

Transforming Corporate Third Places to Foster Social Connectivity Among Minority Groups

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of business adaptability in fostering social connectivity among minority groups. The study argues that making the switch from corporate-based third places to community-based ones is essential to minimize social isolation and the criminalization of people of color in public areas. Community-based third places not only improve individual mental health and workplace productivity but also benefit businesses by yielding higher profit margins. The findings conclude that a lack of opportunity structures creates social deserts in densely populated minority areas, leading to group polarization and reduced connectivity. Ultimately, it was realized that businesses must prioritize the incorporation of community-based activities, such as community discussions, to promote interaction between ingroups and outgroups.

Keywords: Business Adaptability; Third Places; Connectivity; Minority Groups; Community-based; Corporate-based

INTRODUCTION

Business adaptability, an organization's capacity to quickly adjust its current business model in response to changing market trends and to meet consumer needs, represents a critical priority for sustainable organizational success. Making the shift from corporate-based third place business models to community-based ones is the ideal way to promote connectivity among minorities. According to Felicia Fai and Llara Marrioti, associate professors of international business and regional economics in the UK, third places are one of three vital locations for all individuals: home (first place), office (second place), and third places such as "collaborative

working spaces, cafes, bars and libraries" (1). In this context, corporate-based third places are defined as commercialized environments primarily utilized for transactional efficiency and metrics. Conversely, community-based third places refer to environments structured to prioritize social equity, civic engagement and interconnection. They are vital spaces that hold social and mental benefits outside necessary sites like home and work. As stated by Ferreira *et al.*, expert researchers from the Centre for Business in Society at Coventry University, a qualitative and descriptive analysis showed how third places encourage social activity and "potentially develop a sense of community," which is vital for those who rely on third places as it leads to "educational attainment, workplace satisfaction, economic prosperity, and overall feelings," (2) especially among Hispanics and Black people.

To add on, Dr. Vivek H. Murthy, the 19th and 21st Surgeon General of the United States, used a meta-analysis of previous peer-reviewed sources to understand how "(s)ocial connection (inside and) outside the

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workplace” (3) has been proven to be relevant as it can benefit businesses by improving productivity, further strengthening the reasons that businesses should focus on transforming into community-based third places. Nevertheless, some factors of social connection, such as social support, are vital to developing a sense of community, as it refers to assistance from peers, friends, or any source of comfort that can lead to better mental health for an individual. Third places can provide and encourage social support; consequently, it can be assumed that individuals without social support are also likely to have weaker social interaction. Among minorities, this is very common, as they are more likely to fall into outgroup homogeneity bias, or the likelihood of considering all people outside of their ingroup negatively. In this case, the ingroup refers to all individuals of the same ethnicity or race. This disparity is due to the low number of community-based third places in areas with an abundance of people of color, which doesn’t give individuals an opportunity to connect with outgroups (4). Given that marginalized populations are more likely to face adversity and be provided with fewer opportunities for connectivity, business adaptability is important to fit the consumer needs of minorities. Improving social connections between individuals by incorporating community-based activities into corporate-based third places may allow for a better future. Improved connectivity in first and second places can also be rewarding for the reasons stated, but a third place used particularly for social purposes has advantages that far outweigh any others. For example, Rhubart *et al.*, experts from the Department of Biobehavioral Health at The Pennsylvania State University, collected data using a cross-sectional analysis of census tracts and discovered that “densities of ... civic organizations are associated with lower homicide rates among Blacks,” (4) as having the necessary social connection from third places results in substantially positive effects. Therefore, this perspective argues that businesses must adapt their corporate-centered structures into community-focused third place to bridge racial equity gaps, promote intergroup connectivity, and simultaneously secure financial benefits.

DISPARITY OF OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES IN MINORITY GROUPS

As aforementioned, third places being available to people of color, especially Hispanics and Black people, can allow for social opportunities in these weaker

communities. It has been discovered that “neighborhoods with larger concentrations of racial/ethnic minorities have less availability of ... opportunity structures” (4). Third- place infrastructures are built in areas with a smaller number of minorities purposefully, giving people of color who need connectivity fewer opportunities than those who fit the societal standard. Data collected suggests a disparity in social infrastructure; for example, it was found that the highest percentage of Black residents had a median of 369 publicly available third places, compared to a median of only 62 in areas with the lowest percentage (4). However, this doesn’t necessarily mean that people of color are provided with more opportunities, but the opposite. The data shows how some areas are rich in resources with accessibility to third places, while others are complete social deserts; rather, the areas with a high median count are located in big cities where Black populations are concentrated, so although there are more locations, they serve more people per square mile. Kimberly Burrows and Kaela Girod, senior training and technical assistance managers from the Urban Institute, found that, unfortunately, policies that “target people of color ... by criminalizing their use of third places” (5) are still in place and contribute to the reason that people of color have less access to third places that are necessary to aid in improving their sense of belonging. Although this article does evaluate a key point, it’s important to consider the writer’s minimal experiences as they lack a background in a field relevant to the research. The stated criminalization of third-place usage plays a major part in why people of color are provided fewer opportunity structures and why they have a lower amount of social connectivity with outgroups. As stated by Jamelia N. Morgan, a professor at UConn and former civil rights litigator, an illegal policy that specifically targets “young people of color, particularly, low-income Black and Latinx youth” is an exemplary example of how people of color are mistreated, as the policy encourages “hyper-surveillance and regulation of these young people in public spaces” (6). Although this article has its limitations, as it explains an illegal policy that was exploited and has expired, it is still relevant to understand part of the reason that minority groups feel criminalized when using third place. Additionally, it explains why minorities have been found to have the least amount of social connectivity in their communities, and these kinds of policies are majorly setting back society by promoting racial profiling. Discouraging such policies, focusing on providing a third-place environment for minorities, and improving the quantity

of third places in densely populated areas are the optimal ways to encourage interconnection. Thus, this targeted exclusion underscores why business adaptability is an absolute necessity: corporate spaces cannot remain passive observers when public environments are actively restricted, a dynamic explored in the following analysis of community-based activities.

POSITIVE IMPACTS OF IMPLEMENTING COMMUNITY-BASED ACTIVITIES

Businesses utilizing adaptability to transition from corporate-based third places to community-based ones have been shown to help businesses as it ensures a stronger feeling of connection among communities with weak culture. More specifically, in recent times, “corporate third places have flourished” (7) over independently run businesses that function as third places, according to researcher Bob Adams from 27Gen. Although this may seem like a neutral or irrelevant outcome, it isn’t necessary. As reported by experts Rosenbaum & Dickens from the Military College of South Carolina’s Department of Marketing, corporate third places lack community-based activities that independently run businesses do include, such as “open mic nights or community discussions” (8) that foster a stronger sense of community, which is necessary in areas that lack that. The evidence suggests that the integration of said community-based third places will aid in improving connectivity, which seems to be the opposite of corporate-based third places. More specifically, a correlational study discovered that companies such as Starbucks have shown to benefit profit-wise from integrating community-based activities into their established corporate third place environment. When the company “announced a strategic shift to address the company’s departure from its third-place identity,” it faced a “7% decline in same-store sales” (8). This finding further proves the claim that business adaptability to modify current business models into corporate third place that include community-based activities can be an advantage for businesses and individuals. Moreover, Starbucks has provided an example of how “moving away from third-place attributes can affect both business performance and societal well-being,” (8) so, for organizational and community benefits, businesses should abstain from diminishing community-based third place status and rather embrace social interaction by promoting it. According to an expert researcher from the Cambridge Innovation Center with a focus on business,

even corporations with employees who work standard 8-hour jobs can integrate community-based activities into their corporate leaning third places by “creating the space for employees to connect on a human level” (9) for more benefits. Some of these benefits, as previously mentioned, include how creating a comfortable space for employees inside the workplace can lead to more productivity and benefits for the company itself. This synergy occurs due to improved moods and proper work-life balance, and it can also occur because of reduced work-privacy conflict, an issue that occurs when extreme stress from the workplace affects home life and leads to a depressive mood overall (9). Businesses utilizing adaptability in order to incorporate community-based activities into corporate-based third place environments may provide evident benefits for businesses’ profit-wise just as much as it can foster a strong sense of community in areas that lack it. Accounting for the evidence, business adaptability may be essential for minorities to connect with outgroups and to strengthen the amount of social support they have, so businesses receive benefits such as more productive employees and happier customers (9). On the other hand, while it is essential to connect with outgroups, Laetitia Mimoun and Adèle Gruen from the Cass Business School at the University of London, found that third places may also come in the form of “community and religious centers” (10) that give individuals a part of the same ingroup an opportunity to engage with each other, which can be beneficial. Debrosse *et al.*, researchers from the School of Social Work at McGill University, found that connections between people of the same ethnicity are reported to be “higher-quality” (11). When businesses fail to adapt their models to protect and welcome minority consumers, they inadvertently reinforce this societal exclusion and drive down local social connectivity.

CONNECTING ADAPTABILITY TO LACKS IN ACCESS FOR MINORITY GROUPS

Focusing on adapting businesses in areas with large concentrations of minorities is significant as it allows them to utilize third places without being criminalized. According to Ferreira *et al.*, third places like coffee shops “contribut (e) to a community’s social vitality with others who use the space,” (2) promoting connectivity and fostering a strong sense of community in areas with weak culture. These findings suggest the idea that social support, which can often come from third places, is vital to improve connectivity, as the Office of

Table 1. The differences in corporate-based business models and community-based ones have proven to be prevalent in various ways. This table illustrates the shift from corporate-centered business models to community-centered ones, highlighting the resulting improvements in minority safety, social belonging, and overall business profitability as supported by the cited research (1-11).

Category	Corporate-Based Model	Community-Based Model	References
Main Goal	Speed and profit	Connection and community	7, 10
Environment	Grab-and-go culture	Social events	1, 7
Impact	Higher risk of social isolation	Higher sense of belonging	3, 11
Safety/Policy	Potential for racial profiling	Reduced bias/criminalization	4, 5
Business Value	Can lose customer loyalty	Higher productivity and profit	2, 8, 9

the Surgeon General of the United States explains how “people with higher perceived emotional support from family and friends” (3) are more likely to live happier, more productive lives with more social connectivity than those without it. Considering this information, these data suggest that spending time within an ingroup is socially beneficial, but it’s also important to find a balance. Stefan Thurner *et al.*, researchers from the Center for Medical Data Science, Institute of the Science of Complex Systems, Medical University of Vienna, Complexity Science Hub Vienna, and Santa Fe Institute, found that overly “increased social connectivity (with the ingroup) influences (group) polarization” or the “strengthen(ing of) existing opinions” (12) from discussing prevailing similar beliefs, which can be negative if too extreme. Group polarization can cause strong beliefs and stubbornness, and is caused by the lack of opportunity to connect with people in outgroups (12). Nevertheless, restoring community-based third places environments for minorities outside of religious centers can undoubtedly ensure that minority groups can prevent group polarization, while still ensuring that minorities have prospects to connect with people of their ingroup (13). Because group polarization is associated with overconnection within the ingroup, it should be ensured that people of color are not being criminalized for utilizing third places and rather encouraged in order to promote a balance of connection between ingroups and outgroups and to prevent a lack of connectivity among minority groups.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, business adaptability to integrate community-based activities into corporate third

places to cultivate a stronger sense of community is vital for connectivity. Third places must be further encouraged and developed, especially in areas with large concentrations of minority groups, to prevent the criminalization of people of color and to promote social interaction with outgroups. The primary way for businesses to achieve this is by incorporating more community-based activities like karaoke nights, community discussions, etc., that lead to a stronger sense of connection and social support among individuals in a community. Businesses adapting to shift towards this more community-based third-place business model rather than a corporate-based one will allow for a much better cultural identity and improve social connectedness in communities that would adamantly benefit from it. Implementing these models within underserved, densely populated neighborhoods directly address existing opportunity disparities. Also, by doing this, businesses will positively affect personal well-being among individuals and themselves as profit was proven to be higher when a third-place environment was fostered in certain companies such as Starbucks. Ultimately, corporate leaders must therefore look beyond transactional metrics and view community-based third places as vital sites for social connectivity.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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