

Starbucks : 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 Frappuccino and cup sizes that seem to defy logic (a " 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 .

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