

Spatial Experience in a Bookstore Based on Third Place Theory Case Study: Gramedia Bookstores

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ABSTRACT

The changes in consumer behavior and the digitization of books have made visitors increasingly reluctant to visit bookstores, pressuring bookstores to modify the bookstores space design so it can still attract visitors and that bookstores can survive. One of the big bookstores that is still surviving today is Gramedia. The development of the bookstore function no longer just serves as a retail store where the main activities are just book buying and selling, but also other functions to add to the visitor's spatial experience such as a reading room or a community space. This is also in accordance with the Third Place theory which stated that inclusive public spaces are needed in the development of community life. The unique spatial experience in the development of bookstore dimensions and design as can be seen in the Gramedia bookstore has the potential to fulfill human and consumer needs ranging from material things to the need for socializing. This research compared the designs of two Gramedia bookstores to discover how they influenced the consumer's experience of the space and conducted semi-structured interviews with visitors and bookstores management to know how these designs affect the users. The results of this research showed that the Gramedia bookstore still does not meet all the qualifications to become a third space, however the design changes have the potential to reflect the development of community needs for space that can fulfill the function of a place for community interaction.

Keywords: Design, Bookstores, Gramedia, Spatial Experience, Third Place Theory

INTRODUCTION

The presence of bookstores in society initially functioned as a retail space although, over time, changes in consumer behavior and the digitization of books have made visitors increasingly reluctant to visit bookstores, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic which caused offline bookstores to struggle. One of the largest surviving bookstores is the Gramedia Bookstore.

Despite some struggles, some branches of the store continue to develop to become more than just a place to buy and sell books.

From the perspective of social and economic development, consumer needs have gradually shifted from physiological needs to psychological needs and self-fulfillment (Huang & Hands, 2020). To maintain their existence, bookstores have developed to have other functions to adapt the current consumer behavior through the addition of the Experience Economy function. Experience Economy is when the company that manages the bookstores could take their commodity and turn it into a form of experience value that is sold by creating spontaneity, uniqueness and entertainment for consumers (Lu, 2017).

This research focuses on the development of the spatial design taken by the Gramedia bookstore and finds out what influence results from these design changes. The dimensions of a space in an urban area can have a big influence on living patterns, and the existence of a bookstore that still exists today can be a strategic example that can become a reference for the design of Third Place that is needed by the community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Third Place Theory

Public space cannot be separated from the development of a city (Oldenburg, 1989). In the book *The Great Good Place*, Ray Oldenburg first used the term third place when dividing space into three theories. According to him, the first place is the home or place to carry out domestic activities, then the second place is the workplace where productive activities are carried out. The third place is a space that balances the conditions of the two main spaces or an inclusive public space that can bring together people without conditions with other people to carry out interactions or other activities in the same space. The explanation begins with the industrial revolution that occurred in the United States, which made people start to separate work and home.

Oldenburg then divided eight aspects that can make people comfortable in Third Place, thus are:

1. **Neutral Ground:** Everyone can come and go without being tied to anything. This neutral public space condition can attract people to attend and unite the social life of people from various levels.
2. **Leveler:** It can be interpreted as the absence of differences that dominate one or become the ruler of another. It can also be interpreted as a public space that equalizes people and is able to create the same social conditions in that place.
3. **Conversation is The Main Activity:** Basically, the activities carried out at Third Place are communication or interaction between friends who entertain each other.
4. **Accessibility and Accommodation:** This place must be easily accessible both

in terms of time and location.

5. The Regulars: Third Place can have regular visitors or can also become members of the place with strict trust building.
6. Low Profile: A place that is physically simple and there is no artificiality in the place.
7. Mood is Playful: This public space has a pleasant atmosphere and is not boring so that users will want to keep coming to the place again and again.
8. A Home Away from Home: A space that is a home but can provide comfort like a home physically and mentally.

METHODOLOGY

To obtain the data needed in this research, the research will be conducted by using qualitative methods to obtain information about the changes in spatial design that have occurred at the Gramedia Bookstore and their influence on visitors' spatial experience. The type of research that will be used more precisely is a descriptive qualitative method which can describe data systematically, in accordance to facts and stated accurately regarding the character or reality of a particular population (Krisyantono, 2014). Then the analysis process will be carried out by making observations followed by interviews with respondents and combining several results of literature studies as a theoretical basis used to carry out synthesis.

The data that has been obtained will later be processed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns or themes in data. This analysis method was used as a technique in this research to obtain more concrete results from the interview process carried out. With the thematic analysis process, a uniform conclusion can be drawn and describe the data in general so that the analysis process can be carried out more precisely and efficiently.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

This research was conducted at two branches of the Gramedia bookstore. These two branches are:

1. Gramedia Matraman
Located in Matraman Street, East Jakarta, this branch was first opened in 2007 and was once the largest bookstore in Southeast Asia. It was temporarily closed during Covid-19 but is now the main warehouse branch for distribution of books in Jakarta and surrounding areas. The main strategies used for marketing currently are book bazaars and holding in store exhibitions
2. Gramedia Grand Indonesia
Located in Grand Indonesia Mall, this branch was first opened in 2008. They were the first bookstore located in the most modern mall in Southeast Asia at that time. Before it was closed for renovation in 2023, this branch occupies the second and third floor of Grand Indonesia. After being renovated, they now occupy the third floor of East Mall Grand Indonesia while carrying the Fresh and Fun concept. Before the renovation, the store could accommodate more

than 10,000 books. However, after the renovation, the marketing strategy mainly used in stores was only to sell best seller books, which only consist of around 1000 books in store.

The research was carried out by observing the object and interviewing the management and bookstores visitors based on eight characteristics of the Third Place theory proposed by Oldenburg. The following are the results of this data collection through observation:

1. Neutral Ground:

In both Matraman and Grand Indonesia branches. visitors are not required to become members or need to be attached to the place to be able to come and visit. Everyone is free to come and go.

2. Levelers:

There are no special treatments that occur in both Matraman and Grand Indonesia branches. All visitors who come and want to buy books can do so without having to meet any criteria and they are welcome to read wherever they want.

3. Accessibility and Accommodation

Both of these branches are located where there are various types of public transportation services available. Starting from the MRT, Transjakarta, to Mikrotrans.

4. Low Profile

- Gramedia Matraman: Without changing many design elements and carrying out renovations, the Gramedia Matraman bookstore still looks simple like a bookstore in general.
- Gramedia Grand Indonesia: The modern appearance that can be seen from the new face of Gramedia Grand Indonesia cannot be said to be simple. This design was also chosen to match the atmosphere in the mall which also has to look classy.

The other characteristics from Oldenburg's Third Place Theory obtained from interview with bookstores visitors and here are the results of the research:

1. Conversation is the Main Activity: *Can the current Gramedia design be a place to socialize with friends? Why?*

a. Gramedia Matraman:

- Conversation can't be conducted, because this is the place to buy books and there are no places to sit. (D, 25 years old, Private Employee)
- No, because you can't be noisy in a bookstore (N, 20 years old, Student)

b. Gramedia Grand Indonesia:

- You can if you come with friends who like reading books. (I,

- 28 years old, Housewife)
 - You can't because this is a bookstore. (F, 22 years old, Student)
2. The Regulars: *When do you usually come to the Gramedia Bookstore?*
- a. Gramedia Matraman:
 - If I need to buy a book (D, 25 years old, Private Employee)
 - If the book you are looking for is not on the online bookstores. (N, 20 years old, Student)
 - b. Gramedia Grand Indonesia:
 - Once a month (I, 28 years old, Housewife)
 - If necessary to look for a book (F, 22 years old, Student)
3. Mood is Playful: *What do you think about the renovated Gramedia bookstore?*
- a. Gramedia Matraman:
 - Better and neater (D, 25 years old, Private Employee)
 - More modern. (N, 20 years old, Student)
 - b. Gramedia Grand Indonesia:
 - Modern, neat. (I, 28 years old, Housewife)
 - Better but smaller than the previous one. (F, 22 years old, Student)
4. A Home Away From Home: *How comfortable do you feel when you are at Gramedia? Is the comfort level like a place to relax? Are there any suggestions for additional facilities to make the bookstore more comfortable?*
- a. Gramedia Matraman
 - Convenient for shopping, but not for relaxing. They can add a place to read, so you can sit and read a book. (D, 25 years old, Private Employee)
 - Not comfortable to relax. Now is enough. (N, 20 years old, Student)
 - b. Gramedia Grand Indonesia
 - Convenient for looking for books. And I think just a place to sell books is enough. If there is a cafe, it will be dirty. (I, 28 years old, Housewife)
 - Comfortable and clean just for shopping. A cafe near Gramedia will be good. (F, 22 years old, Student)

The result from the research can be seen as in the following table:

Table 1 Data Results. (Source: Chalpia, 2024)

Third Place Characteristics	Gramedia Matraman	Gramedia Grand Indonesia
Neutral Ground	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Levelers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accessibility and Accommodation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Low Profile	<input type="checkbox"/>	-
Conversation is The Main Activity	-	-
The Regulars	-	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mood is Playful	-	-
A Home Away From Home	-	-
Total	4	4

CONCLUSION

After the research was conducted, it can be concluded that there are still several characteristics of Third Place that Gramedia still cannot fulfill, such as Conversation is The Main Activity, Low Profile, Mood is Playful, and A Home Away From Home. This is mainly because the two designs of the Gramedia branch that were observed still focus on the role of bookstores as retail stores. Despite the design developments that have occurred, especially at the Grand Indonesia branch of the Gramedia bookstore. With the change to a more modern design, this bookstore is still able to survive amidst the turbulence regarding the need for a physical bookstore. However, providing public spaces in accordance with the characteristics of Third Place conveyed by Oldenburg is still not the main idea of this design change.

Bookstores have the potential to become public places that can provide experiences to visitors and space users. Bookstores still have this potential because they can provide various human needs from across the spectrum. Even though this has not happened in large bookstores, the experience of a more intimate and close space that can become a discussion space and create a friendly and comfortable feeling can occur on a small bookstore scale.

Design still has a big influence in providing a sense of space through the physical experience it provides. Through this research, it has been found that design influences the survival of large bookstores even though they have not fulfilled the role as a Third Place. The experience of space provided by the Gramedia bookstore is currently still dominated by its role as a retail store where buying and selling transactions take place, however, changes in user behavior and needs also influence the design direction of this bookstore. Because after all, the evolution of the design of a physical store is a reflection that represents the development of the area where the physical store is located. Design changes need to occur and go hand in hand between what is needed and what users are looking for in order to maintain the existence of the space.

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