

Meet me at the local shop: designing community anchors for customer engagement

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Design plays a vital role in facilitating community-building by triggering interpersonal social interactions, enhancing a sense of attachment, and connecting individuals. This study aims to identify how local creators are currently casting community anchors for their customers and explore design opportunities to further enhance these practices. First, a literature review is conducted to establish the significance and concepts of 'local creators', 'community anchors' and 'level of customer engagement'. Subsequently, 40 practical cases are thematically analysed to identify which and how local creators cast community anchors to engage customers for community-building. Consequently, fourteen types of community anchors and five ways of anchoring the community anchors are identified: 'Exploiting Locality', 'Village Well', 'Sparkling Interest', 'Digging Interest', and 'Local Activism'. Based on these findings, this study discusses design implications and implementations to enhance local creators' practices of creating community-anchored experiences so that they can have a greater impact on their regions beyond individual businesses. This study has significant implications in that it provides a foundation for customer experience design to create communities around local shops.

Keywords: *local creator; local shop; community anchor; customer engagement*

1 Introduction

The roles of design in social innovation for communities include triggering interpersonal social interactions, enhancing a sense of attachment, connecting individuals, and facilitating community-building and community actions (Cho, 2013; Hui et al., 2020; Liddle et al., 2020; Williams, 2005). By utilising such capabilities, design researchers and practitioners have created relationships and communities, as well as designing engagement for various purposes and contexts. Examples include building online fandom communities (Smith et al., 2022; Uttarapong et al., 2022), collaborative care communities (Kanstrup & Bertelsen, 2019; Light & Akama, 2014), neighbourhood resource-sharing activities (Fedosov et al., 2021; Lampinen et al., 2017), and public participation in policymaking (Hansen et al., 2014).



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Community-building is becoming increasingly important for local businesses. Traditionally, local community-building has focused on local residents (Fraser & Lepofsky, 2004), but local businesses are also key stakeholders in their local communities, and thus should be key players in building them. However, a persistent difficulty with local businesses participating in community-building is that they often lack the impetus or resources to participate unless it is beneficial for their own businesses (Miller & Besser, 2000; Siemens, 2019; Zatepilina-Monacell, 2015). One effective approach for overcoming this obstacle for businesses is to form customer communities that can naturally be a part of the local community. In this context, the aforementioned roles of design can be used as a potent business strategy for effective community-building around the businesses that can serve both the local communities and the businesses.

Currently, local shops are attempting to adapt to changing societal needs in consumption and shopping as they face fierce competition from online retailers and franchises. To counter the new forces on the horizon, a new breed of local shops has emerged: the 'local creator'. This is a global phenomenon, but it mushroomed with such a force in a relatively short period of time in South Korea. The term was coined by a Korean scholar in economics and is widely used (Mo, 2017). The term 'local creator' refers to a local shop with entrepreneurial creativity in its way of business (Kyung et al., 2020). Such shops aim to provide engaging experiences that build relationships and foster customer communities based on shared interests, values, geographical proximity, and human intimacy (Woo & Nam, 2021), differentiated from high-street brands. For example, an independent bookshop creates communities centred around common interests within the neighbourhood (DifferReach, n.d.), while a local restaurant creates communities centred around its authentic locality by showcasing local stories through food curation and short plays (Haenyeo Kitchen, n.d.). Such experiences appeal greatly to customers, especially the MZ generation, who value social and genuine experiences (Borsboom & Lawson, 2018; Calienes et al., 2016; Harris et al., 2011). Hereinafter, such experiences will be referred to as 'community-anchored customer experiences'.

The impact of community-anchored customer experience is not only significant for the prosperity and sustainability of individual businesses but also for the vitalisation of the local economy and the entire neighbourhood (Kilkenny et al., 1999; Korsching & Allen, 2004). Hence, the Ministry of SMEs and Start-ups in South Korea has initiated support programmes to encourage and nurture local creators (Ministry of SMEs and Start-ups, 2023). However, the success of their practices still depends on the proprietors' individual capabilities, such as critical sense, creativity, and practical skills.

How can design be utilised to help local creators create community-anchored customer experiences? Existing studies have argued for the use of experience design to increase customer loyalty (Garrett, 2006; Woo & Nam, 2020), interaction design to provoke social encounters among users (Acer et al., 2019; Crivellaro et al., 2016), and co-design to build relationships among community members (Lorini et al., 2017; Müller et al., 2015). However, these studies have often disregarded small local shops run by entrepreneurs, while focusing on large retailers as a means of business marketing or civic engagement for public purposes. Owing to the lack of research interest in the context of small local shops, there is a need to establish a conceptual foundation for designing 'community-anchored customer experiences'.

Therefore, the current study has the three following aims:

1. To establish the significance and concepts of community anchors and levels of customer engagement for local creators;
2. To identify specific ways and types of community anchors, and propose ways of anchoring community anchors to engage customers for community-building;
3. To discuss design implications and its implementation to enhance local creators' community anchoring.

2 Literature review

2.1 Local creators: community as a competitive strategy

A local shop typically refers to a small business that is independently owned and operated within a specific neighbourhood. Examples include shops that sell goods, such as groceries, clothing, home goods, or hobby items, as well as service-based businesses, such as cafés, salons, or repair shops. As this study aims to explore the role of design in creating community-anchored experiences in local shops, we define a local shop according to the following criteria based on the literature (Clarke & Banga, 2010; Everts, 2010; Oldenburg, 1999; Steigemann, 2017; Zukin et al., 2015):

- a business in which a proprietor is directly involved in sales, merchandising, production, and shop operations;
- a business with a physical space where social interaction occurs;
- a business where actual sales and provision occur.

Local shops are often considered as important contributors to the local economy and community (Clarke & Banga, 2010; Kilkenny et al., 1999). However, with the rise of online retailers and franchises, local shops face several market challenges and strong competition. These competitors have sufficient resources and capabilities to offer a wider range of products, lower prices, and faster deliveries (Smith & Sparks, 2000). Consequently, local shops have a thirst to differentiate their businesses to survive in the market beyond merely appealing to customers for the utilitarian value of their products or services.

In this context, a new type of local shop has emerged that creates unique cultures and communities by utilising physical, cultural, and human resources available only in a specific neighbourhood (Bookman, 2014; Ferreira et al., 2021; Hubbard, 2016; Zukin, 2008). This trend is observed worldwide in hipster neighbourhoods, such as Portland in the U.S. (Broadway et al., 2018; Heying, 2010), Berlin in Germany (Heebels & Van Aalst, 2010), and Brick Lane in the U.K. (Hubbard, 2016), and has recently gained attention in South Korea (Ji, 2021). Some literature has argued that this trend could respond to a consumption trend that merely seeks the authenticity that the concept of 'local' embodies, which can pose a risk of gentrification (Cao, 2023; Ji, 2021; Zukin, 2008).

From both an economic and urban regeneration perspective, a new type of local shop known as the 'local creator' is emerging, where proprietors build relationships and communities with customers through creative experiences (Mo & Kang, 2022). Examples of local creators include a local restaurant that creates communities centred around its authentic locality by showcasing local stories through food curation and short plays (Haenyeo Kitchen, n.d.), an independent bookshop that creates communities around environmental activities (Beodeulbooks, n.d.), and a launderette that facilitates small social gatherings among local residents through spatial interventions (e.g. round tables and gardens) (Laundryproject, n.d.).



Figure 1. Examples of Local Creators. Source: (left) Haenyeo Kitchen, (middle) Beodeulbooks, (right) Laundryproject.

The evolution of local creators can be attributed to three main factors. First, acquiring regular customers is critical for local shops because their customer base is usually limited to the neighbourhood residents. Therefore, local shops need customer relationship management to establish and maintain relationships with regular customers as well as to cultivate a customer community (Gilboa et al., 2019; Goodwin & Gremler, 1996; Landry et al., 2005; Peters & Bodkin, 2018). Second, the rise of the MZ generation as a leading consumer group has led to changes in consumption trends, with authentic experiences, values, and beliefs becoming central factors in making consumption choices (Borsboom & Lawson, 2018; Cummins, 2015; Donnelly & Scaff, 2013). As a result, providing social experiences that fulfil consumers' desires has become even more crucial. Finally, from a more macro perspective, local shops can serve as "the third place" where residents naturally encounter each other frequently (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982; Rosenbaum, 2006). Accordingly, local shops can reap long-term benefits by promoting social connections and revitalising communities.

Thus, creating unique social experiences can be a powerful business strategy for differentiating oneself from large retailers and other local shops. In this study, we define the experiences that establish relationships and cultivate customer communities anchored on shared interest, values, geographical proximity, and human intimacy as 'community-anchored customer experiences'.

2.2 Designing community-anchored customer experience

Creating unique community-anchored customer experiences can be regarded as an experience design activity. Experience design involves the strategic activities of creating multiple touchpoints and channels for a business to provide target users with intended experiences (Press & Cooper, 2017; Shedroff, 2001; Verhoef et al., 2009). Previous studies have suggested that experience design can enhance customers' attachment to a particular merchandise or brand (Garrett, 2006; Woo & Nam, 2020), provoke social encounters among customers (Acer et al., 2019; Crivellaro et al., 2016), and foster relationships and collaborative activities among the community members (Lorini et al., 2017; Müller et al., 2015). Therefore, experience design can be an effective tool for creating community-anchored customer experiences.

However, designing interactions and touchpoints within a local shop is more complex than designing a single product or service. This is because it requires consideration not only of various actions that occur simultaneously between diverse stakeholders and touchpoints but also of the facilitation of formation of relationships and communities.

The following subsections describe the two essential elements necessary for designing community-anchored customer experiences: community anchors and levels of engagement.

2.2.1 Community anchors

The concept of community is mainly dealt with in the field of consumer research or urban regeneration. Based on the literature (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001; Peters & Bodkin, 2018), a community is formed based on the commonalities among individuals. A community is something shared among people, from which members feel a sense of belonging, commitment, and solidarity (McAlexander et al., 2002; Mosconi et al., 2017; Muniz & O'guinn, 2001).

Local shops have a unique character that can serve as a place of community from the perspective of social capital (Crivellaro et al., 2016; Francis et al., 2012), brand community (Hollebeek et al., 2017; McAlexander et al., 2002; Storvang et al., 2020), or both. Therefore, local shops need to anchor on a specific commonality to bring people together and create a sense of community among them. Referring to the commonalities that can foster a sense of community among the targeted customers, the term 'community anchors' is established.

Based on the aforementioned literature regarding community, 'community anchors' in this study are classified into two types: 'Locality' and 'Interest'.

- Locality: Local creators can create service experiences by utilising local resources, culture, and identity. This creates a unique and competitive experience that large franchises cannot replicate, while also instilling a sense of belonging in local customers.
- Interest: Local creators can create service experiences that allow customers to enjoy their interests and socialise with others who share them. Through these experiences, customers can meet other people with common interests and hobbies, and thus, they naturally feel a sense of belonging.

Local creators engage customers in experiences based on shared locality or interest through specific forms of community anchors such as physical touchpoints, indirect touchpoints (e.g. events, campaigns), or business practices.

2.2.2 Levels of engagement

Once the customers gather around an anchor, it is necessary to weave them together to create a community. If customers can experience as members of a community, they tend to develop a stronger attachment to the community (Mosconi et al., 2017). Accordingly, in the process of building a community, customers are required to participate in various activities to interact with others, which require different levels of engagement.

Based on the existing literature regarding community (Goodwin & Gremler, 1996; McAlexander et al., 2002; Mosconi et al., 2017; Peters & Bodkin, 2018; Storvang et al., 2020), levels of customer engagement can be classified into three categories according to the intensity of involvement: 1) 'Chance Encounter'; 2) 'Programmed Participation'; and 3) 'Proactive Participation'.

- Level 1: 'Chance Encounter' refers to naturally recognising other customers within a shop environment that the proprietor purposefully designed. Recognising the presence of other shoppers or similar lifestyles to their own are typical examples (Peters & Bodkin, 2018). In this level, customers' proactivity is low because the actual relationship-building only depends on the customers themselves, while the role of local creators is to create local shop environments where such encounters are likely to occur.

- Level 2: 'Programmed Participation', which means that local creators plan unique programmes or events requiring customers to have direct interactions with other customers. There are various examples, such as product-related activities (McAlexander et al., 2002), skill-sharing programs, or social programs with other customers or neighbours.
- Level 3: 'Proactive Participation', which means that customers proactively propose organising social events or activities in a local shop; for example, customer-initiated collaborative work and campaigns such as hosting social events at local shops. This level requires high customer proactivity and involves the smallest pool of customers among the three levels (Mosconi et al., 2017).

To design a targeted engagement strategy that appeals to people with commonalities, it is necessary to identify community anchors, which can serve as a foundation for designing interactions and touchpoints that encourage customers. Therefore, this study aims to identify the resources that can serve as community anchors, develop engagement strategies that leverage these anchors, and propose directions for local creators and other stakeholders in implementing engagement strategies based on their own unique contexts and available resources.

3 Research methodology

The qualitative case analysis (Gustafsson, 2017) was adopted as the research method to effectively build concepts based on practical cases using a bottom-up approach. The case analysis process included the generation of a priori coding scheme, case selection and case analysis. To promote accuracy and objectivity, three Ph.D.-level researchers participated in the analysis.

3.1 Priori coding scheme generation

A priori coding scheme is necessary for consistent and systematic case analysis (Rashid et al., 2019). The priori coding scheme for the research was constructed with two 'community anchors' and three 'levels of engagement' as key factors in designing a community-anchored customer experience, as established from the literature (see Table 1).

Table 1. Priori coding scheme

Primary Codes	Secondary Codes
Community Anchors	Locality
	Interest
Level of Engagement	Level 1: Chance Encounter
	Level 2: Programmed Participation
	Level 3: Proactive Participation

3.2 Case selection

The case selection criteria were established from the literature (see Section 2.1), consistent with the case analysis objectives:

- A case of a local shop;
- where the proprietor is directly involved in sales, merchandising, production, and shop operations;

- where actual sales occur;
- with a physical space where social interaction occurs.
- A case with information on community-related customer experience;
- A case with descriptions on products/services that they offer.

In January to February 2022, a case search on Google was conducted using keywords including “local shop”, “independent shop”, “small shop”, “customer community”, “creative community”, and “community event”. A total of 40 cases were selected satisfying the selection criteria above (see Appendix A). Each case was built with relevant data extracted from various sources, including official websites, social media accounts, news articles and customer reviews.

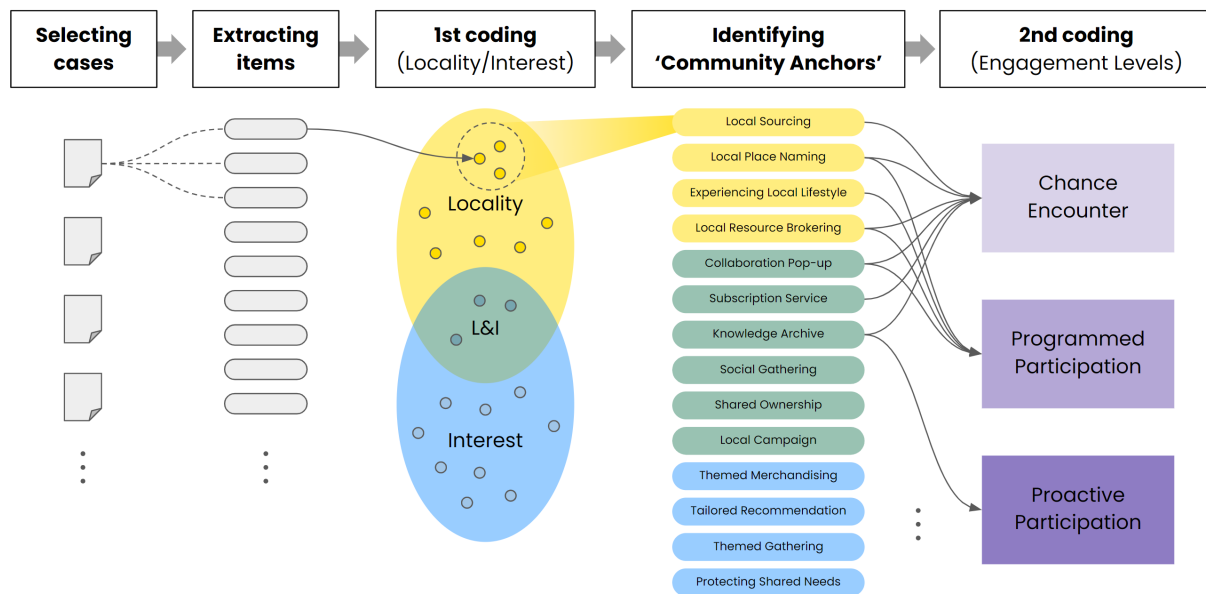


Figure 2. Thematic analysis process.

3.3 Thematic analysis

The cases were thematically analysed. First, the goods, services, events, programmes, and spatial interventions from each case that may have served as community anchors were coded with the types of anchors: ‘Locality’ and ‘Interest’. For example, the merchandise or services sourced from local resources, culture, or identity were coded with ‘Locality’, whilst the merchandise or services allowing customers to enjoy their interests and socialise with those with similar interests were coded with ‘Interest’.

The data coded with each priori code were further classified into tertiary-level codes. These newly-discovered codes were used to elaborate and characterise the resources that can serve as community anchors. As a result, 14 new codes were identified that represented specific ways and types of community anchors (see Table 2).

The data coded with the 14 newly-found ‘community anchors’ codes were then coded again with the three ‘engagement levels’ codes, since each community anchor requires engagement from customers. This coding determined the levels of engagement for each of the 14 ‘community anchors’ codes.

The final stage of the thematic analyses was to discover different patterns of how local creators can cast community anchors in relation to their products and services to engage customers in community-building. Cases sharing similar anchoring paths were grouped to represent different ways of community anchoring.

Table 2. Code table detailing community anchors

Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Definition
Community Anchors	Locality	Local Sourcing	Utilising local resources for products development, curation, or interiors
		Local Place Naming	Utilising local place names to name brands, menus, or programmes
		Experiencing Local Lifestyle	Incorporating local lifestyles into the in-shop experiences
		Local Resource Brokering	Brokering various local resources within the community
	Interest	Themed Merchandising	Curating merchandise centred around a specific theme
		Tailored Recommendation	Recommending products or menus tailored to individual's interest levels
		Themed Gathering	Gathering related to a specific theme for enthusiasts
		Protecting Shared Needs	Creating an atmosphere where like-minded people can gather
	Locality & Interest (L&I)	Collaboration Pop-up	Collaborating with other brands to introduce new producers to customers
		Subscription Service	Incorporating in-shop experiences into everyday life
		Knowledge Archive	Collecting and sharing useful knowledge with community members
		Social Gathering	Events where people can gather and interact with each other
		Shared Ownership	Right to use or co-own a shop
		Local Campaign	Collective actions taking place within a neighbourhood

4 Community anchors and ways of anchoring

4.1 Community anchors

The research found 14 community anchors that a local creator can cast in relation to their products and services for community-building, with three levels of customer engagement. These community anchors include four related to 'locality' (locality anchors), another four related to 'interest' (interest anchors) and six relevant to both (L&I anchors). The community anchors identified from the thematic analyses are detailed in Table 2 above.

4.2 Ways of anchoring

Five ways of anchoring community anchors were found, showing how current local creators combine: 1) the 14 community anchors of 'locality' and 'interest'; and 2) the three levels of engagement, to find effective paths to creating their unique community-anchored customer experiences. The five ways of community anchoring were found to be: 'Exploiting Locality', 'Village Well', 'Sparking Interest', 'Digging Interest', and 'Local Activism'.

In this section, the 14 community anchors identified from the thematic analyses are described in the context of each way of anchoring - an anchoring path paved with the combination of community anchors and the extent to which the customers are engaged for community-building. Examples of how these anchors are cast are presented in each way of anchoring. Cnumber (e.g. C12) denotes a particular case used for the analyses.

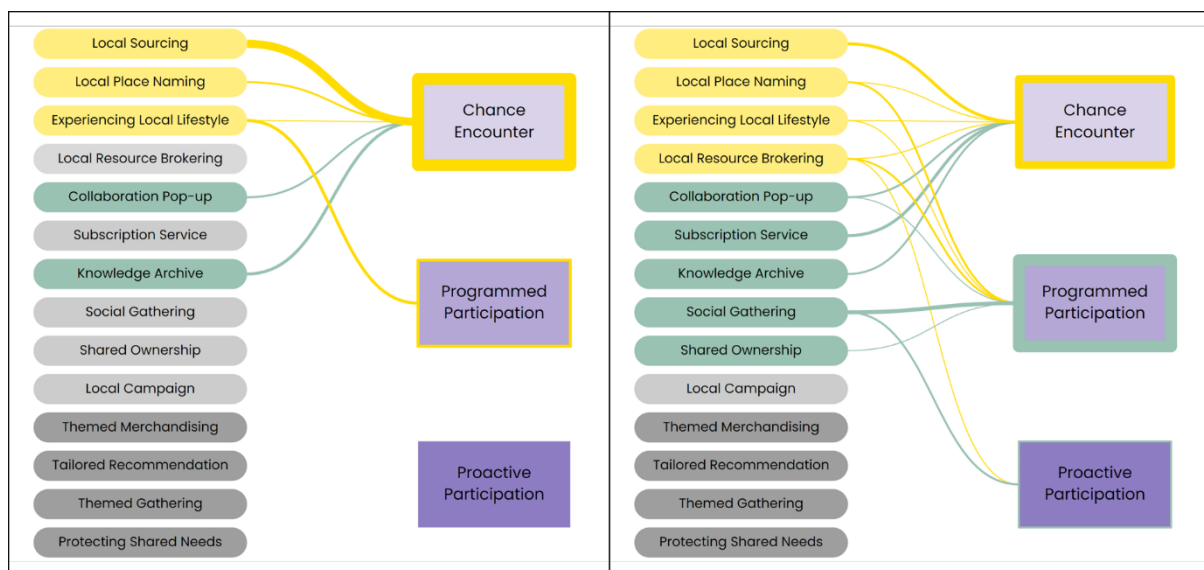


Figure 3. (Left) 'Exploiting Locality' anchoring path; (right) 'Village Well' anchoring path.

4.2.1 Exploiting locality

As the name suggests, 'Exploiting Locality' is a way of casting mainly locality anchors, aiming to establish customer communities by anchoring on customers' desires for unique local products. According to the results of the thematic analyses, ten cases were found in the 'Exploiting locality', which casts locality anchors such as 'Local sourcing', 'Local place naming', 'Experiencing local lifestyle', as well as L&I anchors of 'Collaboration pop-up', and 'Knowledge archive'. The second-round coding found that this way of anchoring utilised the 'Chance encounter' level of engagement (Level 1). Figure 3 (Left) shows the anchoring path of the 'Exploiting Locality' anchoring.

This way of locality anchoring shows creative ways in which local shops can exploit locally sourced products and resources around which they build customer communities. Two of mainly used anchors will be introduced hereafter.



Figure 4. Examples of 'Exploiting Locality'. Source: (left) A Collective Grain, (middle) Bed Radio, (right) Parfum Samgak.

- 'Local sourcing' anchor: To exploit localities, local creators endeavour to unearth hidden or little-known local resources to develop unique merchandise. For example, a café (C05) offered beverages and desserts made from local produce and created a brand identity around them, while a perfumery (C11) developed perfume offerings, brands, and packaging inspired by the neighbourhood's character and atmosphere. A gift shop (C36) sold products and artworks designed by local university students and alumni.
- 'Experiencing local lifestyle' anchor: Beyond creating and delivering products and services, local creators exploit localities by creating immersive experiences that reflect local lifestyles. For example, a guesthouse (C12) provided its guests with a curated map of curating various local lifestyles (e.g. walking routes, nightlife) and partnered with nearby shops to offer classes that provide customers with a leisurely lifestyle in the neighbourhood. These unique experiences can foster a sense of community and connection with the local area.

The 'Exploiting Locality' way of anchoring was found to engage customers mainly by 'Chance Encounter' (Level 1) - when the anchors are cast, customers naturally recognise and encounter the like-minded who appreciate the shared locality.

4.2.2 Village well

The 'Village Well' is another way of casting locality anchors, based on the residents' needs for having social encounters with their neighbours, seeking to foster relationships among locals. Eight cases were found in the 'Village Well' anchoring. It casts four locality anchors and five L&I anchors including 'Local place naming', 'Social gathering', and 'Knowledge archive' (see Table 2). 'Village Well' is anchored through the 'Programmed participation' level of engagement (Level 2).

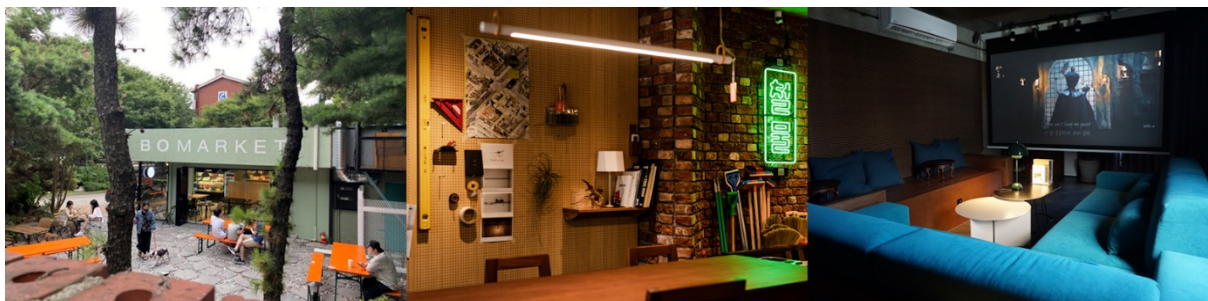


Figure 5. Examples of 'Village Well'. Source: (left) Bo Market, (middle) Urbanplay, (right) Project Huam.

- 'Social gathering' anchor: Local creators casting the 'Social gathering' anchor create environments where people can gather together by organising spatial interventions or social events. For example, a hardware store (C02) organised a home DIY seminar for the local

residents. This event motivated them to exchange and share their resources such as DIY tools and materials, further boosting community-building through the ‘Village Well’ anchoring for the residents and ultimately toward the customer community for the business.

- ‘Knowledge archive’ anchor: Interestingly, some local shops were found to serve as local resources, showcasing the local lifestyle by using the ‘Knowledge archive’ anchor. For example, a grocery store combined with a restaurant (C01), hardware store (C02), and café (C10) each played a significant role as a village well in their respective neighbourhoods through neighbourhood archive exhibitions and local experts directories. As a result, the shops became popular places where the unique local lifestyle were showcased, attracting visitors from other areas.

The ‘Village Well’ anchoring was found to attract residents mainly by ‘Programmed Participation’ (Level 2) - when the anchors are cast, residents can get a chance to greet their neighbours. Community-building is carried out through social interactions including local residents' gatherings and directly interacting with one another in a shop, requiring the ‘Village Well’ anchoring to adopt a higher level of customer engagement than the ‘Exploiting locality’.

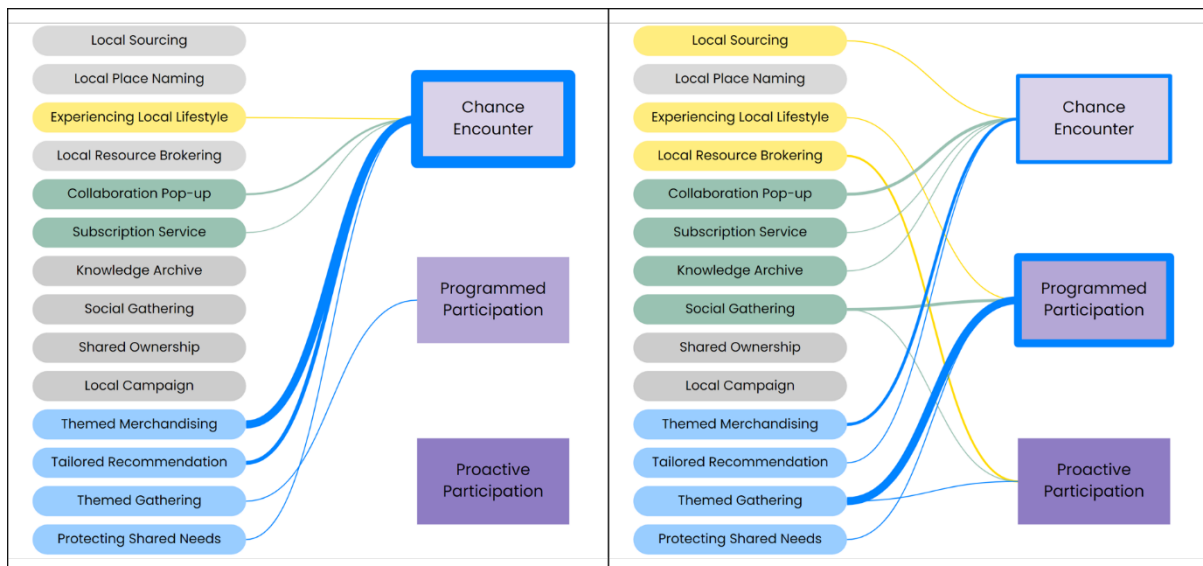


Figure 6. (Left) ‘Sparkling Interest’ anchoring path; (right) ‘Digging Interest’ anchoring path.

4.2.3 Sparking interest

The ‘Sparkling Interest’ is a way of casting mainly interest anchors, cultivating customer communities by anchoring on their desire to explore new interests. According to the result of the analyses, ten cases were found in the ‘Sparkling Interest’ way of anchoring, which casts one locality anchors, two interest anchors, and four L&I anchors including ‘Themed Merchandising’ and ‘Tailored Recommendation’. Adopting the ‘Chance Encounter’ level of engagement (Level 1), customers can discover new areas of interests, and feel attached to the local shop that provides such pleasurable serendipitous discoveries. The ‘Sparkling Interest’ anchoring explores creative ways to trigger an interest among those who may not be familiar with a particular field.



Figure 7. Examples of 'Sparkling Interest'. Source: (left) My Favorite, (middle) Velomano, (right) Rough Trade east London.

- 'Themed Merchandising' anchor: Local creators using the 'Themed Merchandising' anchor provide a wide range of items related to a specific field of interest to showcase their expertise and passion for the field. For example, a gift shop (C13) specialising in movies, offered everything from posters and screenplays to essays written by movie stars. It also invited people from the movie industry to hold special events and sold exclusive movie merchandise. This led to the formation of a community of movie enthusiasts who regularly gather at the shop.
- 'Tailored Recommendation' anchor: It was found that other local creators with the 'Sparkling Interest' anchoring focused more on laypeople and provided them with creative ways of understanding and exploring the area of interest intuitively. Herein, the 'Tailored Recommendation' anchor was used. For example, a tea house (C14) sold tea curation packages with themes such as movies or artworks (e.g., 'One Summer Night', 'Lost Time', 'Mood for Love'). This can spark the interest of tea in the customers who may not know much about tea and help them understand tea in a sensual way. A chocolatier (C15) selling handmade bean-to-bar chocolate provided tasting notes to help customers develop preferences for more and finer tastes that may have previously been an uncharted territory for them.

Since anchors are cast in the 'Sparkling Interest' anchoring through only a 'Chance Encounter' level of engagement (Level 1), even beginners who are unfamiliar with the domain can easily access and visit those shops. As the interest community around the shop becomes more connected and concrete, a natural transition to a deeper level of anchoring can be deployed: 'Digging Interest'.

4.2.4 Digging interest

The 'Digging Interest' is another way of casting mainly interest anchors on the customer needs to deep-dive into a specific interest area. Seven cases were found in the 'Digging Interest', where three locality anchors, four interest anchors, and four L&I anchors are cast through the 'Programmed Participation' level of engagement (Level 2). The 'Digging Interest' anchoring is distinguished from 'Sparkling Interest' in that the former encourages customers to deepen their tastes and knowledge on a field by belonging to a network of people who share the same interest.

This way of anchoring shows creative ways in which those with the same interest actively participate in or even organise themselves gatherings with foci.



Figure 8. Examples of 'Digging Interest'. Source: (left) Matbaezip, (middle) Look mum no hands, (right) Gay's the word.

- 'Themed Gathering' anchor: Local creators were found to cast the 'Themed Gathering' anchor to foster shared culture among customers. For example, a bike café (C28) hosted a cycling race watching event, fostering a sense of community among the attendees and providing an environment that facilitated more intense interactions among cycling enthusiasts. This kind of community event requires the 'Programmed Participation' level of customer engagement (Level 2). Interestingly, the research found that the same type of business can cast different anchors through different levels of engagement for community-building. For example, another bike café (C16), in contrast to C28, adopted the 'Sparkling Interest' way of anchoring through 'Chance Encounter' engagement (Level 1) with a bike-themed interior and bike-related products, casting the 'Themed Merchandising' anchor.
- 'Collaboration Pop-up' anchor: The 'Collaboration Pop-up' anchor is cast to enable customers to delve deeper into a specific area of interest through 'Chance Encounter' (Level 1) to 'Proactive Participation' (Level 3) engagement. A hardware store (C02), a bookshop (C18), and a zero-waste shop (C20) were found to host pop-up store events collaborating with other brands so that customers can be introduced to relevant merchandise and brands. Moreover, customers can not only encounter new products related to the field of interest as the consumers of such products but further participate as sellers themselves. For example, C18 and C20 provide the opportunity for customers who are experts in the field of interest or preparing to start a business to participate in a shop-in-shop.

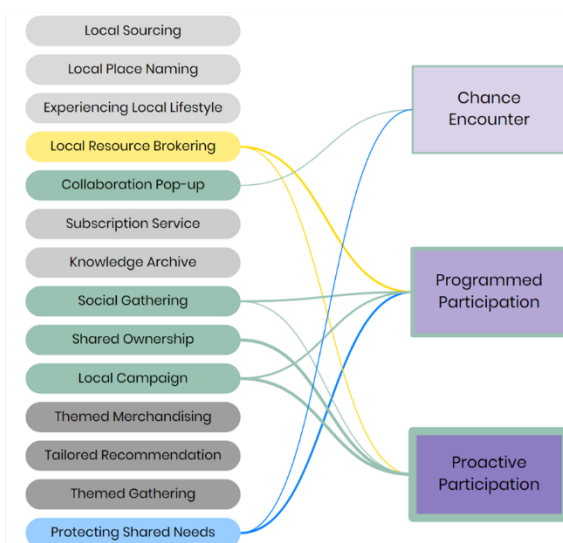


Figure 9. 'Local Activism' anchoring path.

4.2.5 Local activism

Finally, the 'Local Activism' is a way of casting mainly L&I anchors. This way of anchoring exploits customers' ownership and responsibility for their local community, which can be manifested as activism through a local shop in given areas of interest. Five cases were found in this way of anchoring, which casts two locality anchors, one interest anchors, and three L&I anchors including 'Shared ownership', 'Local campaign, and 'Protecting shared needs' with the 'Proactive Participation' level of engagement (Level 3). This way of anchoring explores creative ways to gather people with a shared goal and allow them to take action centred around a local shop.

- 'Shared Ownership' anchor: Local creators allow customers to have a stake in the shop and participate in its operations. For example, a bakery (C23) raised funds for business operations through a crowdfunding campaign. Customers who participated in the funding project received job and training opportunities and access to community meeting spaces. Likewise, the 'Shared Ownership' anchor helped run the shop and created benefits for the community. This community anchor required the customers to engage themselves more proactively (Level 3 engagement) than simply joining a pre-prepared programme.
- 'Local Campaign' anchor: Local creators guide and facilitate residents to solve local problems. For example, a zero-waste shop (C20), which requires customers to bring their own containers for purchases, encouraged customers to use their own reusable bags for shopping in the market nearby. As customers participated in this activism, the market vendors also adopted eco-bags instead of plastic bags.



Figure 10. Examples of 'Local Activism'. Source: (left) Almang market, (middle) Homebaked Anfield, (right) Canvas cafe.

It was found that the 'Local Activism' could be transitioned to from other ways of anchoring aforementioned. For example, when the customer community gathered through the 'Village Well' anchoring can evolve from interacting with neighbours to voluntary activities to solve local issues (Level 2 → Level 3 engagement), the employed method can transition into the 'Local Activism' anchoring. Similarly, if the customer community gathered through the 'Digging Interest' anchoring can evolve to a belief system-related interest (e.g. veganism, feminism), it can also transition into the 'Local Activism' anchoring.

Figure 11 demonstrates how each way of anchoring can transition into one another.

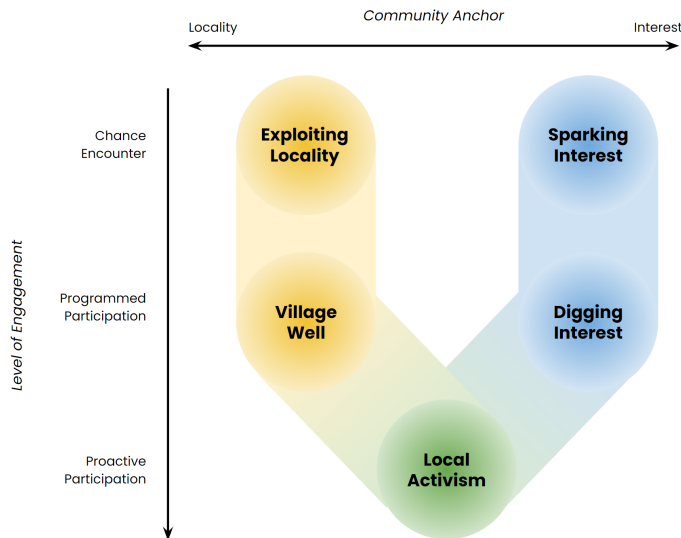


Figure 11. Five ways of anchoring community anchors.

5 Design implications and implementation

This section discusses design implications and implementations that can leverage design expertise to enhance local creators' community anchoring.

5.1 Branding design strategies based on community anchors in local shops

Community anchors can be utilised as design resources for business branding, beyond individual local creators' attempts at community-building. Designers can discover potential resources anchored on specific localities or interests, from which unique touchpoints can be designed such that people can enjoy authentic experiences created by community anchors cast by a local shop. For example, intangible resources anchored on locality, such as local lifestyle and knowledge, can be utilised to design customer touchpoints such as merchandise, packaging, or social media contents in the 'Exploiting Locality' anchoring. Likewise, a local creator's expertise or passion in a specific field can also be utilised in a similar way. Based on these resources anchored on interest, an attractive merchandise curation can be designed as in the 'Sparking Interest' anchoring.

Strategic branding design activities are necessary to ensure that such an experience becomes an ongoing customer engagement rather than just an isolated incident (Keller, 2002). For example, an independent bookshop can establish its own brand identity by incorporating a unique local identity (e.g. a mountainous city) or by promoting a message on a specific interest (e.g. environmentalism). Moreover, the bookshop can differentiate itself from other bookshops by designing a unique curated merchandise that goes beyond the typical curation. As such, community-anchoring branding designs for local shops can reflect the values and characteristics of the community, not just the products it sells. Therefore, identifying the interface where the community and customers interact within the shop can create new design opportunities for a compact and cohesive experience that seamlessly blends shops with the surrounding community.

5.2 Engagement design considerations in terms of stakeholders' attitudes towards community-building

When designing customer engagement in a local shop, the different attitudes of both the local proprietor and their regular customers towards community-building should be considered. Their attitudes can be determined by their 1) willingness for community-building; 2) preferred strength of ties with the proprietor and other customers; and 3) purpose of social interaction.

- **Willingness for community-building:** Engagement should be designed in accordance with customers' willingness for community-building. The customers with a strong desire for community-building tend to interact more proactively with a proprietor or other customers, because they want to share knowledge or act together. For example, regular customers at a zero-waste shop (C20) tend to be environmentally conscious, thus they are willing to share practical eco-friendly tips for daily life, report other zero-waste shops in the neighbourhood, and propose campaigns with others. Such community activities allow customers to embody their values and foster a stronger sense of community with like-minded individuals gathering around the shop. As a result, local creators need to design engagements that facilitate the active participation of customers with a strong inclination of community-building.
- **Preferred strength of ties with proprietors and other customers:** Engagement should be designed differently according to stakeholders' desired strength of ties with other people at the local shop. The findings show that not everyone interested in community-building around local shops wants stronger ties with others. For example, customers attracted to a local shop through the 'Sparkling Interest' anchoring tends to prefer weaker ties with others, as the purpose of this anchoring is to arouse customers in a specific field of interest rather than fostering intensive relationships among them. Weaker ties among individuals are advantageous for abundant information sharing, positively impacting community-building (Granovetter, 1973). On the other hand, those attracted by the 'Digging Interest' anchoring want to establish stronger and closer relationships with others sharing the same interest. Since the customers are already immersed in the field, it is necessary to design engagement for activities like debate, discussions, and in-depth digging activities based on stronger ties.
- **Purpose of social interaction:** The customer's purpose of social interaction is a significant consideration in engagement design. People engage themselves in social interactions to fulfil not only utilitarian but social needs. For example, the 'Village Well' anchoring encourages social interactions among residents by catering to utilitarian needs such as a hardware store (C02) organising a home DIY seminar for them. On the other hand, the 'Digging Interest' anchoring promotes social interactions for social needs, like a bike café (C28) hosting an event for cycling race watching. Existing studies also imply that those who initiate social interactions based on practical needs may transition to social activities (Cho & Rogel, 2013), whereas those who initially gather for fun may shift towards a community that fulfils practical needs (Bakhanova et al., 2020).

These considerations can be utilised to understand the community-building tendencies of stakeholders, including local creators and customers, and to design interactions that are tailored to their various tendencies.

5.3 Engaging in co-designing community-anchored experience

Customers' knowledge and expertise are valuable resources in devising a process of co-designing community-anchored experiences. Involving customers as the main participants in the co-design process can strengthen a sense of belonging and brand attachment, leading to sustained engagement. Design can be utilised to devise guided processes for participation and rewards for engaging in the process of creating local shop experiences.

For example, customers at a zero-waste shop can share their knowledge by recommending other zero-waste shops or suggesting eco-friendly activities that can be practised in daily life to promote their values in the 'Local Activism' anchoring. Tapping into such voluntary customer activities, a co-design process can be built that enables customers to inform and benefit other customers. Additionally, attractive rewards can be devised as a gesture of appreciation to promote further engagement. Thus, local creators can outsource expertise and knowledge that they may lack from customers. As the customers feel a sense of ownership and develop a strong attachment by participating in brand creation (Hussain et al., 2021), outsourcing customers' expertise and knowledge can not only complement local creators' lack of expertise and knowledge but also serve as an effective tool for engaging customers.

Customers' voluntary activities of sharing their expertise do not represent only an interesting phenomenon but can also be used as a meaningful co-design basis for strategically utilising their expertise to create unique experiences and sustain their engagement. According to Kim et al. (2018), a novel intervention can be designed to naturally engage people in revealing their experiences through daily life activities. This implies that local shop-specialised participatory methods can be designed by tapping into customers' everyday behaviours in which they are already engaged (e.g. browsing menus), from which they can discover their own unique knowledge that deserves sharing with others.

5.4 Recommendations for implementation

The practices of local creators can be regarded as "diffuse design" activities that are innate to them based on their critical sense, creativity, and practical sense (Manzini, 2015). To develop a systemic approach for enhancing the awareness and use of design in building customer communities around local shops, this study proposes the following recommendations for each stakeholder.

Local creators are no longer just beneficiaries of design but rather the main actors practising diffuse design activities. To enhance their impact, local creators should be able to identify areas requiring the assistance of design professionals and properly understand the needs of their current customer communities around their own shop. Based on this understanding, they should set experience design goals and critically evaluate the impacts of community-anchored experiences according to these goals.

Design professionals should strategically support and enhance local creators' diffuse design activities. These can include:

- Structuring the ad-hoc practices created by local creators and establishing community-anchored branding strategies based on the unique characteristics of each creator's customer community and neighbourhood;
- Facilitating social interactions among people based on an understanding of their individual needs;

- Developing co-design tools that enable local creators to effectively create and evaluate their experiences in their shops.

Governments should support local creators in designing community-anchored experiences that meet customers' needs and create social value. It may be unfair to expect small business owners to achieve social value without the necessary resources and capabilities. To address this issue, governments should develop support programmes that help local creators enhance their creativity and design capabilities (e.g. matching programmes with design professionals, design literacy education programmes) and provide a shared vision for the local impact they can achieve.

6 Conclusions

Local creators create unique community-anchored customer experiences by considering community anchors and levels of customer engagement. This study identified fourteen types of community anchors and proposed five ways of anchoring the community anchors to engage customers for community-building: 'Exploiting Locality', 'Village Well', 'Sparking Interest', 'Digging Interest', and 'Local Activism'. Based on the findings, this study discussed design implications for customer engagement and its implementations for local creators, design professionals, and governments. This study can provide local creators with insights into which customer engagement strategies are appropriate for their situations, and provide design professionals and governments with suggestions on how to support local creators.

This study has significant implications in that it provides a foundation for designing customer experiences that can create relationships and communities around local shops. Further research is recommended to develop design interventions that can effectively engage customers and create experiences by utilising community anchors at local shops.

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Appendix A: Details on Selected Cases

No.	Name	Region	Business Type	Websites
C01	Bo Market	Korea	Grocerant	http://bomarket.co.kr/
C02	Jungeum Hardware	Korea	Hardware store	http://www.urbanplay-global.com/project_jungeum_hardwaere
C03	Palsazin	Korea	Photo studio	https://www.instagram.com/palpal.88/
C04	Okhee Mill	Korea	Mill & Café	https://www.instagram.com/okhee_mill/
C05	A Collective Grain	Korea	Café	http://acollective.kr/
C06	Laundry Project	Korea	Launderette & Café	https://www.laundryproject.co.kr/
C07	Joyful Coffee	Korea	Café & Bookshop	https://www.instagram.com/hi_nicetoreadyou/
C08	Inside the Village	Korea	Flower shop & Bookshop	http://www.insidethevillage.com/
C09	Jungnyeon-ui-ohu	Korea	Leather workshop	https://myohoo.com/
C10	Huam Union	Korea	Café	http://project-huam.com/huam_union
C11	Parfum Samgak	Korea	Perfumery	https://www.instagram.com/parfumsamgak/
C12	Bed Radio	Korea	Guesthouse	https://www.instagram.com/bedradio_jeju/
C13	My Favorite	Korea	Cinema goodies shop	https://www.instagram.com/store.myfavorite/
C14	Cha-Cha	Korea	Tea café	https://www.instagram.com/chacha_willbegood
C15	Choose-value Chocolate	Korea	Chocolatier	https://www.instagram.com/choosevalue/
C16	1st Bidon	Korea	Bike café	https://www.instagram.com/1st_bidon/
C17	Matbaezip	Korea	Wine bar	https://www.instagram.com/matbaezip/
C18	Differeach	Korea	Bookshop	https://www.instagram.com/differeach/
C19	Rama Home	Korea	Apparel shop	https://www.instagram.com/ramahome/
C20	Almang Market	Korea	Zero-waste shop	https://almang.net/
C21	Leila's Shop	UK	Grocerant	https://www.leilasshop.co.uk/
C22	Host Café	UK	Café	https://hostcafelondon.com/
C23	Homebaked	UK	Bakery	https://www.homebakedbakery.com/
C24	The Ivy House	UK	Pub	https://www.ivyhousesunhead.co.uk/
C25	The Canvas Café	UK	Vegan café	https://thecanvascafe.org/
C26	Next Door Records	UK	Record bar	https://www.nextdoorrecords.co.uk/
C27	Rough Trade East	UK	Record shop	https://www.facebook.com/roughtradeeast/
C28	Look Mum No Hands	UK	Bike café	https://www.lookmumnohands.com/

C29	Print Club London	UK	Screenprinting studio	https://printclublondon.com/
C30	DIY Art Shop	UK	Art shop	https://www.facebook.com/diyartshop/
C31	LN-CC AC LTD	UK	Apparel shop	https://www.instagram.com/thelncc/
C32	Klei Ceramics	UK	Ceramic shop	https://klei.shop/
C33	SE20cycles	UK	Bike café	https://www.se20cycles.com/
C34	NADA	UK	Zero-waste shop	https://www.thenadashop.com/
C35	AIDA Shoreditch	UK	Apparel shop	https://www.instagram.com/aidashoreditch/
C36	Not Just a Shop	UK	Homeware shop	https://www.instagram.com/notjustashopual/
C37	Libreria Bookshop	UK	Bookshop	https://www.instagram.com/librerialondon/
C38	Earl of East	UK	Bath shop	https://www.instagram.com/earlofeastlondon/
C39	Gay's the Word	UK	Bookshop	https://www.gaystheword.co.uk/
C40	Hatch	UK	Gift shop	https://hiddenscotland.co/listings/hatch/