

Social interaction and space design

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Introduction

Humans are social creatures and live in the world full of social encounters as mentioned by Erving Goffman, an American-Canadian sociologist, which brought up the situation that it is unavoidable for human to escape from interacting with each other. Social interaction focuses on how a two-way communication would happen, whereby people can voice out their mind, thinking, ideas, problems and solutions with the opposite party or parties and vice versa. University students are at the stage whereby communicating is a skill needed to excel in workspace. They are encouraged to be able to cooperate, share ideas, insights, experience and meet various people that build up their social networks. On the other side, human interactions are being pushed forward along with progressive development of technology which bring positive but mostly negative impacts towards the quality of conversation, slowly changing social norm and sequences. Millennial generations in the present associate themselves with social media and other digital gadgets more compared to the conventional face to face interaction that brings different value and level of understanding (Cincotta, 2015).

Student lounges in universities played an important roles as a platform that is able to accommodate different types of activities, and creating an opportunity for students to be able to socially interacting with their peers as well as surrounding. The space design is influential towards the space users as it affects the way people behave. Exclusion made by a space might discourage an individual from interacting, hence it is important to make sure a space is designed to cater the social needs of space occupants and create

an impact towards their behaviour (Sommer, 2007). A theory proposed by Ray Oldenburg explained that human needs a third place as a balancing medium to fulfil their needs of social interaction aside from their safe zone which is their home and professional workplace that is more rigid. By implying certain criterias adapted from the theory onto the student lounge as a supporting factors aside from the space design and planning, it is hoped that the space would be effective and do help in encouraging the interactions among the students in particular.

Social interaction and its occurrence

Social interaction is fundamental in the social life of human being, discussing primarily about how people act and communicate with other people and the way they react towards their actions (University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing, 2010). It forms relationship between two individuals or more and its approaches diverse depending on series of internal factors such as psychosocial state, character, temperament, and personality of each person or external factors including their environment, the physical space that they are in and other affecting issues (e. g. family issues)(Gundogdu, D. et al , 2017 ; Newman, B. M. ; Newman, P. R, 2018).

Personality defines character and temperament of an individual that is habitually practiced and becomes their identity. It affects how they convey their feelings and handle situations during the process of interacting with other people. Some people are inclined to be extroverted or vice versa and this personality issue does influence the acceptance and pace of someone to open up with another individual. It is a complex way of human mind and

emotion that control this part of human beings (Keirse, 1998). However, this personality of human can be influenced or reinforced from the individual's innermost social circle and surroundings.

External factors such as social environment of human beings encompasses the conditions, circumstances, and interactions that they have among each other. It also includes the real life physical settings presented by the society and all other individuals, groups, organizations, as well as systems that come in contact with the particular person. Influences from the surroundings will help to shape the way human overcome and handle an issue (Kirst, 2014). These factors are crucial especially in working space as people might encounter a number of people with their own particular personality and without good communication skill, it is possible that some situation might create understanding between people and create a dysfunction within the working system that is mainly caused by the ineffectiveness of communication.

The basis to socially interact with people is through communicating with them. As a human, stages of communication start from their family circle where they are being brought up. Communication learnt and taught to them ever since they were small will indulge and blends in as their personality and be their basis in interacting with other people later on. In reality, it is nearly impossible to expect every individuals to grow fond of each other in a blink of eyes especially strangers. Today social culture has made people speculative towards their surroundings for safety purpose. Sadly to say, social issues such as crimes, lack of common knowledge and empathy

towards each other and misunderstanding raises the unlikeliness of individuals clashing with each others personality, (Oldenburg, 1997) However space in a way might be able to affect the behaviour of the space users and by creating a comfortable zone and right mood, it might affect the occupants to have a better mood. Space will not be able to control the condition of the human beings and the occurrence that happens due to the human factors however it is able to affect them in a way as a helping medium.

The importance of Student Lounge Space Design and Layout

Physical space interferes with the frequency and correlatively the quality of social interaction by involving the usage of nonverbal cues that are not able to be captured through digital media interaction such as via phone. Face to face interaction will ease the efficiency of communication and established more trust. Nonverbal cues such as tone of voice, facial expression, eye contact might not be the only components needed to have a good two way communication but indeed able to emotionally engage the concerned parties better. These nonverbal communication can capture people feelings better as in people can express their happiness or curiosity through their voices or from their basic gestures as well.

Besides that, the layout of the space itself actually is affected by the people reprocally as the main users of the space get the chance to actually rearrange spaces that was designed for them to their own personal needs and preferences. Some people might find different way of chair arrangements works better for them to fulfil their purpose inside the space.

There are not any exact benchmark that can be fully used to determine the best design that can fulfil every person's needs though the design can be extracted from the common intention and purpose of coming to the student lounge and reduce the possibility of the space not able to answer the necessity of the users (Sommer, 2007).

Based on the research done by Jay. L. Brand (2009) in defining the connection between physical space and social interaction, arrangement of furnitures, spacing, and other design elements within a physical space will help to encourage the interaction among space users. The space affects task interaction of the occupants in respect to the accessibility and efficiency of the interaction inside the space. Physical distance for an instance is determining the frequency and opportunity for people or students to coincide and talk to each other. Physical distance in student lounge would be represented by the pathway size that is prepared between tables, how far is a chair placed from another chair, and in what manner are the chairs arranged. There are so much more than just these examples presented and it is crucial to arrange them with a mind that caters the personal space of each person (Sommer, 2007). Back to the discussion that has been brought up before regarding how different people's personality and responses towards a situation and condition would be, the purpose of the design is not to intrude their privacy however to provide certain and appropriate distance but at the same time able to create more encounters for them to start up a conversation. Reason being is that in workplace, work related information that an employee can get is mainly from the colleagues that share the same

local area (Brand, 2009). So to sum up, distance really does determine the proximity and better understanding of each others.

Besides area planning and layout in overall, detailings of the space is also contributing to a bigger picture and mood of the space. These might looked trivial however strong enough to create different atmosphere and message that is conveyed towards the occupants. Furniture choice and arrangement which removes any barriers between people will likely has more possibility for a communication to occur and couches compared to wooden chairs will help the user feel more comfortable but might be less effective towards strangers. Each design elements plays certain role in affecting the space as a whole.

The Theory of Third space and implementation on student lounge space design

Third space as described by sociologist Ray Oldenburg, is a middle space aside from the two primary spaces of human which is their home and workspace. Third space intends to balance social needs of human being and meant to create a 'home away home' as a medium to gather alike-minded individuals to share their emotion, ideas, and experience. Third space in present community are places such as barber shops, restaurants, cafes, lounges, and even neighborhood centre for as long people would gather to fulfill their social needs (Oldenburg, 1997). However due to trends that are keep changing throughout years, conventional places that fall under the categories of third place such as restaurants, cafes, and shops does not really fulfil the criterias and main purpose of the space and yet some other

places that were not part of third place before evolved as one because it fulfil the requirement of as a place for people to gather and interact with their peers or friends such as a park located just nearby a neighborhood. The possibility of places utilised as a third place is really diverse and flexible in today society. Trends such as coffee shops that is nicely designed has created an image of prestige for anyone to spend their time to have a meeting and do their works there. Though there is nothing wrong about the current coffee shops trends that are established because it is also forming a new culture of society and commercialised which loses its sentiment of being a locally owned space. Commercialised and franchised companies tend to be less engaging in these way because it is catered to bigger audiences and must fulfil the crowd in a general way (Fadem, 2017).

Third place theory suggested that for a place to work as a well-catered space for interaction is that it should not be hard to reach and expensive. The space aims to unify people and bring entertainment for them to stay. It serves as ports or entries for new visitors and newcomers to know more about the culture of the space. It is also a space to unify people. Student lounge itself has actually fulfil this criteria as no fee is needed to enter and utilise the space, however things that might need to be considered is the accessibility of the space to all of the students as main space users that have different venues as their classes. The opportunity and frequencies of meeting other individuals are helping in making communication possible within a space as there are more familiar faces with the same intention and purpose that are using the student lounge.

Besides that, the lounge should not be hideous, hidden, and not welcoming. Student lounge that serves the purpose as a meeting point for the students might as well be one of a supporting space to provide social support that students need. There are several things to describe a third space as a whole. It is a space that boost social interaction and focuses on conversation as its main purpose. Third place also works as a platform to collect time-saving, labor-saving, and money-saving advice sometimes without asking because the people that spend time inside the third place are inclined to be fine with each other and do it without being asked. Common interests are also playing part in creating a bond between individuals. Having more things to talk about helps people to relate with each other and create the quality of conversation as there are things similar about them to talk about. By helping the users to acknowledge the existence of other individuals in the space is one of a factor to have them interact with each other.

By applying suitable supporting aspects from third place, the student lounge function as a mingling area for students can be enhanced by understanding the context and suitable location to place the lounge to create more possible encounters of social interaction.

Case Study : Observation of Student Lounge in The One Academy

A case study about the student lounge of the interior department in The One Academy about the way students utilise their student lounge. As a design student, communication is an essence. It connects people's ideas, understanding, and critical feedbacks that helps to improve themselves. As mentioned previously by Jay L. Brand, in workspace work related information

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are obtained from people within six-feet of their primary work area which also applies to university students when handling their assignments and projects which is just emphasize how important socially interacting with others is.

Current design of The One Academy Student Lounge is designed practically as the space is not too big itself and it is located in the main block of The One Academy. There are several facilities that can be accessed as shown in the image which are seating areas, tables, lockers, toilet, and also plug points.

Based on the observation, people tend to pass by this student lounge because it is located strategically near the library and other classes in different buildings. The lounge is usually packed with students and an observation is done to measure the level of interaction that occurred in the space by noting down number of people that actually stay or just passing by the space. The observation is done from 1-3 P. M. by taking in consideration of lunch hour and after class hour as there will be more crowd to observe.

Fig 2. Floorplan of the student lounge in Main Block of The One Academy

Referring back to the data collected throughout four days of observation from 17 July 2018 to 20 July 2018, it can be seen that quite a number of people are most likely to pass by the lounge. Most students stayed back to spend their time doing assignments either with their laptop or just simply sketching. The students have tendencies to come in groups and are mostly classmates. They would take a whole table for themselves and stay for quite

long after they finished their class. Several students stayed by themselves and do their things and whilst doing their assignments, they would start up small talks within the time frame and back to do their assignments and had little talks again and keep repeating the cycle.

Fig 3. Floorplan of the student lounge in Main Block of The One Academy

From the overall data collected, it is shown that more than 50% of the total occupants or passerby actually interacts within the space which means the space is indeed functioning in encouraging students to interact. This number is constituted from those who stays and pass by the space. The interconnection that can be explained is the fact that by preparing seating area and tables based on their needs as students does help to increase the number of interaction that happens and that way the communication will naturally occur among those who stay. The fact that people choose to stay and do their work also attract their friends that coincidentally pass by the space to stop and strike a small talks with their friends or even settle down in the space.

Conclusion

Communication might sound common but it is a method strongly impacting the system of society. It helps individuals to understand their surrounding, to understand themselves and also build social circle. Social support and acceptance that someone received will build their confidence and better performance as well as ensuring the health of individual mentally. To conclude, third place criteria of having the space located where the access to

the space is easier has helped to create more opportunity for the occupants to start up a conversation and leads to more active and engaging learning experiences as they are inclined to meet more often with other people. it was also proven partially that certain components or facilities might influence the number of people into the space as well as understanding how the design is affecting the space users.