My Parents' Basement (MPB) has a lively, themed interior with pinball machines and comics, but the outside section can feel comparatively empty and less engaging. This matters because when the interior is packed, customers who would otherwise stay may be less inclined to sit outside—or may even turn away after realizing there's limited inside seating. My gadget aims to reduce that "outside vs. inside" experience gap by adding an interactive, eye-catching decoration in a high-traffic location: the top of the shelf where customers grab their cutlery. The prototype is a smart dispenser that responds to a wave (motion sensor interaction), runs a short "raffle" animation on LED panels, then dispenses a small item (designed around Lindor-sized candy, but swappable) from one of four randomized tubes to create a fun "gacha" vibe.

Participants & data type: I collected qualitative interview data and observational notes from several MPB community members (customers) who used the gadget as intended. Data includes (1) recorded interview audio and responses for 4 customers, and (2) my direct observation of interaction behavior (confusion points, excitement moments, and how people physically approached the device).

To evaluate the design in a realistic context, I brought the candy dispenser to MPB and set it up on a table near the proposed installation area (next to the shelf where customers get cutlery). I invited customers who were already passing by or seated nearby to try the gadget with minimal instruction so I could see whether the interaction was discoverable and whether it felt appropriate in the bar environment. I recorded interviews (4 customers total) immediately after use and took observational notes during the raffle and dispensing phases. This approach was appropriate because the core goal of the design is experiential and contextual—whether it feels fun, fits MPB's theme, and improves the "outside section" atmosphere—so open-ended qualitative feedback plus in-the-moment observation provided stronger evidence than purely numerical measures like performance time or success rate.

What I asked (non-leading prompts):
"What do you think this is doing?" (before explaining)
"Would this make you more likely to come back, or recommend MPB to someone? Why or why not?"
"What would make you want to use this again?"
"Where would this feel best placed in MPB?"
"Does it fit into the MPB theme?"
"Does this feel distracting or disruptive in a bar setting? Why/why not?"
"What kinds of items should it dispense here?"
"Are there features you wish it could have had?"

Summary of interview themes (from 4 interviews):

Fun + fits MPB vibe: Participants generally described the dispenser as playful and fitting the environment.

Not distracting: Participants did not feel it would disrupt the bar experience.

Repeat value concerns: Most said it's exciting at first sight, but may not strongly drive repeat visits on its own (a "one-time surprise" risk).

Better bar-appropriate items: Multiple participants suggested prepackaged snacks (e.g., peanuts) could work better than loose candy in a bar context—something you might grab "on the way to the bathroom" or as a small bonus.

Make dispensing "shoot out" / more game-like: Some wanted faster dispensing or even a "catch challenge" (e.g., it shoots/drops more quickly) to make the payoff more comedic and interactive.

Observed interaction data (behavioral notes):

High engagement during the raffle animation: People became visibly excited and reached their hands out early, anticipating the prize.

Sensor sensitivity confusion: Users sometimes triggered the sensor unintentionally (device sensed presence before a clear wave), creating uncertainty about what action "counts."

Delight from unexpected outcomes: When the device malfunctioned and dispensed extra candy, users reacted especially positively (this suggests randomness/bonus moments may be a strong emotional driver if made intentional and safe).

Overall, the interaction unfolded close to what I intended: the LED "raffle" phase reliably built anticipation, users understood the basic idea quickly, and participants felt the gadget fit MPB's vibe without being distracting. The biggest gap was repeat engagement: multiple users felt it might not attract new or returning customers beyond the initial novelty, meaning the design may need additional "reasons to come back" (e.g., better items, rotating animations, occasional bonus drops, seasonal themes, or a playful challenge mechanic). The clearest usability issue was motion sensor over-sensitivity, which sometimes triggered without an intentional wave and caused momentary confusion about how to interact. For future iterations, I would narrow the sensor's detection cone (e.g., physically surrounding it with a box so it only detects motion from a specific direction) and tune the activation threshold to better match the "wave to play" mental model. I would also test alternative dispensed items (especially prepackaged snacks) and improve the mechanical path so items slide more smoothly—possibly by moving the dispensing wheel higher in the tunnel to give the item more runway after release.