prioritize the food and beverage pop-up shop attributes that most appeal to Gen Z in Davao City – such as ambient conditions, space functionality, pricing, service personnel, and product quality. Through this framework, each attribute’s utility was evaluated, offering practical insights into how Gen Z consumers make decisions based on complex trade-offs. The approach was especially relevant in a culturally diverse and economically evolving city like Davao, ensuring that preferences were analyzed in a localized context.

Servicescape Theory by Mary Jo Bitner (1992)

The Servicescape Theory, introduced by Bitner (1992), explains how physical surroundings influence customer perceptions, experiences, and behaviors in service environments. Bitner categorized the servicescape into three dimensions: ambient conditions, space/functionality, and signs, symbols, and artifacts. This theory expands on earlier work by Kotler (1973), who emphasized that consumers respond to their environments through sensory perceptions such as sight, sound, and smell.

In this study, the Servicescape Theory was used to understand how temporary retail spaces – like pop-up shops – can create immersive, emotionally resonant experiences for Gen Z consumers. It guided the assessment of physical elements such as lighting, layout, cleanliness, and visual appeal. Since pop-up shops often operate within limited timeframes and rely heavily on first impressions, the physical environment becomes a critical factor in shaping consumer satisfaction and intent (Chang, 2016). The theory also informed the survey development by providing a lens through which researchers selected environment-related attributes to include in the analysis.

7Ps Marketing Mix by McCarthy, Booms, and Bitner (1982)

The 7Ps Marketing Mix, expanded from McCarthy’s original 4Ps, includes Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence (Allen, 2020; MOCK the agency, 2024). This model was designed to provide a comprehensive structure for marketing strategies in service industries.

In this study, the 7Ps framework supported the analysis of how Gen Z interacts with food and beverage pop-up shops from a marketing perspective. It allowed the researchers to examine Gen Z preferences regarding value for money, staff demeanor, service speed, and promotional appeal. Used alongside MAUT, the 7Ps framework clarified which marketing-related attributes were most influential in shaping consumer decisions. This offered practical recommendations for designing pop-up shops that not only meet functional expectations but also align with Gen Z’s brand loyalty drivers.

Together, these three theories created a cohesive foundation for understanding Gen Z consumer preferences in a multi-attribute retail environment. MAUT enabled the breakdown of complex choices; Servicescape provided insights into environmental influences; and the 7Ps Marketing Mix added a layer of strategic marketing relevance. These theoretical perspectives informed the study’s conceptual framework, which guided the research process from attribute identification to data interpretation. The framework, adapted from

Gumasing et al. (2022), includes four key phases: (1) identification of attributes through qualitative methods, (2) evaluation via the PAPRIKA method in 1000minds software, (3) data collection through online surveys, and (4) analysis and interpretation of results. By combining these theoretical foundations, the conceptual framework offers a structured approach to understanding Gen Z preferences in food and beverage pop-up shops in Davao City, as shown in Figure 1.

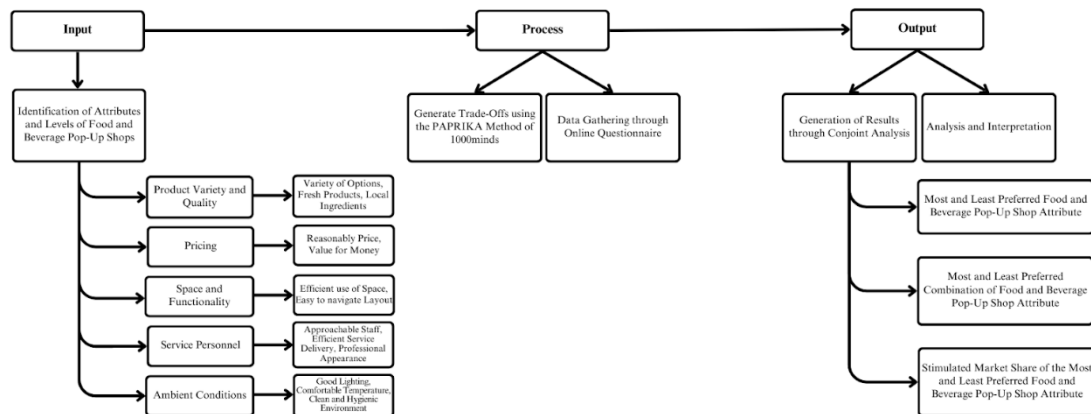


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive correlational research design to examine the relationship between selected pop-up shop attributes—pricing, space and functionality, ambient conditions, product variety and quality, and service personnel—and the preferences of Generation Z college students in Davao City. The research was conducted in two phases. The first involved gathering qualitative insights through key informant interviews (KIIs) with Gen Z students and focus group discussions (FGDs) with food and beverage pop-up shop owners. These sessions identified and validated the attributes and levels for use in the quantitative phase. The second phase implemented a survey through 1000minds software, using the PAPRIKA method of conjoint analysis to evaluate the trade-offs Gen Z students made when choosing between different combinations of attributes. This structure enabled the study to simulate real-world decision-making scenarios based on user-generated input.

Data collection occurred from February 24 to March 26, 2025, across five higher education institutions in Davao City: Ateneo de Davao University, Holy Cross of Davao College, Mapúa Malayan Colleges Mindanao, San Pedro College, and the University of Mindanao. Respondents were Gen Z college students aged 18 to 26 with prior experience purchasing from food and beverage pop-up shops. A purposive and quota-based sampling approach was used to ensure qualified participation and balanced representation. Based on established recommendations for conjoint studies, a minimum of 300 respondents was set, with a 20% buffer added to address non-response, resulting in a final target of 360 participants.

Instrument validation included a pretest and pilot testing phase. The pretest, conducted with 30 valid respondents, and the pilot, with 31 valid responses, both demonstrated high internal consistency, with Kendall's W values of 0.819 and 0.830, respectively, and Spearman's rank correlation values of 0.817 and 0.829. These results confirmed the reliability of the instrument in ranking attribute importance. The final survey presented 46 pairwise trade-off tasks per respondent, allowing 1000minds to generate utility scores and identify the most and least influential attributes. Data were analyzed using the PAPRIKA method, which calculated relative importance scores based on utility ranges. Kendall's W and Spearman's rank correlation further confirmed inter-rater agreement and rank-order consistency.

The study complied with ethical research standards under the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Informed consent was obtained electronically prior to participation, ensuring respondents understood the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights. All personal data were anonymized and securely deleted following analysis. No coercion was used at any point during the research process, and the results were reported with transparency and academic integrity.

RESEARCH RESULT

Overview of Demographics

As seen in Figure 2, a total of 346 respondents initially participated in the study; however, only 311 were considered valid for analysis after applying exclusion criteria. These included consistently selecting only one side, choosing the "they are equal" option for all comparisons, failing two consistency checks, or completing the survey in an implausibly short time. These filters ensured the reliability and engagement of the final dataset.

The valid respondents were Generation Z college students in Davao City, aged between 18 and 26 years. The majority (49%) were aged 21 to 23, followed closely by those aged 18 to 20 (47.1%), reflecting a strong representation of younger Gen Z consumers. These findings are consistent with Luna (2023), who noted the strong interest of Gen Z in experiential retail formats like pop-up shops.

In terms of gender distribution, 52.1% identified as female and 47.9% as male, suggesting a slightly higher engagement among women. This supports Dhuria et al. (2021), who found that women's food shopping preferences are often shaped by environmental factors, product variety, and ease of access.

Respondents were enrolled across five universities located in District 1 of Davao City. Ateneo de Davao University and Holy Cross of Davao College each contributed 63 respondents, while Mapúa Malayan Colleges Mindanao and San Pedro College contributed 62 each. The University of Mindanao had 61 respondents. This balanced distribution allowed for a diverse range of insights across academic institutions and ensured the generalizability of findings within the urban student population.

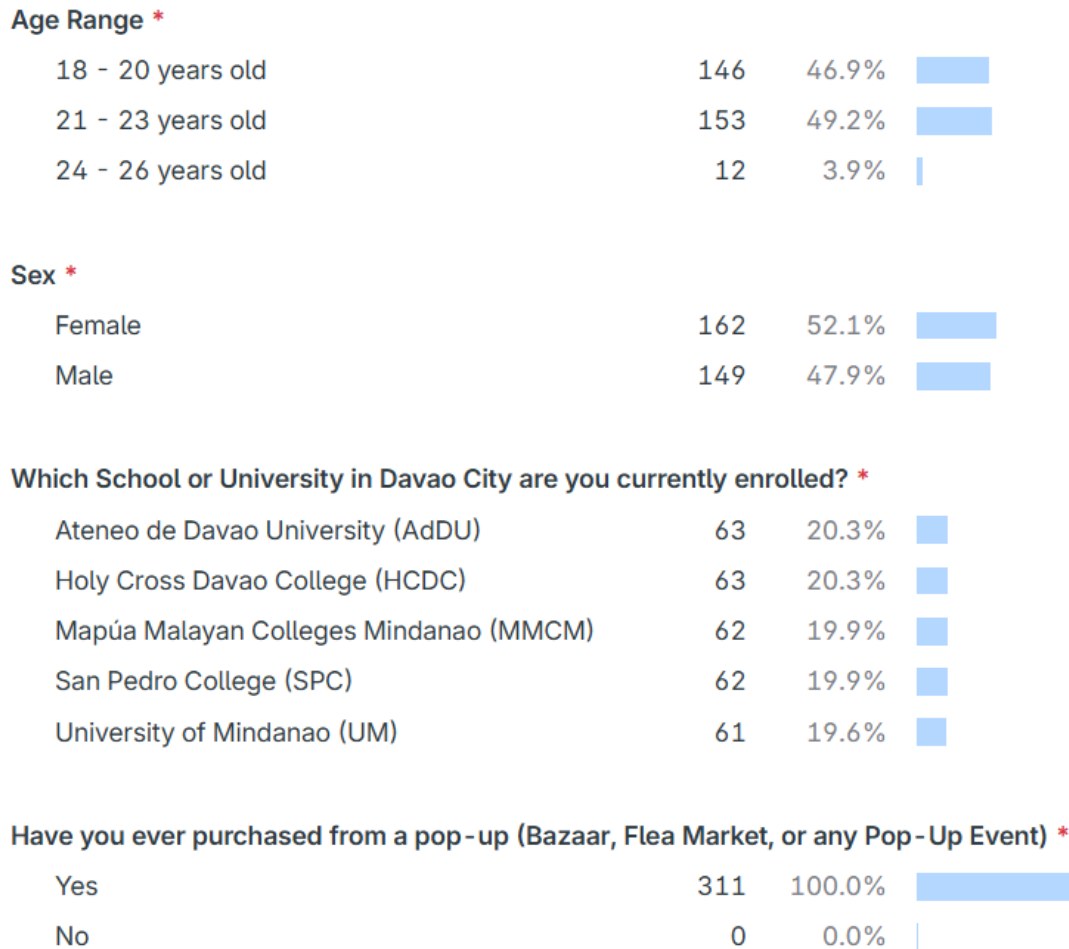


Figure 2. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Most and Least Important Attributes

As shown in Figure 3, the weighted preferences of Gen Z college students toward food and beverage pop-up shop attributes reveal clear priorities. Ambient conditions emerged as the most influential factor, accounting for 33.5% of overall preference, followed by product variety and quality at 20.7%, service personnel at 18.8%, space and functionality at 16.1%, and pricing at 10.9%. This distribution illustrates that environmental elements and product quality carry more weight in Gen Z decision-making than price.

These findings highlight the importance of creating immersive and comfortable physical environments to attract and retain young consumers. As Bitner (1992) emphasized in the Servicescape framework, the physical surroundings of service environments play a central role in shaping customer perceptions and satisfaction. For pop-up shop businesses, this suggests that investment in ambiance and quality offerings may be more effective in appealing to Gen Z than relying on competitive pricing alone.

As shown in Figure 3, these results collectively suggest that Generations X and Y place the greatest emphasis on taste and ingredients, underscoring the need for product developers and marketers to focus on flavor authenticity and ingredient transparency in plant-based meat products.

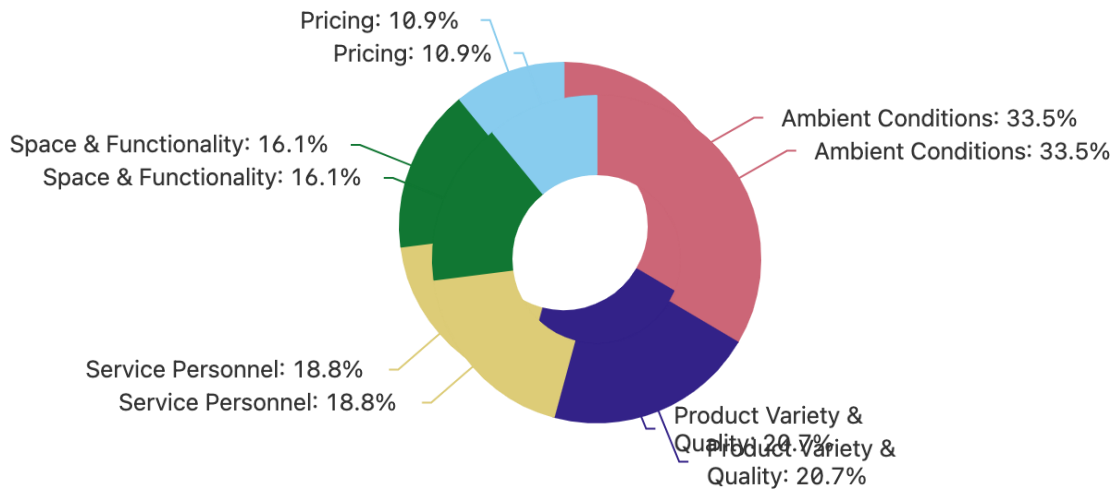


Figure 3. Relative Importance of Attributes

Most and Least Preferred Combination of Attribute Levels

As shown in Table 1, the most preferred combination of attribute levels among Gen Z college students in Davao City was Pop-up Shop 100, which received a total preference score of 100 percent. Respondents favored shops that use local ingredients, offer good value for money, feature easy-to-navigate layouts, employ professionally presented staff, and maintain a clean and hygienic environment. These preferences suggest that young consumers prioritize both product quality and the overall experience of convenience, professionalism, and cleanliness. Research by Carfora and Catellani (2023) confirms that trust in local food producers is associated with positive purchase intentions, while Bianchi and Mortimer (2015) highlight local food’s perceived health and authenticity benefits. Similarly, Tacardon et al. (2023) found that value for money significantly drives customer satisfaction, more so than pricing alone.

In terms of physical layout, a well-structured and intuitive design is essential to consumer satisfaction, enhancing in-store navigation and reducing frustration (Behera & Mishra, 2017, as cited in Tlapana, 2021). Service personnel also played a key role, with professional appearance being more favored than simply being approachable, aligning with findings by Radulović (2023) and Chen and Lee (2018) that staff presentation influences customer impressions and likelihood of return. Cleanliness further emerged as a critical factor, reinforcing findings by Ramirez et al. (2024) that hygiene standards strongly affect return intentions and word-of-mouth recommendations.

Conversely, the least preferred combination, Pop-up Shop 101, received a score of 0 percent. Despite offering product variety and reasonable pricing, it lacked key experiential elements such as layout simplicity, visual professionalism, and environmental comfort. This result suggests that variety alone does not ensure preference, especially when it contributes to decision fatigue (The Oboloo Team, 2023). Moreover, between reasonable price and value for money, respondents favored the latter, prioritizing long-term utility over short-term cost savings (Nordqvist, 2023; Trendex, 2017). FasterCapital (2024) notes that store layout is integral to customer satisfaction and business success,

with organized, navigable spaces increasing sales and loyalty. While ambient lighting was present in the least preferred option, research suggests lighting has limited influence on purchase behavior unless perceived as negative (Krümpelmann, 2018). Finally, the results indicate that service personnel who are merely approachable may be less preferred than those who project professionalism, which is essential in fostering customer confidence and perceived service quality (Canny, 2014).

Table 1. Most and Least Preferred Combinations of Attribute Levels

Alternative	Rank	Total Score	Product Variety & Quality	Pricing	Space & Functionality	Service Personnel	Ambient Conditions
Pop-up Shop 100	1st	100%	Local Ingredients	Value for Money	Easy to Navigate Layout	Professional Appearance	Clean and Hygienic Environment
Pop-up Shop 064	2nd	91.3%	Fresh Products	Value for Money	Easy to Navigate Layout	Professional Appearance	Clean and Hygienic Environment
Pop-up Shop 097	3rd	90.7%	Local Ingredients	Value for Money	Easy to Navigate Layout	Efficient Service Delivery	Clean and Hygienic Environment
Pop-up Shop 106	106th	11%	Variety of Options	Value for Money	Efficient Use of Space	Approachable Staff	Good Lighting
Pop-up Shop 103	107th	9.5%	Variety of Options	Reasonably Priced	Efficient Use of Space	Efficient Service Delivery	Good Lighting
Pop-up Shop 101	108th	0%	Variety of Options	Reasonably Priced	Efficient Use of Space	Approachable Staff	Good Lighting

DISCUSSION

Key Findings

This study identified ambient conditions, product variety and quality, and service personnel as the most influential factors shaping the preferences of Gen Z college students toward food and beverage pop-up shops in Davao City. Cleanliness, comfortable temperatures, and aesthetic lighting created sensory environments that not only attracted customers but also encouraged them to stay longer. Shops that used locally sourced ingredients and offered high product quality were also favored, while price played a less significant role. The most preferred combination—Pop-up Shop 100—reflected all top attribute levels, achieving 100% simulated market share. These included: local ingredients, value-for-money pricing, an easy-to-navigate layout, professionally dressed staff, and a clean, hygienic environment. In contrast, Pop-up Shop 101, which featured less engaging environmental and service features, was the least preferred despite offering reasonable pricing and variety.

Implications to Theory

The findings reinforced the applicability of Multi-Attribute Utility Theory (MAUT) in modeling Gen Z's purchasing decisions by illustrating how they

weigh trade-offs among various attributes. Ambient conditions ranking highest supports the theory's utility in capturing experiential preferences. However, limitations of MAUT in addressing sensory and emotional factors were addressed by integrating qualitative insights. The Servicescape Theory helped explain how the physical environment – such as layout and cleanliness – directly influenced behavior, especially in temporary retail formats like pop-up shops. Likewise, the 7Ps Marketing Mix proved useful in connecting key preferences like value for money, professional appearance, and physical layout with effective marketing strategies, offering a multidimensional framework for understanding Gen Z consumer behavior.

Implications to Research

The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of Gen Z consumer behavior in emerging urban centers like Davao City, expanding existing literature that has been largely centered on Western or metropolitan contexts. The integration of MAUT, Servicescape Theory, and the 7Ps Marketing Mix provides a multidimensional framework that future researchers can replicate or refine to study experiential retail. By identifying ambient conditions as the most influential attribute, this study also challenges conventional assumptions about pricing being the primary driver of consumer choice, especially among youth markets. It offers a methodological contribution by demonstrating how conjoint analysis, supported by qualitative groundwork, can effectively quantify and contextualize preference structures in underrepresented local markets. These findings open avenues for comparative studies between regions or across retail formats, and highlight the importance of incorporating cultural and sensory dimensions in future consumer behavior research.

Implications to Practice

Businesses aiming to attract Gen Z must go beyond aesthetics and invest in substance. High-quality, locally sourced food, a well-organized shop layout, professional service, and clean surroundings are essential. These elements not only meet Gen Z's expectations but also foster trust and repeat visits. The data also demonstrate that experience, not just cost, drives consumer loyalty in this demographic, suggesting a shift from traditional pricing-based competition to experience-based value creation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that Gen Z college students in Davao City prioritize immersive, high-quality shopping experiences over cost. The most influential combination of attributes includes cleanliness, navigable layouts, locally sourced ingredients, and professional service, showing a strong preference for pop-up shops that balance sensory appeal with product value. These findings provide a strategic framework for businesses seeking to engage Gen Z consumers through food and beverage pop-up shops.

Recommendations

For Businesses and Marketers. Pop-up shops should align their strategies with Gen Z values by offering high-quality, locally sourced ingredients and matching visual design with exceptional taste. Businesses are encouraged to develop innovative and diverse menus with seasonal and limited-time offerings, ensuring the food lives up to the expectations created by aesthetic spaces. Staff should be trained in professional presentation, and shop interiors must prioritize hygiene, comfort, and navigability to deliver an integrated, memorable experience.

For Researchers and Academics. Future studies should examine the underlying cultural and psychological drivers behind Gen Z's preference for ambiance and experiential value. Research could extend to other types of retail spaces or food establishments, exploring whether similar preferences apply. There is also a need to investigate variables like sustainability, social media presence, or emotional triggers that influence Gen Z's choices.

For Government and Policymakers. The local government should implement quality control standards that require pop-up shops to use local ingredients, meet hygiene benchmarks, and maintain ambient conditions. Incentives—such as grants or tax reductions—should be provided to shops that embrace sustainability and regional sourcing. Awareness campaigns promoting local ingredients, eco-conscious choices, and aesthetic standards can be conducted in partnership with schools and influencers to encourage informed consumer decisions.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This study was limited to District 1 of Davao City and may not reflect the preferences of Gen Z students in other regions. Future research could expand to other districts or cities across the Philippines to improve generalizability. In terms of attributes, the study focused primarily on physical and product-level features. Researchers should consider incorporating social, emotional, and ethical dimensions—such as social media influence, sustainability practices, and real-time feedback mechanisms. Additionally, future work could explore Gen Z preferences across different types of establishments beyond pop-up shops, including cafes and traditional restaurants. The use of quota and purposive sampling also limits the randomness of participant selection. Future studies may consider stratified random sampling and longitudinal designs to capture evolving trends in consumer behavior over time.

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