

Life at Luna

by

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Introduction

Coffee and caffeine are the typical starts to America's day, whether that be making a hot cup at home or heading off to the local coffee shop to buy one. The coffee shop provides the products that people want, but the environment is one that can hardly be replaced. Coffee shops are known for stimulating conversation and catching up with others as well as providing a place for productivity and getting work done. With this in mind, we thought a coffee shop was an intriguing environment to study to view the interactions and behaviors that occurred daily. We sought to observe and interpret the nonverbal cues used in the coffee shop, Luna Cafe, to gather more in-depth information on what types of interactions occur, the overall environment, and the differing people and personalities of the customers. The research questions we used for the basis of our study are as follows: How much noise is in the background of this environment and how does the music help or hurt the ambiance of the cafe? How do the perceptions and visual characteristics of the environment affect consumers? Does gender influence the behavior exhibited throughout the cafe?

Methods

Our observations occurred inside Luna Cafe located on Main Street in De Pere, Wisconsin. Most of our observations took place on weekdays in the late morning to early afternoon given that the cafe hours are 6:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. daily, but there were some observations that occurred on the weekend and some early in the morning. The times we observed in Luna Cafe were based on our individual schedules, however, we went at different times of the week to attain as much variety in our observations as possible. We mostly went to our observations individually or met each other in passing.

Each of us visited the cafe multiple times for three hours of observation, totaling nine hours. We were able to record our observations on our laptops while sitting in the cafe since many customers in the cafe were on laptops or other electronic devices to study or work. This way, we were easily able to observe and immediately record our observations without standing out from the crowd, being able to blend in with the others who were typing away at their laptops. We produced 28 pages of observation notes collectively after finishing our three-hour observation sessions. Our rationale for taking notes involved finding an open seat in the cafe and using our computers to type as we watched what happened throughout the cafe. We would typically peer up from our computers to watch someone, then type what we saw, observing their actions, facial expressions, and physical characteristics. We also would watch what they did in relation to other people and write down if there was any significance. Our overall goal was to write down as much detailed information as we could during our time at Luna Cafe.

After completing our individual observations, we compared notes with each other. To code our observations, we gathered our observation notes into a collective document. From there, we each started off, individually, reading through the notes carefully at least twice. After this, we began the process of coding by highlighting portions of the observations that coincided with various labels that we created. These labels were based on our initial questions about the environment, the music, and the gender of the people we observed. The labels we decided upon for coding included the environment, kinesics, proxemics, and physical characteristics: in particular, gender, age, and dress. Finally, we met as a group to put together our findings and link them to specific nonverbal communication theories that we agreed fit best.

Discussion

Environment

The environment is a big factor in nonverbal communication related to consumer behavior. Luna Cafe is a small space, so the owners must be smart in how they use it. Luna Cafe just finished undergoing a remodel which created an open concept to make it more inviting. One of the main issues with the new setup is most of the tables are within one foot of each other. According to Hall's Theory of Proxemics, intimate distance is within one and a half feet whereas social distance, such as a meeting is four to 11 feet (Agnus, 2012). Coffee shops typically do not have tables 11 feet apart from each other, but when one is trying to find a seat, one should not have to worry about hitting the surrounding tables. In a normal coffee shop setting, one would expect to maintain somewhere in the middle of that distance away from others which would be classified under Hall's Theory of Proxemics as personal distance, or one and a half feet to three feet apart (Agnus, 2012). Luna Cafe violated this distance by having the tables so close to each other. They offer multiple seating options, but many of the seats are within one foot of each other.

By violating the intimate distance of Hall's Theory of Proxemics, Luna Cafe's environment allows for conversations to be intruded upon. Since the distance between the tables is so close, multiple conversations can be heard across the cafe. It was difficult not to hear other people's conversations while we were seated at our tables, which was an issue for many of the customers. If a person wanted to communicate something personal or private, they would lean towards each other, giving them the ability to hear better without getting mixed up with various other conversations. Most of the time people were talking at a moderate volume, but during busy hours, this volume got out of control. The small space of the cafe causes many difficulties in terms of volume during busy times because all the sounds combined echo and mix in one large, open space.

The sounds of the cafe were rather intrusive throughout the time we spent there. The majority of our observation time involved a busy setting, which meant a lot of conversational noise and noises of coffee machines, dishes, and music. Many people use music as an element to improve their productivity, but this does not always work how people think. In fact, silence or no music typically contributes to higher levels of cognitive performance and loud music at high intensity decreases cognitive performance significantly (Dolegui, 2013). Although the genre of the music does not matter as much as the volume of the music on productivity, it plays a factor in the coffee shop environment.

Coffee itself, along with the environment involving the type of music being played provides a psychological stimulant and can provide a mood and energy boost (Garner, 2015). The music within Luna Cafe was noted within our observation notes to be varying between being too loud and too quiet. Music in a coffee shop should be pleasant and contribute to the conversation when it involves acoustics, which people find appealing (Waxman, 2006). Since the music in Luna Cafe did not meet these criteria, we saw a lot of customers put in headphones to listen to their own music if they sat individually. The environment was productive for them, but the sounds were not.

The environment involves not just the interior of the cafe, but the building and the design of the shop itself. Using multisensory skills is an important part of the total experience of the customer and the environment (Motoki, Takahashi, & Spence, 2021). When building a coffee shop, one must consider the furniture, walls, and lighting. Luna Cafe's lighting involves a lot of natural light through large windows on the front face of the shop. The lighting indoors is dim but allows for excellent supply on a cloudy day. The walls in the cafe are mostly brick, and the floor and benches are made up of light-colored wood making the environment warm and inviting.

There are very few dark colors throughout the cafe. This is ideal because research found that warm colors can lead to people coming back to the shop (Motoki et al., 2021).

Within a coffee shop, we can think about the six dimensions of an environment and how they affect us in this context. The six dimensions include formality, warmth, privacy, familiarity, constraint, and distance. Coffee is psychologically warming to us, and coffee shops are viewed as warm and conducive to conversation (Garner, 2015). When an environment is psychologically warm, it encourages people to linger, relax and experience comfort. We can see this take place at Luna Cafe because of the amount of time we observed people lounging or working within the coffee shop.

Another aspect to bring in is privacy, which can be affected by many factors such as lighting, noise, and any partitions in the space. Public privatism occurs in coffee shops frequently, especially in Luna Cafe, where people do their private work in a public space (Garner, 2015). Many customers make the space in the cafe their own by working on their personal computers and others spend the time in the cafe meeting with co-workers, family members, or friends. Although the cafe has seemingly low privacy with no partitions, tables extremely close together, and an open floor plan, people still utilize the cafe as a private area for their work or conversations.

Lastly, familiarity in a coffee shop is important to study because people appear to be comfortable and “at home” in the space. If one is unfamiliar with a space, it can cause anxiety, but we see very little of this in Luna Cafe. There are some exceptions, like if it is a customer’s first time in the coffee shop, they may be unsure of the norms or what to do, but overall, everyone is very comfortable in the space. Familiarity with a space also allows for relaxation and

comfort of conversation even if it involves work or business (Garner, 2015). The cozy and inviting atmosphere of Luna Cafe allows individuals to feel this in the environment.

Gender

Separate from the physical environment itself, another element that played a significant role in the observation notes was gender. The most notable elements included the overall number of males versus females in Luna Cafe, the age of the men and women, the dress of different people and how it related to their outward gender identity and the orientation and proxemics of men and women. All these elements impacted various ways in which men and women communicated non-verbally.

Overall, the number of women in the cafe was often greater than the number of men with ratios as high as 15:3, and although there was a diverse range of ages in the cafe, the elderly population was prominent. Given the small atmosphere of the cafe, it was easy to pick out the ratio of women to men unless there were people working in the back kitchen. Collectively, there was not a single day of observation in which the number of men in the coffee shop outnumbered women.

Expectancy Violation Theory tends to occur within opposite-gender dyads more than same-gender dyads within Luna Cafe. There are norms and expectations that seem to be broken in relationships that are less familiar or strangers. These violations occurred in various ways, but one that stuck out was when one person was standing too close to another person in the line to order. This caused nervous and anxious behaviors in the person that was being violated. Another way the expectations were violated at Luna Cafe was based on how close the tables were to each other. If someone was in a private conversation, they felt violated by anyone sitting at a table near them. The conversation among customers at their respective tables also revealed some

violations. In fact, women tend to choose a smaller distance from a friendly person and a large distance from an unfriendly person. They keep this close distance from a particular person until their conversation shifts to a bad or not-neutral message (Hmilyar, 2015). This could be seen by observing body orientation and posture in many of the conversations and was significant throughout the cafe.

Age was another contributing factor that affected the observed behaviors. The age range of men and women at the cafe was between the early 20s and mid to late 60s. Age and gender work together in many unique ways including how they distance themselves from each other. Women-to-women interactions if both are between the ages of 18 to 45 will usually converse within the personal zone, but if the other person is 50 years or older, they will stick to the public zone (Hmilyar, 2015). We could see this taking place in Luna Cafe with college student friends and women sitting together. They would typically sit close together and orient their bodies in a way that suggested friendship and closeness. This changes in woman-to-man interaction, where the woman would stay more distant from any man over 26 years old (Hmilyar, 2015). This may explain why women get anxious when a man stands too close to them in line or when other expectancy violations occur.

Another important finding was those who appeared to be in their early 20s commonly sat alone doing work on laptops. Since men were usually outnumbered by women in the cafe, it was typical for young males to be sitting alone working on their laptops. For women, there were usually groups of two or three sitting and having conversations interpersonally. However, there were outliers in terms of gender and age groups throughout Luna Cafe. One outlier was an interaction between an older man in his late 60s and a younger woman who was in her late 20s. The two were sitting at a two-person table with the man facing the counter and door, so the man

seemed to be dominating the conversation. His age and gender also affect this assumption because of the age gap and the way he was dressed in business casual attire compared to the woman who wore more casual and comfortable clothing. This coincides with males tending to be more spatially dominant while females tend to be more vulnerable and have a lesser spatial status in interpersonal interactions (Madden, 1999). Hall's Theory of Proxemics would also indicate that in a social setting such as a coffee shop, the space between a man and a woman would be less frequently invaded due to the difference in status (Madden, 1999).

Physical appearance and clothing were important aspects of our observations at Luna Cafe and a lot can be interpreted from our findings. One main observation was tie-dye shirts being a popular choice among older women, along with brighter and bolder colors on clothing. Clothing color is an important aspect of both genders' visual appearance and expression of personality (Kodžoman, 2019). This is interesting because the bright and bold colors of orange, yellow, and red are seen as the less favored clothing colors, and the more preferred colors are different shades of blue and violet (Kodžoman, 2019). Young adult men and women were noted to be wearing these preferred cooler and darker colors more than older women.

During the week, many customers were seen wearing business attire, and the interactions between these people were kept at a greater distance by comparison to those who were in the cafe chatting with friends. Those who wear formal clothing are seen as being less approachable, and therefore, are more likely to abide by the appropriate spatial distance outlined by Hall's Theory of Proxemics (Kodžoman, 2019). Of the four clothing orientations including clothing conscious, exhibitionism, practicality, and conservatism, it was observed that customers at Luna Cafe seem to dress in a professional way that relates to conservatism or in a practical manner, valuing comfort over looks. Given the types of behavior observed, these clothing orientations

complement the environment of Luna Cafe as being a place for working individually and with colleagues or a relaxed conversation with friends and family.

Limitations of Research

Although we tried to be as thorough as we could with our research, there were still some things we could not control or could have done better. To start, we only did a total of nine hours of observation. To get a good grasp on the environment and the nonverbal communication behaviors of the customers, more hours of observation were necessary. Another setback for us was the layout of the coffee shop. The cafe offered very few seating options where we could see the entire cafe. Even if there was a good seat for observation, it was often taken by another customer. Our observations were limited to the seat we were in during that time and what we could see and observe from where we were. In addition, Luna Cafe has two locations, but our observation only took place in one location. The other location could play a large role in analyzing the nonverbal behaviors, but we do not know how it would have affected our findings. Lastly, each of our group members have their own personal preferences on what we observed, the seat we took in the cafe, what we felt was important to write down, and the time of day we went to observe. These personal preferences and biases led to different perspectives in each of our observations resulting in a hard-to-control factor.

Conclusion

Luna Cafe features a small, intimate environment that most people see as warm and inviting. Although there are factors throughout the environment that may inhibit certain elements, such as music inhibiting calmness and productivity and the closed tables inhibiting privacy, it is a space that most people feel comfortable and welcomed into. In addition, gender can play a key role in interactions, proxemics, and what their physical appearance and clothing

communicate. Nonverbal communication is a form of communication that is often glossed over, taken for granted and not talked about. To our research, nonverbal communication is a key aspect of many of our daily interactions from the messages we receive from other people to the messages we send out from our own nonverbal behaviors. The clothing we adorn ourselves with, the facial expressions we make, the distance we set around ourselves, and so many more factors all contribute to who we are and combined send a bigger, more honest message about ourselves than our verbal communication ever could.

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