

Original Article

Rules of Experience Density in Independent Bookstores: A Meta-Ethnography of Gangwon and Chungcheong, Korea

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ABSTRACT

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Objectives: This study examines how “experience density” forms in independent bookstores through interactions among programs, space, and networks, using Noh & Lee (2024) as the sole corpus. **Method:** We applied meta-ethnography with documentary coding to synthesize cross-case patterns from Gangwon and Chungcheong. **Results:** Experience density followed a low-barrier → expansion → deepening sequence; servicescape affordances moderated program impact; diffusion occurred via repeated, symmetric partnerships, with tourism-oriented alliances in Gangwon and learning-centered rhythms in Chungcheong. **Conclusion:** We propose desk-based design rules and indicators for comparative assessment without fieldwork, and suggest mixed-methods validation with additional datasets.

Keywords: Experience density, Independent bookstores, Meta-ethnography, Network embeddedness, Program rhythm, Servicescape, Third place

1. Introduction

Independent bookstores are not merely retail channels; they function as local cultural infrastructure where reading, discourse, and creation intersect. Especially since the 2010s, independent bookstores have foregrounded “experience” as a core value, shifting from sales-centered transactional spaces to experiential spaces in which participation, relationships, and learning accumulate [1,2]. This turn is also consistent with discussions of placeness that argue the meaning of place is constituted in users’ embodied experience [3,4]. Nevertheless, research on independent bookstores in Korea has often remained descriptive—focusing on store counts, sales, and location factors—so a framework that systematically explains the mechanisms by which ‘experience’ is designed and, through rules, leads to revisits and community formation has been relatively lacking; to address this gap, we ground ‘experience density’ in a structured review

that synthesizes the experience-economy, third-place, servicescape, social-learning, and network-embeddedness literatures and operationalize it into measurable program-space-network categories.

This study takes as a single corpus—the published, field-record-based secondary source—the investigation report by Noh and Lee [5] that captures independent bookstores in Gangwon and Chungcheong through on-site records and narratives, and theorizes, via meta-ethnography, how “experience density” (Experience Density) in independent bookstores is formed through program-space-network interactions and what rules govern that formation [6]. Here, experience density refers to the extent to which interaction and learning accumulate per unit time through the combination of program intensity and thematic diversity, spatial modules and sensory affordances, and the structure of network embeddedness—partnerships with local actors such as clubs and libraries [1,2,7,8].

The primary aim of this study is to interpret and translate bookstore operators' utterances, descriptions of programs and space, and accounts of collaborating entities presented by Noh and Lee [5], and to inductively derive the rules by which experience density is formed. To this end, we pose the following research questions:

- RQ 1. In what combinations do programs (readings, talks/lectures, workshops, clubs), space (modular compositions such as café, gallery, workshop, archive), and networks (libraries, schools, festivals, local creators) elevate experience density [1,5]?
- RQ 2. Through what rules (e.g., rhythms and periodicity, the height of entry barriers, role differentiation, repeatable formats) does the formation of experience density become stabilized [1,6] ?
- RQ 3. How do differing regional contexts—Gangwon and Chungcheong—produce variation in the above combinations and rules [5]?

2. Theoretical background and conceptual frame

This chapter establishes an analytical perspective that understands the “experience density” of independent bookstores as an interaction among programs, space, and networks. We first define the units and quality of experience through the experience economy and place/service-scape theories [1-4,9], and then explain the mechanisms by which participation becomes stabilized using theories of social learning and network embeddedness [7,8, 10-12]. Finally, we adopt the translation/synthesis procedures of meta-ethnography as the analytic logic of this study [6,13-15]. The primary corpus of analysis is the investigation report that systematically compiles on-site records of independent bookstores in Gangwon and Chungcheong [5].

To position the study within domestic scholarship and policy, we additionally reference Korean research on independent bookstores, regional cultural spaces, and regeneration—as well as Gangwon and Chungcheong policy documents—to clarify the study's contribution to national debates and implementation.

2.1. Experience economy and experience density

From the perspective of the experience economy, organizations intentionally design experiences as outputs, and staging and participation structures that act on emotion, attention, and memory are treated as key variables [2].

In the context of independent bookstores, experience consists of event formats that precede, accompany, or follow sales (lectures, readings, workshops, exhibitions), the spatial staging that supports those formats, and the rules of interaction among participants. In this study, “experience density” is defined as the degree of accumulation of interaction and learning within a unit of time. We assume multiplicative and interactive combination effects among (a) program intensity and thematic diversity, (b) spatial modules, visibility, and circulation (Bitner, 1992; Gibson, 1979), and (c) network bridging and brokerage [7,8]. The S-O-R (Stimulus-Organism-Response) model from environmental psychology serves as a reference pathway between a bookstore's atmospherics and participatory behavior, in that physical/ social stimuli transform the organism's affective/cognitive state to produce behavioral responses [9,16].

2.2. Placeness, third place, and the servicescape

Place theory emphasizes that the meaning of place is constituted within layers of user experience and memory [3,4]. As a “third place,” the independent bookstore softens the boundary between private and public realms and enables repeatable social interactions [1]. The servicescape perspective presents the systematic effects of the physical environment—illumination, acoustics, furniture, circulation, signage—on the behaviors of staff and customers [9], while ecological psychology's concept of affordance identifies the action possibilities that a space offers as an analytic unit [17]. Through this lens, we can theorize the mediating and moderating effects that a bookstore's module combinations (café/gallery/workshop/archive), visibility (lines of sight and exposure), and dwelling friendliness (seating, dwelling pockets, noise management) exert on program experiences.

2.3. Programs and social learning: the formation of community

Programs constitute arenas of social learning in which participants move from legitimate peripheral participation to core practice [10,11]. Repeated formats—readings, talks/lectures, and clubs—support role, skill, and identity transitions along an introduction → deepening → expansion trajectory, while the accumulation of cultural capital and rules of practice stabilizes community norms [18-20]. From this perspective, a program's rhythm (periodicity and frequency) and the grammar of its formats (time, roles, rules of interaction) operate as rule-like conditions for the regulated emergence of experience density.

2.4. Network embeddedness and governance

External linkages of independent bookstores—to libraries, schools, festivals, and local creators—complement scarce resources and expand both reach and trust. Weak ties draw in novel ideas and participants [8], and brokers who span structural holes facilitate exchange across groups, thereby expanding the opportunity structure of participation [7]. At the same time, excessive embeddedness can produce closure and rigidity [12], requiring a balance between bonding and bridging social capital [21,22]. In this study, we read the repetition, symmetry, and co-planning of external partnerships as indicators of network quality and explore their indirect effects on experience density.

2.5. Rhythm, formats, and sequences of experience

Experience acquires form through the temporal arrangement and performance of events. Ritual and performance theories show that a passage structure of preparation-enactment-dispersal and the ‘time of the threshold’ (liminality) strengthen memory and communal cohesion [23-25]. The time sociology of events holds that chains, cycles, and tempo are fixed as rules that heighten the predictability of participation [26]. The working hypothesis of this study is that when bookstore programs are organized as a sequence from low-entry formats (open readings/book talks) → relationship-expanding formats (collaborative exhibitions/clubs) → deepening formats (serial courses/publishing projects), the accumulation and acceleration of experience density occur.

2.6. Analytic logic of meta-ethnography and validation

Meta-ethnography is a synthesis method that extracts and reciprocally translates key concepts from multiple qualitative texts to construct lines-of-argument [6]. This study codes the cases, utterances, and photo captions in the investigation report into first-order concepts, and then reciprocally translates concepts across cases to derive common and discriminant categories. Reliability is secured through codebook and decision-rule documentation and stability checks via self re-coding [13]; transferability and credibility are reinforced by thick description and the search for counterevidence [14,15]. Given the characteristics of the corpus, quantification is minimized; where necessary, ordinal coding is employed to conduct relative comparisons of format intensity, diversity, and repetition.

2.7. Summary of the conceptual frame and analytic propositions

Based on the foregoing discussion, we set the following analytic propositions.

- P1 (Program-Space Interaction): As program intensity and diversity increase, experience density rises; this effect is amplified or attenuated by servicescape affordances—visibility, circulation, and dwelling pockets [9,17].
- P2 (Network Mediation): As repetition and symmetry of external partnerships increase, bridging capital expands, widening the reach and strengthening the trust of program participation [7,8], thereby elevating experience density.
- P3 (Rule-like Rhythm): As periodicities and sequences settle into rules, the predictability of participation and role learning are strengthened, leading to the accumulation of experience density [11, 26].
- P4 (Contextual Variation): Differences in regional social, cultural, and tourism infrastructures generate path dependence in the above combinations, producing substitutable operating paths between Gangwon and Chungcheong [5].

3. Research data and methods

This study adopts meta-ethnography as the core logic of synthesis and documentary ethnography as the data strategy, and reinterprets Noh and Lee’s [5] investigation report—containing cases of independent bookstores in Gangwon and Chungcheong—as a single corpus (a published, field-record-based secondary source). Meta-ethnography is a qualitative method that reciprocally translates key concepts dispersed across multiple texts and synthesizes them into lines-of-argument [6,27], while documentary ethnography is an approach that extracts rules of practice and the construction of meaning embedded in field records, photographs, captions, maps, and editorial metadata [13,14]. This chapter sequentially describes the research design, boundary-setting of the corpus, units of analysis and coding scheme, synthesis procedures, strategies for reliability and validation, and issues of ethics and researcher positionality.

3.1. Research design overview

The purpose of this research is to theorize, in terms of rules and sequences, how the experience density of in-

dependent bookstores is formed and stabilized through program-space-network interactions. To this end: (1) we extract, from the corpus, per case, descriptions of program formats, spatial modules, and network relations; (2) we derive first-order concepts through open, in vivo, and process coding [28]; (3) we reciprocally translate concepts across cases to construct second-order categories and aggregate dimensions [29]; and (4) we present operating paths in which program rhythms, spatial affordances, and network embeddedness combine, checking the robustness of the synthesis through the search for counterevidence and for alternative explanations [15].

3.2. Corpus scope and collection

The corpus comprises the entirety of Noh and Lee's [5] report, including the main text, tables and figures, photo captions, maps, and editorial metadata (subtitles, notes, and descriptions of appendices). We treat as source data operators' utterances for each case, descriptions of program/space composition, and mentions of external collaborating entities such as libraries, schools, and festivals. This study conducts no additional fieldwork; as a secondary analysis of publicly published material, it falls under exemption from ethics review (per institutional policy; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.3. Units of analysis and sampling

The unit of analysis is the individual bookstore case included in the report; within each case, event episodes—for example, the introduction of a regular reading series, the consolidation of a club, and collaborative exhibitions/courses—are coded as auxiliary units [30]. Sampling analyzes the full set of cases contained in the report with the aim of theoretical saturation [13]. Where narrative density is insufficient to reconstruct sequences, we perform only categorical coding and exclude process data.

3.4. Codebook design and coding procedures

The codebook consists of five axes: Program, Space, Network, Rhythm, and Outcomes. The Program axis covers format types (talks/lectures, readings, workshops, exhibitions, clubs, publishing projects), intensity (frequency, duration, participant base), and diversity (topic spectrum). The Space axis includes module combinations (café, gallery, workshop, archive), affordances (seating, illumination, acoustics, circulation, visibility), and the presence of dwelling pockets [9,17]. The Network axis records partner types (libraries, schools, festivals, local creators), relational

properties (repetition, symmetry, co-planning), and brokerage (spanning structural holes) [7-8]. The Rhythm axis includes periodicity, tempo, sequences (entry → relationship-expansion → deepening formats), and role differentiation (operator, host, participant rules). The Outcomes axis consists of text-based signals of revisit, markers of community consolidation, and learning/creation outputs (e.g., sustained clubs; the emergence of serial courses and publishing). First-order coding is conducted using in vivo and process coding [28]; in second-order coding, categories are integrated and axial relations specified to construct a data structure of first-order concepts, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions [29].

3.5. Meta-ethnography synthesis procedures

The synthesis follows Noblit and Hare's [6] classic seven steps. First, we specify research questions (the rules of experience density). Second, we select relevant texts. Third, we explore how concepts relate across cases. Fourth, we translate the core concepts of individual cases into the terms of other cases. Fifth, we synthesize those translations. Sixth, we structure counterevidence and tensions through refutational synthesis. Seventh, we represent the synthesis results as path models and rule sets. Given that we are reciprocally translating multiple cases within a single source (the investigation report), we follow the eMERGe guidelines for transparency in reporting—disclosing coding, translations, and the bases for judgment [29].

3.6. Sequence mapping and auxiliary ordinal coding

To render the rules of experiential formation temporally, we reconstruct event narratives through sequence mapping (prepare-introduce-settle-expand), applying multiple strategies for process data where needed [30]. We do not aim at quantification; however, to enhance comparability we add three-level ordinal codings—low/medium/high—for program intensity, diversity, and repetition, for spatial affordances, and for network quality, and use them for cross-case pattern matching [28]. As a follow-on robustness check to assess sufficiency and equifinality of particular paths, we complement the analysis with a limited set-theoretic interpretive lens (QCA-style thinking) [31,32].

3.7. Reliability, validation, and audit trail

Given that this is a single-researcher study, we secure dependability and traceability through stability across re-coding (two-week interval recoding agreement), documentation of decision rules, and an audit trail [15]. We

strengthen transferability through thick description and the presentation of counterexamples [14]. To bolster construct validity, synthesis results are presented in parallel as a data-structure diagram and as case-by-case mini-narratives [13,29]. For operationalization, we specify ordinal thresholds as follows: program rhythm—less than once per month = low; 1–3 times per month = medium; 4 or more times per month = high; spatial affordances—an additive composite of the number of reconfigurable modules, line-of-sight clarity, and the presence of stay pockets scored 1–3; network quality—the number of fixed annual partners and the presence of repetition, symmetry, and co-programming scored 1–3. The sum of the three scores (range 3–9) constitutes a minimal Experience Density index.

4. Case synthesis and findings

This chapter reciprocally translates and synthesizes the Gangwon and Chungcheong independent bookstore cases contained in the corpus [5] through meta-ethnographic procedures, and presents the rules and pathways by which experience density is formed and stabilized via interactions among programs, space, and networks. The report systematically provides public lists of neighborhood bookstores and on-site narrative, photographic, and map information, thereby offering a primary textual corpus suitable for cross-case comparison and synthesis [5]. To directly answer the research questions, Chapter IV is organized as follows: IV-1 (RQ1) Program-Space-Network interactions (Sections 4.2–4.4); IV-2 (RQ2) Regional pathway variation (Sections 4.5–4.6); and IV-3 (RQ3) Evaluation framework (Section 5.5).

4.1. Data structure (first-order concepts – second-order themes – aggregate dimensions)

Open and in vivo coding yielded first-order concepts such as readings, talks/lectures, workshops, reading groups, and children's programs; library tie-ins, patron pickup of requested titles, and inter-bookstore joint campaigns; as well as recurrent index terms like regularity, periodicity, and participation roles. Through reciprocal translation, the second-order themes were organized as low-entry formats, relationship-expanding formats, deepening formats, network embeddedness, and rhythm/rules; the final aggregate dimensions converge on the interaction of program-space-network-rhythm. This structure is consistent with the core axes of experience design proposed in the servicescape, third-place, and experience-economy literatures [1,2,9].

4.2. Formation rule A: a sequence from low-entry formats to relationship expansion and deepening

In many cases, experience density begins with low-barrier formats (e.g., reading groups; light writing/copying workshops), proceeds to a relationship-expansion stage accompanied by linkages with libraries, schools, and peer bookstores, and then transitions to deepening formats such as serial courses and publishing projects [5]. The more program intensity and diversity are temporally organized, the more experience accumulates [2], and third-place interactions become fixed into repeatable forms that strengthen revisit paths [1].

4.3. Formation rule B: amplification of experience density through network embeddedness

Experience density was amplified as the repetition and symmetry of external partnerships increased. Joint services with libraries (e.g., patron pickup of requested titles; joint promotion of programs), inter-bookstore alliance campaigns, and co-planning with local schools and festivals simultaneously broadened the reach and strengthened the trust of participation [5]. This aligns with network theory's prediction that information diffusion through weak ties and brokerage across structural holes creates channels for the inflow of new participants and ideas [7,8].

4.4. Formation rule C: strengthening contexts of dwelling through coupling with local resources

When bookstores are coupled with local identity and resources—regional authors, crafts, tourist itineraries—visit motivations align with cultural/touristic routes and dwell time tends to extend [5]. From the perspectives of placeness and the servicescape [3,9], the coupling of local narratives and experiential resources expands the spatial affordances—visibility, circulation, and dwelling pockets—thereby enhancing dwelling friendliness; in turn, this substantially amplifies the intensity of program experiences.

4.5. Derivation of path types

The synthesis can be summarized into several representative paths. First, in the library-linked path, complementary division of labor between bookstores and libraries widens inflows to low-entry formats and subsequently stabilizes transitions to deepening formats [5]. Second, in the alliance/campaign path, joint programs and campaigns by multiple bookstores generate collective visibility and inflow, which individual bookstores then leverage to expand

deepening formats [5]. Third, in the children/creator-learning path, regular operation of children's and creator workshops and reading groups forms learning tracks of entry-expansion-deepening that accelerate community settlement [5]. Finally, in the local-resource-coupling path, interfacing with regional authors, crafts, and tourist itineraries strengthens motivation to dwell and composes composite experiences [5].

4.6. Regional comparison: variation between Gangwon and Chungcheong

In the Gangwon region, alliance programs with other bookstores and coupling with tourist routes are relatively prominent, and this trend clearly broadens the base of external visitors [5]. In contrast, the Chungcheong region distinctly features regular learning communities centered on children and creators, with experience density accumulating strongly through role transitions and skill deepening among internal members [5]. These differences, combined with contextual factors such as population structures, tourism infrastructure, and the distribution of cultural facilities, are interpreted as producing substitutable operating paths [3].

4.7. Counterexamples and tensions: conditionality of the rules

In some cases, even with many program types, revisit paths were weak when regularity and role rules were insufficient. Conversely, participation inflow was maintained when network devices—such as library linkages and alliance campaigns—operated effectively, even where the program spectrum was limited [5]. Thus, experience density is more sensitive to combinations of rhythm and external linkages than to program diversity per se, and the servicescape's affordances amplify or attenuate these effects [2,9].

4.8. Summary of results: rule set and operating pathways

In sum, after lowering the participation threshold through low-entry formats, expanding reach and trust via repeated and symmetric linkages with libraries, schools, and peer bookstores, and fixing regular rhythms and role rules to enable transitions to deepening formats—such as serial courses and publishing projects—experience density accumulates and accelerates. This pathway is strongly conditioned by servicescape affordances such as visibility, circulation, and dwelling pockets [9], while coupling with local resources provides contextual motivation for dwelling

and further strengthens the effect [3,5]. In the Gangwon-Chungcheong comparison, the former shows reinforcement through alliances and tourism coupling, whereas the latter shows reinforcement through learning-community rhythms.

5. Discussion and implications

This chapter organizes the theoretical implications based on the formation rules of experience density derived in Chapter 4, and proposes design principles and policy implications that can be applied by independent bookstores, libraries, and local governments. The discussion centers on interactions among program, space, and network, while also proposing region-specific strategies and an evaluation framework that reflect contextual differences between Gangwon and Chungcheong [1,2,5,9].

5.1. Theoretical implications: independent bookstores as “experience-production devices”

First, this study reconceptualizes the independent bookstore not as a point of sale but as a device that produces experiences. Experience is the joint product of program intensity/diversity, servicescape affordances, and network embeddedness, which operate multiplicatively and interactively [2,9,17]. Second, insofar as the rhythms of experience and the grammar of formats stabilize paths of revisiting and learning, we concretize, at the level of practice rules, the third-place characteristics of enabling repeatable social interaction [1,11]. Third, external partnerships function not as mere supports but as amplification devices for experience density, thereby validating within cultural-space contexts the network-theoretic prediction that weak ties and brokerage simultaneously expand the reach and trust of participation [7,8,22]. Fourth, variation between Gangwon and Chungcheong shows that the same outcome—high experience density—can be reached via different pathways—alliances/tourism coupling versus learning-community rhythms—supporting the contextual dependence emphasized by place theory [3-5].

5.2. Design principles: a rule set for program-space-network

The rule set that independent bookstores can apply in practice is summarized as follows. First, design programs to begin with low-entry formats, move through relationship-expanding formats, and then transition to deepening formats. Low-entry formats should consist of low-barrier

forms such as open readings, book talks, and light workshops; next, broaden participation through co-planned formats with libraries, schools, and peer bookstores; finally, transition to high-density learning formats such as serial courses and publishing projects [2,5,11]. Second, tune space around visibility, circulation, and dwelling pockets. Ensuring sightlines among stage-seating-stacks during events, fine-tuning noise and illumination, and distributing dwelling pockets catalyze interaction [9,17]. Third, secure repetition and symmetry in networks to accumulate relationship quality. Through reciprocal devices—such as patron pickup of requested titles, reciprocal membership, and shared calendars—simultaneously expand reach and trust [7,8,22]. Fourth, overlay regular rhythms and role rules across all devices. Month/week routines, role differentiation among operator-host-participant, and the public posting of participation rules increase predictability and ensure the accumulation of experience density [11,26].

5.3. Linkage strategies with libraries and local governments

Libraries can amplify regional reading participation by building a complementary ecosystem with independent bookstores. First, operate co-curation and co-programming that combine libraries' information services and collections with bookstores' curation and community capabilities [1,11]. Second, local governments should provide infrastructure that maintains the rhythms of experience through small-scale, high-frequency micro-grants, joint promotional channels, and linkages with streets and festivals [2,22]. Third, institutionalize the broker role by establishing standing cooperation hubs that connect bookstores, libraries, schools, and festivals [7,8].

5.4. Region-specific application strategies: Gangwon and Chungcheong

In the Gangwon region, where coupling with tourist routes and alliance programs is already a strength, it is effective to build a themed rotating calendar linked to seasonal events and festivals so as to convert external visitors into long-term audiences [3,5]. In the Chungcheong region, a strategy suited to the context is to further refine the rhythms of learning communities centered on children and creators, and to clarify a performance pipeline that connects stage-wise tracks of entry-expansion-deepening to outputs such as publishing and exhibitions [5,11].

Dominant pathways in a region indicate what is most commonly observed, not a single obligatory route; regional infrastructures moderate rather than determine outcomes

Our experience-density rules (P1-P3) operate as generative mechanisms across contexts, while regional infrastructures (population mix, tourism capacity, etc.) function as moderators (P4) that shift effect sizes and thresholds. Accordingly, 'non-dominant' pathways—for example, a learning-community track in a tourist region—are feasible when the minimum conditions of regular rhythm, clear role norms, symmetric partnerships, and baseline affordances are in place, though effect sizes and thresholds will vary by context. Because inflow velocity and ceilings may differ, we recommend a hybrid design that couples closed deepening formats (clubs, serial courses) with at least monthly open showcases to convert bridging capital into the core.

5.5. Evaluation framework: minimal text-based indicators

This study proposes minimal, text-based indicators that can be applied using only secondary sources. First, program rhythm can be ordinalized by extracting expressions of regularity from reports, promotional copy, and captions (e.g., weekly, monthly, serial) and by ordering frequency and duration [5,26]. Second, spatial affordances can be compared relatively by coding descriptive keywords for module combinations, visibility, and dwelling pockets [9,17]. Third, network quality can be scored for presence/absence and strength based on expressions indicating the three properties of repetition, symmetry, and co-planning [7,9]. Combining ordinal indicators on these three axes enables assessment of the relative level of experience density and of strengthening pathways even without fieldwork. Subsequent research can extend external validity through a mixed-methods approach that combines card sales, mobile footfall, and participation logs [2,30].

Add the following hybrid/transition indicators: (1) Public-to-core conversion rate: the monthly share of open-event attendees who register for clubs or serial courses. (2) Repeated and symmetric partnership index: repetition (standardized monthly co-events, 0-1) × symmetry (role/cost balance, 0-1) × co-planning share (0-1). (3) Rhythm stability: three-month continuation rate of regular programs (%). (4) Revisit signal (text-based): relative frequency of regularity phrases ('weekly,' 'monthly,' 'next session') in reports and captions. (5) Stay-pocket utilization (text-based): density of keywords for seating, cozy nooks, or café modules (keywords per sentences).

For operationalization, we specify ordinal thresholds as follows: program rhythm—less than once per month = low; 1-3 times per month = medium; 4 or more times per month = high; spatial affordances—an additive composite of the number of reconfigurable modules, line-of-sight clarity,

and the presence of stay pockets scored 1-3; network quality—the number of fixed annual partners and the presence of repetition, symmetry, and co-programming scored 1-3. The sum of the three scores (range 3-9) constitutes a minimal Experience Density index.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

This study formalized, through meta-ethnographic synthesis of a single corpus—the investigation report by Noh and Lee [5] covering independent bookstore cases in Gangwon and Chungcheong, treated as a published, field-record-based secondary source—that the experience density of independent bookstores is formed and stabilized via interactions among programs, space, and networks. The key results are summarized as follows. First, a sequence that proceeds from low-entry formats → relationship expansion → deepening formats drives the accumulation and acceleration of experience [2,11]. Second, repeated and symmetric partnerships with libraries, schools, peer bookstores, and festivals simultaneously broaden the reach and strengthen the trust of participation, amplifying experience density [7,8,22]. Third, servicescape affordances—centered on visibility, circulation, and dwelling pockets—mediate and moderate program effects [9,17]. Fourth, Gangwon is relatively characterized by alliance/tourism-coupled pathways, and Chungcheong by learning-community rhythms, confirming that the same outcome can be reached via different paths [3,5].

Scholarly contributions are as follows. We reconceptualize the independent bookstore not as a sales space but as a device for producing experience, and we model experience formation at the level of rules and sequences. In doing so, we concretize the repeatable interactions posited by third-place theory [1] into the grammar and rhythms of programs, and we graft the weak-tie and brokerage effects of network theory [7,8] onto the cultural-space context. Practically, we propose: design rules for programs along the low-entry → expansion → deepening trajectory; spatial “recipes” anchored in visibility, circulation, and dwelling pockets; and linkage governance grounded in reciprocal devices (reciprocal membership, patron-pickup arrangements, shared calendars). These rules are applicable when libraries and local governments design complementary ecosystems with independent bookstores [1,5,22].

Limitations of the study are as follows. First, as a secondary analysis based on a single documentary corpus, there are constraints. Depending on the report’s narrative density, focus, and editorial units, specific formats or spatial elements may be under- or over-represented, and micro-tem-

poral trajectories and quantitative effects (e.g., dwell time, revisit rates, sales) are difficult to estimate directly from text-only sources [15]. Second, given constraints on time-series comparison, it is difficult to cleanly distinguish the endogeneity of program rhythms (success followed by institutionalization versus institutionalization followed by success) [30]. Third, servicescape affordances and network quality are approximated via text-based ordinal coding in this study; thus, absolute magnitudes cannot be pinned down and causal inference is not possible without quasi-experimental or panel designs [8]. Fourth, differences in pathways between Gangwon and Chungcheong may reflect both regional contextual effects and sampling biases inherent in corpus composition [5].

Future research is proposed as follows. First, mixed-methods validation is required. By estimating the rules and pathways presented here using difference-in-differences (DID) or panel fixed effects and combining card-transaction panels, mobile footfall, program logs, and participant surveys, external validity can be greatly expanded [2,30]. Second, to deepen process theorizing, conduct process tracing and sequence analysis for representative bookstores to identify thresholds at which the low-entry → expansion → deepening pathway accelerates [26]. Third, expand the scope of comparison by adding corpora from the Capital Region, Honam, and Yeongnam to examine transferability and contextual variation, and perform cross-comparisons with adjacent cultural infrastructures—libraries, maker-spaces, and small venues—to clarify boundary conditions [3-4]. Fourth, from a network perspective, refine two-mode network modeling (actor-activity) and brokerage indicators to quantify and visualize the indirect effects of linkage structures on experience density [7,8]. Fifth, experimental policy evaluation is meaningful. Design micro-grants, shared calendars, and reciprocal membership at the municipal level as policy experiments and verify cost-effectiveness using selection-nonselection comparisons or stepped diffusion [22].

Note that, as a secondary analysis of publicly published material, this study handles no personally identifiable information and strictly adheres to citation and source attribution [15]. For reproducibility, we recommend systematizing an audit trail that includes the codebook, decision rules, data-structure diagrams, and case-specific mini-narratives, and conducting stability checks for recoding at set intervals [13,28]. Presenting the codebook, coding guidelines, and example tables as appendices—within the limits of what can be made public—would enhance comparability for follow-on research.

Experience density in independent bookstores peaks when the three axes—the grammar of programs, spatial

affordances, and network embeddedness—are bound by rhythms and rules. The divergent pathways in Gangwon and Chungcheong indicate not a “single right answer” but the presence of multiple executable design paths. Accordingly, localities should localize the principles of lowering thresholds for low-entry formats, designing repeated and symmetric linkages, fixing regular rhythms, and connecting deepening formats to tangible outputs. The rules, pathways, and indicators proposed here can function as a common language for independent bookstores, libraries, and local governments in designing and managing experiences; once corroborated quantitatively by subsequent mixed-methods studies, reading-culture and regional-culture policies can take a decisive step toward empirically grounded, experience-based design [1,2,5].

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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