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An Investigation of How Interior Design Elements Can Enhance Customer's Interest in Fast Fashion Retail Stores In-person Experience After the COVID-19

Qianyue Tu
qt6083@rit.edu

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An Investigation of How Interior Design Elements Can Enhance Customer's Interest in Fast Fashion Retail Stores In-person Experience After the COVID-19

Capstone Candidate | Qianyue Tu

Rochester Institute of Technology | College of Art and Design | Interior Design Program

Abstract

The goal of this capstone project is to investigate how interior design elements can enhance customers' interest in fast fashion retail stores' in-person experience after the COVID-19 pandemic. To answer the research question, this capstone is organized into three parts which are the literature review, research agenda, and creative agenda. First, the literature review section of this manuscript examines consumer behavior and changes in fast fashion brands before and after the pandemic. The goal of the literature review is to understand four questions: 1) What are changes in consumer behavior after COVID-19? 2) Why are fast fashion brands retailing being more affected by the pandemic? 3) What is fast fashion? 4) What are the design considerations used in the design of fast fashion retail? Second, the research agenda utilizes online surveys and in-person store interviews to find out what customers need and how to attract them to the fast fashion retail store when they return to the in-person shopping experience after the COVID-19 pandemic. Case studies in the research agenda suggest that an important strategy to attract more consumers to do in-person shopping after the COVID-19 pandemic is to give customers a unique in-store experience they cannot experience online. Third, the creative agenda is the result of all the knowledge acquired through research applied to a realistic context. All the diagrams, 3D models, and graphics provide a broad idea for solutions to create a unique retail space and promote practical design methods to all the knowledge acquired through research applied to the realistic context. The site chosen for the capstone project is in the East View Mall in Rochester, NY, to house a concept store that combines retail, museum, and café. The creative agenda used evidence-based design strategies to create a fast fashion flagship store for the UNIQLO brand. This design project demonstrates how interior design can draw more customers to the retail store after the COVID-19 pandemic. By creating a unique in-person experience that includes a glass art exhibition in the center of the store, a café area, and a DIY station and bring customers an attractive and welcoming shopping environment.

Keywords: Post-Pandemic, COVID-19, Retail Space, Fast Fashion, Consumer Behavior, In-person Experience, Design Elements, UNIQLO, Uniqlo Coffee, Corning Glass Museum, Glass Art.



Committee List



Capstone Committee Chair

Isabella Trindade

PhD Architect
Lecturer at the Interior Design at
Rochester Institute of Technology



Capstone Committee Member

Richard Napoli

Adjunct Professor
Department of Architecture at Rochester
Institute of Technology



Capstone Committee Member

Ann Miller-Michaels

Interior Designer
Chief Sales Officer at Intivity Inc



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- Qianyue Tu, May 2023

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Committee List	iii
Acknowledgements	vi
Figures and Tables	ix
Introduction	01
Literature Review	03
Changes in Consumer Behavior after COVID-19	04
Why are Fast Fashion Brands Retailing being More Affected by the Pandemic	05
What is Fast Fashion	06
Design Considerations	07
Case Study	11
Research Agenda	13
Online Survey	14
Interview at In-person Stores	18
Creative Agenda	19
Introduction	20
Site Location	21
East View Mall Location	22
East View Mall Map	23
Existing Condition	24
Schematic Block Plan	25
Schematic Design Phase	26
Design Proposal and Mood Board	27
Concept Drawings	28
Final Project	31
Floor Plan	32
Reflected Ceiling Plan	33
Furniture and Lighting Selection	34
Activity Diagrams	35
Exploded View	37
Renderings	38
Conclusion	41
Bibliography	43
Appendix	47
Appendix A: Prospectus	48
Appendix B: Research Instrumets	51
Appendix C: Approval Sigatures	54

4



Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Coronavirus update: where COVID-19 has spread around the world.	01
Figure 2: Top clothing retailers by sales revenue.	06
Figure 3: Acoustics solutions for retail.	08
Figure 4: Manipulation of the surface.	09
Figure 5: Sense of community.	10
Figure 6: MUJI embroidery and alterations.	12
Figure 7: Uniqlo divides store space-half museum, half Starbucks.	12
Figure 8: Survey question: How old are you?	14
Figure 9: Survey question: What is your gender?	14
Figure 10: Reason for shopping in person in a fast fashion retail store.	14
Figure 11: Environment of the store influence people.	15
Figure 12: Attractive interior design environment.	15
Figure 13: Fast fashion environment.	16
Figure 14: In-person retail stores or online shopping.	16
Figure 15: In-person shopping experience.	16
Figure 16: Favorite fast fashion retail shopping experience.	17
Figure 17: Rochester and Victor Area.	21
Figure 18: East View Mall Location.	22
Figure 19: East View Map.	23
Figure 20: Existing Condition-Entrance.	24
Figure 21: Existing Condition-South View.	24
Figure 22: Existing Condition-Food Court.	24
Figure 23: Existing Condition-Skylight.	24
Figure 24: Schematic Block Plan.	25
Figure 25: Schematic Design Phase.	26
Figure 26: Mood Board.	27
Figure 27: Concept Drawing: Display Window.	28
Figure 28: Concept Drawing: Glass Art Gallery.	29
Figure 29: Concept Drawing-UNIQLO Coffee.	30
Figure 30: Floor Plan	32
Figure 31: Rflected Ceiling Plan.	33
Figure 32: Speical Cooperation Display.	34
Figure 33: Wave Coffee Table.	34
Figure 34: Men/Women Merchandise Display.	34
Figure 35: DIY Station Table.	34
Figure 36: Slide Rod Spot Light.	34
Figure 37: Lighting Pendants.	34
Figure 38: Lumen Werx Recessed.	34
Figure 39: Wave Lghting.	34
Figure 40: Activity Diagram: Glass art gallery and DIY station.	35
Figure 41: Activity Diagram: Merchandise area.	35
Figure 42: Activity Diagram: Cashier & Fitting room.	35
Figure 43: Activity Diagram: UNIQLO Coffee.	36
Figure 44: Activity Diagram: Coffee seating area.	36
Figure 45: Exploed View.	37
Figure 46: Entrance.	38
Figure 47: DIY Station.	38
Figure 48: Glass Art Gallery.	39
Figure 49: UNIQLO Coffee.	39
Figure 50: Merchandise Display.	40
Figure 51: Casheier Desk.	40

Introduction

As we all know, in 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic virus disrupted the way people live and shop at the same time disrupting the way traditional retail sales. More and more people started to buy items online and get rid of the risk of being exposed to Covid-19 in indoor shopping experiences. Compared to other types of retail merchandise, fast fashion stores were significantly more affected by the COVID-19 pandemic because of deficiencies in the sales model and a lack of good shopping experience (Rodriguez). At the time of the initial pandemic, many retail stores, including fast fashion brands, were closed when consumers had to quarantine themselves at home to stay safe. As the pandemic developed and continued, and retail stores reopened, steps were taken to minimize the risk of contagion, such as: maintaining a 6-foot social distance and limiting the number of people entering the store as well as reorganizing the store layout. Even with all the measures in place to prevent the spread of the pandemic, more and more customers are getting into the habit of shopping online (Bakhtiari). Now that people are facing the later stages of COVID-19, and returning to the in-person shopping experience, the question of how to attract consumers to fast fashion retail stores has become an issue that needs to be examined. This capstone project hypothesizes that innovative interior design strategies can help attract more customers to the in-person shopping experience after COVID-19.

According to Lefebvre in his seminal book *The Right to the City* (2008, p. 30) in these privileged commercial places, the consumer also comes to consume the space, the agglomeration of objects in stores, shop windows, exhibitions. All of these becomes the reason and pretext for people to gather. They come, they look, they talk. It is a meeting place, because of its double role: as place of consumption and consumption of place. We can conclude that the importance of these commercial spaces go beyond the assumption that a commercial space only serves to promote consumption, but can become a tool to build the identity of places and local culture.



Figure 1: Coronavirus Update: Where COVID-19 Has Spread Around the World. ABC7 New York, 30 Apr. 2020, abc7ny.com/coronavirus-johns-hopkins-map-where-is-tips-news/5988128. Accessed 01 May, 2023.

Literature Review

Changes in Consumer Behavior after COVID-19

Long-term home isolation and living patterns have changed the form of consumer spending, and most consumers have become accustomed to the online shopping model under COVID-19. The closure of brick-and-mortar stores during the pandemic forced consumers to question their ingrained shopping habits, and people who were previously reluctant to shop online are setting up online accounts and experiencing a whole new customer journey (Bakhtiari). The COVID-19 pandemic has changed consumer consumption habits and consumer psychology, a behavioral shift that could have a permanent impact on consumer behavior (Bakhtiari). Research shows that the habits created by COVID-19 will last beyond COVID-19 and may have the potential to permanently change consumer values and how and where they shop. To isolate themselves and stay away from the Coronavirus, consumers were, and still are, buying the goods they need online, retail goods included, and they are maintaining spending habits that are likely to last and remain beyond COVID-19. This means that even with the end of Covid-19, and retail stores reopening, after trying the convenience of an online shopping environment for a long time, consumers will continue to buy online rather than choose to enjoy the in-store experience and service.

Currently, most consumers' habits returned to normal after the end of COVID-19 but inevitably the habit of shopping online will permanently influence consumer behavior. In Jagdish's article, he suggests that when an existing habit is abandoned, it always comes back as a pastime or hobby (Jagdish). Perhaps after the habit of shopping in retail stores is abandoned, online shopping will become a hobby for consumers. In addition to the fact that online shopping services and models have matured under the pressure of the pandemic, this has made online shopping more convenient after the pandemic than it was before. Thus, how to attract more customers to the in-person shopping experience after COVID-19?



Why are Fast Fashion Brands Retailing being More Affected by the Pandemic?

The pandemic and the consequent lockdown regulations have led to various retail store closures and layoffs, which have affected retail brands in almost every part of the world, especially the fast fashion industry. Customers not attending events, and working remotely, ultimately affected their purchasing decisions and the sales of retailers and fashion companies. In addition to this fact, less impulsive consumption occurred during the pandemic. Nealon mentioned, “One of the issues with fast fashion is a lot of it is impulse and occasion driven. Impulse-purchasing drops massively when consumers can’t visit stores” (Nealon). In her article, she points out that when brick-and-mortar retail stores close, impulse purchases decrease significantly, consequently decreasing revenue (Nealon). Occasion-driven purchases by fast fashion brands also decline as consumers have fewer opportunities to attend events. Fast fashion brands themselves have more brick-and-mortar stores than other types of retail brands, so more stores have closed because of the pandemic than other types of retail stores. Another reason that makes fast fashion brands more affected by the COVID-19 pandemic is the lack of brand loyalty among customers (FitzGerald). Fast fashion brands are often chosen for their cheap prices and variety of styles, which also means fewer customers have brand loyalty.

Fast fashion retail stores often lack one-on-one service to consumers, personalized service, and good consumer service are one of the major factors that attract customers to spend money in-store. Space planning also influences the decision of in-person or online shopping experiences. Crowded lines, disappearing clerks, and noisy fitting rooms make customers prefer to buy fast fashion products online, especially under the influence of COVID-19.

What is Fast Fashion?

Fast fashion is a term used to describe “inexpensive clothing mass-produced rapidly by retailers in response to the latest trends” (Chua). Fast fashion brands are produced quickly and keep a steady pace of new arrivals, and fast fashion retailers often offer a wide range of styles and fashionable clothing, which is the main reason why fast fashion brands are so popular among consumers. Fast fashion retailing is a business model in the fashion industry that includes among other categories - apparel (men, women, unisex, and children’s clothing), footwear, sportswear, formal wear, accessories, and jewelry.

Fast fashion represents the current trend in our society for most people in the average class, and the number of people buying fast fashion brands has been growing exponentially over the past 20 years. According to 2022’s research, 88% of consumers in the US prefer to buy fast fashion brands, followed by 46% of consumers in Europe, then 25% in India, and 21% in China (Barron). This huge purchase volume and exponential growth make fast fashion brands a hot retail niche today. Consumers choose fast fashion brands because of their low prices and wide variety of styles and products available but choose to buy fast fashion brands online because of their poor service and overcrowded store interior layouts and queues. Zara and Hennes & Mauritz are two giants in the fast fashion field. Others include UNIQLO, GAP, FOREVER 21, and Topshop.

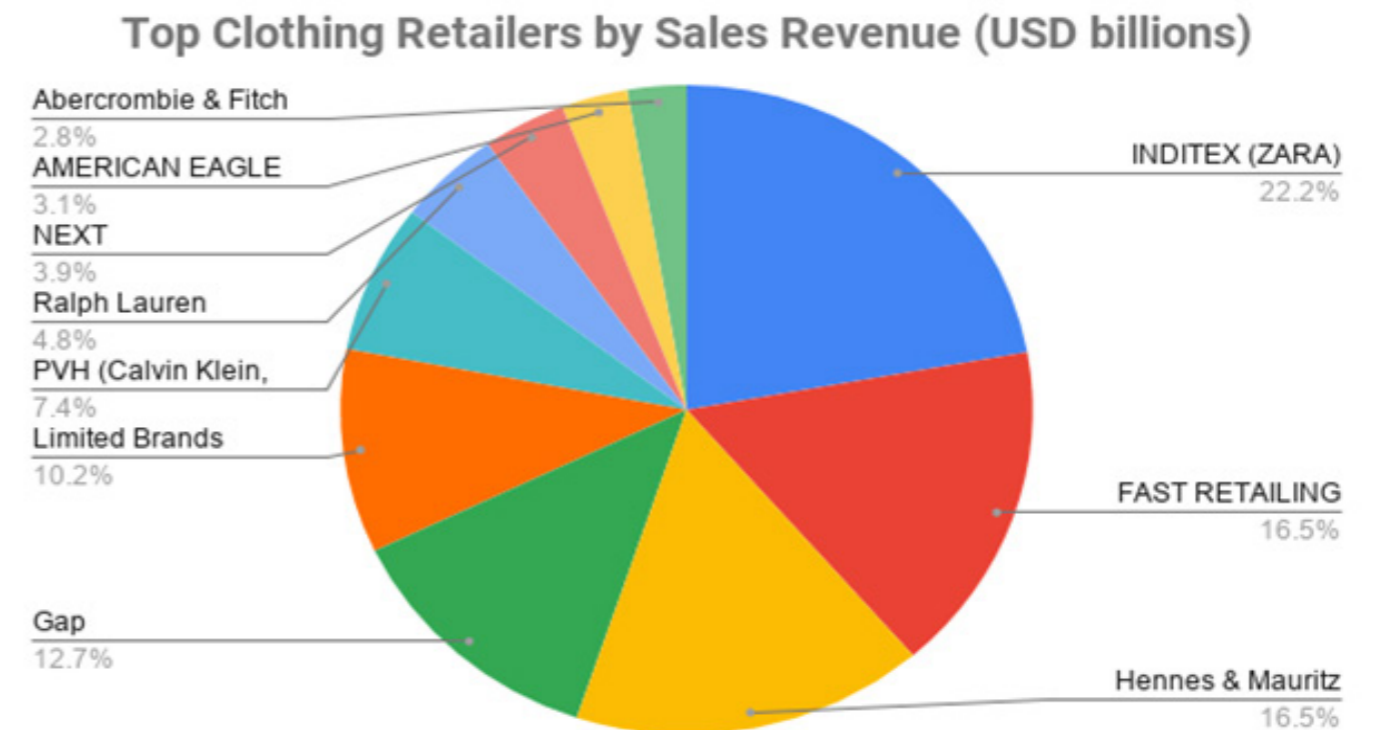


Figure 2: Jesse. “Top Clothing Retailers in the World in 2020, Clothing Retail Industry Analysis Factsheet.” Bizvibe Blog, Aug. 2020, blog.bizvibe.com/blog/top-clothing-retailers. Accessed 01 May, 2023.

Design Considerations

After 3 years of shopping online, we supposed that customers are eager to return to brick-and-mortar stores. As consumers maintain their online shopping habits, they are now also returning to brick-and-mortar stores with the expectation of an even better shopping experience. Online shopping allows retailers to provide an accessible, efficient, and often customized experience which is a standard they have bought into. The outcome is that brick-and-mortar stores should offer in-store shoppers a more comfortable service than online shopping to attract customers. Design elements that influence and attract consumers to the store experience include:

1. Floor plan layout: The layout should have generous spacing so that shoppers aren't awkwardly bumping into each other. The design and layout should be accessible, barrier-free, and spatially conscious.

2. Customer flow routes: Removing more architectural obstructions from the interior to help guide consumers to a safer shopping experience during and after the later phases of the pandemic (FitzGerald). This can be achieved through a combination of physical barriers and visual cues as well as at the entrance, by providing an overview of the store's pandemic prevention efforts protocol. Adding protective barriers at checkouts, signaling where customers are waiting in line, installing a one-way system, and reducing the number of products on display are all representative means of preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the store by guiding traffic flow (Admin).

3. Window display: A good window display directly determines whether customers will visit the store or not.

4. The lighting selection: The balance of accent lighting and ambient lighting is the key to successful lighting design (Harrouk). Accent lighting allows retail products to stand out from the overall store environment, while ambient lighting requires an attractive retail space with a bright shopping environment to allow customers to select products without difficulty. Choose from a variety of types of lighting to meet the unique needs of each area of the retail space. Calculate the lumens required for each area of the retail store and select the correct color temperature, which can create a warm or cold space and affect the overall atmosphere of the store.

5. Wayfinding: Wayfinding is what makes consumers know exactly where they are in the entire space and how to get to the next zone (McCormick). Consumers expect to be able to locate their desired products quickly in a retail space and not get lost in the environment. The appropriate wayfinding gives consumers a sense of security and confidence. In addition, wayfinding in retail spaces requires particular attention to the installation of storytelling signage (Fletcher). When designing attractive wayfinding signage in retail stores, the most important thing is to ensure that the signage is clear for customers to identify and read. When designing attractive wayfinding signage in retail stores, the most important thing is to ensure that the signage is clear for customers to identify and read.

6. Acoustic: Acoustics is defined as the science that deals with the production, control, transmission, reception, and effects of sound (Astronomy). Interior acoustical design is a mixed discipline field that makes a significant acoustic contribution to the advantage of the customer (Acoustics and Interior Design – Gyptech Systems). It is crucial to keep the interior of a retail space free of disturbing noise so that customers can enjoy the shopping environment. In addition, acoustical materials and acoustical interior decoration in the room can achieve the effect of optimizing indoor noise and can also have an aesthetic value. Noisy retail environments have a direct influence on the quality of consumer experience in the retail sector. Noise reduces the consumer dwell time in the store which negatively impacts sales. Noise may be generated from several sources: Inappropriate in-store music, external, noise intrusion, and mechanical systems (HVAC) (Enhance Acoustics). Solutions vary according to the design project but could include acoustic panels, ceiling treatments, acoustic fabrics, floor treatment, sound barriers, sound blankets, acoustic foam, and door & window solutions (Enhance Acoustics).

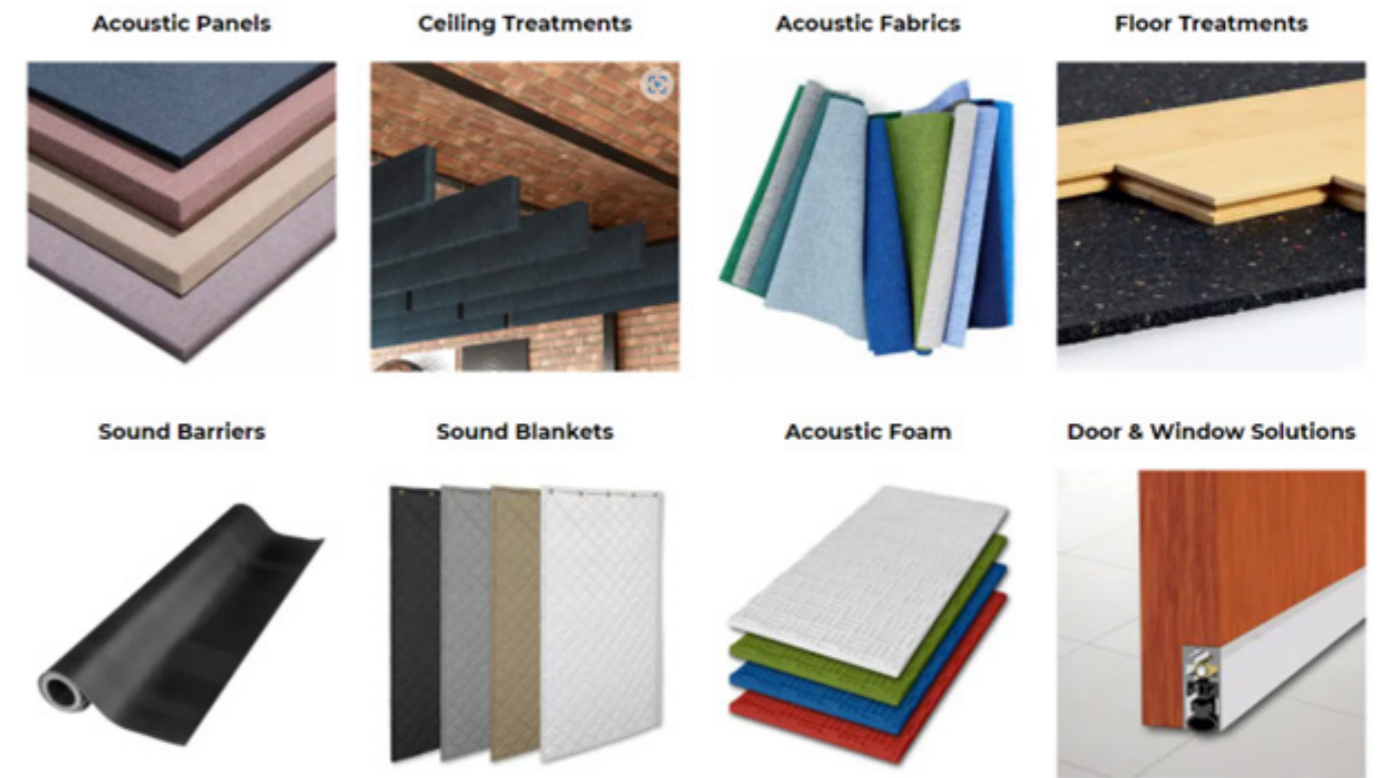


Figure 3: Acoustical Solutions. "Home." Acoustical Solutions, 20 Apr. 2023, acousticalsolutions.com/?utm_source=bing&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=General_Solutions_... Bing&utm_content=sound%20acoustic%20solutions&utm_term=%2Bsound%20%2Bacoustic%20%2Bsolutions&msclkid=79da9afb8d1b169ed123feab05fb57dc. Accessed 01 May, 2023.

7. Material and Color: The choice of colors and materials allows the interior environment to create a powerfully emotional and visual enjoyment in the retail environment (Olesen). Choosing the right colors and materials to decorate an interior space will influence customers' buying habits and attract more customers. Choose colors and materials that are aligned with the brand concept the target customers will be attracted to. Consider the maintenance and repair of materials and life safety aspects when choosing suitable materials for retail spaces.

8. Customers Crave authenticity: Objects and expressive aspects of the design give a unique and fitting character. Designers can give expression to all aspects of design by manipulating such project elements as layout, space, surfaces, details, furnishings, displays, and accessories.

9. Creating a Sense of Community: In addition to the key design considerations, creating a sense of community is an important element in making retail stores attractive, especially after the end of the pandemic. Life during isolation was most of the time lonely and joyless, which leads consumers to expect more of a sense of belonging in their shopping environments. The fast fashion retail store as the community is a place that can be transformed to hold events to connect customers to the brand. This format allows retailers to engage with their customers and organize events and allows customers to feel a sense of belonging.

10. Five Senses: Additionally, making a store a sensory experience can also make fast fashion more attractive. A good design can stimulate all five senses at the same time and immerse the consumer in the store environment (Moore). Making sure the store's music and smells are attractive and creating not only an identity but also a pleasant environment. Brands are experience providers, and sponsors of environments both physical and emotional, which ask the consumer to connect, relate and co-create their relationship with the brand. Attracting all the consumer's senses is a particularly essential part of creating an attractive store.



Figure 4: SND Fashion Store. "Gallery of SND Fashion Store / 3GATTI - 1." ArchDaily, www.archdaily.com/565201/snd-fashion-store-3gatti/545c48abe58ece70e000008d-snd-fashion-store-3gatti-photo. Accessed 01 May, 2023.



Figure 5: Harrouk, Christele. "7 Design Guidelines for a Safe Post COVID-19 Transition." ArchDaily, June 2020, www.archdaily.com/941517/5-design-guidelines-for-a-safe-post-covid-19-transition. Accessed 01 May, 2023.

Case Study

Retail can provide experiences that is possible only in person. The following two case studies demonstrate how interior design can be used to attract more customers to the in-person shopping experience. According to the literature review, it is not only stored aesthetics and store environment that are essential factors in influencing customers to spend in person after COVID-19. It is also vital to create a store experience that can only be completed in person.

1. MUJI Provide DIY experience:

The Japanese retailer MUJI creates some of the services and experiences you can find in the flagship store, such as offer the service of an embroidery machine, which enables customers to print their selected photos on a specified fabric. MUJI also offers a DIY stamp service that allows customers to create unique items using free stamps, and in a few stores, you can blended essential oils used in aroma diffusers to create your personal essence. Mixing these oils can be a fun activity as you get to try different scents and mixtures, possible only in person, once relates to one of the senses. This not only makes MUJI stores more attractive to customers but also increases customer consumption.



Figure 6: Rightsleeve Marketing. "This Brand Is Creating an In-Store Experience Unlike Any Other — RXS" RXS, June 2019, community.rightsleeve.com/posts/2019/03/26/this-brand-is-creating-an-in-store-experience-unlike-any-other. Accessed 01 May, 2023.

2. Uniqlo combines art museum and Starbucks:

The Uniqlo store on New York's Fifth Avenue is an example of a successful effort to create an attractive brick-and-mortar store, by partnering with Museum of Modern Art and Starbucks, both iconic New York brand, the Uniqlo store has created a retail space that combines retail, museum, and coffee shop. The Uniqlo brick-and-mortar store sells fast-fashion merchandise on the first floor and a café and gallery on the second floor.

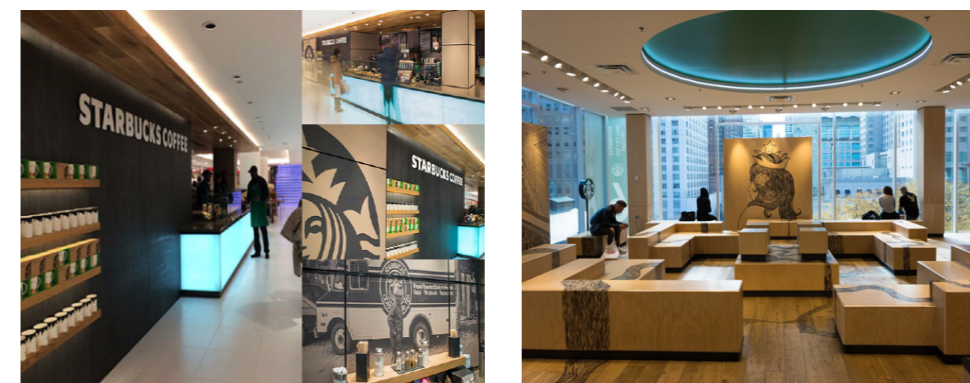


Figure 7: Uniqlo divides store space-half museum, half Starbucks. UNIQLO Divides Store Space – Half Museum, Half Starbucks | Brandingmag. Accessed 01 May, 2023.

Research Agenda

Online Survey: "How can Interior Design Draw More Customers to the Retail Store after the COVID-19 Pandemic?"

A total of 90 participants took part in the online survey from October 2022 to January 2023 to investigate how interior design can attract more customers to shop in brick-and-mortar stores. The participants range from school students to working employees and retired elderly people. All the online question in the format of Google Forms and distributed through email, and social medias.

Question 1: How old are you?

In this survey, 66.7 % of the participants were young people between the ages of 18 and 30. In addition, there are 8.9% of middle-aged people between 30 and 40 years old and 18.9% of middle-aged people over 40 years old. A small number of older people also participated in the survey.

Question 2: What is your gender?

In the survey, 68.9 % of the participants were female, 28.9 % were male, and a small number of participants were nonbinary. this means that most of the participants in this survey were female.

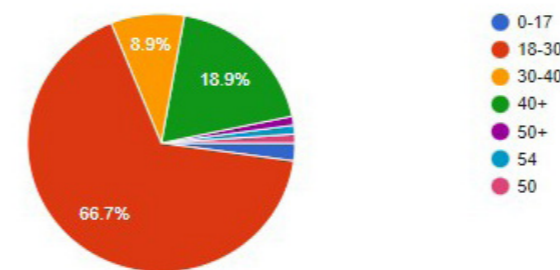


Figure 8: Question 01: How Old are You?

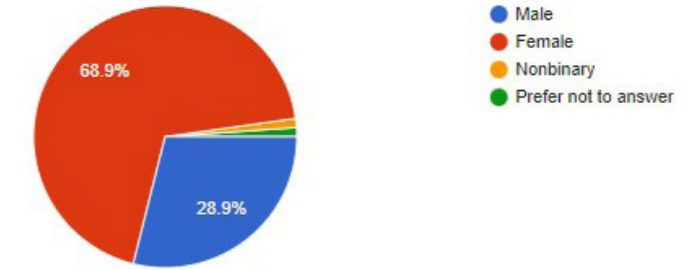


Figure 9: Question 02: What is Your Gender?

Question 3: What reason make you go shopping in person in a fast fashion retail store?

The third question of this survey investigates the main reasons that make customers visit in-person stores. Most of the participants believed that the store's products, as well as the store's overall environment and coupons, had a significant impact on the attractiveness of the in-person store. In addition, the popularity of the store itself and the influence of the brand and the service of the store is also the main reason to influence consumers to enter the store shopping.

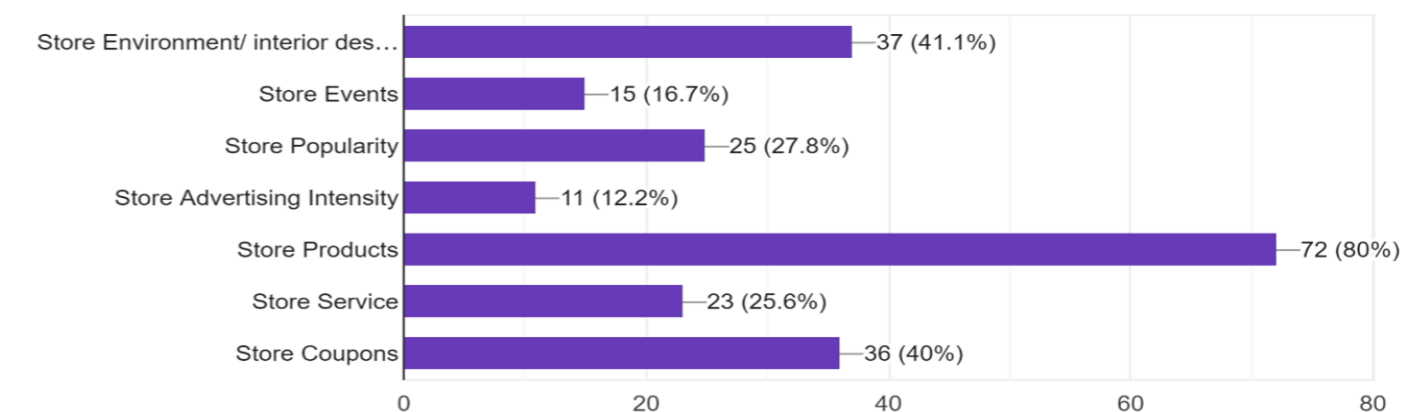


Figure 10: Question 03: What reason make you go shopping in person in a fast fashion retail store?

Question 4: The interior design and environment of the store influence you to go shopping in person instead of online?

This question was designed to investigate whether interior design and interior environment can directly influence consumer behavior in the aftermath of COVID-19. A 72.2 % of participants believed they would enter a brick-and-mortar store because of its interior design and environment, with a smaller percentage of 27.8 % choosing to look more forward to shopping online after COVID-19.

Question 5: What do you think is an attractive interior design environment in a fast fashion retail store?

The fifth question in the online survey asked participants what design elements make the interior design environment attractive in a fast fashion retail store. The chart of responses to this question demonstrates that many factors make a retail store attractive, including a comfortable environment at 70 %, design aesthetics at 61.1 %, and lighting choices at 52 %. Since each of these choices was chosen by many of the participants, it proves that all the design elements on the chart should be considered in designing an attractive fast fashion store.

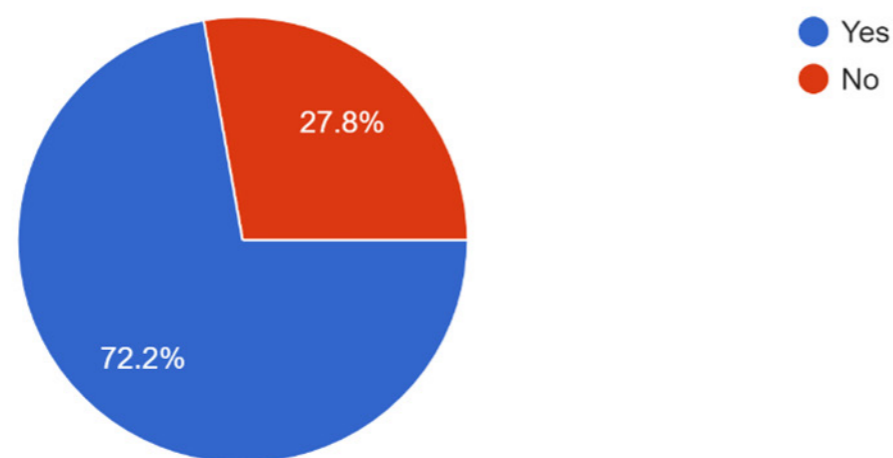


Figure 11 Question 04: The interior design and environment of the store influence your wish to go shopping in person instead of online?

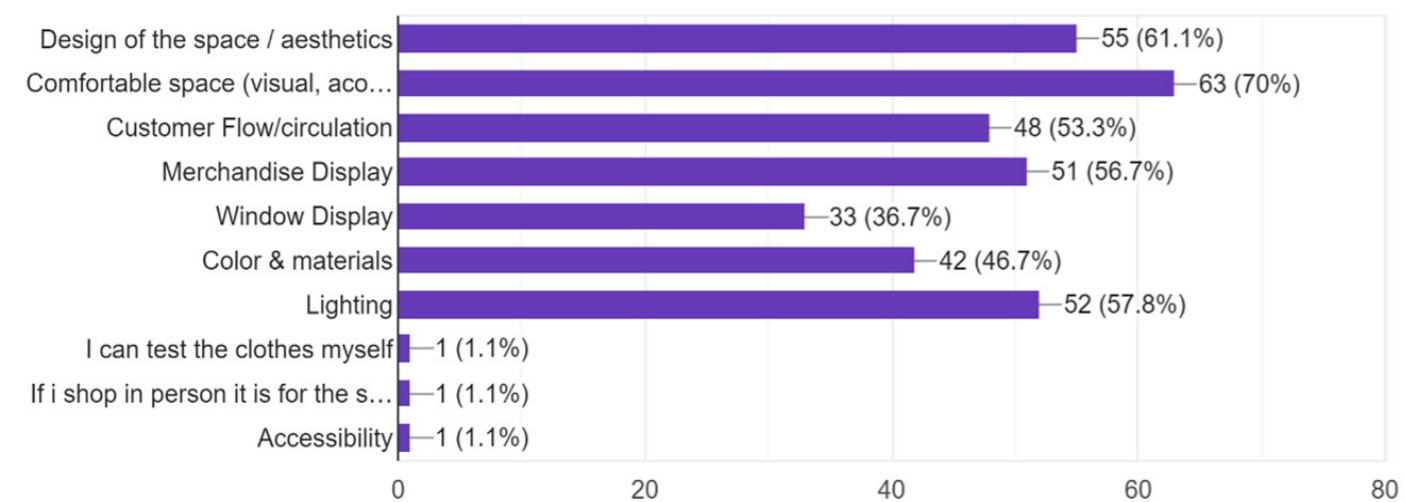


Figure 12: Question 05: What do you think is an attractive interior design environment in a fast fashion retail store?

Question 6: Is there anything about the fast fashion environment that you feel uncomfortable with in your current shopping experience?

The sixth question investigated the interior design factors that customers feel uncomfortable with within retail spaces. Most participants chose crowded stores and uncomfortable music and smells and uncomfortable lighting. Participants felt that too much light would make a retail space uncomfortable compared to more dark lighting. In addition, many participants believe that the design and aesthetics of the store, as well as the flow of customers and the way the merchandise is displayed, also affect the comfort of the customer experience in a fast fashion retail store.

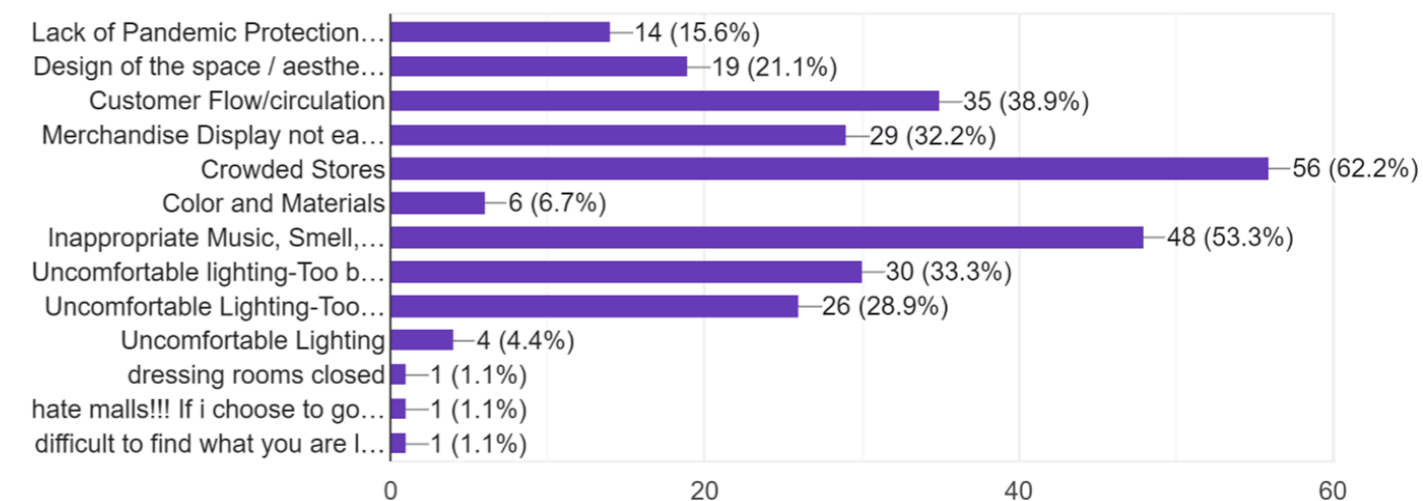


Figure 13: Question 06: Is there anything about the fast fashion environment that you feel uncomfortable with in your current shopping experience?

Question 7 & 8: After Covid-19, are you more likely to go to in-person stores than online shopping? What do you think of the in-person shopping experience in fast fashion brand retail store after the pandemic?

The seventh and eighth questions in the online survey were both rank-order type questions. Both questions were about customer loyalty to retail stores after the outbreak. According to chart 1, it can be learned that participants consider shopping either online or in physical stores to be optional. This means that offering services and designs in brick-and-mortar stores that are not available in online shopping will be especially important in attracting more customers. Chart 2 clearly shows that more participants will be more excited about the fast fashion brick-and-mortar stores after the COVID-19 pandemic.

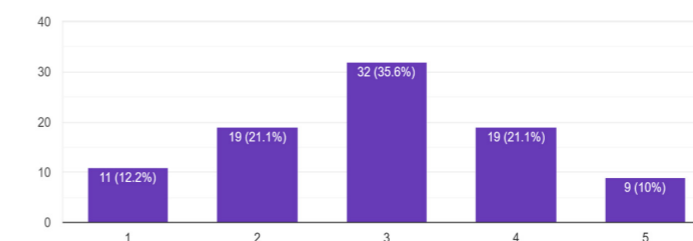


Figure 14: Question 07: After COVID-19, are you more likely to go to in-person retail stores than online shopping?

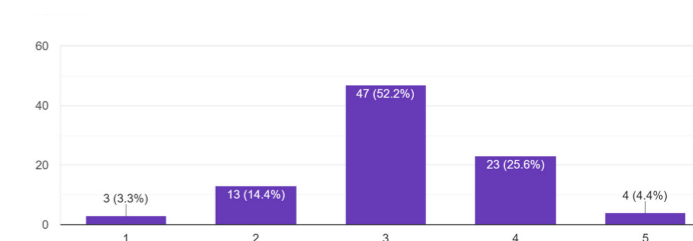


Figure 15: Question 08: What do you think of the in-person shopping experience in fast fashion brand retail stores after the pandemic?

Question 9: What is your favorite fast fashion retail brand?

The last question investigated what the most popular fast fashion brands fashion are today, UNIQLO was chosen for the Capstone project because it is the brand of choice for most people of all genders and ages. Most of the participants chose ZARA, H&M, UNIQLO, GAP, and Forever 21 as the most popular fast fashion brands in our society today. According to the data records, most female participants chose Aritzia and Forever 21, while many male consumers chose H&M and Uniqlo. However, H&M and Uniqlo were chosen by many male and female participants at the same time.

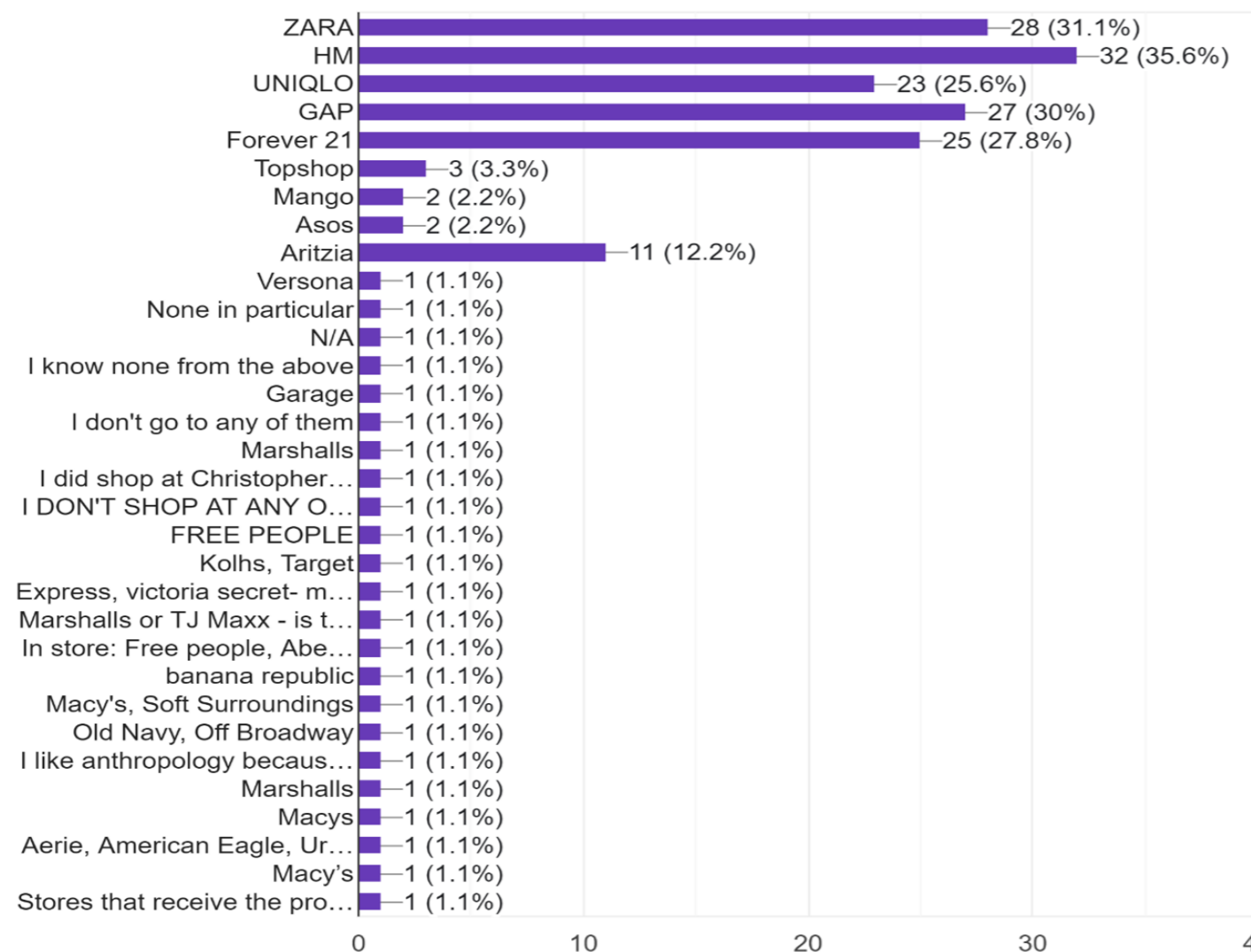


Figure 16: Question 9: What is your favorite fast fashion retail shopping experience?

Interviews at In-person Stores

The in-store interviews consisted of 15 random interviews with customers and store staff. The interviews were held with three fast fashion brands located in East View Mall in Rochester NY, they were HM, GAP and Forever 21. In Each store one staff member and four customers at random were interviewed. The interview questions were based on the survey: how can interior design draw more customers to the retail store after the COVID-19 pandemic? To cover the gap that most of the interviewees in the online survey were between 18-30 years old, the offline interviews were conducted with as many people as possible between 30-40 years old and 40 years old and above.

HM's Random Interview: The interview included a total of three people over the age of 40 and one person between the ages of 18 and 30 and one person between the ages of 30 and 40. Three of them were men and two were women. Most of the interviewees considered the overall design of the store and brand awareness as the main factors that influenced them to enter the store. Only two people felt that the store environment influenced them to shop in the store rather than online. The most interviewed believed that the overall comfort of the store (visual, acoustic, and thermal comfort), as well as the choice of colors and materials, made the store attractive. Among them, all the interviewees over 40 years old think that the comfort of the store makes the store attractive. In addition, almost all respondents believe that crowded stores make the overall environment uncomfortable. Almost all the interviewees had a good experience with the in-person fast fashion retail stores after the pandemic.

GAP's Random Interview: The interviews at the GAP included a total of one between the ages of 18-30 and two between the ages of 30-40 and two over 40. The interviewees were three females and two males. Most of the interviewees thought that store events and store service and store coupons would make them go to the store to spend money. Most of the interviewees believed that the store environment would make them shop in an in-person store rather than online. In addition, the display of merchandise and the choice of colors and materials of the store will make the interviewees find the store attractive. All the interviewees agreed that lighting that is too dark is not suitable for the display of merchandise in retail stores of fast fashion brands. Most of the interviewees chose to shop online after the pandemic rather than coming to an in-person store. In addition, most interviewees felt that the store environment and design would attract them to shop in-person rather than online.

Forever 21's Random Interview: In total, there was one interviewee aged 18-30 years old and one interviewee aged 30-40 years old, and three interviewees aged 40 years or older. Four of the interviewees were female, and only one interviewee was male. All the interviewees felt that the design and aesthetics of the store would lead them to a fast fashion store. All the interviewees also believed that the interior environment would make them choose to shop in-person rather than online. Most of the interviewees believed that the choice of colors and materials would make a fast fashion store attractive, and that inappropriate colors and materials would make a store uncomfortable. In addition, most of the interviewees would prefer to shop in-person retail stores rather than online. These interviewees also felt that the post-COVID-19 environment of fast fashion stores was amazing.

Creative Agenda

Introduction

This capstone project's design proposal uses research-based design to create an attractive retail space that focuses on promoting fast fashion retail in-person consumption after the COVID-19 pandemic. All the knowledge gained from the literature review and from the research agenda were applied in the creative agenda. For example, the use of appropriate lighting and wayfinding and to create a sense of community are important design elements that are expressed in the creative agenda which objective is to create a unique in-person space that customers cannot be experienced through online consumption. The research agenda's findings show that UNIQLO is a popular brand among most consumers of all ages and genders. This is the reason that the brand was chosen to apply the knowledge acquired and develop the design project.

The capstone project is located at East View Mall in Victor, NY. The entire store is a 9,000-square-foot UNIQLO concept store that includes a coffee shop, glass art gallery, and DIY station. The creative agenda makes the project attractive to customers in and around the Rochester, NY area by partnering with the Corning Museum of Glass in Corning, NY. Furthermore, the findings in the research agenda show that most customers are motivated by store events, such as clothing recycling events where customers can recycle their old clothes and receive a discount. All of these strategies combined are used in the concept of the UNIQLO project at the East View Mall, in Rochester NY.



Site Location



Figure 17: Rochester and Victor Area, Drawn by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.

East View Mall Location

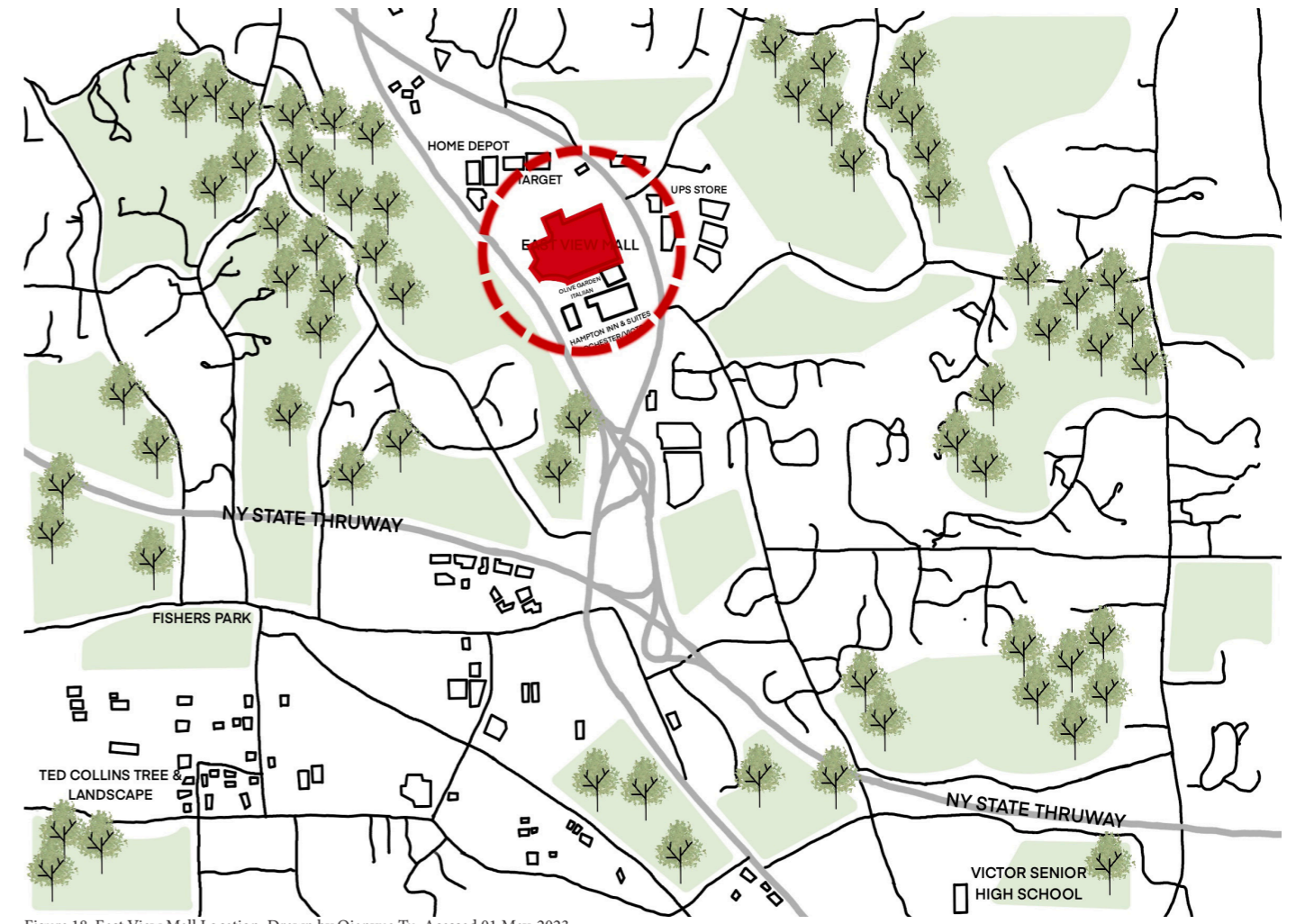


Figure 18: East View Mall Location, Drawn by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.

East View Mall Map

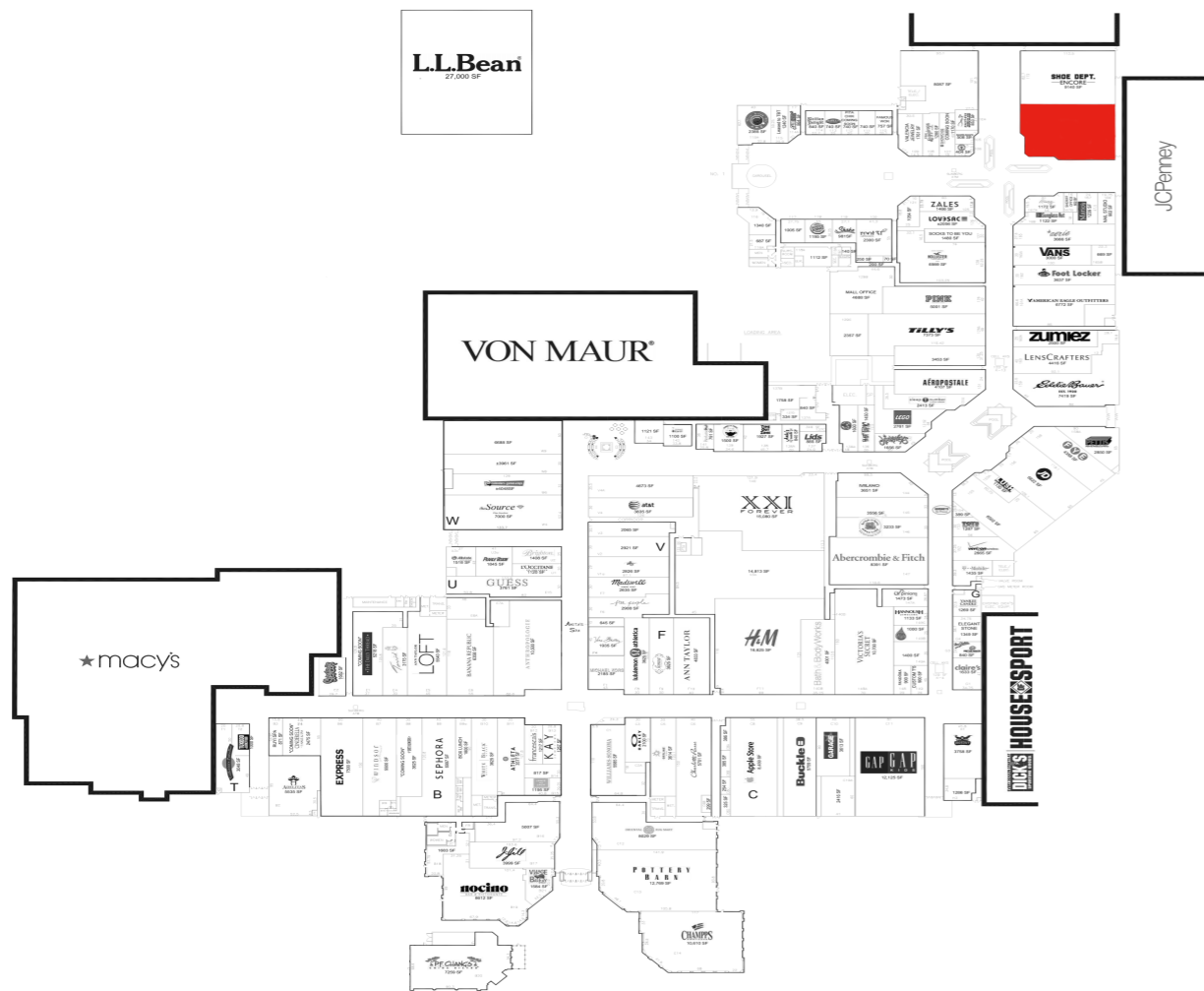


Figure 19: Eastview. wilmorite.com/LeasingSpecialtyLeasing/LeasingInfo/Eastview.aspx. Accessed 01 May, 2023.

Existing Condition



Figure 20: Existing Condition-Entrance, Photo by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.



Figure 21: Existing Condition-South View, Photo by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.



Figure 22: Existing Condition-Food Court, Photo by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.



Figure 23: Existing Condition-Skylight, Photo by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.

The existing condition of the store selected for the Capstone Project is 9,038 square feet overall, with a floor-to-ceiling height of 14'10". The store is close to the mall's food court and restrooms and is very close to the mall's entrance and exit. The entire store is located at the corner of East View Mall which means it is visible from more than one "street". There is a small fountain and a carousel around the entrance of the store, this is the area of the entire mall where the traffic is concentrated. Also, the parking lot is located around the store. Combining all of these factors, this 9,038-square-foot store was the best choice for this capstone project's location.

Schematic Block Plan

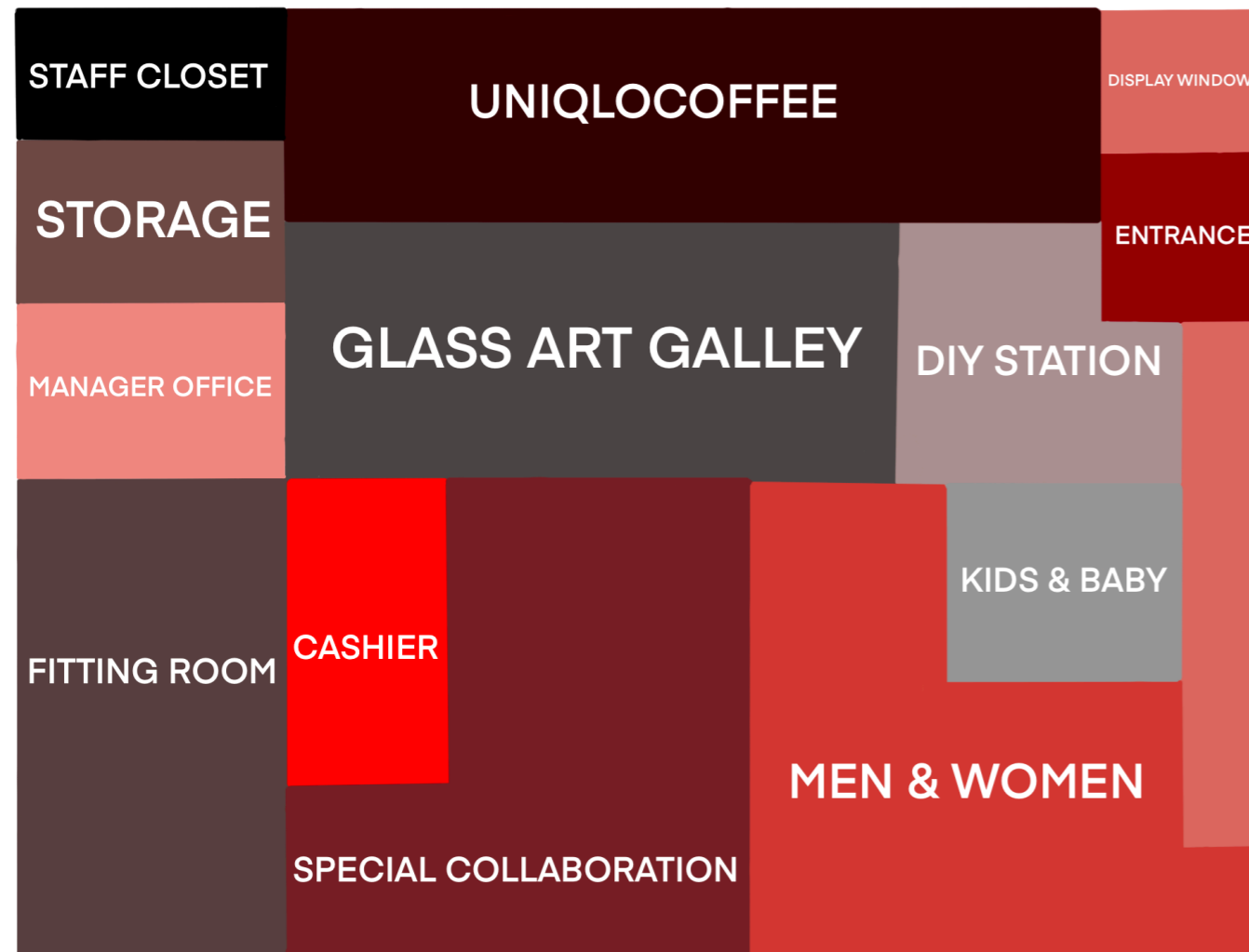


Figure 24: Schematic Block Plan, Drawn by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.

Skematic Design Phase

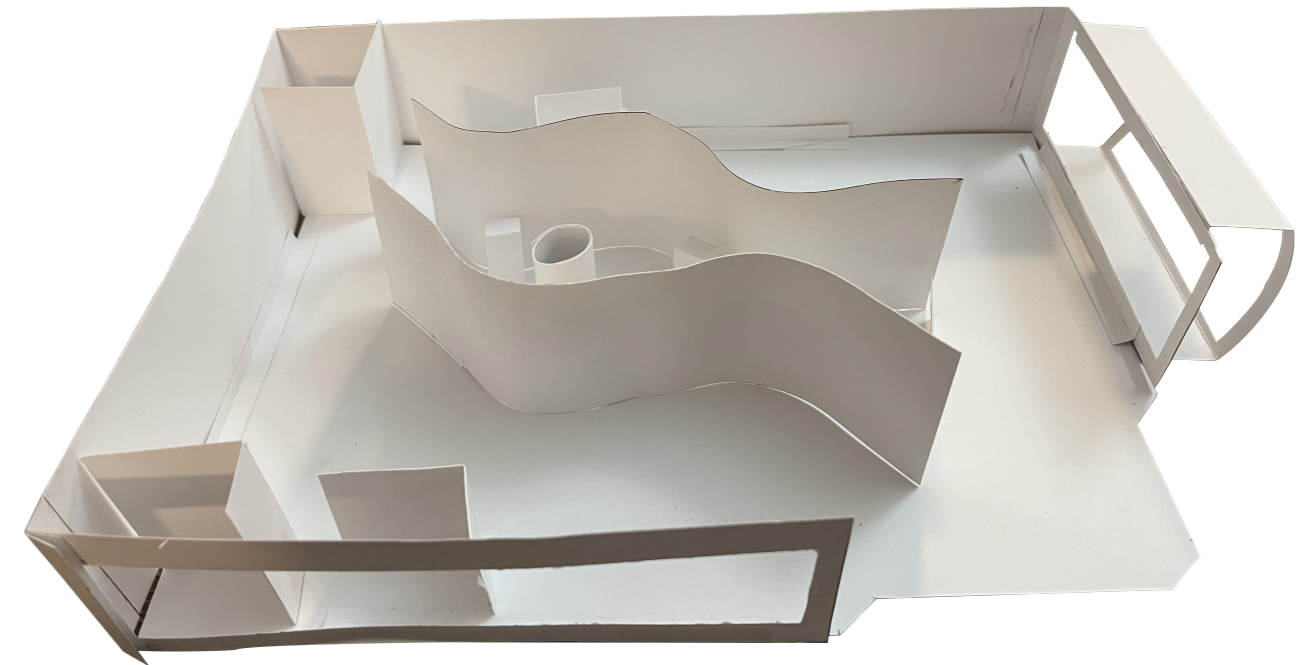


Figure 25: Bristol Paper Model, Made by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.

This bristol paper model shows the spatial relationship of the capstone concept Uniqlo store. The Glass Art Gallery will be at the center of the store and will occupy most of the storage space. The physical model also indicates the location of the window displays. One window display area is located in the west of the store, and the other window display area is located in the south of the store. Both window display areas are adjacent to the small indoor fountain and food court in the corridor area. This physical model highlights the shape of the walls of the Glass art exhibition maintaining an organic curved status. Private areas such as fitting rooms and staff lockers are located at the far end of the store. The physical model not only shows the initial idea of the spatial arrangement but also shows a process of transforming the public area into a private area.

Design Proposal

A portion of the Corning Museum of Glass is the concept of the project, combines a traditional fast fashion retail store including merchandise area with art glass museum, a small coffee shop, and DIY station. To make the retail interior design space attractive in the aftermath of the pandemic, a space was created to allow customers to have a unique in-person experience through the interior mixed use environment and atmosphere.

Mood Board



Figure 26: "SALTED CARAMEL (Pattern Curator)." Bloglovin', 15 Aug. 2019, www.bloglovin.com/blogs/pattern-curator-19574247/salted-caramel-7062389515. Accessed 01 May, 2023.

Concept Drawing: Display Window

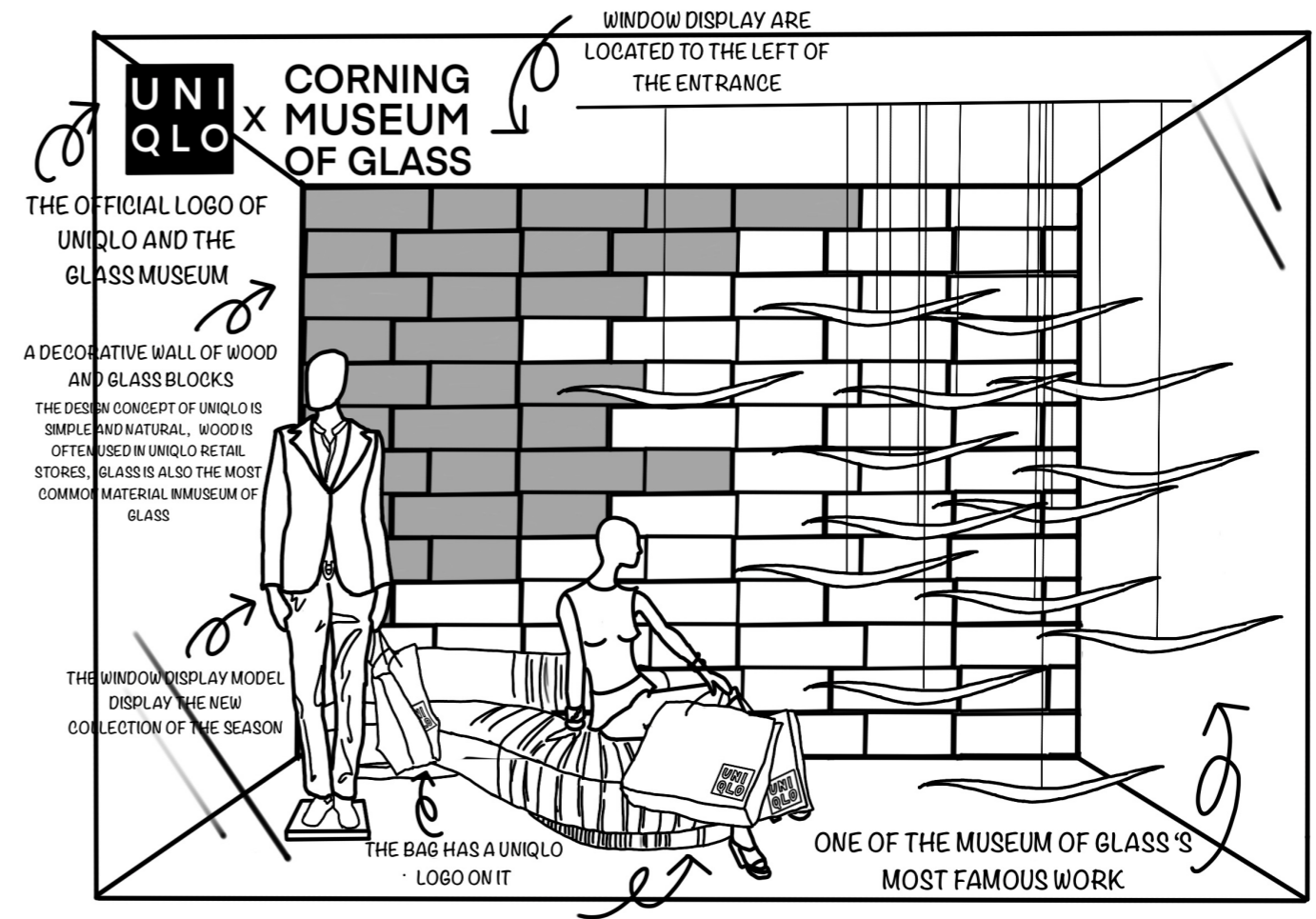


Figure 27: Concept Drawing-Display Window, Drawn by Qainyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.

Concept Drawing: Glass Art Gallery

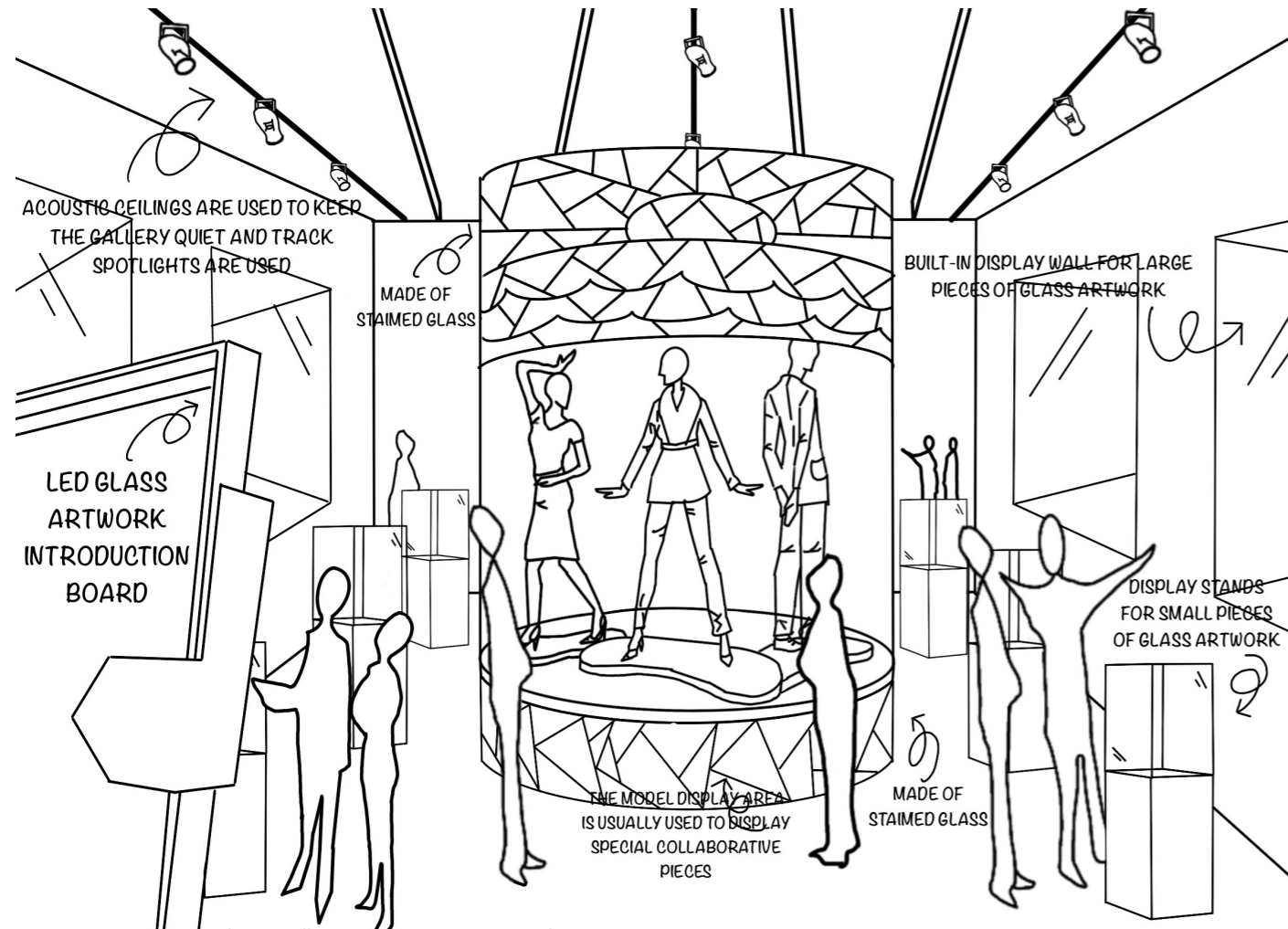


Figure 28: Concept Drawing-Glass Art Gallery, Drawn by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.

Concept Drawing: Uniqlo Coffee

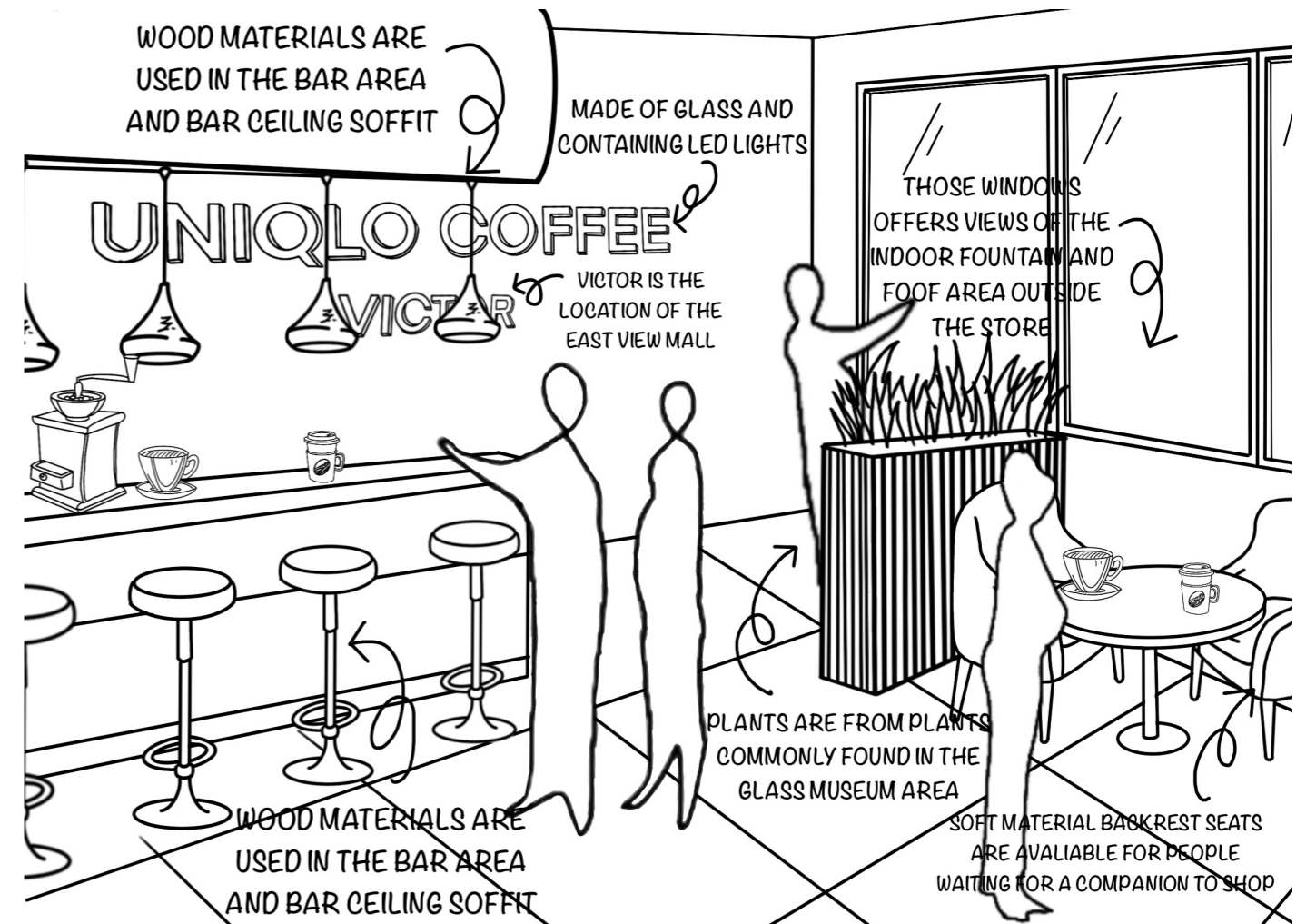


Figure 29: Concept Drawing-Uniqlo Coffee, Drawn by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.

Final Project

Floor Plan

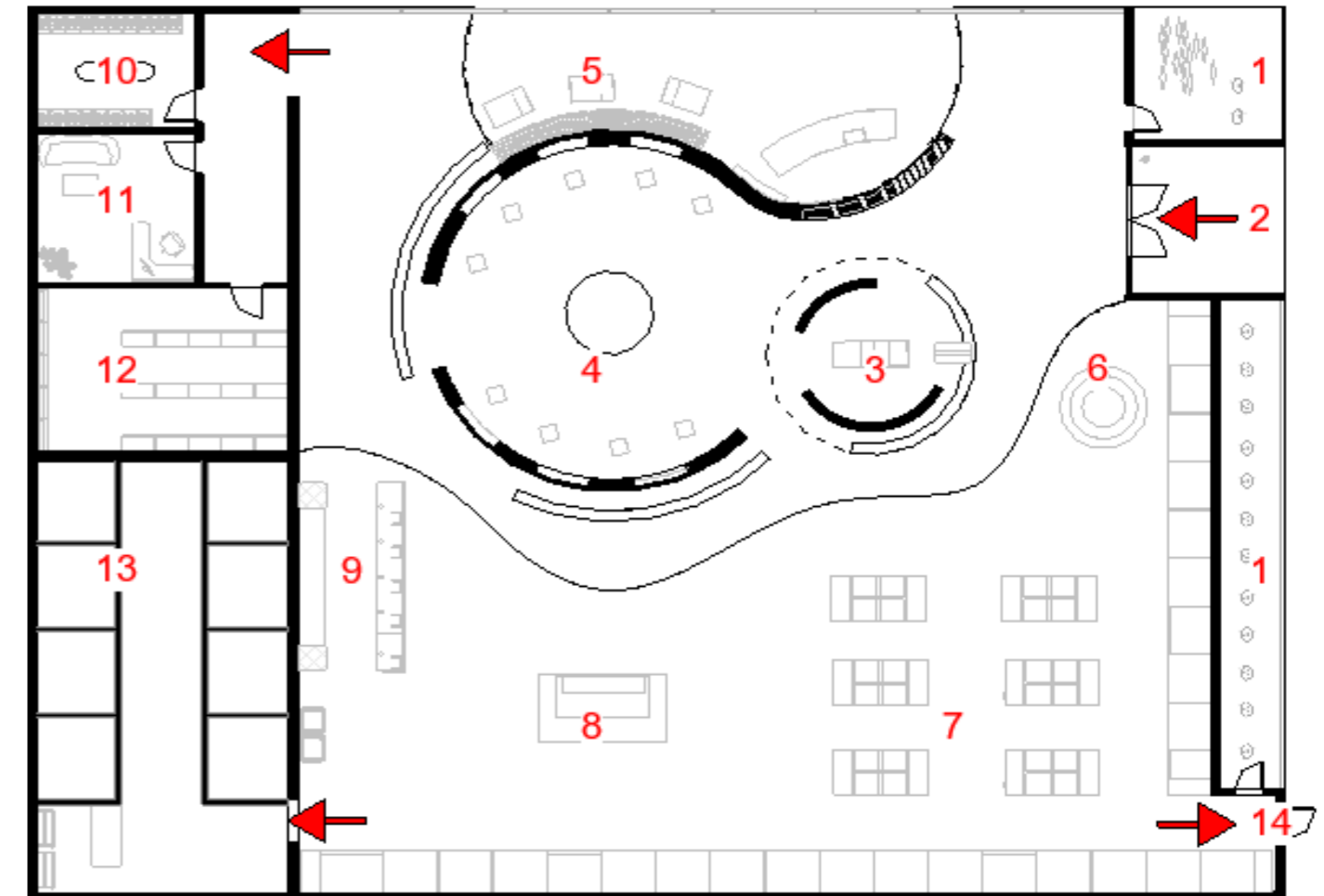


Figure 30: Floor Plan, Drawn by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.

Reflected Ceiling Plan Legends

1. Display Window
2. Entrance
3. DIY Station
4. Glass Art Gallery
5. UNIQLO COFFEE
6. Kids & Baby Merchandise
7. Men & Women Merchandise
8. Special Collaboration
9. Cashier
10. Staff Closet
11. Storage
12. Manager Office
13. Fitting Room
14. Exit

Reflected Ceiling Plan

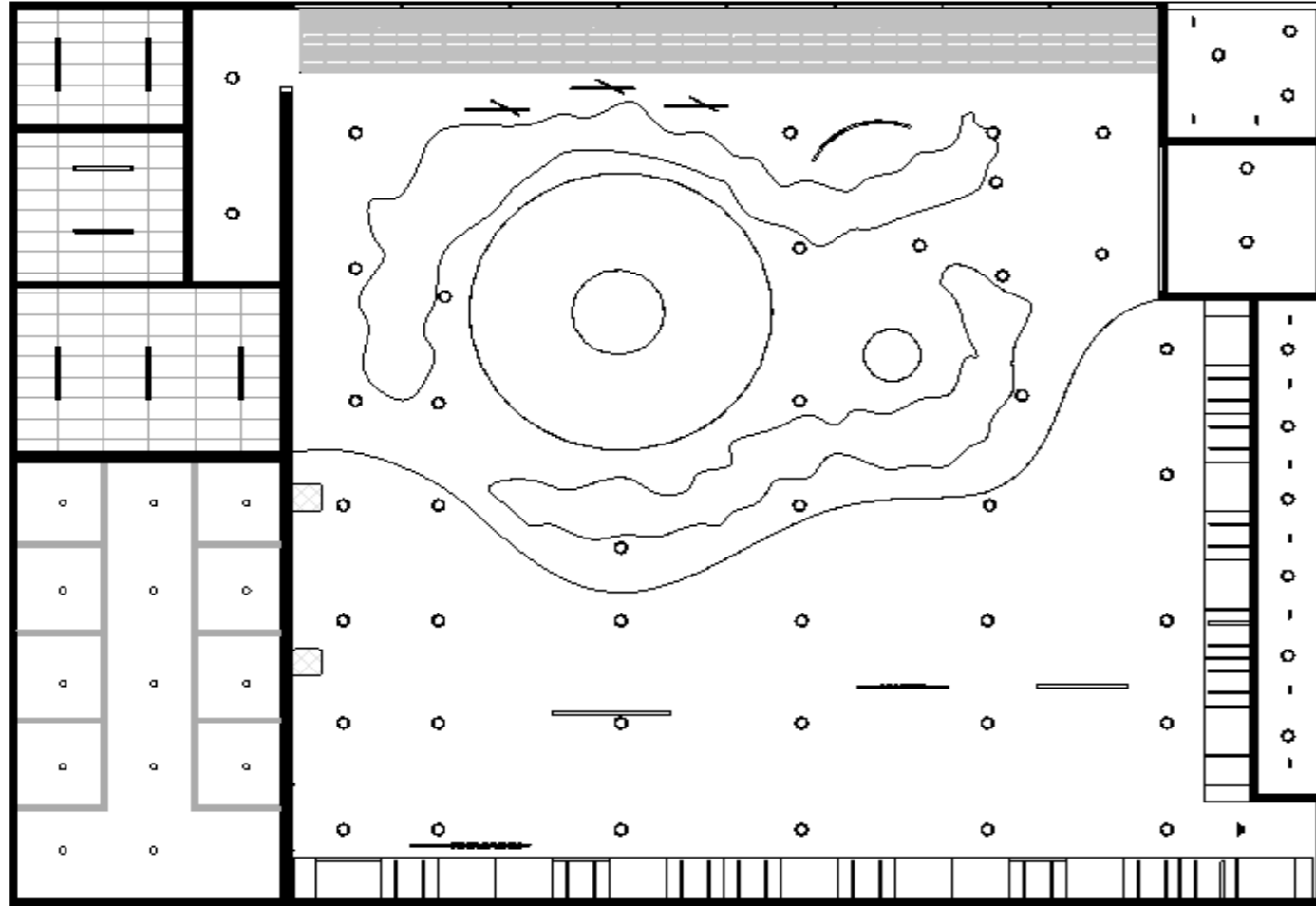









Figure 31: Reflected Ceiling Plan, Drawn by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.

Reflected Ceiling Plan Legends

RCP KEY	LIGHT NAME
	Lighting_Other_LumenWerx_Shell-Recessed-12
	Lighting_Linear_LED_StarTek_HydroBeam (1) Not a type - Load Type Catalog!
	Basic Doco Surface X3 BX30SE-840M-1300-G
	Slide rod spot light
	Lighting_Other_LumenWerx_Shell-Recessed-12
	Lighting Pendants_Intra-Lighting Night&Day L2525DPR7100+19501m67+22W840F0-d3IP20
	Exit Sign

Furniture Selection



Figure 32: Estiler, Keith. "How Do Retail Experiences Differ Between Japanese and American Consumers?" Hypebeast, 15 Dec. 2016. hypebeast.com/2016/12/japan-versus-united-states-retail-experience. Accessed 01 May, 2023.



Figure 33: "Kishun Coffee Table." Wayfair, 20 Apr. 2023. www.wayfair.com/furniture/pdp/ivy-bronx-sled-coffee-table-w010081615.html. Accessed 01 May, 2023.



Figure 34: Insider, Retail. "Inside Uniqlo's 1st Canadian Store, at CF Toronto Eaton Centre." Retail Insider, 4 Feb. 2021. retail-insider.com/retail-insider/2016/09/uniqlo-tec. Accessed 01 May, 2023.



Figure 35: Uniqlo. "UNIQLO Brings Back Popular U!me! Customization Program." UNIQLO TODAY | UNIQLO US, 21 Feb. 2022. www.uniqlo.com/us/en/news/topics/2020073101. Accessed 01 May, 2023.

Lighting Selection



Figure 36: "Dabmar Lighting Cast Aluminum Directional Spot Light - Transitional - Outdoor Flood and Spot Lights - by LIGHTING JUNGLE | Houzz." Houzz, www.houzz.com/products/dabmar-lighting-cast-aluminum-directional-spot-light-prvw-vr~118105859?m_refid=P-LA_HZ_118105859. Accessed 01 May, 2023.



Figure 37: "BIM Objects - Free Download! Night and Day SDI | BIMobject." BIMobject, www.bimobject.com/en-us/intralighting/product/nightday_sdi. Accessed 01 May, 2023.



Figure 38: "BIM Objects - Free Download! POP RECESSED, Recessed Round 24, Direct | BIMobject." BIMobject, www.bimobject.com/en-us/lumenwerx/product/poror-24. Accessed 01 May, 2023.



Figure 39: "BIM Objects - Free Download! Night and Day SDI | BIMobject." BIMobject, www.bimobject.com/en-us/intralighting/product/nightday_sdi. Accessed 01 May, 2023.

Activity Diagrams

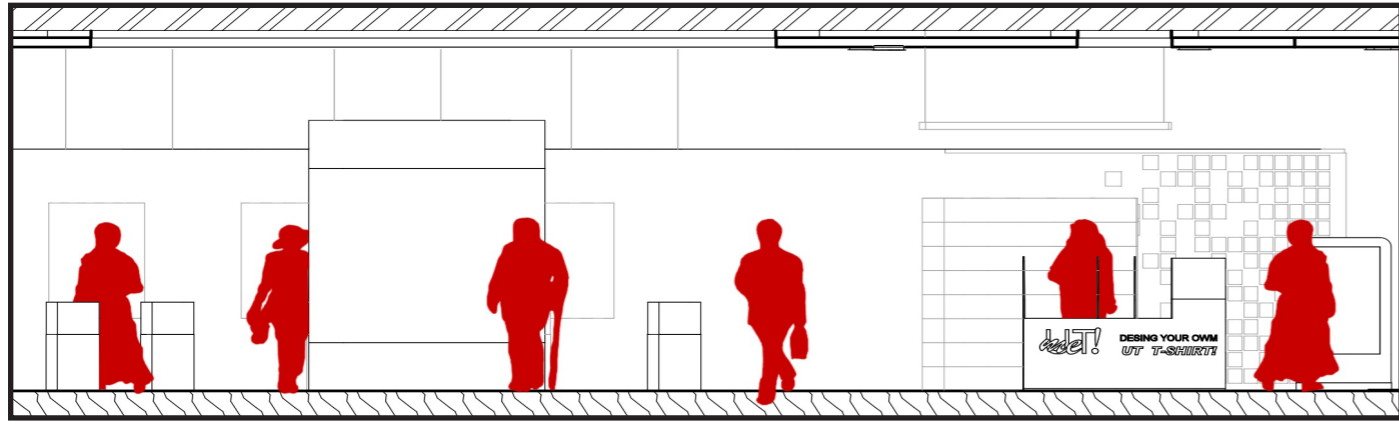


Figure 40: Glass art Gallery and DIY Station, Drawn by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.

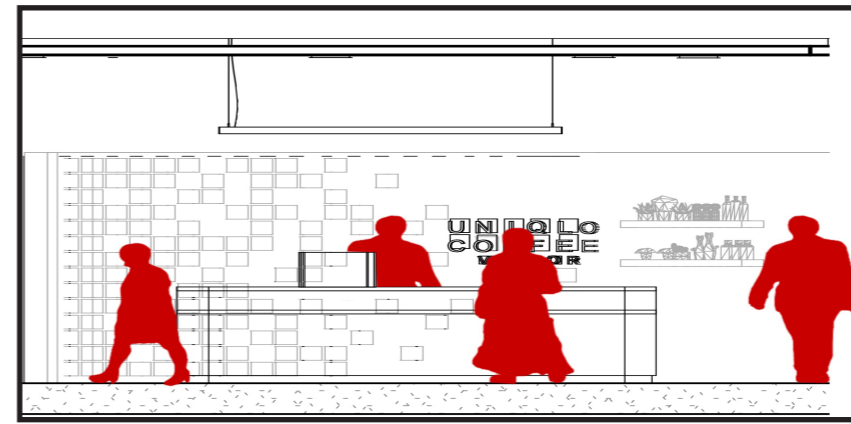


Figure 43: UNIQLO Coffee, Drawn by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.



Figure 41: Merchandise Area, Drawn by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.

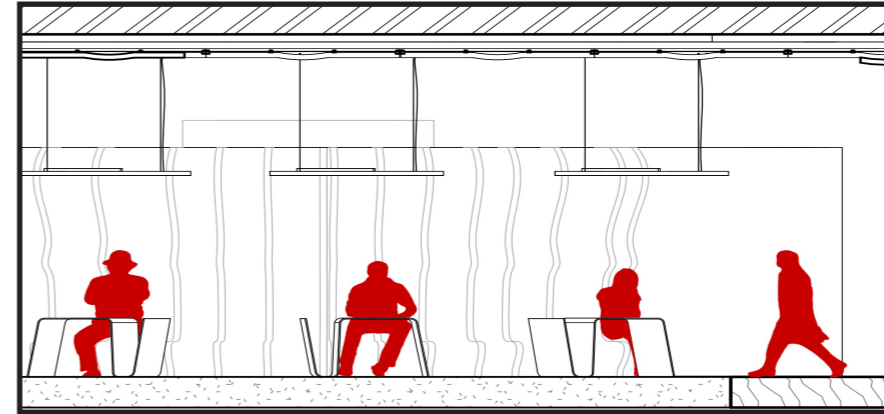


Figure 44: UNIQLO Coffee Seating, Drawn by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.

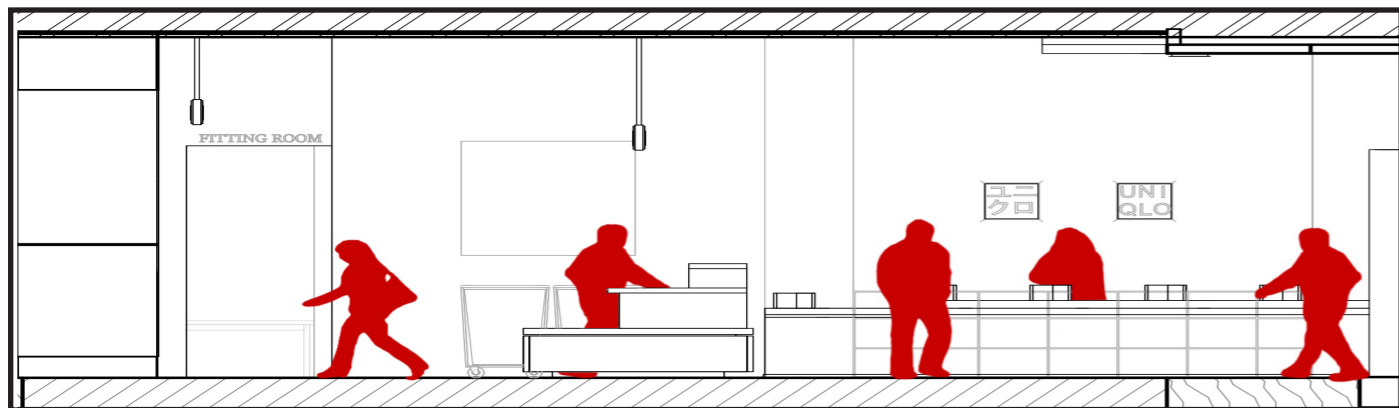


Figure 42: Cashier and Fitting Room, Drawn by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.

Exploded View

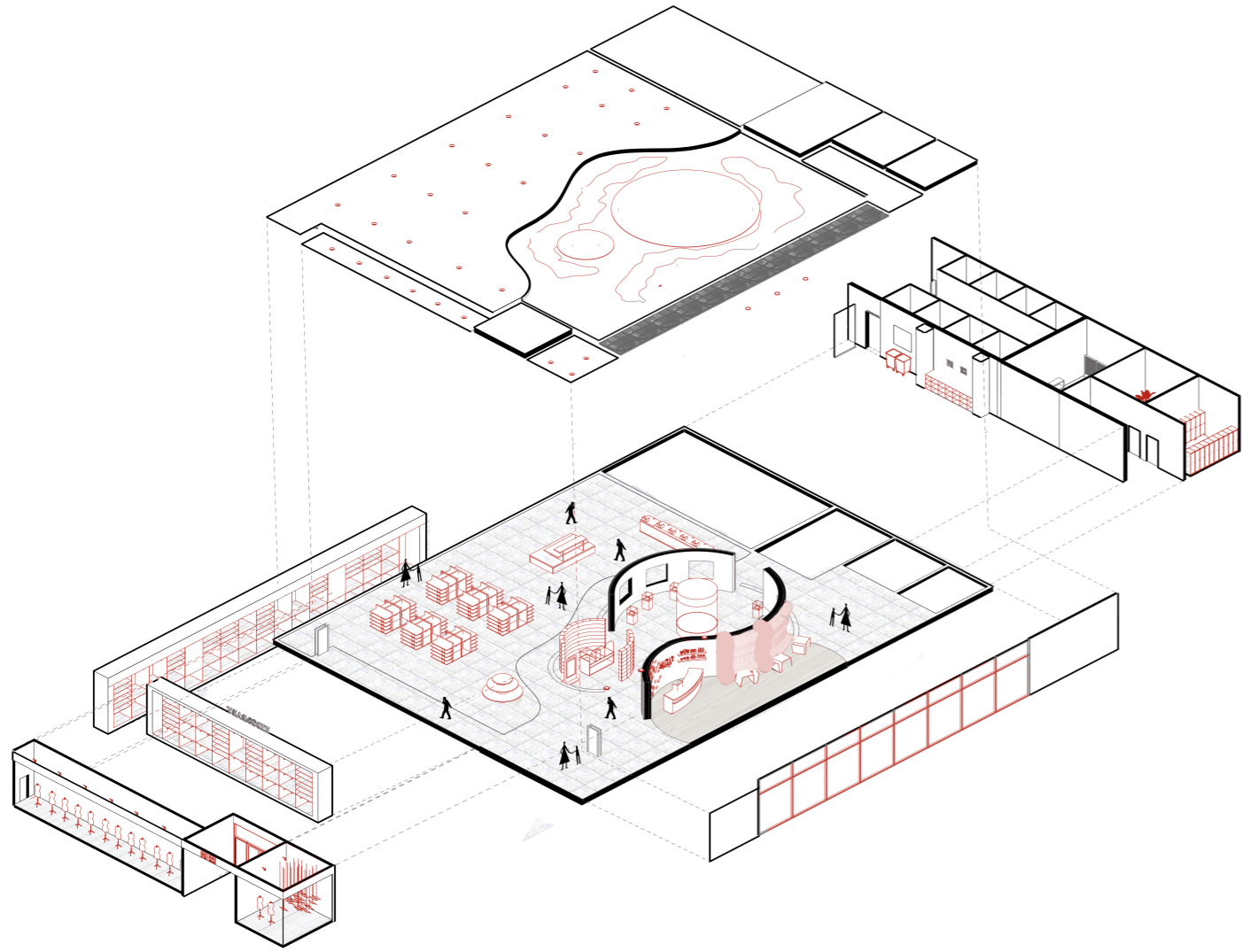


Figure 45: Exploded View, Drawn by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.

Rendering: Entrance



Figure 46: Entrance, Drawn by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.

Rendering: DIY Station



Figure 47: DIY Station, Drawn by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.

Rendering: Glass Art Gallery



Figure 48: Glass Art Gallery, Drawn by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.

Rendering: Merchandise Display



Figure 50: Merchandise Display, Drawn by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.

Rendering: UNIQLO Coffee



Figure 49: UNIQLO Coffee, Drawn by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.

Rendering: Cashier



Figure 51: Cashier Desk, Drawn by Qianyue Tu, Accessed 01 May, 2023.

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this project is to investigate how interior design elements can enhance customers' interest in fast fashion retail stores' in-person experience after the COVID-19 pandemic. Creative agenda design has accomplished the goals of this capstone project, with the concept of Uniqlo stores combining side activities, such as the art gallery in partnership with the Corning Museum of Glass, a Cafe, and DIY station, and recycling area, as well as highlighting the interior design space programming as using the lighting and material choices that will attract more customers to experience the retail stores in person. The combination of traditional retail stores, museums, and cafes gives Uniqlo a unique atmosphere that can only be experienced when customers visit the stores.

Makes in-person shopping more attractive than online shopping. All the artworks in the Glass Art Gallery are from the Corning Museum of Glass, which is the strategy to accomplish the goals of the capstone project. While customers are immersed in glass art, they can also increase their spending on Uniqlo merchandise. The whole project demonstrated that interior design elements can create an attractive factor for customers to experience retail stores in person.

Conclusion



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Appendices

Appendix A. Prospectus

Research Question

How can interior design draw more customers to the retail store after the COVID19 pandemic?

The Capstone Justification

As we all know, in 2019, the Covid-19 pandemic virus disrupted the way people live and shop at the same time disrupting the way traditional retail sells. More and more people started to buy items online and get rid of the risk of being exposed to Covid-19 in indoor shopping experiences. Compared to other types of retail merchandise, fast fashion stores were significantly more affected by the COVID-19 pandemic because of deficiencies in the sales model and a lack of good shopping experience (Rodriguez). At the time of the initial pandemic, many retail stores, including fast fashion brands, were closed when consumers had to quarantine themselves at home to stay safe. As the pandemic developed and continued, and retail stores reopened, steps were taken to minimize the risk of contagion, such as: maintaining a 6-foot social distance and limiting the number of people entering the store as well as reorganizing the store layout. Even with all the measures in place to prevent the spread of the pandemic, more and more customers are getting into the habit of shopping online (Bakhtiari). Now that people are returning to the in-person shopping experience, the question of how to attract consumers to fast fashion retail stores has become an issue that needs to be examined. This capstone project hypothesizes that innovative interior design strategies can help attract more customers to the in-person shopping experience after COVID-19.

Literature Review

Fast fashion represents the current trend in our society for most people in the average class, and the number of people buying fast fashion brands has been growing exponentially over the past 20 years. According to 2022's research, 88% of consumers in the US prefer to buy fast fashion brands, followed by 46% of consumers in Europe, then 25% in India, and 21% in China (Barron). This huge purchase volume and exponential growth make fast fashion brands a hot retail niche today. Consumers choose fast fashion brands because of their low prices and wide variety of styles but choose to buy fast fashion brands online because of their poor service and overcrowded store interior layouts and queues (Assoune). Design elements and methods that influence and attract consumers to the store experience include adequate space for proper customer flow routes and removing more architectural obstructions from the interior, which can lead to a better attractive experience for consumers just returning to the in-person store from COVID-19. First, this literature review will investigate whether fast fashion brands are more affected by COVID-19 than other categories of retail. People who were previously reluctant to shop online are setting up online accounts and experiencing a whole new customer journey. The closure of brick-and-mortar stores during the pandemic forced consumers to question their ingrained shopping habits (Bakhtiari). Second, it will examine how pandemics change consumer consumption habits and consumer psychology in the aftermath of a pandemic. The pandemic is causing customers to change the way they buy

retail goods, a behavioral shift that could have a permanent impact on consumer behavior (Bakhtiari). Finally, the literature review will investigate the interior design key elements that can make an attractive and comfortable consumer environment applicable after the pandemic.

Research Agenda

The research agenda activities are designed to find out what customers need and how to attract them to the fast fashion retail store when they return to the in-person shopping experience after the COVID-19 pandemic. Qualitative methods will be used to achieve this goal. First, the survey will be used to collect the opinions of consumers on how COVID-19 has changed the way they consume and why they choose to continue online rather than offline. The overall survey will be divided into an online sample survey and an offline sample survey. The offline sample will be conducted in Rochester, NY, with a random selection of fast fashion shoppers in the East View Mall with multiple choice questions and rankorder content. The online sample survey will focus on collecting customer experiences from consumers of several well-known fast fashion brands such as ZARA and Topshop. Feedback on the online buying experience and the reason for choosing online shopping was collected by observing comments from customers who bought fast fashion brands' items online. Interviews will also be used in the investigation process, focused on staff and managers because they are the primary source of information on consumer trends and changes in consumer behavior and they can provide accurate and detailed information. Finally, an analysis of case studies of successful fast fashion design and what strategies these brands are using to attract customers. The study aims to identify the changes in fast fashion brand consumers' preferences after covid-19. After all the data is collected, it will be analyzed to help create a new design approach that addresses how to attract more customers to fast fashion branded items offline stores.

Creative Agenda

This capstone investigates the specific reasons and perceptions of why customers prefer online consumption to offline consumption after the pandemic, what interior design elements will be attractive to make them return to the in-person experience, and customers' reasons that influence their preference, interior design space, and service. Therefore, the creative agenda will combine the existing literature and summarize it, and the research agenda that will provide methodological guidance and strategic guidelines on how to design an attractive retail space. The creative agenda then used the identified data to create a concept store design that would be attractive to customers returning to fast fashion in-person retail from COVID-19. This creative agenda will result in a final capstone design that is consistent with the elements of the interior design that make the retail store attractive.

Summary

In conclusion, interviews and surveys, and studies will be used to complete data collection and analysis, and then the results will be used to determine the key interior design elements that could be used in a retail store to attract more customers to the in-person quick fashion retail space after COVID-19.

Appendix A. Prospectus Approval Signatures

Capstone Chair: Isabella Trindade Date October 11, 2022
(E-Signature)

(Written)

Committee Member: _____ Date _____
(E-Signature)

(Written)

Committee Member: _____ Date _____
(E-Signature)

(Written)

Appendix B. Survey Platform

Link: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfdPncw7QJdGi0BcqaZ3_1pIShQhiHY-8Nln39_yyc1mHAWFEQ/viewform?usp=sf_link

Appendix B. Research Instruments

Online Survey: "How can Interior Design draw More Customers to the Retail Store after the COVID-19 Pandemic?" Google Form

1. How old are you? *

Mark only one oval.

- 0-17
 18-30
 30-40
 40+

2. What is your gender? *

Mark only one oval.

- Male
 Female
 Nonbinary
 Prefer not to answer

3. What reason make you go shopping in person in a fast fashion retail store? *
(Select all you want)

Check all that apply.

- Store Environment/ interior design
 Store Events
 Store Popularity
 Store Advertising Intensity
 Store Products
 Store Service
 Store Coupons

4. The interior design and environment of the store influence your wish to go shopping in person instead of online? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No

5. What do you think is an attractive interior design environment in a fast fashion retail store? (Select all you want) *

Check all that apply.

- Design of the space / aesthetics
 Comfortable space (visual, acoustic & thermal comfort)
 Customer Flow/circulation
 Merchandise Display
 Window Display
 Color & materials
 Lighting
 Other: _____

6. Is there anything about the fast fashion environment that you feel uncomfortable with in your current shopping experience? (Select all you want) *

Check all that apply.

- Lack of Pandemic Protection Measures
 Design of the space / aesthetics
 Customer Flow/circulation
 Merchandise Display not easy to access or see
 Crowded Stores
 Color and Materials
 Inappropriate Music, Smell, and/or temperature
 Uncomfortable lighting-Too bright
 Uncomfortable Lighting-Too dark
 Other: _____

7. After Covid-19, are you more likely to go to in-person retail stores than online shopping? *

Mark only one oval.

Shopping Online

- 1
2
3
4
5

Shopping in-person

8. What do you think of the in-person shopping experience in fast fashion brand retail stores after the pandemic? *

Mark only one oval.

Horrible experience

1

2

3

4

5

Amazing experience

9. What is your favorite fast fashion retail shopping experience? (Select all you want) *

Check all that apply.

- ZARA
- HM
- UNIQLO
- GAP
- Forever 21
- Topshop
- Mango
- Asos
- Aritzia
- Other: _____

Appendix C. Approval Signatures

Undergraduate Interior Design Capstone
An Investigation of How Interior Design Elements Can Enhance Customers' Interest in Fast Fashion Retail Stores' in-person Experience After the Pandemic

Undergraduate Scholar
Lavender Qianyue Tu

Date
May 3, 2023

This undergraduate capstone research project submitted to the Rochester Institute of Technology Interior Design program has been approved and accepted by the student's Committee Members in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts.

Isabella Trindade

Isabella Trindade
Capstone Chair

Ann Miller-Michaels
Committee Member

Richard Napoli

Richard Napoli
Committee Member



Rochester Institute of Technology | College of Art and Design | Interior Design Program