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Starbucks’ Cyclical Impact on Society

Starbucks retains a global presence, vending coffee and various food items throughout the world. Starbucks is not a mere coffee shop, but a worldwide example of true social responsibility. The coffeehouse has established a movement that has forever changed society. Coffee is no longer a luxury, but instead has transformed into a lifestyle – an addicting, unconquerable drug. With this addiction came new trends and new realities. Some may argue that this addiction has left American’s helpless to the white paper cups characterized by the circular green logos; however, many would argue that with such a large constituent basis Starbucks is ever more responsible for providing an optimum product. In order to provide the finest product and continue to receive positive consumer ratings, the coffeehouse must cater to customer wishes and needs. To facilitate continued customer satisfaction, Starbucks has established a tradition of social responsibility and support for various causes. This in turn stimulates consumer satisfaction with the company and therefore kindles further investments in the prosperity of a coffeehouse nation.

America has become a Starbucks nation – a nation in which coffee commands life. When one awakes in the morning, the first thing thought of is a mug full of steaming hot coffee, instant energy juice to carry one through their cloud of monotonous slumber. Coffee has “changed the dynamics of the modern world” creating a social movement driven by the consumption of a luxury drink, a population driven by lunacy.[[1]](#footnote-0) Coffee houses have become second homes to many patrons through their bewitching magnetism. Coffee has a seductive appeal that raises many questions regarding its ethical nature. It is pillaging peoples’ obsession of following a trend and conceding to a dire addiction, by cutting a hole in peoples' wallets and greedily collecting the falling money. The avalanche of events resulting in the culmination of Starbucks coffee houses on every corner of any major city is fueled by the feelings of extravagance, invigoration, and safety that people feel upon walking into a Starbucks – gazing upon the familiar barista setup and comfy lounge chairs. This is not a recent phenomenon; coffee has dominated the American palette since its peak during 1962 when seventy-five percent of the population drank coffee, accumulating a daily consumption of 3.12 cups per day.[[2]](#footnote-1) But why coffee? Coffee is known to have no “nutritional properties other than those of a stimulant.”[[3]](#footnote-2) Not only does coffee lack any nutritional value, but trace metals such as arsenic, copper, and lead have been commonly found residing between the coffee grinds of your daily cup of Joe.[[4]](#footnote-3) Coffee also contains a maximum of 450-ppm benzoic acid, methyl, or propyl para-hydroxybenzoate – preservatives. Coffee is made of 34-90 percent water, 45-60 percent sugars (as dextrose), 17 to 35 percent organic matters (not sugars), 1 to 85 percent ash, 0 to 30 percent caffeine, 25 percent coffee, and 16 percent chicory.[[5]](#footnote-4) Despite the unhealthy, non-nutritious nature of coffee people are still addicted to the substance. People live for the caffeine rush – it is their heroine. “Caffeine consumption increases subjective reports of wakefulness and energy, as well as increasing measures of attention and speech rate.”[[6]](#footnote-5) People have forever dreamed of being more than they can be – to be immortal, gods – and coffee is the medium through which to most nearly attain such Super-man like powers. Starbucks has capitalized on just this, people’s addiction to coffee, therefore allowing for Starbucks’ prosperous existence.

The first Starbucks Coffee Shoppe was opened in 1971 in Seattle’s Pike Place Market. The coffee company was established as a small hole in the wall café. Howard Schultz joined the company as director of retail operations and marketing in 1983.[[7]](#footnote-6) His innovative, ingenious ideas allowed for him to hit the jackpot and capitalize on his brilliance and consequentially further advance the success of Starbucks as a whole. After having founded Il Giornale – a small specialty European style coffee shop – in 1985 Schultz was able to secure financial backing to purchase the Starbucks Corporation in 1987[[8]](#footnote-7). In 1998 Starbucks acquired the Seattle Coffee Company apotheosizing Starbucks in the center of the nation’s coffee culture capital[[9]](#footnote-8). As the company continued to grow, Schultz was unhappy with the long lines twisting throughout his coffee shops – people were awaiting service for far too long – and came up with the idea to open a Starbucks across the street from his most popular coffee house[[10]](#footnote-9). People thought Schultz was insane for even having merely proposed such an idea. After all, who had heard of having identical stores across the street from one another? Despite this, Schultz was able to prove everyone wrong producing a commodity item that was able to better prosper with the supplementation of convenience. “Starbucks was involved in the process of shifting of the position of coffee in what Pierre Bourdieu terms ‘the economy of cultural goods’ from that of homogenized, mass-marketed product, to one identified with ‘handcrafted quality,’ making it, quire literally an object of discerning taste.” [[11]](#footnote-10) Starbucks became a “metaphor for the rapidity and inexorability of cultural change” [[12]](#footnote-11)capturing a social niche and commanding the ubiquity of an iconic product, symbolizing a chic and breezy life-style. This milieu captivated affluent, young, culturally literate professionals who were eager to indulge in a global phenomenon. With Starbucks’ help, coffee became a non-alcoholic breakfast “wine,” allowing for a morning-time “happy hour” with colleagues – a time to reflect and converse about the day lying ahead. Not only did the coffee corporation create an urbane, cosmopolitan activity but they also furthered their customer attraction through good business practices.

The company’s good business practices resonated within their roots; therefore, giving them a strong motivation to do “the right thing.” Starbucks shed the dreaded connotation associated with the coffee industry of being an exploiter of the underprivileged, by practicing social responsibility and committing to free trade initiatives. According to Smith, Starbucks practices a “‘relationship of dependency that connect[s] the poor, underdeveloped nations of the south to the rich, industrialized nations of the north’”[[13]](#footnote-12) therefore giving disadvantaged nations an opportunity to advance themselves in the global market place. Throughout the years the coffee industry has been associated with slavery and subpar standards in poorer nations such as Colombia or Jamaica. Coffee was grown on relatively small parcels of land that were left to erode and remain unproductive due to a lack of contouring techniques after the coffee was harvested – a similar trend amongst poorer coffee-producing nations.[[14]](#footnote-13) Starbucks has attempted to distance themselves as far as possible from these horrors of the coffee industry. In an attempt to combat such dismay, Starbucks introduced a pilot program in 2001 called Starbucks’ CAFÉ Practices Program. Starbucks established this program partly in fact due to pressure by activists in the 1990’s and also to reflect Starbucks’ business model. This program pursued “two central goals: on the sourcing side, the establishment of sustainable supplies of high quality coffee to meet the company’s rapidly growing demand; on the consumer side, the development of a systematic response to increasing consumer awareness and concern regarding both product ‘origins’ and social and environmental dimensions of production.”[[15]](#footnote-14) This has allowed for the company to import free trade coffee that can be traced from grower to the store in which it is sold; therefore, Starbucks can verify that their money is being put towards growers who are making adequate wages and growing coffee in safe conditions on environmentally friendly farms. This in turn satisfies consumers who are becoming increasingly aware and concerned regarding the unjust coffee industry. The Starbucks Company is proud to secede their name from the anthology of coffee corporations who give little regard to their global actions – those who view profit as not only the bottom line, but as the only line. Starbucks takes responsibility of worker well being by investing in growers by promoting education, micro financing, medical stability and clean living environments.[[16]](#footnote-15) The company strives to earn the trust and respect of their customers and neighbors and is currently fulfilling this ambition through their Shared Planet program, which focuses on “areas of ethical sourcing, environmental stewardship and community involvement;”[[17]](#footnote-16) which has allowed the Starbucks Company to attain better tasting and consumer friendly products, thus promoting a higher patron yield throughout the years.

Beyond their globally sound actions, Starbucks holds a prestigious mission statement rendering no detail too minor to be accounted for. Starbucks’ mission statement is “to inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup, and one neighbor at a time.”[[18]](#footnote-17) The company holds their coffee, their partners, their customers, their stores, their neighbors, and their shareholders as top priorities. No where on their website is there a mention of a drive for profit – even if this is inherently intimated through their mere existence as a retail company. Starbucks holds their customers as number one, after all, without their customers the company would not be flourishing and would therefore be desiccated and wither away in time. In order to uphold their clientele, the company values their employees as vital to their survival, and in doing so promotes company loyalty and a wave of enthusiasm that saturates employees who partake in friendly converse with customers. Happy employees are key to attaining happy patrons who persistently return for their daily cup of Joe. The coffee company keeps employees joyful by creating a conducive working environment and giving employees – both part and full time – health benefits and stock options.[[19]](#footnote-18) This results in a lower turnover rate due to a dedicated work force. Employee contentment with working for Starbucks is further exemplified by their ranking as the number 24 best company to work for in the United States in the February 2009 Fortune Magazine with 146,700 U.S. employees and 70,875 employees outside of the United States.[[20]](#footnote-19) The company in turn has high-quality service and superior productivity living off of the saying “If its not right, we’ll make it again.” Starbucks advances its accomplishments through maintaining a high standard for business conduct. Each partner is distributed a Standard of Business Conduct booklet in order to uphold loyal, productive, responsible actions while on the work force both during and after “office hours.” This booklet “facilitates legal compliance and ethical training” and provides partners with an outlet through which to voice concerns.[[21]](#footnote-20) David Landau, the company’s chief compliance officer is proud of the way that Starbucks’ ethics program enhances everyday life, and was quoted saying: “Our business ethics and compliance program is truly global and has helped not only Starbucks partners, but business partners as well, to operationalize the company’s values and guiding principles. We’re proud that partners regularly show their trust by contacting us to share concerns or broach questions.”[[22]](#footnote-21) As a result of Starbucks’ high moral standards and promotion of good business practices they have been listed on Ethisphere Magazine’s “World’s Most Ethical Companies List” for the third year in a row.[[23]](#footnote-22) Starbucks is not a mere corporate powerhouse, leeching off of the pockets of a financially stable population, but instead truly cares about its customers and its employees. Starbucks recognizes that without these key individuals their success would drastically be limited and therefore dedicates itself to revering them – their consumers and staff – and in turn reaping the benefits of great financial accomplishment that can then be dedicated to further foreword thinking investments.

Dating back to Starbucks’ humble origins, they have held a tradition dear to their soul as a corporation of giving to the less fortunate. The company gives an average of 15.5 million dollars back to the global community each year – which is divided between four key subgroups: The Starbucks Foundation, product donations, social products in coffee communities, and corporate giving.[[24]](#footnote-23) Starbucks practices a wide variety of social responsibility in order to better their neighbors, their suppliers, and the global society as a whole. This unanimous desire to give back is founded in the beliefs delineated in the company’s mission statement. The “good neighbor” policy is held to a whole new standard in Starbucks’ eyes. They believe that not only should they do good to their neighbor but they should bend over backwards in order to help give them a leg up in the world. The Starbucks Corporation epitomizes the American dream of giving people an equal opportunity to excel, and therefore levels the playing field for the less fortunate, in an attempt to allow for their empowerment. The corporation believes that “action inspires action” and therefore takes a front seat in the philanthropic race. They “inspire and nurture the human spirit” through contributing aid in the form of capital and resources in various networks such as: Mexico coffee growing communities, New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, community neighborhoods in Chicago, V2V (a community involvement program connecting customers and partners), the recent Chinese earthquake, donating to youth organizations, and (PRODUCT)Red – helping to save lives of AIDS victims.[[25]](#footnote-24) Starbucks has a progressive image that has furthered their success at giving back to the communities in which they reside. Not only does the company donate capital and resources, but they have also engaged in the practice of executive-on-loan programs such as when in 2003 The Starbucks Company “loaned” Deidra Wager to CARE, a multinational nonprofit organization, to “reenergize their relationship with the antipoverty group and determine how to spend their donation of $200,000.”[[26]](#footnote-25) The company believes that their responsibilities do not end at the door with a mere cash check, but should instead transcend throughout society, throughout the world as a whole – a view that enthralls loyal patrons.

Due to Starbucks’ pivotal philanthropic role and powerhouse mentality their social responsibility has materialized beyond the neighborhoods in which they reside, and trickled down to their coffee producers. Starbucks prides itself on its investment in coffee communities. Such investments not only aid the people in the communities but by doing so also help produce a better product, which in turn attracts far more customers. The green-apron army donates resources to strengthen coffee-growing communities through social investments. Starbucks does this by working collaboratively with nongovernmental organizations that have expertise working with farming communities. NGOs such as African Wildlife Foundation, CARE, Conservation International, Save the Children, and Coffee Kids work to bring high-quality coffee to the market by providing access to education and health care which improves the farming communities’ overall quality of life.[[27]](#footnote-26) By investing in the coffee communities in which Starbucks’ Free Trade Coffee is grown, the company invests in its own future demonstrating novel forward thinking. Starbucks is continuously thinking of ways to pioneer their future in the global market place. Their inventive thinking has prevailed throughout the years and will continue throughout Starbucks’ vitality as a corporation. Current goals for 2015 include contributing one million hours of community service each year, having 100% of their coffee responsibly grown and ethically traded, and to have 100% of their cups reusable or recyclable. Starbucks is also building LEED certified roasting plants and coffee shops in order to give back to the environment in which we live and help in the race to protect our planet so that future generations will still have the opportunity to partake in its beauty. The company does a masterful job of making patrons feel that they matter in order to make these goals accomplishable. “Every time you purchase Starbucks’ coffee, you’re also making a difference, helping to improve people’s lives, and encouraging conservation where our coffee is grown.”[[28]](#footnote-27) Starbucks enables people to *want* to help in the company’s stride towards excellence. They have mastered the ways of including their customers through quotes such as “Way to go, you” [[29]](#footnote-28)on coffee cups, showing their appreciation for their support of donating to communities and respecting the planet. Starbucks constantly is thanking its loyal customers for their support and enthusiasm by including patrons as part of the “journey” towards exceptionality. When people feel a part of the mission for global posterity they are exultant for the opportunity to purchase a coffee, a minute action with a gargantuan universal affect.

Starbucks has always believed in a better cup of coffee, of giving one the opportunity to be enlightened and partake in a sophisticated experience while sipping at a hot cup of coffee. The company has not only stood for exceptional coffee, but for something bigger, something that will never be forgotten but instead forever admired. Starbucks’ vision of sharing their passion and knowledge of coffee with the world has been accomplished. Their success has been attained as a result of their optimal product, people’s addiction to the caffeine rush, the newfound popularity of coffee, and above all, their social responsibility. People are eager to purchase Starbucks coffee because they know that they are contributing to a good cause. Customers are overjoyed that their money is going to a good place, that they are part of a greater good, superior to their mere existence. Starbucks’ loyal patrons feel that their support is vital to the survival of the corporation and therefore gladly purchase their daily energy juice from Starbucks in order to power through yet another rigorous day of life.

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