

Field Study Plan

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Goal

Design Question

How can the District Market shopping experience on campus be improved?

Motivation

The District Market (DM) offers many different types of foods and products for different purposes. People can go there to buy groceries (mostly on west campus), prepared meals, including hot, fresh, and frozen, home cleaning products, snacks, and other household-use products. This wide variety of items may be able to be better optimized to match customers' needs. Especially during peak hours, such as lunch, long lines often form at the register and extend through the store, partially obstructing walkways for other patrons. Workers are often stocking shelves with carts of boxes that can also obstruct access. As one of the places where students can spend dining money, the DM is a central location on campus and addressing user pain points is impactful.

Research Questions

When is the DM more or less busy?

Who purchases products from the DM?

What do people buy at the DM?

Where do people spend the most time in the DM?

What are people doing at the places where they spend the most time in the DM?

Do people spend more time actively, or passively waiting to be able to take an action?

Participants

A typical user at the DM is most often an undergraduate student, often a first year student. There may also be other students of different years and ages. People who enter the store and make purchases, as well as people working in the store, may all be observed. These participants were chosen as representative of the population within the store on an average day.

As the store is a public space meant for commerce, I will not have issues gaining permission to observe in the space. I will not interact with the participants, and will observe them in their original context.

One ethical consideration that could come into play is the right to be informed. Since I am trying to study people without affecting their actions, they need to be unaware that I am observing

them. However, since they are in a store, it seems there is enough expectation of observation to warrant my studying of them. I will not be recording any participants, and all will be anonymous, since I will not be discovering their names through observation.

Methods

Areas of Focus

Focal Point	Example Research Questions
Family and Kids	Do any families come into the store? How do their behaviors differ from other patrons?
Food and drinks	What proportion of people are buying food items? What food items do they tend to buy? How much?
Built environment	How wide are the aisles? compared to the carts the staff use to stock the shelves? How many paths can customers take from one point of the store to another?
Possessions	Are people carrying bags, or shopping empty-handed?
Media Consumption	Are people wearing headphones while shopping? on their phones?
Tools and Technology	How are people's interactions with the POS system?
Demographics	Are there patrons who are not within the most common demographic?
Traffic	How long do people spend in the store? How quickly do they walk through? Do they browse the shelves or head directly to items they plan to purchase?
Information and Communication access	Are there prices posted for every item? Do people read the prices, or do they just grab what they would like to purchase?
Overall experience	Do people seem to be more or less positively affected when leaving the store, compared to when they entered?

Logistics & Workback Schedule

I will do observations at various points in the store where I can observe the main flow of customers well without obstructing their actions. This can include standing in corners of the store, as well as within the aisles. If necessary, I will take up a post farther away, where the perspective may be less clear, but there will be no risk of intrusion.

Each session will be half an hour long.

To prepare for each session, I will have some form of keeping track of time, as well as a medium by which I can record proceedings. I will make sure that I have enough time to conduct the observation and also clean up notes afterwards.

At the start of each session, I will record the date, time, and general atmosphere in the store.

During each session, I will focus on a select few research questions centering around some of the focal points, but will collect data on any question if important notes arise. I will follow individual journeys throughout the store, as well as take in the general atmosphere and flow.

To end each session, I will write concluding notes about the overall things learned from this session, and note the actual runtime of the study.

After each session, I will clean up notes and do some processing as seen fit, to help make the notes more informational when referenced later on in research.

Work Back Schedule

Week	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
9/30-10/4				Finalize topic, write plan	Plan due Sun 11:59 pm
10/7-10/11			Collect data		
10/14-10/18			Write report		Report due Sun 11:59 pm

Data Collection

Pen and paper records may be preferable for capturing real-time thoughts, but in this setting, that may stand out too much, so to avoid disrupting the actions of patrons who notice me, I will choose to take notes on a mobile device, eg a phone.