Starrbucks : cool coffee culture

Complicated drinks served in big paper cups don’t exactly evoke the ideal coffee bar. So why are Starbucks cafés doing so well?

An interview between an American journalist and a consumer research specialist.

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When the first Starbucks Coffee store opened in Tokyo in 1996, they said it could never happen in Japan: an American fast-food chain selling high-priced coffee-based drinks in non-smoking cafés would never succeed in a traditional cigarette-smoking, tea-drinking country. However, they have been proved wrong, as more than 500 Japanese stores will attest. If you are unfamiliar with Starbucks it may surprise you to learn that most people don’t actually go there for the coffee – they go for the experience. So just what is so special about the Starbucks experience?

Going to a Starbucks in America for the first time can be confusing. First you’ll notice the atmosphere: comfortable sofas and chairs, eclectic music, and no smoking. Then, there’s the complicated drinks menu featuring a rather large choice of syrupy, creamy, sometimes frozen concoctions with Italian-sounding names like Frappucino and cup sizes that seem to defy logic (“tall” is actually small).

How did Starbucks begin and how did it develop?

A long time before Starbucks became known as a café, it was simply a store selling gourmet coffee beans. The first store opened in Seattle in 1971, and during the next decade not much would change. Then in Italy in 1983, the Starbucks drink concept was born. During a visit to Milan, Starbucks employee (now chairman) Howard Schultz noticed the popularity of espresso bars. Soon after, Schultz started his own espresso bar business in Seattle, and eventually acquired ownership of Starbucks. By the end of the 1990s, Starbucks had more than 2,000 stores and its symbol— a green and white mermaid—was an icon of American culture. It was fashionable to carry a Starbucks coffee cup when walking on the street or driving in your car.

So it seems the world has succumbed to Starbucks.

This amazing growth has resulted in the "Starbucks Effect". Starbucks stores are everywhere, and the chain has a growing number of drive-in coffee shops. People are driving more to go to Starbucks, raising concerns about air pollution and traffic congestion, and independent coffee shops worry that Starbucks will drive them out of business, destroying local coffee-house culture. At the same time, Starbucks prides itself on being a good corporate citizen: it is committed to protecting the welfare of its coffee farmers and supports Fair Trade coffee—a movement that ensures that coffee farmers receive a fair price for their coffee so they can sustain their farms for the future. Starbucks continues to grow rapidly with more than 8,000 stores world-wide and another 1,500 to open this year. It’s even prospering in traditional café culture societies such as France.