

Dales and the Environment's Influence: An Inspection of Dales and How the Environment
Affects the Students that Choose to go there

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Dales is unique in the St. Norbert College environment because it is the only sports bar and lounge function the campus has. Dales brings in a lot of students that come in and out during its open hours. Dales is well known for being one of the most popular spots on the St. Norbert campus for students to come visit. The Students go to Dales for many reasons, whether it is to grab food and leave, to dine in with their food and relax, to socialize with friends or social groups, or even some students go to Dales to study. We wanted to know why students are drawn there as well as what types of people are attracted to dales and the times of day that attract the most customers. Therefore, this brings about our research question: How does the environment affect the use of the restaurant space by the students and what can be assumed about Dale's environment that results in the way it's used?

Methods

Data Collection

We came up with a method in which to test our research question through physical data collection. As researchers we went to Dales to actively observe the environment and further understand the effects of the space on the students and the type of students that it tends to attract. We did this by bringing our computers and as nonpersons, analyzing every aspect of the establishment that we could observe including social interactions both verbally and nonverbally, the environment, and the relationship between the two. More specifically, we observed the way in which the environment affected the social context in terms of atmospheric influence, artifacts and clothing, server quality, and the clientele attracted. Each of the four of us attended Dales on three to four separate nights and wrote approximately three pages each night over a span of two

to three hours. The format in which we took our original notes was not meant to be adept in terms of vocabulary or containing complex ideas. Rather our intention was to write the most amount of information in the simplest way possible, therefore we could more accurately analyze the data to draw conclusions of Dale's influence on clientele.

Data Analysis

In order to answer the research question we had to accurately identify common themes that related to both the clientele and the environment of Dales. We did this by having each individual analyze all thirty seven pages of observations with eight core nonverbal themes in mind, that way we had a broad understanding of different influences of the environment and people in it rather than focusing on one specific theme. After we all completed our decoding of the observations we gathered as a group and discussed our several different findings which gave one another new perspective and more insight into the research question. From there we were able to identify and further examine these five main themes through additional research: Social interaction (Customer-Customer Interaction [CCI], Customer-Employee Interaction [CEI]), sService Quality and Customer Satisfaction, Atmospheric Influence, Artifacts, and Restaurant layout/time Influence.

Discussion Section

From this analysis we were able to discover six main themes. Which consist of the atmospheric influence, the artifacts in Dales, Service quality and Customer satisfaction, social interactions within Dales, how the restaurant hours influence the students when they come into Dales, and the expectancy violation theory. All of these themes are demonstrated and found to be of importance as they are key factors of the Dales environment and influence the students in the way they act, dress, and overall interact with the restaurant and others within Dales.

Social Interactions

When it comes to the social interaction aspect in Dales between customer-customer and customer-employee, there are many varieties of emotions that come through the door. As an employee for about a year and a half, I have seen a lot of things happen inside Dales and the environment is different compared to other food places on campus such as Phil's and Ed's. When eating at a restaurant that is late in the day hours, many people come to eat here if they weren't able to eat dinner at the cafe or are just in the mood for some Dales food. Many people enjoy the variety of foods that are on the menu and most of the time, they are undecided on what they would want to eat when they are up to order. Dale's design allows for social interaction between people by having booths, along with movable chairs and tables. It allows for big or small group interactions and because of this, Dale's is perceived as a spot to eat, relax, and socialize with people.

Social Interactions: Customer-Customer Interaction

I see many different ways on how the environment affects the use of the restaurant's space by the students and how the Dale's environment is perceived. The customer-customer interaction is the most important aspect of how Dale's is operated and its main goal is to provide a great environment for students to eat and relax with their friends. When working, it was rare to see someone come alone and order food for dine-in. Most of the time, students that came alone tended to order food for take out or placed an online order so they could pick it up and go back to wherever they were originally. It was common to see students of two or more come to Dales to dine-in which is the intention of the Dale's environment to have groups of students come and enjoy food inside the restaurant. In addition, there are TVs installed around the restaurant and they are all visible to see wherever the students decide to sit which allows for group gatherings to

come and watch sports games. Whenever football, basketball, or baseball was on the tv's, I noticed groups of guys would tend to view the tv more than groups of girls. The guys would adjust themselves when they were at their table to be able to eat and watch the game at the same time.

The major impact that can occur between customer-customer interaction is the social environment, meaning that there are multiple customers constantly in which the experience of the customer can impact others (Moura e Sá & Amorim 2017). Dales is meant to be a social environment and that there isn't a voice limit while being in there but respectfully and not screaming to annoy the others. The customer's interactions could have a domino effect on how the rest of the environment could and I have noticed it myself. When groups that come in socializing and appear that they are having a good time, other groups of people tend to get comfortable and place themselves at a similar status as that one sociable group in which creating a positive environment and that customers won't have to worry about being judged for being the loudest ones in Dales. Then on the other hand, when there aren't too many people in Dales and there are a few groups present, it tends to be more quiet and customers tend to use their inside voices so they won't stand out in Dales and be recognized as the loud ones. Customer-customer interaction is important in the Dales' environment and it usually determines what kind of night we employees are expecting coming from the customers.

Social interactions: Customer-Employee Interaction

Customer-Employee Interaction is very important to help determine what type of environment Dales is all about and that being a good employee could alter a customer's feeling from what they once had. When I work, I tend to put on a higher pitched/happier voice and give more eye contact to the customer when I take their order at the register or when I bring their food

to them. When taking orders at the register, I usually start off with a hello and then ask what they would like to eat. Since face masks are required indoors and block our nose and below, eye contact and tone of voice is key to give off a positive tone to the customers. I recognized that a lot of times that when I use a higher pitched/positive voice and give a good amount of eye contact, customers tend to respond positively, especially the women. With the men, they tend to say “appreciate it” and would give me a head nod after I take their order. Despite using a higher/pitched voice and eye contact, I wouldn’t always receive the same energy back from the customer due to them possibly being shy or they are not in a positive mood. These types of people tend to make less eye contact and try to order as quickly as possible and swipe their card quickly to pay. No matter what reaction I receive from customers, I always make sure to use my positive tone of voice and maybe it could have a positive impact on them on how they go about the rest of their day.

In order for customers to have a positive environment in Dales, the process of satisfaction with consumption, which is essential for the service process, must be the employee’s number goal to have when serving others (Falter & Karsten 2020). Having satisfaction with service leads to a positive impact at the table and the environment in the restaurant. Providing a positive mood to customers is key for me when working because I enjoy people having a smile and socializing at Dales which puts me in a happier mood too. It gives the notion of communion which our school strives for and it all starts us to make it possible and bring a positive attitude wherever we go. Bringing a positive tone to groups gives the domino effect to the entire group and it has happened to me many times where one member of the group was happy to order from me and then it led on to the rest of the group members and it was something great to see. The

Dales environment can vary each day, you never know what type of environment it is going to be until it opens and all depends on the customer's and employee's attitude they have.

Service quality and Customer satisfaction

The purpose of restaurants and any company is to have the most customers possible and have them continue to consume their services. Customer satisfaction is strongly influenced by service quality (Yan, Wang, & Chau, 2013). Therefore, when there is more customer satisfaction the more likely customers will return to the restaurant for their services. When it comes to Dales it is the same thing, this is a business that has a limited amount of customers as it is usually just students but from time to time the customers can be professors and other guests that are visiting the campus. So Dales has to be sure that the customers are satisfied with everything that is provided to them. So that the space is used by the students because without good service quality and customer satisfaction the restaurant would not continue to have business. Furthermore, the business is only able to run because of the environment that is created by the staff and customers. This environment that they all create results in the use of the restaurant space. By this it goes into how often it is used by customers as well as how frequently the customers choose to return to the restaurant space and Dales' environment. Overall, There are many things that go into the concept of customer satisfaction and the use of an environment. But it all starts with customer service experience, it is shaped by things such as the core service itself, the physical environment and surroundings, as well as the social interactions between the customers and employees/other customers (Tran & Tournois, 2019).

In Dales it is a sports lounge that gives the customers some entertainment while they eat as they have TVs placed all around the restaurant. This is very important as nowadays customers do not only go out to eat for a meal but they go out to pursue their inclination that they have

some form of entertainment (Yan, Wang, & Chau, 2013). This is well demonstrated with the popularity in Dales, they have a lot of people that come in to use the space for relaxing and watching tv, that usually consist of them playing sports events and games. Likewise, customer satisfaction is further brought past the entertainment that can be provided; it is also brought by the scale of the restaurant. As higher scale restaurants have less opportunities for entertainment and consist of a specific type of atmosphere. Therefore, as Yan, Wang, & Chau (2013) studied, customer satisfaction with service quality has more positive effects on customer loyalty and revisitation for downscale restaurants. Not only for the atmosphere but also for the general price and value when compared to higher scale restaurants. Moreover, this demonstrates that the environment makes the students feel more relaxed and gives them a sense of satisfaction from the entertainment as well as the low scale style it has. That which affects the use of the space as students use Dales as a relaxing place to hangout in the afternoon.

The next thing that is important for customer satisfaction is the employee interactions that makes up the general service quality. This means not only the way the employees act but also how they present themselves. To start, as studied by Tran & Tournois (2019), the way employees interact with the customers will create a perceived quality of their interaction and overall experience. Thus, when the employees have a sense of helpfulness, politeness, and pleasantness when interacting with customers it can increase the customers satisfaction and quality. Therefore, employees should be fostering their social interactions because if they are aware of them they can improve the quality of service and experience for the customers (Tran & Tournois, 2019). Likewise, when employees are giving the customers a positive experience they can develop an emotional bond with the restaurant that creates more service (Tran & Tournois, 2019). Dales' employees do a good job at this and creating a positive experience for the

students/customers. For the fact that students are the ones working and running the front of the restaurant. As a result of this the customers already have an emotional bond to some extent as they come in and some of their friends are workers. As we saw in our analysis when customers would come up to the desk when ordering and socialize with the workers like Gabe, Abby, and Daijah. It creates a more relaxed, fun, and kind environment for the students so they feel more comfortable in the space. Furthermore, the environment is developed even further by the way the employees dress and present themselves (Yan, Wang, & Chau, 2013). For this instance, with Dales it enhances the relaxed and comfortable feel for most of the employees, as they wear loungewear. Such as sweatpants and hoodies. Henceforth, this comfortable environment develops customer satisfaction with the students/customers at St. Norbert which can have a positive effect on customers. Thus, creating customer loyalty, as studied by Yan, Wang, & Chau (2013) if there is a good environment and positive employee attitudes there will be better service quality and more customer satisfaction/loyalty.

Influence of Atmosphere/Location

The atmosphere of a restaurant creates a first impression. It sets the stage for the overall enjoyment of the guests and there are many elements that go into creating the perfect atmosphere (Group, 2021). The atmosphere of Dale's Sports Lounge is laid back, which has a lot to do with who comes in and what goes on. Dale's is located inside of Michael's Commons and shares a space with the main cafeteria on campus, Ruth's Marketplace. It's right in the heart of campus, between the freshman and sophomore dorms and living spaces because they will no doubt utilize Dale's the most. It's right in between all of the buildings where classes and meetings take place. And, it's also located pretty close to the main entrance of the main part of campus. Although Dale's is an after-hours eatery and lounge, it's advertised in such a way that even visitors can

appreciate what it has to offer. Even when Dale's itself isn't open and operating, you can still sit and lounge at the tables and booths when breakfast, lunch, and any hours in between are going on.

Dale's is a place where you can relax. It's not as big and open as the cafeteria; it's small space is designed for cozy comfort. It's only open after hours, between the hours of 7:30pm and 10pm most nights. It's a place you can go after a day full of classes, meetings, practices, social interaction, and homework. The tvs and close seating create an atmosphere where you can linger, hangout with friends, and talk for hours about anything and everything. The food served is bar-style, such as wings, sandwiches, and chips with dip. Reminiscent of an actual bar, the food creates a similar atmosphere of a place where you can have fun and let go. In general, the seating is open enough so as to not cut off all others around you in the lounge. It's not supposed to be a very private and formal setting. The point is to interact with those near you. The lighting is warm and welcoming, which also adds to the comfortability of the atmosphere.

Artifacts

The clothes people wear and the items they bring with them, also known as artifacts, are extremely important to creating a certain atmosphere. Even restaurants, of all caliber, have expectations for their guests (Inc., 2016). The artifacts of the people who come into Dale's also tell you a lot about what kind of place Dale's is meant to be. Girls usually come in wearing leggings, sweatpants, yoga pants, or shorts/spandex. They'll be wearing t-shirts, sweaters/hoodies, jackets, and comfortable sneakers. Men will usually be wearing caps/hats, sweaters/hoodies, sweatpants or shorts, and comfortable sneakers. One of the other common trends I've noticed among both men and women are wearing birkenstocks and crocs. In our society, these two types of shoes are considered peak comfortable footwear, so to see so many

people wearing them to Dale's just affirms that this lounge is a place of relaxation. There was also no shortage of people who brought backpacks with them, presumably stopping at Dale's for food immediately after their schedule or wanting to do some late night studying before ending their day. Some outliers I had noticed were there were a few groups of people who popped into Dale's dressed up in more formal attire. It's obvious they had somewhere to be other than the places planned out in their regular school schedule; either before or after eating at Dale's. But if they did choose to linger, they would nonetheless relax into the booths or chairs and blend into the chill atmosphere of Dale's.

Restaurant Layout/Time Influence

One of the major themes that we were able to identify about the interaction between Dale's and its customers fell under the umbrella of the restaurant's layout and the time of day. We addressed how this affected the customer or groups of customers in certain ways by examining when customers frequent most often, who they sit with, where they sit or spatial proximity, and group size. This theme helps us understand the research question through the scope of how the clientele is influenced by certain factors such as busy times, who tends to frequent the establishment, and how environment affects seat choice.

Dale's has very interesting hours as it opens at 7:30 pm in the evenings after Ruth's dining hall closes at 7 pm. Dales stays open from 7:30-10:30 pm with the intention to allow Saint Norbert students another option for dining after 7 pm in the evening. Upon observation we discovered that Dales' biggest rush comes when the restaurant opens at 7:30 pm due to the fact that oftentimes students will miss dinner at Ruths and therefore decide to eat at Dales. A trend that we identified was that customers, generally groups, arrived minutes before the opening of Dales in order to get in line when the restaurant opened because they were hungry and aware

that oftentimes there is a line upon opening. Our research group recognized that Tuesday nights at 9 pm were the second busiest time for Dales due to the fact that the BIG group had a tradition of coming in after their weekly chapter meetings for food. Although the next busiest times are not recurring, similar to BIG was when other social groups or teams arrived at one time which happened fairly frequently.

Another more complex aspect that we analyzed in order to better understand the clientele was the location of small group seating and proximity. According to a study by Balnchard, Dyachenko, and Kettle a majority of patrons in eating establishments strategically locate themselves in terms of proximity to others and proximity to focal points in the room (2020). After reviewing our research we concluded that oftentimes though not all the time there was clear intention in the seating choice of individuals in Dales based on the proximity to particular focal points of interest or other patrons. Primarily, we identified that those who were sports fans or came with the intention to watch sports positioned themselves in front of one of the four televisions in Dales in order to see and hear better. In terms of proximity to other groups we identified a correlation between multiple sets of two groups who knew individuals from the other group and therefore had close proximity to one another due to comfortability. Finally, we identified tendencies of small groups of one or two people during non busy times and concluded that they tend to choose sitting away from others on the outer portion of the restaurant.

A final way in which we analyzed the type of people that Dales attracted was through identifying individuals that frequented Dales most often and the correlation between their reasons for attendance. What we identified gave us a further understanding of the types of people who come to Dales and the group sizes they come in. We concluded that the most frequent customers of Dales were those who came in groups, whether it be a social group, friend group, or

sports team. Most often we observed groups of three and above who were able to utilize the larger tables and move the semi fixed features to accommodate their group. Additionally, we were able to make direct correlation for the reason some particular groups came for example: one evening a sorority meeting was held, another BIG came after their chapter meeting, and finally the volleyball team came after their practice. In a study performed by Auty the reason for this is that the primary reason for college students to choose to eat out is not for the food quality or convenience rather for the social aspect (1992). Dales uses the time of day and spatial setup to influence the type of individual the establishment attracts in order to best serve the Saint Norbert community.

Conclusion

The research question that we posed as a group was: How does the environment affect the use of the restaurant space by the students and what can be assumed about Dale's environment that results in the way it's used? To answer this question we performed a series of observations of the Dale's environment including social interactions, customer satisfaction, service quality, the artifacts people wore, the atmospheric influence, and the restaurant layout and time of day. Next we identified and analyzed common themes among the observations and used them to answer the research question. Through our research we concluded that those who most frequented Dales were in groups of three or larger who are incorporated in some sort of group and tend to sit near focal points. Additionally, the most busy time of day is 7:30 pm when oftentimes there are lines of various groups whether social, friends or a sports team. As well as the importance of interactions with customers-customer and customer-employees to develop a good environment. That will result in better service quality and customer satisfaction so that Dales' space will be used more frequently by students/customers. Overall, our research has shown that all of the

found themes from our analysis contribute to the development of a positive and relaxed environment that leads to the restaurant space being used as a place for students to lounge and relax.

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