

CONSUMPTION PATTERNS AND HANGING-OUT CULTURE IN SHAPING STUDENTS' PURCHASING DECISIONS IN SURABAYA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study examines how consumption patterns and hanging-out culture shape students' purchasing decisions in Surabaya, addressing the limited attention to the socio-symbolic dimensions of student consumption in urban Indonesia.

Design/methodology/approach: A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed to capture students' lived experiences. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with eight university students selected using purposive sampling and analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring meaning structures.

Findings: The findings suggest that coffee shop strategies should adopt a more segmented and context-based approach. Student consumers can be broadly divided into social-oriented and experiential-oriented segments. For social-oriented consumers, coffee shops should prioritise affordability, group-friendly seating, and functional spaces that support interaction. Meanwhile, for experiential-oriented consumers, businesses should focus on aesthetic design, ambience, and curated experiences that support self-expression and social media engagement. In addition, pricing strategies should be flexible and context-based, recognising that students are more price-sensitive in routine gatherings but are willing to pay more for specific experiential or symbolic occasions.

Research limitations/implications: The study is limited by its qualitative scope and small sample size. Future research should incorporate mixed methods to examine the relationship between symbolic consumption and spending patterns quantitatively.

Practical implications: The findings suggest that coffee shop strategies should adopt a more segmented and context-based approach. Student consumers can be broadly divided into social-oriented and experiential-oriented segments. For social-oriented consumers, coffee shops should prioritise affordability, group-friendly seating, and functional spaces that support interaction. Meanwhile, for experiential-oriented consumers, businesses should focus on aesthetic design, ambience, and curated experiences that support self-expression and social media engagement. In addition, pricing strategies should be flexible and context-based, recognising that students are more price-sensitive in routine social gatherings but are willing to pay more for specific experiential or symbolic occasions.

Originality/value: This study provides empirical insights into how Bourdieu's concept of habitus operates in a fluid and situational manner within student consumption practices.

Paper type: Research paper

Keyword: Consumption Patterns, Hanging-out Culture, Purchasing Decisions, Coffee Shop.

A. INTRODUCTION

In many developed countries, especially in Europe, the role of coffee shops has changed significantly. Coffee shops are no longer just places to drink coffee, but have become social spaces where people gather, interact, and spend time. This idea is known as the third place, a concept and work (second place), where people can relax, build relationships, and feel a sense of belonging.

The rise of third-wave coffee culture in many European cities has strengthened this shift. Many coffee shops now focus not only on the quality of coffee, but also on design, atmosphere, and unique experiences that attract young people and coffee communities (Jennifer Ferreira, Carlos Ferreira, 2021). This transformation of coffee shops is closely related to changes in how people consume goods and services, especially in urban areas. Today, consumption is not only about meeting basic needs, but also about emotional, social, and symbolic values. People choose where to spend their time and money based on what those choices say about them (Kurnianto et al., 2025). Coffee shops, therefore, become social spaces where individuals can express their identity through their choices such as the types of coffee shops they visit, the menu they order, and the activities they do there. Research shows that factors such as interior design, atmosphere, Wi-Fi availability, and branding strategies play an important role in attracting young consumers. These elements make coffee shops not only comfortable places to stay, but also spaces that provide social recognition and a sense of prestige (Narae Lee, 2022).

From a sociological perspective, the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu help explain this phenomenon. Bourdieu introduced concepts such as habitus, taste, and symbolic capital to describe how people's preferences are shaped by their social background. In this view, choosing a modern coffee shop instead of a traditional one is not only about financial ability, but also about social class, cultural values, and personal taste (Czarniecka-Skubina et al., 2022). What people eat, drink, and where they spend time can reflect their position in society. Recent studies in food and beverage consumption also show that young people often make consumption choices as a way to gain social recognition and to distinguish themselves from others (Yue, 2025).

In Indonesia, the practice of “nongkrong” (hanging out) is diverse and influenced by local culture. People do not only gather in modern coffee shops with aesthetic designs and specialty menus, but also in traditional coffee stalls and *angkringan*, which are more affordable and inclusive. For example, in Surabaya, the culture of “*cangkrukan*” shows how traditional spaces function as places for discussion, relaxation, and building community relationships (Santoso, 2019). However, there are clear differences between modern and traditional spaces in terms of visitors, interaction patterns, and social meaning. Modern coffee shops are often associated with a certain lifestyle and social image, while traditional places are seen as more casual and community-oriented (Chang & Spierings, 2023). This shows that spaces for hanging out are not neutral, but reflect social differences within urban society (Feng Lin; Kisang Ryu; Yong Ki Lee; Faizan Ali, 2024).

Although previous studies have examined coffee shops as spaces of lifestyle and social class, research in the Indonesian context remains limited, particularly in explaining how social class, habitus, and situational factors interact in shaping students' consumption practices. Existing studies also tend to focus on economic aspects or lifestyle trends while treating consumption patterns as relatively stable, overlooking the dynamic and context-dependent nature of students' behaviour. This gap is particularly important as university students represent a key group in urban culture, actively constructing identity and navigating social mobility through everyday consumption practices (Gaddis, 2023).

Therefore, this study aims to explore how the interaction between social class and habitus shapes students' consumption patterns within hanging-out culture, and how coffee shop spaces function as sites for identity expression and social meaning-making. Focusing on university students in Surabaya, this research provides empirical insight into consumption as a dynamic and relational process within urban public spaces, while also offering practical implications for understanding young consumers in the food and beverage sector.

B. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Surabaya between December and January using a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore students' lived experiences and the subjective meanings associated with hanging-out culture and consumption practices (Çakmak et al., 2021). By focusing on everyday experiences, the study seeks to understand how students construct meaning within urban social spaces. A total of eight participants were selected, with the sample size determined based on Consumption Patterns and Hanging-Out Culture in Shaping Students' Purchasing Decisions in Surabaya

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on the principle of data saturation, where no substantially new themes emerged. This is consistent with phenomenological research, which prioritises depth of understanding over generalisation.

Research Participants

As shown in Table 1, participants came from various universities and academic backgrounds in Surabaya, including social sciences and business-related disciplines, ensuring diversity in perspectives. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria aligned with the research objectives. The criteria included: (1) active university students in Surabaya, (2) individuals who engage in hanging-out activities at least once a week, and (3) those who have experience visiting both modern coffee shops and traditional coffee stalls. These criteria ensured that participants had sufficient exposure to the phenomenon under study.

Data Collection Method

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, with each interview lasting approximately 30 to 60 minutes. This method allowed participants to express their thoughts and experiences in a flexible and open manner, while still guiding the discussion toward key topics relevant to the study. During the interviews, participants were invited to reflect on the meaning of hanging out in their daily lives, as well as the factors that influenced their choice of place. Particular attention was given to aspects such as price considerations, the overall experience offered by the venue, and the role of social influences, including friends and environmental factors. This approach enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of both individual motivations and broader social dynamics.

Data Analysis Method

Data were analysed using thematic analysis following the framework proposed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which is widely used in qualitative research to identify patterns of meaning. The analysis consisted of several stages: (1) familiarisation with the data through repeated reading of transcripts, (2) initial coding to identify meaningful units, (3) categorisation of codes into broader themes, and (4) refinement and interpretation of themes. Unlike purely descriptive coding, this analysis focused on identifying underlying patterns that explain how consumption decisions are shaped by social and symbolic factors (Elliott, 2023).

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were applied. First, source triangulation was conducted by comparing responses across participants to identify consistent patterns. Second, data verification was carried out by re-examining the relationship between raw data and emerging themes to avoid misinterpretation. Third, the analysis maintained close alignment with participants' original statements to preserve the authenticity of their perspectives.

Coding Process

As shown in Table 2, the coding process involved the identification of recurring meaning units, which were subsequently grouped into categories and developed into core themes. Several key orientations were identified that shape how students understand the culture of hanging out. These orientations indicate that purchasing decisions are not merely economic actions, but are also closely related to social needs, togetherness, experiential aspects, and self-representation.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1.1 Main Findings Overview

As shown in Table 3, the findings should be interpreted within the context of a small qualitative sample, where the emphasis is on depth of insight rather than statistical generalisation. The analysis identifies five key themes shaping students' consumption behaviour: hanging out as a lifestyle (6 out of 8 participants), price as a consideration (6 out of 8 participants), social consumption (5 out of 8 participants), experiential consumption (5 out of 8 participants), and aesthetics and social media (4

out of 8 participants). These findings indicate that students' consumption practices are shaped by the interplay of social, experiential, and economic considerations rather than a single dominant factor. Importantly, the distribution of themes suggests that consumption is not uniform, but varies depending on situational context and social purpose.

1.2 Hanging Out as a Lifestyle

The finding that 6 out of 8 participants perceive hanging out as a routine activity suggests that this practice has shifted from optional leisure to a normalised part of students' daily lives. Rather than being a deliberate or occasional decision, hanging out appears to function as a habitual social practice embedded within their routines.

From the perspective of Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 2019), this reflects the internalisation of social practices shaped through repeated interactions within peer environments (McLaughlin, 2024). Students engage in hanging out not primarily as a result of conscious economic evaluation, but as a socially conditioned behaviour that feels natural and expected. This supports the argument that consumption practices among young people are strongly influenced by social context rather than purely individual preferences (Siallagan et al., 2025).

This finding is consistent with previous studies that highlight the normalisation of leisure consumption among young people as part of everyday routines. At the same time, this study offers a deeper interpretation by showing that such behaviour is not only a matter of lifestyle, but is shaped by habitus and social conditioning. This suggests that hanging out is not merely a lifestyle choice, but a socially structured practice embedded in students' daily lives.

“Hanging out has become an obligation, at least once a week.”

(P1)

“Hanging out has become a necessity; without it, I feel left behind.”

(P2)

1.3 Dualism of Consumption Patterns

The findings reveal two dominant consumption orientations among students: social-oriented consumption and experiential consumption, each identified in 5 out of 8 participants. Social consumption is characterised by an emphasis on togetherness, affordability, and the functional use of space, where students prioritise environments that support interaction and collective activities (Jæger & Møllegaard, 2020). In contrast, experiential consumption emphasises atmosphere, comfort, and the pursuit of unique experiences, often leading students to choose higher-priced coffee shops. However, rather than indicating two fixed consumer types, these findings suggest that students shift flexibly between both orientations depending on situational contexts. The same individual may prioritise affordability and functionality in routine social gatherings, while moving towards experiential and symbolic consumption in specific moments, such as leisure or self-representation. This suggests that consumption behaviour is not structured by stable preferences, but is context-dependent and shaped by the interaction between functional needs and symbolic considerations.

This finding aligns with previous research that identifies multiple motivations in coffee consumption, including social interaction and experiential value (Mit, 2025). However, rather than placing consumers into fixed categories, this study shows that students move flexibly between these orientations depending on the situation. This points to a more dynamic understanding of consumption behaviour.

“The most important thing is being able to gather together; a simple place is not a problem.”

(P2)

“Going to expensive places is for the experience, not something I do every day.”

(P7)

1.4 Aesthetics as Symbolic Capital

The finding that 4 out of 8 participants consider aesthetics an important factor highlights the role of symbolic value in consumption decisions. Coffee shops are evaluated not only based on their functional attributes, but also on their visual appeal and their capacity to support self-representation, particularly through social media (N. Hashemi, B. Sebar, 2018). This behaviour reflects Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, where consumption is used to communicate identity and social positioning. Aesthetic coffee shops provide a space for students to construct and display their desired self-image, indicating that consumption extends beyond utilitarian purposes.

This result supports previous studies that emphasise the importance of visual culture and social media in shaping consumption patterns among young people (Qotrunnada et al., 2025). What this study adds is a clearer understanding of how aesthetics function as symbolic capital, allowing students to express identity and social positioning through their choices.

“When I hang out, I choose a proper place because I want to upload it.”
(P3)

“When I go out with my partner, I choose an aesthetic place for social media stories.”
(P8)

1.5 Price as a Contextual Consideration

Price emerges as an important consideration, identified by 6 out of 8 participants, although its role appears to be situational rather than fixed. Students tend to prioritise affordability in routine social interactions, but become less sensitive to price when seeking specific experiences or symbolic value.

This finding is in line with previous research suggesting that price is an important determinant in consumer decision-making (Samoggia & Riedel, 2019). However, this study shows that price sensitivity is not fixed, but shifts depending on context, particularly when social and symbolic considerations become more important.

“It's okay if it's expensive as long as it matches the taste of the food and the facilities provided, such as clean toilets and stable Wi-Fi.”
(P5)

“When hanging out with friends, I choose cheaper places, but for certain moments, I don't mind spending more.”
(P8)

1.6 Synthesis: Consumption as Social Practice

Overall, these findings both support and extend existing literature on consumption behaviour by demonstrating that student consumption is not fixed, but dynamically shaped by the interaction between social context, symbolic value, and situational factors. This provides a more relational understanding of consumption compared to traditional models that emphasise stable preferences and rational decision-making.

Within this framework, hanging-out culture can be understood as a social arena in which consumption operates as a social practice rather than merely an economic transaction. Coffee shops function as spaces where students maintain social relationships, construct identity, and express lifestyle preferences within an urban context (Ghannam, 2019). These findings indicate that student consumption is better understood as context-dependent and socially embedded, rather than as a fixed or purely rational behaviour.

D. CONCLUSION

This study suggests that students' consumption behaviour tends to be context-dependent and shaped by the interaction of social and symbolic factors. Rather than being fixed, consumption practices appear to shift depending on situational needs and social contexts. These findings indicate that purchasing decisions are not solely driven by economic rationality, but are embedded within everyday social practices through which students express identity, maintain relationships, and negotiate meaning.

From a practical perspective, coffee shop businesses should move beyond uniform strategies and adopt a more segmented and context-sensitive approach to student consumers. Based on the findings, students can be categorised into two primary consumption orientations: social-oriented and experiential-oriented. For social-oriented consumers, coffee shops should emphasise affordability, accessible pricing, and spaces that facilitate group interaction, such as larger seating areas and a relaxed atmosphere. In contrast, experiential-oriented consumers are more attracted to aesthetic design, unique ambience, and visually appealing environments that support self-expression and social media activities.

Furthermore, pricing strategies should not be treated as fixed, but rather as flexible and situational. Students tend to prioritise lower prices in routine social interactions but are willing to spend more in specific contexts, such as special occasions or experience-driven visits. Therefore, coffee shops may consider differentiated pricing or value offerings that align with these varying consumption contexts.

In addition, customer experience strategies should be designed to integrate both functional and symbolic elements, including reliable facilities (e.g., Wi-Fi, cleanliness, seating comfort) and atmospheric elements (e.g., interior design, lighting, and branding). By aligning business strategies with the dynamic and context-dependent nature of student consumption behaviour, coffee shops can better attract and retain diverse student segments.

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Attachment

Table 1 – Participant Characteristics

| Participant | Gender | Age | University | Hanging-out Frequency | Preferred Hangout Place |
|-------------|--------|-----|--|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| P1 | Female | 21 | UPN Veteran East Java | 2-3 times per week | Modern Coffee Shops |
| P2 | Male | 21 | State University of Surabaya | 3 times per week | Traditional Coffee Shops |
| P3 | Female | 22 | Widya Mandala University | 1-2 times per week | Modern Coffee Shops |
| P4 | Male | 21 | Airlangga University | 2 times per week | Traditional Coffee Shops |
| P5 | Female | 21 | Surabaya Shipbuilding State Polytechnic | 3 times per week | Modern Coffee Shops |
| P6 | Male | 22 | Surabaya Shipbuilding State Polytechnic | 1 time per week | Traditional Coffee Shops |
| P7 | Female | 21 | Airlangga University | 2 times per week | Mix |
| P8 | Male | 21 | Sepuluh Nopember Institute of Technology | 2-3 times per week | Mix |

Table 2 – Coding Process

| Quote | Code | Category | Theme |
|--|--------------|------------|--------------------------|
| “Hanging out has become an obligation” | Routine | Social | Lifestyle |
| “The important thing is to gather” | Togetherness | Functional | Social Consumption |
| “Going to expensive places for the experience” | Experience | Emotional | Experiential Consumption |
| “For uploading” | Aesthetics | Symbolic | Social Media |
| “Price depends on the situation” | Flexibility | Economic | Price |

Table 3 – Distribution of Students Consumption Themes

| Theme | Number of Participants |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Hanging out as a Lifestyle | 6 out of 8 participants |
| Social Consumption (togetherness) | 5 out of 8 participants |
| Experiential Consumption | 5 out of 8 participants |
| Aesthetics & Social Media | 4 out of 8 participants |
| Price as a Consideration | 6 out of 8 participants |