



Downtown Gifts and Thrifts

**Helping students discover the
locally owned shops of
Downtown Harrisonburg**

Design Question

How might we help students discover and support the unique, locally owned shops of Downtown Harrisonburg?

Research Questions

- How often do you travel downtown? Why?
- What do you usually do downtown?
- What is the status of your budget? Are you on more of a strict budget, or do you have a little bit of flexibility with how you spend?
- How often do you purchase used/vintage items? If you have purchased such items, for what purpose were they for (novelty, for collecting, or just because it is easily affordable)?
- What local shops have you heard of/visited? If any, how did you find out about them (word of mouth, social media, website, etc.)?

Summary

In order to conduct my research, I interviewed six students of JMU that vary in ages and academic levels (two that were 18 (both freshman) one that was 19 (sophomore), one that was 21 (junior), and two that were 22+ (seniors). I wanted to experiment with this in order to get an idea of how often students travel downtown, since freshman and sophomores generally don't have vehicles or aren't familiar enough with the area, whereas juniors and seniors usually have vehicles and may be more familiar with downtown since they have been around Harrisonburg longer. I was also able to determine differences in how much of Downtown Harrisonburg the interviewees knew as well as what the status of their budgets were. I decided to focus on more of the lesser known shops that make up the area, most of which are along the lines of thrift/vintage stores.

Interview Highlights

How often they visit downtown

From what I gathered, there aren't a lot of students at JMU that travel downtown more than once a week. The most common answer I received was that they go down a couple times a month, usually once or twice, which was expressed by half of the six interviewees. 1/3 of the interviewees said that they tend to go weekly, which was the most often out of all the students interviewed, though that tended to be on the weekends. The last remaining interviewee stated that they rarely ever travel downtown, the only times being on special occasions.

What they usually do

The overall consensus I gathered from this question was that a major reason people go downtown is to eat at restaurants. That answer was consistent with every interviewee, though two students said they mostly go to bars and shows over just dining out. Due to this, only 1/2 of them had ever visited and/or at least heard of any of the several shops scattered around that area. What I am gathering overall is that these students do not know a lot about the shopping scene in Downtown Harrisonburg, and what shops I was told they did know of, they had trouble remembering their names and where exactly they are located.

Budgets

Each student I interviewed has some sort of barrier on their budget due to paying for their tuition, some being slightly more flexible than others. 2/3 of the interviewees said they like to thrift often, all of which stated because it was an affordable alternative to new, retail items. Half of those people also stated because they like the novelty and the look of having vintage items along with the affordability. Adding to that, two of the people that don't necessarily buy used clothing, are really interested in other vintage items and would invest more time and money into purchasing things like that if the prices were cheaper.

Interview Data

How often do you travel downtown?

Weekly



Couple times a month



Rarely ever



What do you usually do downtown?

Restaurants



Shows



Bars



What is the status of your budget?

Strict Budget



Some Flexibility



How often do you purchase used/vintage items?

Doesn't Thrift



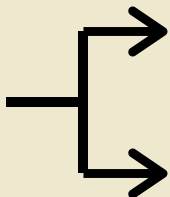
Thrift Shoppers



Affordable



Novelty



Hypothesis

If there was an application that listed all of the local shops, showed their location on a map, and let users know about discount opportunities, students would go downtown more often. This would be a mobile app that provides information about what items are in each shop, what just came in, what was just sold, price ranges, social media pages, and chances to earn discounts on items during special sale events. Students will not only be able to discover shops that they may have never heard of, but also find out which ones are holding deals on items each week, both allowing them to save money, and be more incentivized to shop around downtown regularly.



Jessica

Economical Adventurous Diligent

"Downtown offers so many things to do that I don't mind spending a little extra money every weekend to see all that it has to offer."

Age: 21

Year: Senior

Major: Music

Where they live: Off-campus housing close to downtown

Background Info: Though time is very limited during the week as a student of the School of Music, Jessica loves to explore Downtown Harrisonburg with her friends over the weekends. She hates staying at home and is always looking to do something fun. She enjoys trying the different restaurants, but is growing an interest in the shopping scene since she is a big thrifter.

Jessica is good with the money that she earns, so she doesn't mind spending a little bit of it at places downtown, but is always looking for an opportunity to save. She wants to discover some of the many shops downtown, but she doesn't know of many and is having trouble knowing where to begin. Directions aren't necessarily her strongest quality either, so having the ability to easily find the exact store she is looking for is essential. Her laptop is her best friend, and if she needs information on anything, she looks it up right away. She is also constantly on social media and checks her profiles every time she opens her laptop.

Nick

**Passive
Stingy
Minimalist**

"I've got enough to pay for already. Unless it really catches my eye, I'm not buying."



There aren't too many places besides auction websites where Nick can find rare retro/vintage items for his collection, so he is on the lookout for a store that specializes in just that located in his area. He hates how expensive some of the collectors items he wants are and wishes he could find more deals and discounts on stuff. Since Nick doesn't go out shopping much but from time to time still enjoys keeping up his small retro tech collection, he needs a way to find exactly what he is looking for, what the price is, and where he can get it so he can waste less time shopping and spend more time doing things he considers more important to him. His smart phone is always on him and he uses several, varying apps regularly but heavily relies on notifications. If he is not notified about something, he'll never find out about it.

Age: 18

Year: Freshman

Major: Marketing

Where they live: On-campus dorm

Background Info: Nick is just starting the first semester of his freshman year at JMU and knows nothing about downtown, except when he occasionally is offered to join his friends to see a show. He prefers new items over used/vintage ones, but sometimes likes to splurge on retro technology from decades past. Nick is not a heavy spender though and almost only buys what he absolutely needs.

Design Requirements

- The application must have a user friendly categorization of all local shops for students to scroll through.
- The application must provide easy access to the shops' social media pages, a brief description of their store, and a section for customer reviews.
- The application must give the location of each store on a map as well as directions on how to get to each one.
- The application must provide updates on sales, discounted items, newly received items, and opportunities to earn coupons.
- The application must utilize push notifications in order to keep students up to date on what each store is doing.