

REVISITING SERVICE BRAND AND CUSTOMER PERCEPTION

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Abstract

This research aims to measure the customer perception of service quality standards of Starbucks in Bangalore, India using multiple tools. Starbucks is the popular global brand for coffee experience and has made inroads in India. The brand is popular among young and fresh graduates as a place for hanging out experience. The research has used mix modeling method. Stage one is qualitative research with an interview method to identify the brand's elements, drivers, and clues. Stage two is the quantitative study of the existing customers. A convenience sampling method was employed to select the sample respondents. A sample of 157 respondents was identified and the primary data was collected from them. The results of the research study revealed that there is a significant difference between the expectation and performance of Starbucks. The position of Starbucks is unique on the perceptual map and enjoys a high NPS score. The relative importance of various dimensions of service quality was also analyzed. It was found that tangibility was the most important service quality dimension and gap score was also minimal here. The study will be useful for academicians, students, and retail organizations. This research can be used to understand the perception of service quality among customers. The policymakers can develop proper strategies to retain the existing customers and attract new customers.

Keywords: *Gap Analysis, NPS, Perceptual Map, Service Quality, Customer Journey Canvas*

Introduction

Starbucks is an American coffee company and coffee house chain, founded in Seattle, Washington in 1971. It was named after the fictional character, the ‘first mate of Pequodin Herman Melville’s novel ‘Moby Dick’ (Source: britannica.com). Their product mix includes roasted and handcrafted high-quality coffee, tea, a variety of fresh food items, and other beverages (Source: starbucks.com). Today Starbucks connects with millions of customers every day with exceptional products and more than 21000 retail stores in 66 countries around the world. Since the very first store opened in Seattle, Starbucks has continued to grow and change, adapting to become a better and more successful company. Starbucks is one of the most respected brands, winning many awards and accolades (Source: comparably.com).

Starbucks Winning Awards and Accolades (Source: comparably.com)

- 2021: Best Company, Seattle
- 2020: Best Company for Women, Best Company Work-Life Balance, Best Company Perks & Benefits, Best Company Happiness
- 2019: Best Company for Diversity, Best Company for Women, Best Company Culture, Best Company Work-Life Balance, Best Professional Development, Best CEOs for Diversity, Best Company in Seattle, Best Company Outlook
- Most admired company by Fortune Magazine (16 times) (source: 1851franchise.com)
- 100 best corporate citizens 2010 by Corporate Responsibility Magazine (source: starbucks.com)
- “third place” after home and work as quoted by Mr. Schultz (source: nytimes.com)

Starbucks logo is also inspired by the sea – featuring a twin-tailed siren from Greek mythology. Their mission is to inspire and nurture the human spirit- one person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time. The vision of the company; “share great coffee with our friends and help make the world a little better” helps the company to expand beyond boundaries.

Starbucks started India business in October 2019 in Mumbai with a 50:50 joint venture with Tata Global Beverages, branded as Tata Starbucks Ltd. Currently, it is present in 24 cities of India with 219 stores (source: wikipedia.com).

Purpose of the Paper

General Purpose

The main purpose is to assess the service standards of a service brand e.g., Starbucks India's operation and also to know whether the incumbent customers are happy with the service that they are receiving from the brand. To know if they have any expectation concealed in their mind that can hinder the overall performance of it and find out effective measures to ease those factors positively to meet up the optimum goal of this organization particularly.

Specific Purpose

- The primary purpose of this study is to understand the existing environment of the brand.
- Identify drivers of customer satisfaction through a focus group study.
- Create customer service cue for Starbucks service.
- Measure customer satisfaction on identified elements.
- Mapping customer journey, measuring service quality and mapping competitive positioning and further creating Starbucks service blueprint.
- Produce different alternatives and bring brainstorming recommendation for customer dissatisfaction.

Literature Review

Customer-perceived service quality was conceptualized by Grönroos (1982). This was a hugely successful and adopted concept of service quality. Based on Grönroos work SERVQUAL model was first developed by Parasuraman back in 1985 which signifies service quality as the difference between customers' expectations of service offering and perceptions of service received. Cronin and Taylor (1992) developed SERVPERF model measuring service quality excluding expectation. Ekiz, Bavik and Arasli (2009) developed the RENTQVAL model for the car rental business and customer satisfaction and repeat purchase intention. Lin, Sheu and Pai (2009) used the SERVQUAL model in Laser treatment to myopia surgery. In the life insurance industry, SERVQUAL was used to measure customer perceived service quality evaluation by Siddiqui and Sharma (2012). Meihong, Shengtao and Jun (2011) used SERVQUAL and performed Principle Component Analysis, and built a scale for express delivery service quality. Baoqin and Guangwei (2013) designed for online shopping express enterprise (Caiyun, Zhiqiang & Congyan 2016). This establishes the importance of SERVQUAL in measuring

service quality perception. Cronin and Taylor (1992, p.55) established that service quality is an antecedent of consumer satisfaction and it is customer satisfaction that influences purchase intention. Service Quality itself has less effect on purchase intentions than does customer satisfaction.

The SERVQUAL model is used here for measuring the attitude of the customers towards service. This measurement depends on how customers assess the process of the service delivered and the outcome of it. If a service quality exceeds the expectations of customers then it is said to be a good one (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy are the five dimensions that are used to assess service quality in the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1988). The tangibility dimension is all about the facilities that are available physically to serve a customer like employees, office/showroom, equipment, stationaries/products used to serve customers to offer a service, and so on. Reliability is all about the capabilities to accomplish a service that is promised to a customer correctly without any dependency. If a service is performed accurately every time, on time, in the same way then it can be said that it is a reliable service. The responsiveness dimension means to offer a service to a customer as soon as possible without any delay. When customers have to wait long to avail of service without any solid reason that hampers the reputation of that particular service provider. On the other hand, quick service or quick response to a problem creates a good impression on customers. Assurance includes the quality of instilling faith and sureness by the communication manners of the service providers/employees. Also, the demonstration of completing a service and showing that they have the best services for their customers is best described as assuring customers. Empathy cares about the quality of understanding the specific needs of specific customers, the extent to which caring and individualized attention are given to a customer.

Another measure to the customer satisfaction and popularity of the brand is NPS (Net Promoter Score). Introduced by Frederick Reichheld in 2003, Net Promoter Score is the number that measures customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. NPS measures customers; willingness to stay with the organization also makes recommendations to family, friends, or colleagues. The score varies from -100 to 100. A score higher than 0 is considered to be good and above 50 is considered excellent (source: customer.guru). Starbucks Global NPS is 42 with 59% promoters and 17% detractors (source: comparably.com).

Methodology

The researcher applies multiple tools to understand the brand e.g., Starbucks India. Elements of Value Pyramid developed by Almquist, Senior

and Bloch has been applied to establish the drivers of the value of Starbucks as a brand (Almquist, Senior & Bloch 2016). Berry, Carbone and Haekel 2002, describes that a product or service alone is not sufficient, satisfactory experience should be built for the customers. The focus group method is used here. It's further highlighted that recognizing the clues that organisation is sending to the customers is critical to understand the meaning of service from the customers' perspective. Service cues are categories of functional, emotional, mechanic, and humanic. Since customer experience is the key differentiator for companies, mapping the customer journey is important (Heuchert, 2019). Customer Journey Canvas is used to understand the customer decision process of the said service. It involves touch points, expectations, experiences, and customer satisfaction. Customer Journey Canvas is also used as a tool for innovation by businesses. SERVQUAL Model with Perception Map was applied to Starbucks customers to know whether the services that Starbucks coffee shop provides meet the expectation and to identify the areas of improvement from the perception that is held by its customers.

The sample size for this survey is 157. Qualitative questions were used to know the key drivers that define Starbucks and quantitative questionnaires are prepared consisting of questions on each (Expectation & Perception) by using the five service dimensions. Here, five points Likert scale is used; a range being 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The primary source of data was a survey questionnaire, observation, and direct conversation with customers. Articles, magazines, journals, and websites were the secondary source of information used in the research. The research uses random sampling techniques for data collection, data was collected online by sending mails to the respondents. The elements of the research are customers of Starbucks and the sample size is 157. The main limitation of the study is that as COVID has hit globally and India is no exception, personal visits could not take place for survey data responses.

Data Analysis and Result

Qualitative Study of the Brand

Evaluation of Starbucks' Performance along Value Elements

- Drivers of Customer Satisfaction for Starbucks from Qualitative Survey

For a business it is important to know what keeps customers alive with the brand, what drives them to the brand and what role does brand play for them, how do they perceive the brand, etc. The reflection from elements of the value pyramid brings drivers of customer satisfaction. There are 30 elements of customer values divided under functional values, emotional values, life-changing values, and social impact values. These values when optimally

combined increases customer loyalty and thus revenue growth. Starbucks falls under the food and beverage sector and important customer values are *quality, sensory appeal, variety, aesthetics, and therapeutic values*. The qualitative survey reveals that Starbucks is good at providing 12 values to the customers (Fig. 1). The values under *functional appeal* are *quality, variety, and sensory appeal*. *Emotional values* are *reduce anxiety, design aesthetics, badge value, fun* and provides *access*. *Life changing values* offered by Starbucks are provide *hope, affiliation* and, *belonging*. Starbucks is one of the few brands that provide 10 or more values to the customers.

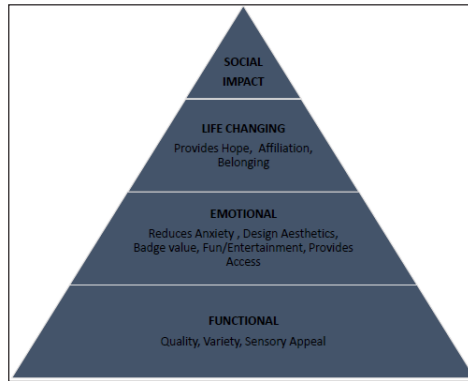


Fig. 1: The Elements of Value Pyramid

- Customer Journey Canvas

Next is customer journey canvas/ customer journey map. It helps to track how customers interact with the brand. It captures the complete overview of the service process that customers undergo and help a brand to innovate further. Canvas is used at pre, during, and post-service periods. Canvas is a visual storyboard of customer interaction. The purpose is to know the brand from customers' eyes and use this knowledge in improving the quality of consistent customer experience at all touchpoints.

The template available at canvanizer.com is used for customer journey canvas. The outcome is that Starbucks has a friendly environment and cares for customers. The ambiance, music, and environment are soothing and make customers relaxed. The brand maintains product quality and is appealing. Customers are satisfied to a large extent with the brand manifestation in India. There are concerns of value for money and Starbucks is a premium coffee brand.

● Creating Customer Service Cues

It is not sufficient to offer products or services alone, the successful organizations should build satisfactory experiences (Berry, Carbone & Haeckel, 2002). This knowledge can be gained by understanding the customer journey. The customer journey will reveal all the clues that people detect in the buying process. These clues are important indicators in building up knowledge about what meets or exceeds people’s emotional needs and expectations. The study of Starbucks customers reveals two categories of clues. The first category is related to functionality (logical set). Functional clues emitted by mechanic and humanic sources are a variety of options, product quality, cleanliness & hygiene, order taking, good service, and fast response. The second category is emotional and clues are ambiance, design/aesthetics, taste & smell of beverages, friendly behavior, warmth, and professional attitude.

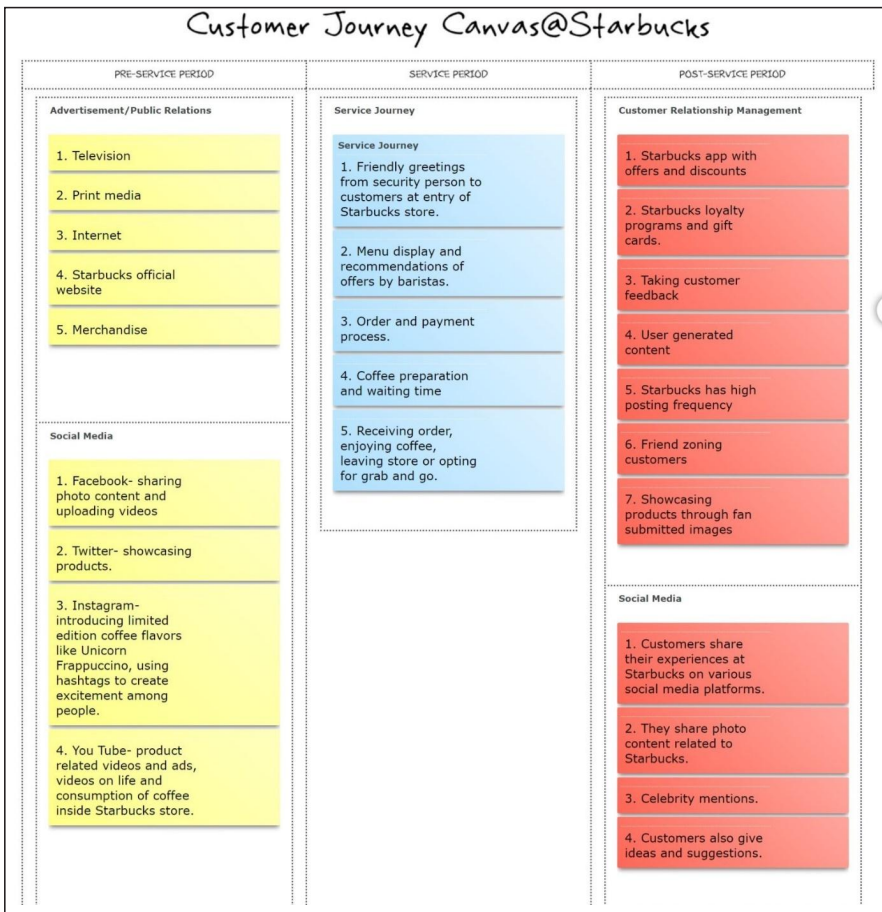




Fig. 2: Customer Journey Canvas

Table 1: Customer Service Cues

STARBUCKS	Functional Clues (Activates Logical Circuitry of the Brain)	Emotional Clues (Emotional Circuitry)
<i>Mechanic</i> (clues emitted by things)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Variety of options ● Quality ● Cleanliness & Hygiene 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ambience ● Design /Aesthetics ● Taste & Smell
<i>Humanic</i> (clues emitted by people)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Take orders well ● Good service ● Fast response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Friendly behaviour ● Warmth ● Professional

The qualitative study develops knowledge of service brands with tools like value pyramid, customer journey canvas, and customer service cues and establishes critically important dimensions of service quality to be used in specific SERVQUAL for Starbucks. The dimensions identified are Reliability, Assurance, Tangibility, Empathy, Responsiveness, Respect, and Value dimension (RATERRV).

Service Quality Measurement- Quantitative Study

- SERVQUAL Survey

Table 2: Mean Scores & Service Gap on Reliability Dimension

Dimensions	Perception Mean	Expectation Mean	Gap (P-E)
Statements for Reliability			
Provides services as promised	3.82	4.35	-0.53
Provides services at the promised time.	3.81	4.38	-0.57
Performs services right the first time	3.75	4.3	-0.55
Handles customer's service problems effectively	3.88	4.31	-0.43
Statement for Responsiveness			
Employees keep customers informed about when the service will be performed.	3.72	4.44	-0.72
Employees are prompt in providing service to customers.	3.82	4.38	-0.56
Employees are willing to help customers.	3.91	4.37	-0.46
Employees are ready to respond to customers' enquiries.	3.96	4.38	-0.42
Baristas provide recommendations or introduce new products/promotions to the customers.	3.84	4.37	-0.53
Statements for Assurance			
Employees instil confidence in customers.	3.67	4.24	-0.57
Employees make customers feel safe in their transactions.	3.88	4.4	-0.52
Employees are consistently courteous with customers.	3.79	4.46	-0.67

Dimensions	Perception Mean	Expectation Mean	Gap (P-E)
Employees have the knowledge to answer customer's questions.	3.82	4.4	-0.58
Statements for Empathy			
Employees give customers individual attention.	3.77	4.42	-0.65
Employees deal with customers in caring fashion.	3.81	4.33	-0.52
Has customers' best interest at heart.	3.7	4.24	-0.54
Employees understand the needs of their customers.	3.84	4.3	-0.46
Has convenient business hours.	3.86	4.42	-0.56
Statements for Tangibility			
Has modern equipment to serve customers.	3.84	4.38	-0.54
The ambience is visually appealing.	4.12	4.44	-0.32
Employees have a neat, professional appearance.	4.03	4.47	-0.44
Hygiene and cleanliness are excellent.	4.07	4.44	-0.37
The lighting is visually appealing and comfortable	4.14	4.47	-0.33
Music at a good coffee shop is good and it suits the environment	3.88	4.44	-0.56
Statement for Respect			
At a good coffee shop, employees use kind language and give customers family-like feeling	3.88	4.49	-0.61
Good coffee shop respects customers' privacy and personality	3.96	4.44	-0.48
Baristas at a good coffee shop greet customers with smile	3.98	4.38	-0.4
Statement for Value Dimension			
A good coffee shop provides its customers with sufficient options and varieties in food and beverages.	3.86	4.33	-0.47
A good coffee shop provides value for money.	3.44	4.1	-0.66

Results are mostly negative ranging from -0.72 to -0.32. The maximum gap is in responsiveness statement about information of service delivered.

Table 3: Unweighted SERVQUAL Gap Score

1. Average score for Reliability	-0.52
2. Average score for Responsiveness	-0.54
3. Average score for Assurance	-0.49
4. Average score for Empathy	-0.55
5. Average score for Tangibility	-0.43
6. Average score for Respect	-0.5
7. Average score for Value	-0.57
Total	-3.6
Average Unweighted SERVQUAL Score (-3.6/7)	-0.514

The result of the average unweighted SERVQUAL score is -0.514. This suggests that services provided by Starbucks have gaps in perception and expectations. Maximum gaps surfaced in the value dimension where customers feel the value for the product is less than expected. It has bearing on what customers are paying for the product and what they expect.

- Net Promoter Score

The NPS tool gives 69% Promoters and 32% Detractors. The overall NPS score on this sample size is 37. This is a good score in India but this is somewhat lesser than the global NPS score of the Starbucks brand (42). It indicates the loyalty of the customers. It may be due to many reasons; the cultural impact may be one of the reasons. However, the brand has scored fairly well on this score.

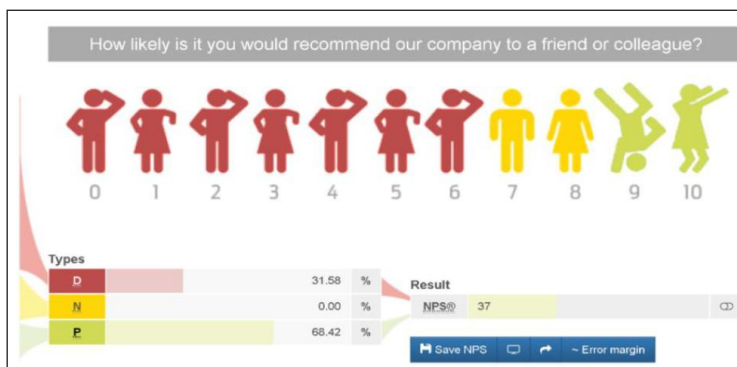


Fig. 3: Starbucks India NPS

- Mapping Competitive Positioning (Individual)

The next stage is identifying the competitive position of Starbucks. In India, Starbucks encountered some tough competition from already established brands in the Quick Service Delivery format. The principal competitors are McDonald’s, Café Coffee Day, and KFC in Coffee Business. Perceptual maps were created for dimensions Variety and Quality and Efficient Service in the first map and Value for Money and Accessibility in the second map and Ambience and Taste in the third map.

Starbucks enjoys a superior perception of a brand on certain dimensions as Variety, Quality Service, Taste, and Ambience but scores low on Accessible outlets and Value for money. Here McDonald’s enjoys the lead for convenient accessibility and value for the money customers receive.

Table 4: Perception Score

Brands	Variety of Options	Quality and Efficient Service	Taste	Ambience	Accessible Outlets	Value for Money
Starbucks	7.28	7.28	7.18	7.52	6.16	5.92
McDonalds	6.82	6.76	6.64	6.64	6.9	6.9
Café Coffee Day	6.58	6.62	6.9	6.76	6.9	6.88
KFC	6.36	6.48	6.64	6.22	6.76	6.5

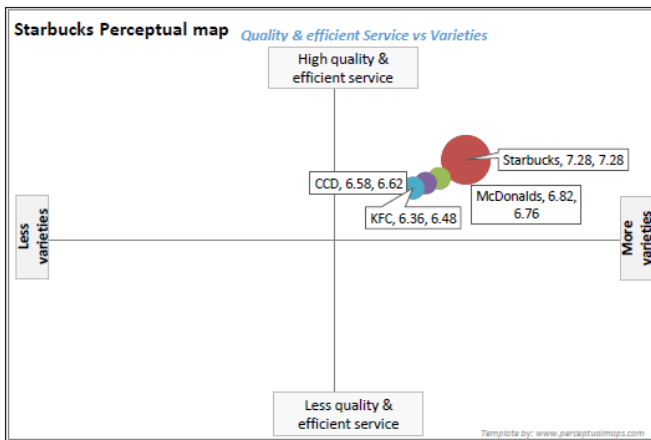


Fig. 4: Perceptual Map- Quality and Efficient Service vs. Varieties

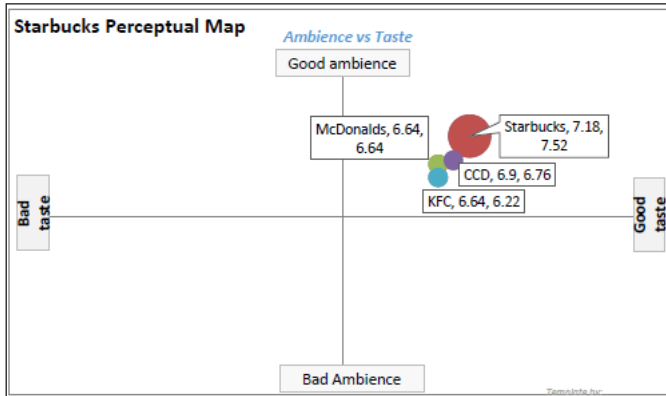


Fig. 5: Perceptual Map- Ambience vs. Taste

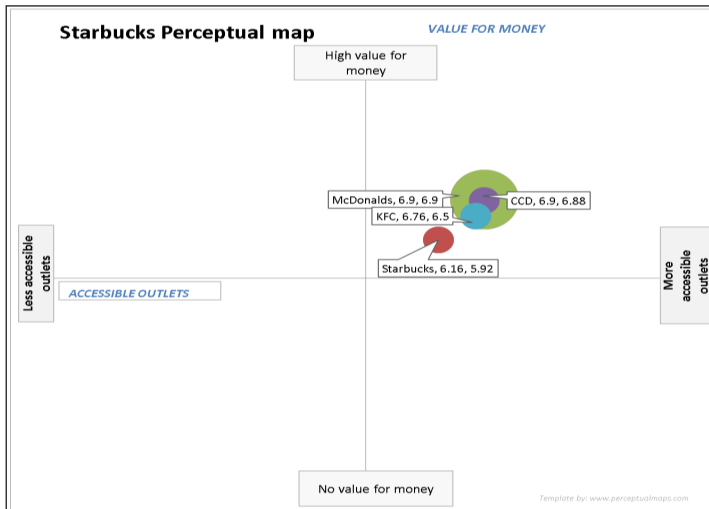


Fig. 6: Perceptual Map- Accessible Location vs. Value for Money

Service Blueprint for Redesigning Starbucks Process

Based on qualitative and quantitative analysis next tool applied to redefine Starbucks is Service Blueprinting. The service blueprint depicts all the related parties that participate in the service delivery process (Shostack, 1984). The analysis of the existing framework can help design new services

or redesign existing ones and specifies how the redesign of the process should be reconstructed (Shostack, 1987). The usage of the tool should be customer-centric. Being an intangible product, the service process should identify all key points (that have been established by the above-specified tools in the study) and then specify the links between the key points. Blueprinting enables to differentiate front stage activities to backstage activities, clarifies the link between customers and employees and gives opportunities to identify potential fail points (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2007).

- Service Blueprinting for Existing Services

The existing process has been mapped in Fig. 7, which displays a line of interaction, line of visibility, and line of internal interaction. Physical evidence is mapped at ten instances, back-stage actions, and support processes are mapped.

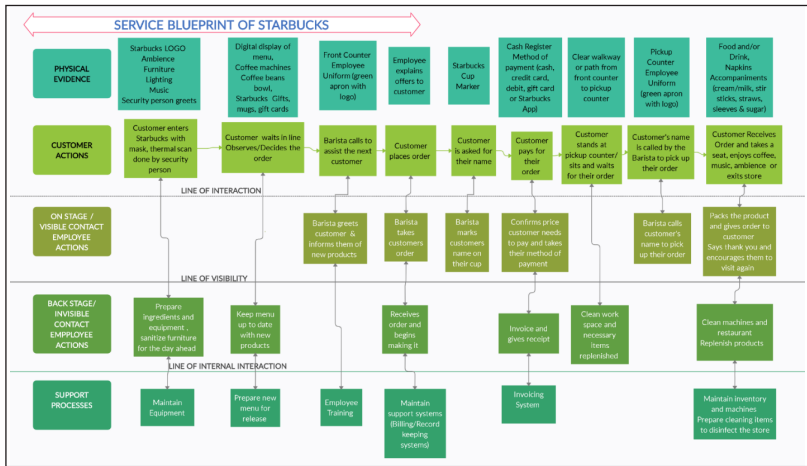


Fig. 7: Existing Service Blueprint of Starbucks

- Redesign Service Blueprint of Starbucks

The improved process should include key points and interactions (marked in red). To suit, the Indian culture process should include a board with everyday specials as customers look for exclusives for the day. Interaction should include a digital board to display customer order status, it is more convenient for Indian consumers as they can track the status of their order.

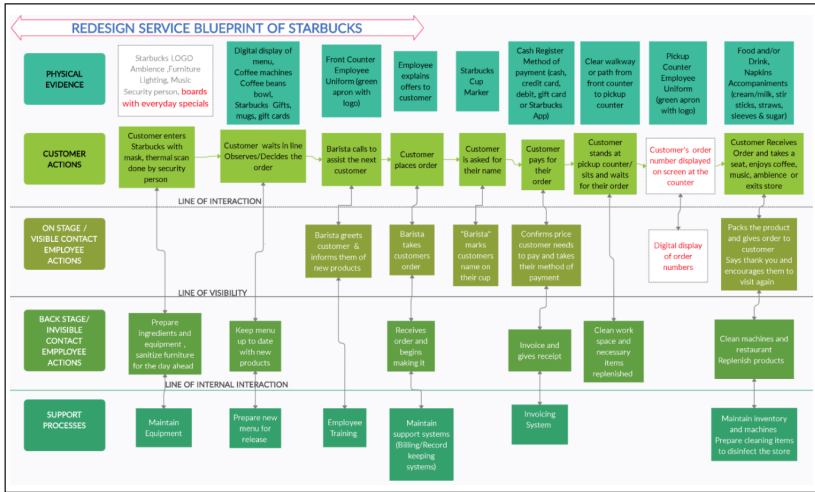


Fig. 8: Redesign Service Blueprint of Starbucks

Discussion

Starbucks is a global brand and has a special position in the market. Starbucks’ India operation has a lot of strength; however, culture plays an important role in transporting a global brand to a local market and this is true in the case of Starbucks also. A strong brand of West, Indians enjoy the affiliation with Starbucks. That is reflected in quite a high NPS score and perceptual map tool. However, there is a scope of improvement for the brand to create a unique and extremely satisfying experience for Indian consumers. Some suggestions in Service Innovations are:

Value for money: Customers feel that they are paying more for the coffee that is being served. They feel that either the quality-of-service offerings have to be improved or the prices need to be decreased to bridge the customer expectation gap, Starbucks can add additional elements of service like discounts, happy meal offers, more add-ons like eatable straws, cashback, etc., so that the customers feel that they are getting their money’s worth especially in a market like India.

Make cultural adjustments: Customers tend to relate to more ‘desi’ offerings and that has been proved time and again. If Starbucks can tweak their menu as well as service offerings according to the mindset and cultures of the Indian consumer, then they are more likely to improve their overall experience. Like McDonald’s has introduced different offerings in different countries according to their culture and preferences, Starbucks also needs to

bring this development in India's Business model. A lot of offerings in the current stores of Starbucks are pretty western. More localised variations in the menu will serve the Indian consumers better. Starbucks has recently added Indian palate as Sanjeev Kapoor menu.

Cater to the middle-income segment: Starbucks is scaring away a huge market of middle-income people in India, due to its perception of a highly-priced store. According to a Pew Research Centre report, the middle-class makes up 28 percent of the total population and 79 percent of the total taxpayer base in India. It also contributes 70 percent to the total consumer spending (Source: the hindubusinessline.com). This is a huge number and they also want a taste of the lifestyle that privileged upper-class people enjoy. Creating a variant store for this segment, as CCD did with variants like the square, the lounge, etc., can only increase the revenues and perception of Starbucks.

Increase the length of time that brand new baristas spend in training: New Starbucks partners experience near trial by fire. They learn very little about corporate history, the Starbucks experience, or even coffee and espresso beverages. Memorizing beverage recipes is critical but there needs to be much more. Usually nowadays by day three, five new partners are on the floor, on the register, or on the bar. There isn't even a module on MyStarbucksRewards, yet it's now a significant portion of transactions. To create an "elevated" Starbucks experience, there is a need to elevate the training.

Make time for coffee education viz. coffee seminars including customers: There isn't enough time for coffee education. One way to spread enthusiasm for the whole bean coffee wall is to share that love of coffee with customers. A person knows a subject matter well when they can teach it to others: it would be fun to create a customer coffee master program.

Conclusion

Starbucks is a great brand and people take pride in being associated with it throughout the world. To understand customers' interaction and perception about it for India operation, the research is carried out. Effective tools were divided into qualitative and quantitative methods. Value pyramid and customer journey canvas and service cues helped to identify meaningful variables for the business. The study further progresses to establish a service quality gap. The Value dimension gap is the most and deserves attention that directly relates to cost-benefit ratio for the customer. The competitive position of Starbucks is fairly advantageous to its competitor. Further Blueprinting is used to redesign the service process. The study will directly help Starbucks and provides a framework that can be applied to all service businesses.

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