

Observational Study: Starbuck Phenomenon

EDTC 809 Assessment and Evaluation

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OBSERVATIONAL STUDY: STARBUCK PHENOMENON

Purpose of The Study

The purpose of this qualitative observational study is to uncover common characteristics and themes that are drawn individuals to visit and spend time in Starbucks cafes? Generally, people believe that Starbucks cafés are used as meeting places and remote workspaces to achieve productivity, while enjoying coffee. (Loudenback, 2016) Starbucks cafés over the years have spread throughout major U.S. cities and metropolitan areas. Through observation, the data will gather by documenting the activities, interactions, and reactions of participants (customers and staff) using rich thick descriptions to identify common themes or trends to understand the success of Starbucks cafés. The observation process used is largely investigative, where the researcher gradually makes sense of this social phenomenon by contrasting, comparing, replicating, cataloguing and classifying the objects of this study. (Creswell, 2013)

Setting and Actors

The observational study was conducted between 6:36PM and 7:36PM on October 5 2016 at a Starbuck's Café in Northeast New Jersey. The location is set alongside a busy highway that sees travelers from New York City and neighboring city such as Hackensack, Teaneck, and Ridgefield Park. The café has been in operations for over five years and serves a working-class community. Majority of the business that are nearby include, car dealerships, restaurants, and small businesses. The primary actors in this study are general consumers that visit the café for food, a meeting, and/or leisure reading. Additional actors will include the workers within the café.

Observational Field Notes:

- At the start of this observation the sun sets as people that work traditional 9-5 hours, make their commute home
- There are currently 18-20 customers in the café and four staff members on duty

OBSERVATIONAL STUDY: STARBUCK PHENOMENON

- Staff members are friendly and actively engage with customers and each other.
- Two staff members work the cash register while two staff work the drive through window
- The smell of coffee is heavily noticeable throughout the café
- Active, but light, chatter can be heard from every space within the café
- Customers walk into the Café at a rate of every 2-5 minutes
- 50% of the customers are sitting together and 50% are sitting alone
- The most common purchase observed is hot medium beverages
- Those sitting alone, are on a computer or cellphone and majority have on headphones
- Those customers that are sitting in groups are engaged in conversations
- Conversations seem to require focus as participants ask questions and review documents
- Most customers are dressed casually
- Laptops and cellphones dominate as the technology used by all customers
- Staff members at the coffee bar happily engage with each other in casual conversations
- At times the staff members share a banter in a joking manner
- The environment is very lax and laidback
- There is ample lighting that is suitable and conducive to reading in most parts of the café
- At 6:47PM, a customer gets up from his computer and seat to purchase a medium sized beverage
- One customer is observed watching a video on his laptop with headphones
- One gentleman sitting by the window actively browses Facebook and talks on the phone
- There are approximately six seats outside of the café
- Three gentlemen sit and talk outside of the café
- There is a 2 to 1 ratio of men to women observed in the café during this observation

OBSERVATIONAL STUDY: STARBUCK PHENOMENON

- Two customers commented to each other about the lighting being poor and moved to a different location in the café
- As customers talk casually and share hugs, many seem to know each other
- Almost all customers that are sitting down are observed carrying a backpack or bag suitable to carry books
- Items like, food, cups, and menus, are boldly displayed for customers to see from all angles in the café
- The age of customers look to range from early and mid twenties to early and mid fifties
- There tends to be more younger than older participants that stay to work in the café
- Customers wait quietly by the cash register as cashiers processes another customer
- At 7:00PM, two customers walk in and purchase a medium beverage
- Windows in the café are large and stretch from the floor to the ceiling with clear view outside
- Staff members of the café casually walk in and out
- Two gentlemen sit in the corner nearest the window and engage in a conversation
- One customer is observed dressed in business-casual attire
- Staff casually use cellphones to talk and send messages
- Majority of the customers that walked into the café did not stay in the café
- At 7:07PM, three gentlemen arrive outside of the café. However, only one entered to purchase an item. The remaining two gentlemen stayed outside and found a place to sit and talk
- Most customers are observed surfing the Internet
- Most customers are engaged in their computer and pay less attention to their surroundings
- Before leaving, two staff members share a hug at 7:10PM
- Staff members actively check on customers to identify each customer's needs

OBSERVATIONAL STUDY: STARBUCK PHENOMENON

- Big pictures of coffee beans and machines acts as accent pieces and décor all around the café
- At 7:11PM, two customers walk in into the café. One customers goes up to a staff for a hug
- A staff asks a customer is she wants a drink. The customer said, no.
- The temperature in the café at the time of observation felt moderate
- At 7:13PM one customers commented on the temperature by saying that it was hot in the café
- Almost all observable customers that enter the café go directly to the register
- Pastries, sandwiches, healthy bars, chips, and water are displayed as accessible center-pieces
- Customers that are not sitting in groups, rarely interact with each other
- There is little noticeable sound from outside
- Outlets are placed near all sitting area throughout the café for customers to use
- The sound of coffee machines can be heard throughout the space
- Zero participants that were present at the beginning of this observation have left
- All participants that were present at the beginning of this observation are still present
- Participants are not observed paying attention to each other. However, at times customers are observed walking by and glancing over at each other
- Two gentlemen, sitting by the window, are observed playing chess, silently
- At 7:29PM customers is observed paying with a phone or application
- At 7:32PM, the largest group of sitting customers prepare to leave the café after ending a meeting
- At 7:33PM, three men enter the café and head to the register
- At 7:33PM, one of the three men that entered the café is heard ordering a regular coffee
- At 7:34PM, three men quickly fill open seats left by a large group that left the café after meeting

OBSERVATIONAL STUDY: STARBUCK PHENOMENON

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Analysis

Overall, the environment the Starbucks café created is one that is accommodating and conducive to social interaction and productivity for an extended period. Unlike fast food restaurants that focus on providing relatively fast service for customers who want to enter and leave quickly, this Starbucks café does the opposite with dimension of comfort and accessibilities. This was evident through the interactions between people within the space, relationships among participants, and effects of the physical space. While carrying out this observational study, five themes emerged and remained consistent. Data related to environment, social interaction, basic needs and accommodations, productivity, and patterns. All five themes connect with the participants and served as support to understanding the phenomenon we see in the rise and use of Starbucks cafés.

The observed Starbucks café presents an environment that is social, warm, welcoming, and accommodating to its customers. Although this study showed that males outnumbered females by a 2 to 1 ratio, the environment did not seem to discriminate between race, age, sex or other human characteristics. Location also plays a large part in accommodation and constant visits by customers because the café is located off a highway, which increases accessibility. Abraham Maslow (1987) is well known for studying the importance of human needs and motivation. Maslow suggests that basic needs must be met before focusing on higher needs, to ensure motivation and happiness. (Maslow, 1987) Data suggests, that the observed Starbucks café focused on and ensures basic needs, such as food, beverages, lighting, temperature, parking, and power, are readily available for all customers to ensure comfort and happiness.

OBSERVATIONAL STUDY: STARBUCK PHENOMENON

In addition to the space, social interactions by both staff and customers create an environment within the observed café that fosters conversations and casual interaction. Data suggests that this social aspect promotes comfort and longer stay by customers. For example, customers that visited the café for longer stays came prepared to work, as evident by book bags and carrying cases. The argument could be made that customers that intended to stay, were confident in the café's ability to accommodate their basic needs to carry out studying, have conversations, and enjoy a cup of coffee. Data also showed that customers tend to follow a pattern in terms of rate of visits, joining lines, items purchased, worked carried out, devices used, and level of conversation.

Conclusion & Further Consideration

Analysis of data gathered through this observational study shows that the observed Starbucks café is likely popular due to the social, warm, welcoming, and accommodating aspects of its environment. Although data collected from this observation study presented ample information to derive themes and trends to deductively make this conclusion about this particulate café, additional studies will be needed to strengthen both validity and reliability of the study, to make a claim for similar Starbucks cafés. Teaming an additional observational studies with interviews of the participants from the current site and new sites, can lead to further insight into what drives customers to these cafes. Additionally, with further studies, items such as the important aspect of the café to customers, and what promotes their productivity within the café can be studied to strengthen the study.

OBSERVATIONAL STUDY: STARBUCK PHENOMENON

Appendix I: Coding Data: Priori Codes

| Environment |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• At the start of this observation the sun sets as people that work traditional 9-5 hours, make their commute home• There are currently 18-20 customers in the café and four staff members on duty• Two staff members work the cash register while two staff work the drive through window• The smell of coffee is heavily noticeable throughout the café• 50% of the customers are sitting together and 50% are sitting alone• There is a 2 to 1 ratio of men to women observed in the café during this observation• The age of customers look to range from early and mid twenties to early and mid fifties• Windows in the café are large and stretch from the floor to the ceiling with clear view outside• One customer is observed dressed in business-casual attire• Big pictures of coffee beans and machines act as accent pieces and décor all around the café• The temperature in the café at the time of observation felt moderate• The sound of coffee machines can be heard throughout the space• At 7:29PM customers is observed paying with a phone or application |
| Social Interaction |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff members are friendly and actively engage with customers and each other• Active, but light, chatter can be heard from every space within the café• Group conversations seem to require thought and focus as participants ask questions and review documents |

OBSERVATIONAL STUDY: STARBUCK PHENOMENON

- Staff members at the coffee bar happily engage with each other in casual conversations
- At times the staff members share a banter in a joking manner
- The environment is very lax and laidback
- Three gentlemen sit and talk outside of the café
- As customers talk casually and share hugs, many seem to know each other
- Two gentlemen sit in the corner nearest the window and engage in a conversation
- Before leaving, two staff members share a hug at 7:10PM
- The environment and staff of the café seem to be welcoming
- Customers that are not sitting in group rarely interact with each other
- Participants are not observed paying attention to each other. However, at times customers are observed walking by and glancing over at each other
- Two gentlemen, sitting by the window, are observed playing chess, silently

Basic Needs and Accommodations

- There is ample lighting that is suitable and conducive to reading in most parts of the café
- At approximately 6:47PM, a customer gets up from his computer and seat to purchase a what looks like a second medium sized beverage
- There are approximately six seats outside of the café
- Two customers commented to each other about the lighting being poor where they were sitting as they moved to a different location in the café
- Items like, food, cups, and menus, are boldly displayed for customers to see from all angles in the café
- Staff members actively check on customers to identify each customer's needs

OBSERVATIONAL STUDY: STARBUCK PHENOMENON

- A staff member is heard asking a customer whether or not they customer wanted a drink.
The customer said, no
- At 7:13PM one customers commented on the temperature by sharing that it was hot in the space
- Pastries, sandwiches, healthy bars, chips, and water are displayed as center-pieces behind clear glass units
- There is little noticeable sound from outside
- Outlets are noticeable placed near all tables and chairs throughout the café for customers to charge their devices
- At 7:33PM, one of the three men that entered the café is heard ordering a regular coffee

Productivity

- One customer is observed watching a video on his laptop with headphones
- One gentlemen sitting by the window actively browses Facebook on his laptop and talks on the phone
- Almost all customers that are sitting down are observed carrying a backpack or bag suitable to carry books
- Most customers are observed surfing the Internet
- Most customers are engage in their computer and are paying less attention to their surroundings
- All participants that were present at the beginning of this observation are still engaged in the tasks, conversations, or computer

Patterns

OBSERVATIONAL STUDY: STARBUCK PHENOMENON

- Customers walk into the Café at a rate of every 2-5 minutes
- The most common purchase observed is hot medium beverages
- Those sitting alone, are on a computer or cellphone and majority have on headphones
- Those customers that are sitting in groups are engaged in conversations
- Most customers are dressed casually
- Laptops and cellphones dominate as the technology used by all customers
- 6:50PM two customers walk in
- There tend to be more younger participants that stay to work in the café versus older that stay to work
- Customers wait quietly by the cash register as the staff member at the cashier processes another customer
- At 7:00PM, two customers walk in and purchase a medium beverage
- Staff members of the café casually walk in and out
- Staff casually use cellphones to talk and send messages
- Majority of the customers that walked into the café did not stay in the café
- At 7:07PM, three gentlemen arrive outside of the café. However, only one entered to purchase an item. The remaining two gentlemen stayed outside and found a place to sit and talk
- At 7:11PM, two customers walk in into the café. One customers goes up to a staff member and share a hug with the staff member
- At 7:16PM two additional customers walked in to the café
- Almost all observable customer that enter the café go directly to the register

OBSERVATIONAL STUDY: STARBUCK PHENOMENON

- Zero participants that were present at the beginning of this observation have left
- At 7:24PM one customer stepped outside of the café to make a phone call
- At 7:25PM the customer that stepped out to make the phone call re-entered and returned to his seat and computer.
- At 7:32PM, the largest group of sitting customers prepare to leave the café after ending their meeting
- At 7:33PM, three men enter the café and head to the register
- At 7:34PM, three men quickly fill open seats left by a large group that left the café after meeting

References

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