

Critical Brand Review

Brand: Starbucks

Generational Lens: Gen Z

Course: Media Marketing - MDCM-250-0NA

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Brand Background

- Founded: 1971
- Founders: Jerry Baldwin, Zev Siegl, Godon Bowker
- Headquarters: in Seattle, Washinton
- Global Presence: in 87 countries with 40,990 stores
- Revenue: 37,184 USD (in 2025)
- Key Product Line: Espresso, Frappuccino, Protein, Matcha, Foam



Brand Personality & Connection to Me (Gen Z)

Brand Imagery

Animal: Little Puppy

- Starbucks gives me a feeling of closeness, familiar, cuteness with the vibe of an adorable little pup that I often cuddle
- For a Gen Z like me, Starbucks is an indispensable source of inspiration every day, reminding me of my furry friend; it brings me positive energy and joy.

Colour: Green

- Green is the signature colour of Starbucks, when I think of Starbucks, this colour always comes to mind.
- Green can be considered a symbol of nature – coffee beans, growth, and freshness.

Emotional Connection

Emotional Connection to Brand (from GenZ's Perspective)

- Starbucks makes me feel close, comfortable, friendly, and convenient.
- Starbucks gives me energy and joy every day; it helps me stay alert and energized enough to work a long day.
- Starbucks has a strong connection with Gen Z because it often has innovative campaigns that capture market trends – something Gen Z really enjoys.
- It's like a spiritual friend that I can't live without every day; I could say I can't live without Starbucks. It's truly important to my life.



Macro Environment

RECENT CAMPGAIN

Christmas/ Holiday Campgain

Target audience: Gen Z, students, young people

Reasons:

- The visual design is attractive; young people tend to take pictures of their drinks and post them on social media, so the cups are designed with eye-catching patterns and colors that perfectly capture the spirit of Christmas, making them irresistible to Gen Z and creating a social media buzz.
- Time limits create a sense of wanting to follow trends, leading to FOMO (fear of missing out), which in turn increases the product's value.
- Starbucks' Christmas campaign helps everyone, not just Gen Z, connect emotionally with the holiday spirit. Looking at Starbucks' Christmas-themed cup, people experience a fresh, relaxing, and enjoyable feeling, rather than simply enjoying a familiar everyday beverage. This promotional campaign is not just about taste, but also about enjoying the soul and visual pleasure.

Macro Environment

BIG 6 FORCES

Technological

We are living in 4.0 era, and Gen Z are increasingly accustomed to ordering food through apps instead of buying directly at stores. In addition, marketing campaigns are now promoted powerfully through social media platforms.

Impact on Customer:

- GenZ expect a faster, more convenient service, without having to wait in long lines to buy Starbucks
- Expect a service that utilizes advanced, modern technology and features visually appealing design.

Impact on Starbucks:

- Failing to meet customer expectations will lead to disappointment.
- Starbucks must constantly innovate, proactively embracing technology and new trends to avoid falling behind its competitors in the market

Brand Response:

- Using technology platforms such as social media, food delivery apps, websites, etc.
- Building their own app on smart phone to improve the service: loyalty cards, good deals, customer care, promoting newly launched beverages, etc.

Economy

Impact on Customer:

- Gen Z, especially students, tend to be frugal and avoid wasteful spending.
- Young people usually only buy what's essential for life; they'll buy the rest when it's on sale.
- Compare prices between different brands to make a decision

Impact on Starbucks:

- Revenue decreased due to reduced consumption.
- Attracting customers only happens when there's a discount program
- Customers can choose other brands with lower prices.

Brand Response:

- Offer promotions for loyal customers: use the loyalty app to earn points, give away drinks and Starbucks merchandise.
- Upgrade services, improve beverage quality, and implement smart marketing campaigns to retain customers

Micro Environment

COMPETITORS

Tim Hortons

- **Strengths:** Affordable prices, convenient, fast service, diverse menu including drinks, pastries, and savory snacks
- **Competing with Starbucks:** Canadian brand, numerous locations across Canada, lower prices than Starbucks, and a more diverse menu.
- **Attracting Gen Z:** Affordability, as many young people rely on their parents' allowance, so price is a priority. Convenience and speed, as young people today don't want to waste too much time buying coffee or drinks.

Second Cup

- **Strengths:** High-quality coffee, affordable prices, authentic cafe vibe.
- **Competing with Starbucks:** Canadian brand identity, is affordable, and has a non-generic brand image
- **Attracting Gen Z:** Reasonable prices, unique vibe, strong coffee flavor, and fast service.

McCafe

- **Strengths:** Cheap, fast service, easy to access, wide variety of choices
- **Competing with Starbucks:** Cheap, fast service, easy to access, wide variety of choices
- **Attracting Gen Z:** Affordable prices and the convenience of being able to enjoy fast food and drinks from McCafe at the same time.

Conclusion & Recommendation

STRENGTH

- Marketing strategy
- Brand image building
- Innovation
- service and beverage quality

Reasons:

- Starbucks excel in building its brand image, making it look like a premium brand.
- Starbucks always improves their quality of products, upgrades menu, launches new products, and designs new cups, merchandise.
- Starbucks always innovative and maintain their strengths, especially during holidays. This has led Gen Z, who always follow the newest trends, to return to buy from Starbucks despite its higher prices compared to competitors.

CONCERNS

- In the current economic situation with inflation, Gen Z will spend more frugally and cut back on unnecessary expenses. An example for this is they maybe saving money is by making drinks at home instead of buying them.
- The rapid growth of competitors, with their lower prices, will attract more Gen Z.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Offering discounts and good deals for students.
- Improving product quality so young people feel it's worth buying.
- Launching campaigns and promoting the brand image and trends that appeal to young people.

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