Coffee Shop IA and Website Design

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INF2170: Information Architecture

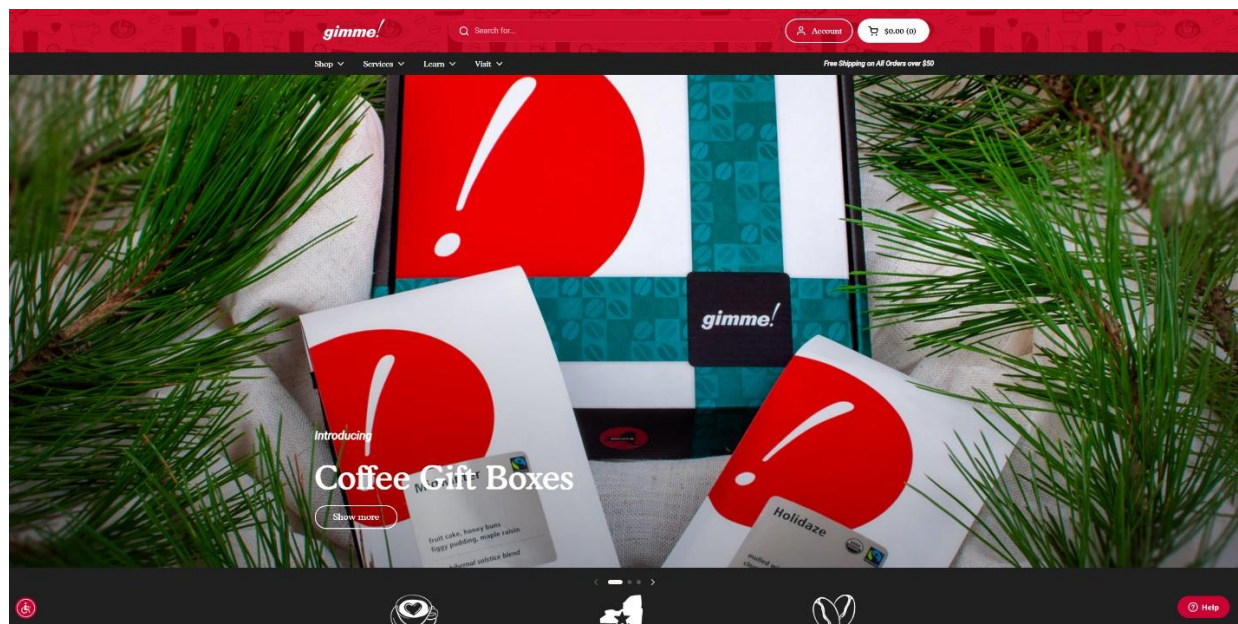Dr. Vera Khovanskaya

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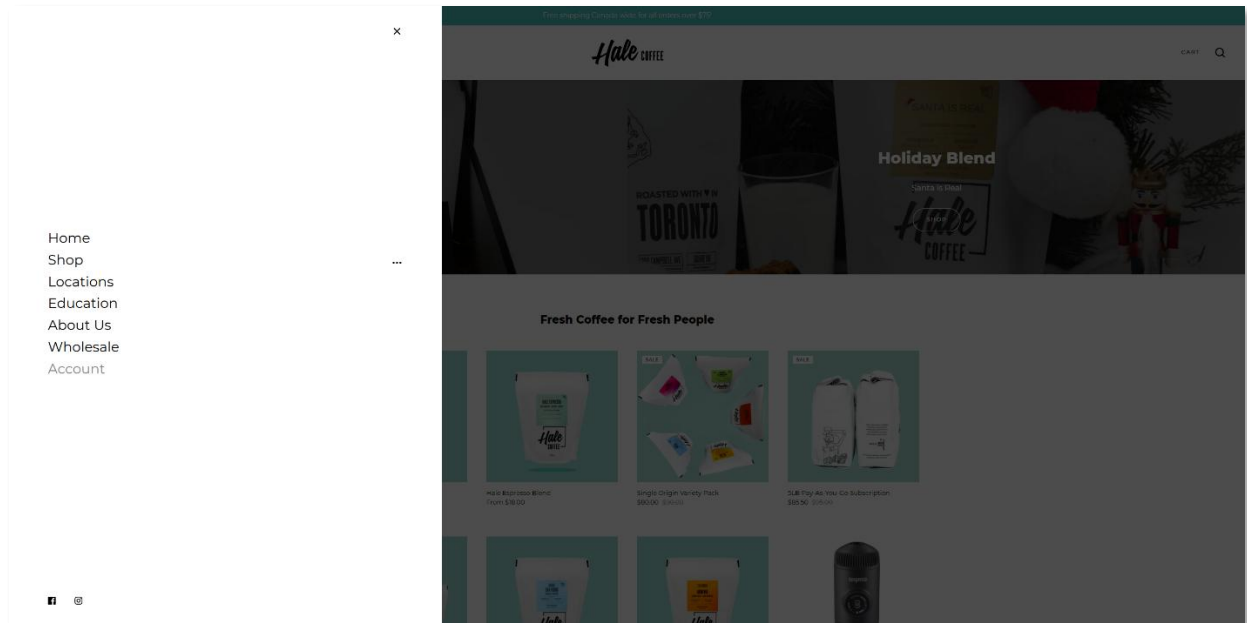
Comparative Critique of Information Architecture for Coffee Websites

The research looked at four different coffee bean stores' websites, **Gimme Coffee**, **Hale Coffee**, **Bean Wise**, and **Javanut**. They have shown similar patterns for approaches to structuring and organizing information, to be specific, using topical organization schemes and a top-down structure.

Gimme Coffee employs a hierarchical top navigation with categories such as Shop, Learn, Visit, and Services. This structure embodies clear labeling, facilitating intuitive browsing that adheres to a top-down organizational system—a fundamental IA principle. By grouping related items logically, the website supports user cognitive models, making navigation predictable and user-friendly.

Hale Coffee utilizes a minimalist hamburger menu, which aligns with IA concepts of progressive disclosure, keeping the interface clean but requiring additional user interaction to reveal primary navigation. This design relies on users being familiar with the affordance of the hamburger icon, which might hinder discoverability for less experienced users—a potential IA drawback.
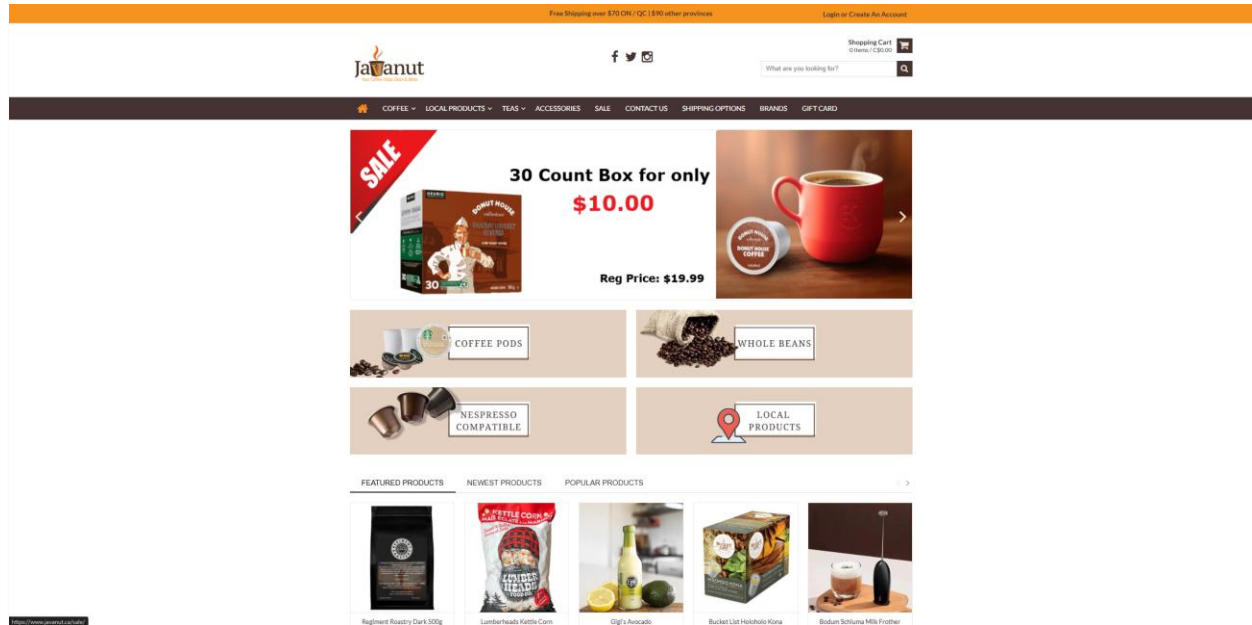
Bean Wise features a dynamic sidebar with labels like Coffee, Tea & Boba, and Accessories. The labeling here helps users orient themselves within the environment, but the sheer volume of links could lead to information overload—an IA issue, where an overly detailed structure sacrifices clarity for breadth.

Javanut uses a horizontal navigation bar, organizing categories like Coffee, Local Products, and Accessories. However, the absence of a Learn or Story section misses the opportunity to connect

with users emotionally, a factor crucial for brand loyalty. Gimme Coffee's inclusion of educational content adds value, adhering to the IA principle of enriching user experience through content that supports understanding and engagement.

Standard IA patterns observed include top navigation, categorization by product type, and a mix of storytelling versus product-centric focus. Gimme Coffee can enhance its IA by refining product filters similar to Bean Wise and streamlining redundant options like Shop All, simplifying user decision paths while ensuring robust navigation.

Card Sorting Summary

For the card-sorting, I chose to conduct a hybrid card sort with five participants. The hybrid card sort was chosen because I wanted to test the effectiveness of existing labeling on the Gimme Coffee websites, while also giving participants the flexibility of adding their own categories if they felt some of the categories didn't work.

Participants displayed varied preferences when categorizing the cards, which resulted in both consistency and divergence in certain groupings.

Standardization Grid:

- **Shop**: The most consistent category was "Shop," with cards like "Gift Cards," "Shop All," "Tea," "Coffee," and "Seasonal" being grouped here by at least 4 out of 5 participants. This indicates a shared mental model of viewing these items as products directly available for purchase.

- **Learn**: The "Learn" category often included informational cards such as "Equipment & Education," "About Us," "About Our Coffee," "Our Values," and "What's a Co-Op?". Specifically, 3 out of 5 participants grouped these cards under "Learn," suggesting users
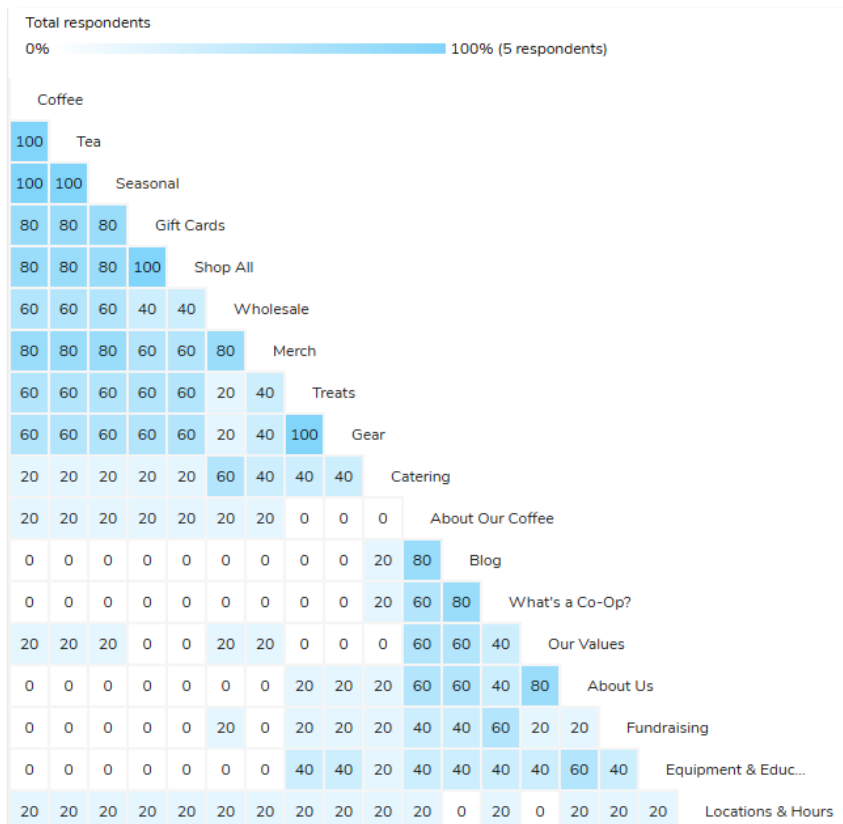
TABLE LEGEND ∧

Total respondents

0% ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬ 100% (5 respondents)

Cards	Shop	Services	Learn	Visit	Not standardized
Tea	4	0	0	1	0
Gear	3	2	0	0	0
Merch	3	1	0	1	0
Gift Cards	5	0	0	0	0
Treats	3	2	0	0	0
Seasonal	4	0	0	1	0
Shop All	5	0	0	0	0
Wholesale	2	2	0	1	0
Catering	1	3	0	1	0
Fundraising	0	3	2	0	0
Equipment & Education	0	2	3	0	0
About Us	0	1	3	1	0
About Our Coffee	1	0	3	1	0
Our Values	0	0	3	2	0
What's a Co-Op?	0	1	3	1	0
Blog	0	0	3	2	0
Locations & Hours	1	2	0	2	0
Coffee	4	0	0	1	0

have a clear understanding of the educational and informative content being distinct from products or services.
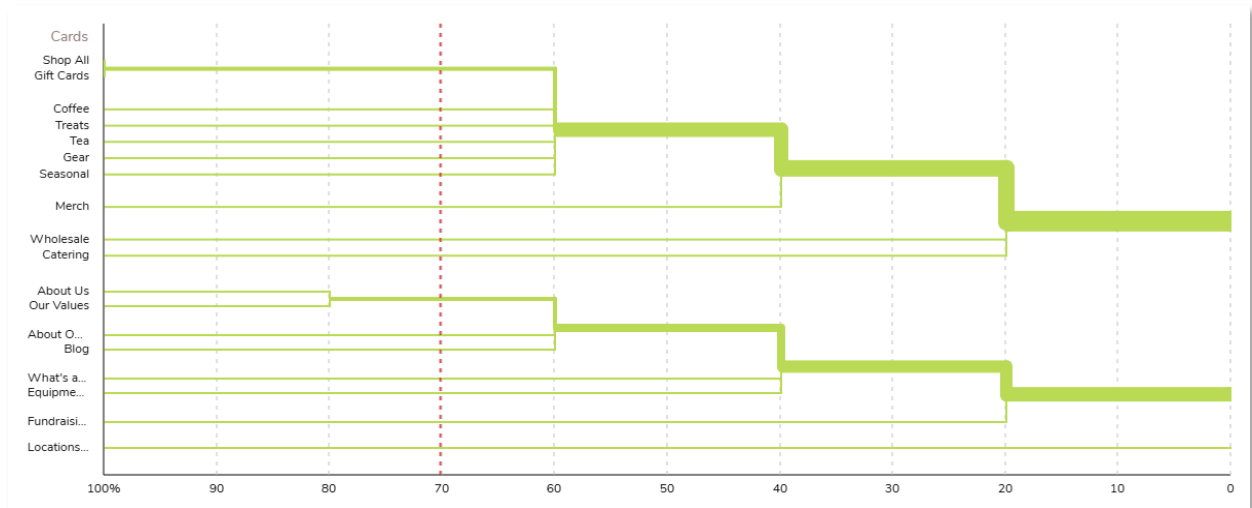
- **Visit**: Cards related to location and in-person experiences, such as "Locations & Hours," were grouped under the "Visit" category by 2 out of 5 participants. This reflects some consistency in understanding physical store-related information but also reveals room for clearer categorization.

- **Services**: Cards such as "Catering," "Wholesale," and "Fundraising" were mostly grouped under "Services," with 3 out of 5 participants including these in the same group. This suggests that users see these elements as separate from product purchasing, more aligned with business-oriented services rather than individual consumer products.

Patterns and Relationships:

- The **similarity matrix** reveals a strong correlation between "Coffee" and "Tea," as well as "Shop All" and "Gift Cards," which were consistently categorized together by 4 out of 5 participants. This implies that users naturally see these items as highly related,

Total respondents
0% ──────────────────────────────── 100% (5 respondents)

	Coffee	Tea	Seasonal	Gift Cards	Shop All	Wholesale	Merch	Treats	Gear	Catering	About Our Coffee	Blog	What's a Co-Op?	Our Values	About Us	Fundraising	Equipment & Educ...
Tea	100																
Seasonal	100	100															
Gift Cards	80	80	80														
Shop All	80	80	80	100													
Wholesale	60	60	60	40	40												
Merch	80	80	80	60	60	80											
Treats	60	60	60	60	60	20	40										
Gear	60	60	60	60	60	20	40	100									
Catering	20	20	20	20	20	60	40	40	40								
About Our Coffee	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	0	0	0							
Blog	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	80						
What's a Co-Op?	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	60	80					
Our Values	20	20	20	0	0	20	20	0	0	0	60	60	40				
About Us	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	20	20	60	60	40	80			
Fundraising	0	0	0	0	0	20	0	20	20	20	40	40	60	20	20		
Equipment & Educ...	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40	40	20	40	40	40	40	60	40	
Locations & Hours	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	0	20	0	20	20	20

supporting the idea that bundling them under an overarching category like "Beverages" or "Shop" is intuitive.
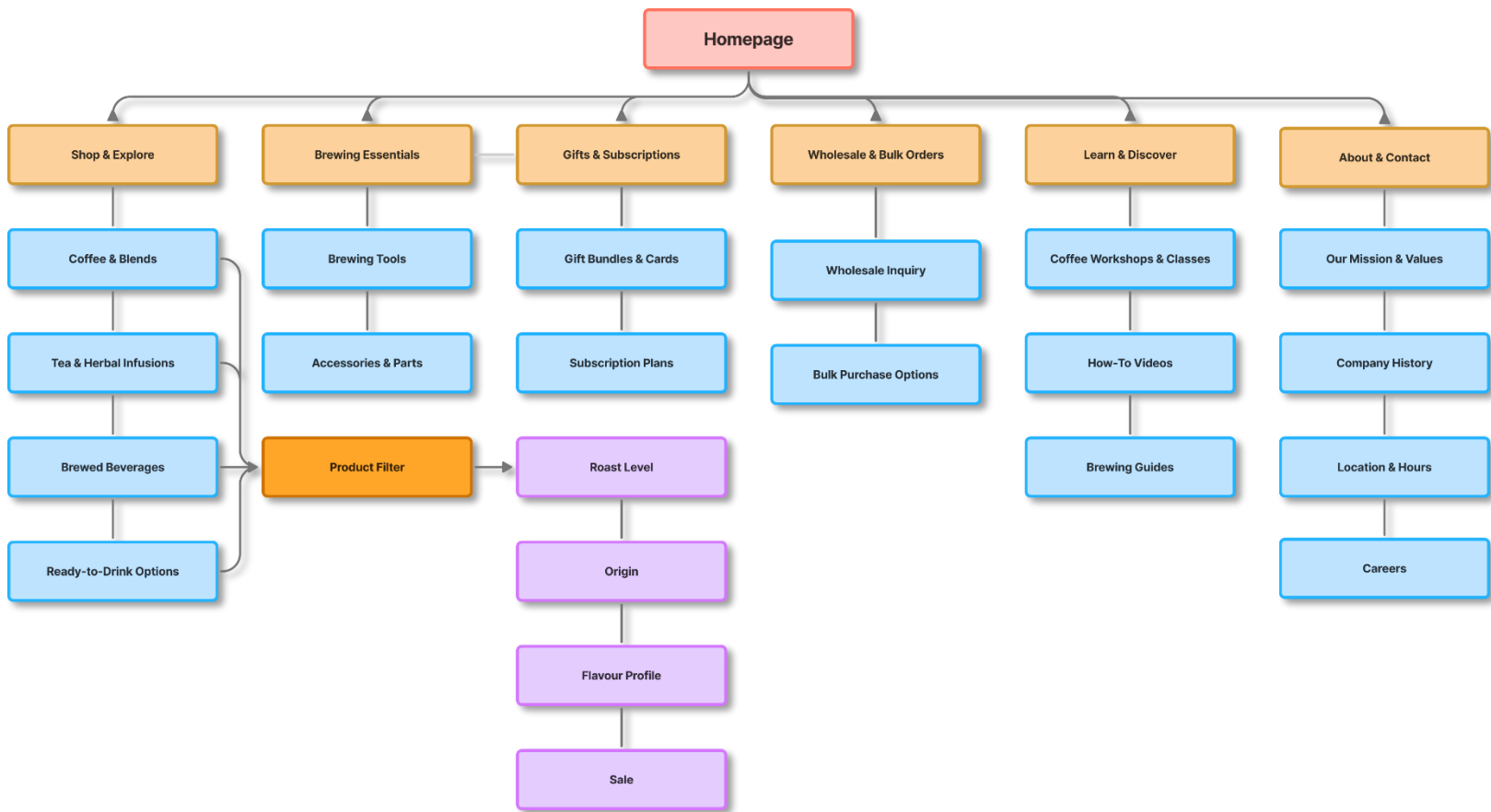

- **Dendrogram Analysis**: The dendrogram visualization shows a high level of agreement for grouping most product-related items, while informational content had more variability in categorization. This suggests that participants see product items more uniformly, while their perception of informational content is more diverse.

The card sorting exercise revealed that users largely align on categorizing product items but have varied mental models for services and informational content. Improving label clarity, especially for categories like "Shop" versus a broader "Products," and ensuring clear differentiation between informational and transactional content could enhance the overall structure and user navigation of the website.

Website Schematic

Explanation of Website Structure

The proposed website schematic for the coffee bean store is designed to align with user mental models identified in the card sorting exercise, ensuring ease of navigation and clarity in the content structure.

The **Global Navigation** is clearly segmented to align with major user needs, as revealed by the card sorting analysis:

1. **Shop & Explore** and **Brewing Essentials**: These categories align with the participants' preference for grouping product-related items. Most participants consistently categorized items like "Coffee," "Tea," and "Gear" under a shopping-oriented section, showing that users expect a straightforward path to browse and purchase products. Including a **Product Filter** helps users further refine their searches based on specific attributes like
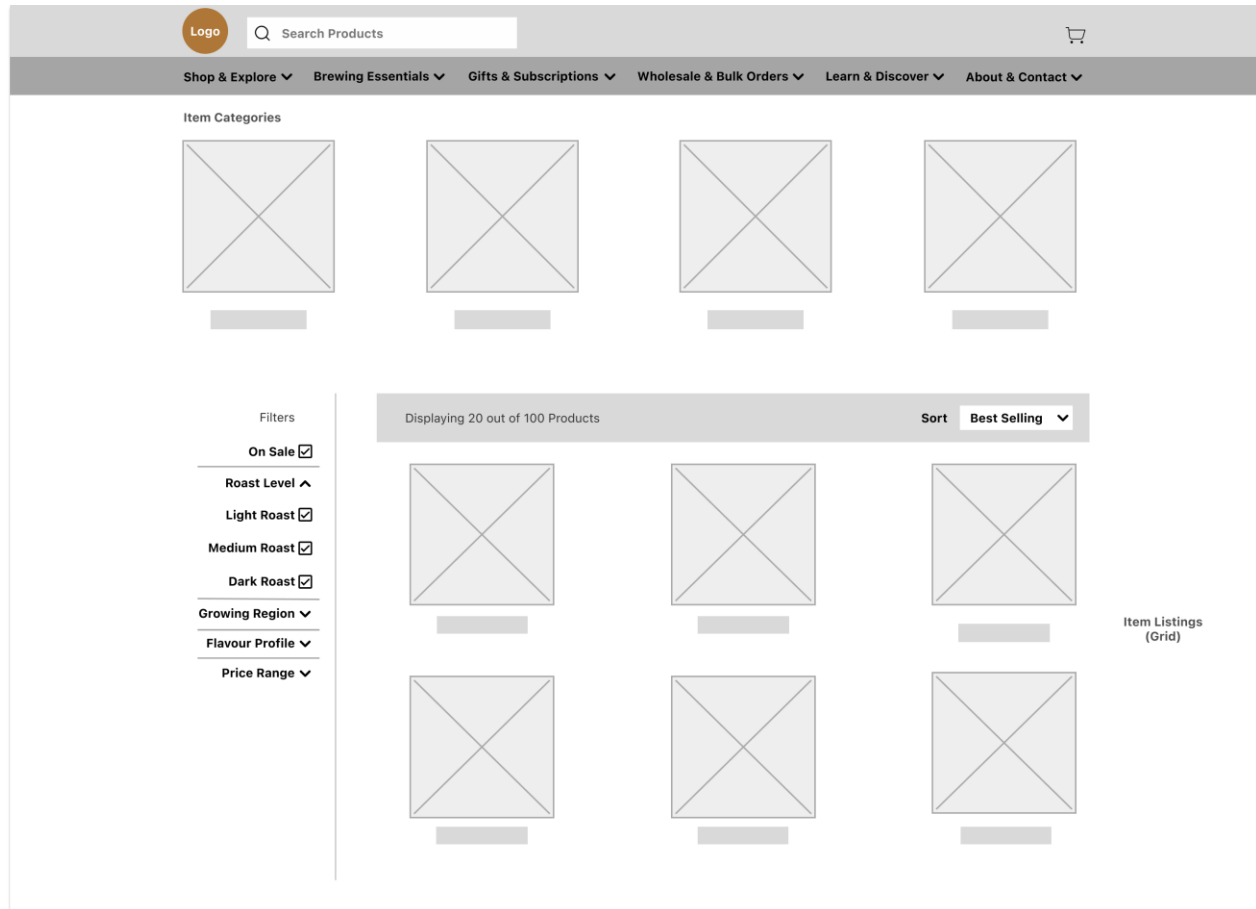
roast level or origin, directly addressing the common need for detailed product exploration.

2. **Gifts & Subscriptions**: These categories were grouped separately by users during the card sorting exercise, which indicates a need for distinction between regular purchasing options and gifting. Combining **Gifts & Subscriptions** emphasizes both recurring services and special purchases, aiding users in quickly locating ongoing purchases or presents.

3. **Wholesale & Bulk Orders**: The card sorting results highlighted that users view "Wholesale" as distinct from typical consumer products, which is why it is placed separately to target business clients and avoid confusion for individual consumers.

4. **Learn & Discover**: Users frequently grouped educational cards such as "Workshops" and "How-To Videos" under a learning-oriented section. This confirms the importance of distinguishing informational content from transactional areas, catering to those interested in learning more about coffee-making techniques or the brand's values.

5. **About & Contact**: These sections cater to users looking for essential company information, such as location and company history. The card sorting exercise showed variability in how users categorized informational content, so keeping **About & Contact** combined helps in clearly directing users based on their specific information-seeking needs.

This structure aims to cater to both casual customers and business clients, while also supporting users interested in learning more about coffee. The distinction between product offerings, educational content, and business services mirrors the mental models uncovered in the card sorting exercise. I would like to discuss with the client whether further segmentation, such as separating workshops from how-to videos, could enhance user experience, particularly for educational content.
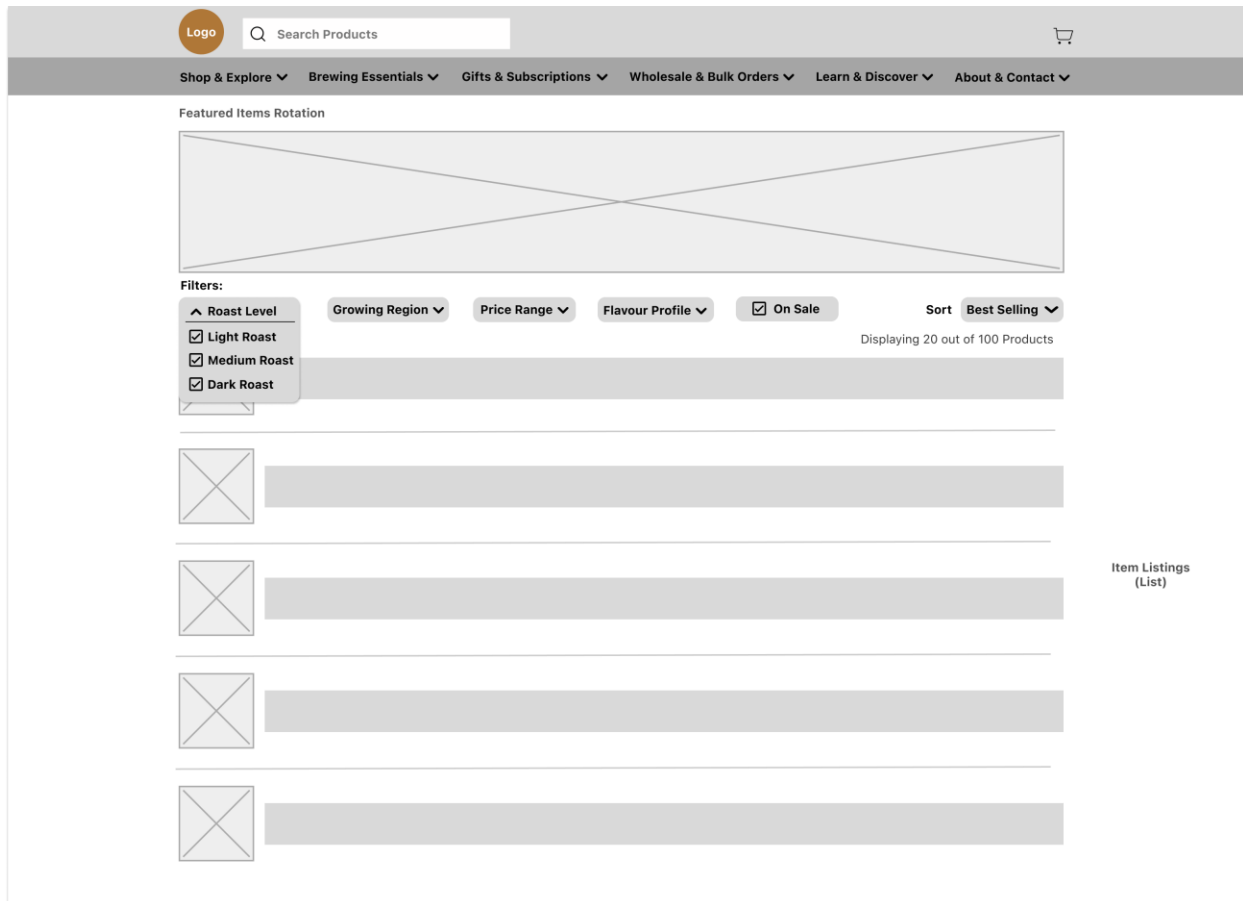
Wireframes

Wireframe 1

- **Design Decisions**:

  - A **persistent sidebar** organizes filters hierarchically, making them visible at all times. This supports a top-down IA approach, allowing users to iteratively refine their search.

  - The **grid layout** prioritizes visual browsing, enabling users to compare multiple products simultaneously. This is especially effective for visually driven products like coffee bags.

  - Sorting options are placed prominently above the product grid, ensuring they are easy to locate and interact with.

Wireframe 2

- **Design Decisions**:

  - Filters are placed horizontally below a featured product banner, reducing visual clutter and emphasizing the product listings.

  - The **list layout** provides more space for detailed product descriptions, catering to users who prioritize information over visuals.

  - A featured banner highlights promotions or special products, drawing attention before users engage with filters.

Key Differences Between the Two Wireframes

1. **Filter Placement**:

- Wireframe 1 uses a persistent sidebar for immediate access, while Wireframe 2 employs dropdowns for a cleaner interface but requires more interaction.

2. **Product Layout**:

   - Wireframe 1's grid emphasizes visual comparison, ideal for quick scanning.

   - Wireframe 2's list focuses on detailed product descriptions, catering to users seeking in-depth information.

3. **Promotional Features**:

   - Wireframe 2 includes a featured banner that highlights promotions or special products, which is absent in Wireframe 1.

User Assumptions and Trade-Offs

- **Wireframe 1** assumes that users value persistent access to filters and prefer visual browsing. However, the sidebar may take up too much screen space on mobile devices.

- **Wireframe 2** assumes that users prioritize simplicity and detailed product descriptions. However, dropdown filters may require additional effort to interact with.

Both designs balance trade-offs between visibility (Wireframe 1) and simplicity (Wireframe 2). For example:

- Wireframe 1's sidebar supports iterative exploration but sacrifices screen space.

- Wireframe 2's horizontal filters conserve space but may obscure filtering options initially.

How IA Principles was applied

- **Navigation**: Both prototypes emphasize clear global navigation, segmented into categories like "Shop & Explore" and "Learn & Discover," reflecting user mental models identified during card sorting.

- **Labeling**: Descriptive labels such as "Roast Level" and "Growing Region" were refined through user testing to align with participants' expectations.

- **Organization**: Both designs group content logically based on findings from card sorting. Product-related items are categorized under "Shop," while informational content like workshops is placed under "Learn & Discover."

- **Search**: Persistent search bar in global navigation menu. Sorting options like "Best Selling" provide users with control over results in both prototypes.

Improvements for Portfolio

- Conduct usability testing on mobile devices to validate the responsiveness of navigation systems and filter placement.

- Incorporate accessibility features such as keyboard navigation, screen reader compatibility, and high-contrast modes.

- Add a visual design layer to the wireframes to showcase how IA principles translate into an engaging user interface.

By addressing these areas, the project will better demonstrate the application of IA principles while ensuring a polished, user-centered design suitable for a professional portfolio.

Conclusion

Both wireframes reflect thoughtful applications of IA principles tailored to different user needs. Wireframe 1 excels at supporting iterative exploration through its persistent sidebar and grid layout, while Wireframe 2 emphasizes simplicity and detail-oriented browsing with its horizontal filters and list layout. Future iterations should focus on balancing these strengths while addressing usability challenges across devices and contexts.