

Starbucks Advertisement Analysis



Starbucks has become a staple for many coffee consumers worldwide harboring around 14.9 million loyalty program subscribers in just the U.S. alone (Expanded Ramblings). Their advertising campaigns span a variety of media and run the gamut from controversial movements (#racetogether) to innovative campaigns (Tweet-a-Coffee). Set amid an urban backdrop, the Starbucks “IF YOUR COFFEE ISN’T PERFECT” advertisement features a short narrative, banner subtext, and a true-to-size cup, lid, and straw. It provides a strong visual story, complex messaging, and targets a wide range of consumers based primarily on behavioral and psychographic attributes through positioning, brand awareness, and association.

Starbucks utilizes positioning within the text to mark its company distinction and convey its premium product. Through a twenty-word narrative complete with conflict, the leading text positions Starbucks in opposition to both bad coffee and other coffee houses. “IF IT’S STILL NOT PERFECT” (aka bad coffee) “MAKE SURE YOU’RE IN A STARBUCKS” (then you’re not drinking *our* coffee). The subtext “IT’S NOT JUST COFFEE. IT’S STARBUCKS” also positions against two ideas – coffee and ordinary. This one line simultaneously conveys that not only is Starbucks better, they also provide an *experience*. Positioning, in conjunction with the larger sized words in the text – COFFEE, PERFECT, STARBUCKS – reinforces their associative brand messaging that Starbucks equals a perfect coffee experience.

Although the text seems relatively simplistic, it allows for the ad to reach a broad audience and can be further segmented based on the publication in which it appears. Instead of focusing on demographics, the ad targets consumers based on behavioral and psychographic characteristics. The behavioral strategy targets coffee drinkers and more specifically those who drink specialty coffee while also addressing psychographic attributes – consumers who prefer quality over economy and those looking for a premium experience. The text “WE’LL

MAKE IT OVER” simultaneously highlights the availability of customizable specialty coffee while also emphasizing their dedication to perfection and delivering a premium customer experience. Both strategic messages associate the Starbucks brand with quality assurance and dedication to consumers.

However, the key messages in this advertisement are not based solely on text. The images also provide a strong visual narrative. The Starbucks cup and lid, which sit on a table in front of blurry bicycles, are set against what appears to be a city backdrop. Positioning Starbucks in the center of urban activity associates its brand as more than just coffee. It embodies the idea that the Starbucks experience is a premium lifestyle choice. As there are no people in the ad, the iconic Starbucks cup is the actor, performing as perhaps its own celebrity endorsement, such as Chester Cheetah. The cup (with rim condensation), the lid (with foam), and the straw (symbolizing alternative beverages) are all true-to-size of their real-life counterparts. Together they convey a thirst allure that increases the sense of realism. It’s as if one could take the coffee straight from the ad which places consumers in a virtual point-of-purchase moment.

Starbucks utilizes several marketing strategies based on statistics and strategic messages. Nearly two-thirds of U.S. adults drink coffee and forty-one percent of those drink specialty coffee (Gallup, Forbes). By wording the text as if consumers already have a coffee in hand, Starbucks places the audience within these statistics, and thus the plain-folk, bandwagon strategies are already in place. However, by eluding that the Starbucks experience is better than their competitors, they use the snob appeal (with humor) to elevate the status of specialty coffee drinkers from bandwagon to those who prefer perfect, premium experiences.

All these messages serve to reinforce the positive brand association for Starbucks, the sponsor of the ad. Their logo appears twice, and their name appears four times. In addition, the only colors used in the ad (green and white) and the font (capitalized sans serif) mirror the Starbucks logo. Although the use of all capitals is often associated with yelling, in this case, it serves to reinforce Starbucks as a singular unwavering entity.

Every element of an advertisement must visually communicate ideas and critical messages in a short amount of time. Whether it be to entice consumers, strengthen brand associations, or convey social messages,

every component must work to transmit a cohesive narrative. With an emphasis on text and product placement, the creators of this meme-like Starbucks ad effectively structured its composition to both sell products and encourage repeat visits. Together, their messages fuse to further strengthen the brand.

The heavy use of text (like those of high-end automobile ads) illustrates that although consumers are drinking specialty coffee more often, it still ranks as a luxury item best appreciated by taste connoisseurs. Although consumers may not actually get a perfect cup of coffee every time, the focus on quality assurance and customer dedication rather than on a specific demographic allows for its inclusion in almost any publication. The creators successfully designed a strong advertisement narrative that is both relatable and relevant.

Although we don't need coffee (or specialty coffee), Starbucks is advertising what consumers statistically want to buy. Superb, customized specialty coffee from an establishment that cherishes their customers. "Can I have a perfect Venti, Iced, Half-Caff, Ristretto, 4-Pump, Sugar-Free, Cinnamon Dolce, Soy Skinny Latte?" Starbucks' answer is yes, just "make sure you're in a Starbucks."