



Leisure and shelter at third places

—Interaction between Starbucks and individual needs under globalization

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Abstract. This paper examines the role of third place provided by Starbucks in a small city in China to explore how the public spaces and individual needs interact with each other under the globalization background. The public spaces are becoming meaningless as they are commercialized, however, this research found that visitors at Starbucks bear personal purpose rather than behaviors being shaped by Starbucks, that for leisure and shelter.

Keywords: Globalization, Urban Modernization, Starbucks

1 Introduction

With the expansion of economic globalization, modern spaces lack diverse and creative meanings and mostly act as an economic sector. According to Mumford, the power of capital makes cities separate from their original locality, which means modern space has become an abstract unit that can be bought and sold without considering its history, topographic characteristics, or social needs [7]. The specific properties of space are compressed and the differences are simplified, and then the exchange value becomes the prominent indicator of various spaces [16].

Additionally, with the rise of hegemonic global brands, city spaces are becoming more and more homogenous. Here comes a question—is the meaning of spaces mainly constructed by the invaded globalizing enterprises? The concept of Globalization provides a way to this question. The processes of globalization achieved through global brands or other means experienced the procedure of localization that the global culture interpenetrates with local culture [19] [25]. Customers actively and creatively adjust foreign things conveying distinct ideologies with their purposes and give up the inapplicable part, rather than passively accepting every given culture [13] [17]. Therefore, heterogeneous meanings are generated from the transition of exotic culture [11] [17]. However, though the concept of Globalization indicates the co-shaping effects of two kinds of cultures, the level of influence of each culture is under discussion. Craig J. put more stress on globalizing corporate capitalism's influence on shaping consumers' life patterns according to a model, that is, the global brand. Customers' actions and thoughts are pointed to be

shaped by global brands like consumption taste, and aesthetic preference. Also, the effect on business mode and operation concept about how to build a counterpart [23].

Starbucks provides a kind of public space called “third places” promoted by sociologist Ray Oldenburg [18]. Third places usually refer to diners, taverns, and cafes, and the level of formality and intimacy is between the workplaces and domestic areas. As Daniels and Holmes asserted, the cannibalization phenomenon is common among Starbucks stores, a transnational corporate company similar to Coca-Cola and McDonald's, due to its hegemonic marketing strategy that gains dominance through expansion of the number of outlets [9] [14]. Starbucks as the representative of other predatory corporations in that case is also criticized for its contribution to cultural homogenization [10] [15]. Regardless, differing from McDonald's, Starbucks may provide a fresh picture of the transnational corporation's Glocalization process. Under the situation that the public space is decreasing, citizens' needs cannot be fulfilled. So they personalized and localized the meanings of the pre-existing public spaces for their means, whatever the original purpose and direction of the physical environment and furniture in it. In this article, I hold the viewpoint that customers are the center of their actions, however, the architectural environment is also organically involved and used in the demands or meanings meeting process.

2 Literature Review

Previously, when it came to coffee houses most scholars considered it from its commercialization orientation, that is, the cafe with coffee itself. Instead, the coffeehouse should be taken as a more abstract item, it says, a type of public space. From the economic perspective as Amy analyzed, specialty coffeehouses, which refers to a cafe with fixed storefronts presenting and creating a theme, may attract potential customers through their service, atmosphere, high-quality coffee, and marketing strategies such as providing coupons and launching tasting activities [22].

Based on the marketing research, we can go beyond the cultural angle. As Aiello noticed, one strategy of Starbucks to make it more acceptable for local people is to establish a sense of community through the potential meaning of materiality. For instance, tables in Starbucks stores are most commonly to be one bigger communal table for five to ten people, resembling the meeting table, and also many small round tables separated in stores. Both two types of tables can let customers feel crowded and then earn the feeling of community, or in other words, an illusion of community as the real physical connection is lacking [1]. Guzman further pointed out that Starbucks endeavors to engage audiences through indefinite joint activities and prevalent values like being environmentally friendly [12]. It meets the need of urban flâneur who are constantly seeking a vibrant world in a metropolis [5]. In the context of coffee stores, these groups of people appreciate the high turnover of customers for continuous conversations, as they are indirectly and anonymously participating in short intimate social contact. Another type of urban flâneur immersed in the hubbub is for obtaining creativity, as a result of the aesthetic inspiration from exciting decoration visually and stimulating music acoustically [23].

Since the 19th century, the third place such as cafes and bars bear a political meaning for forming alliances with consensus [8]. As Starbucks, a third place, efforts on constructing a community, it has the potential to be a political zone. However, this transnational corporation fails to gather political groups as it is too commercialized and homogeneous. Though the marketing factors attracting potential customers are well conducted by Starbucks, there are differences between servicescape and consumptionscape. The term "service landscape" refers to the physical environment maintaining the function of shaping consumer behaviors. It consists of design elements, like the layout, furniture, and other decoration, environmental conditions like the lighting and temperature, and social interactions between customers and employees [4] [6] [21] [24]. Customers can distort the original purposes of these elements into personal meanings, which is called consumptionscape [3]. The service landscapes mostly fit their experiences daily and are interconnected to their cultural backgrounds [2] [20] [21]. In that case, the intended meaning of the service landscape is unpredictable and always not the same as how the consumers use it in practice. Starbucks has been condemned for spreading a boring and stagnant aesthetic. At the same time, Starbucks' predatory business practices and harmful effects on the local coffee trade, the environment, and the economic well-being of coffee growers have led to a boycott of Starbucks by some. Instead, the community or community unity is established in local coffee shops by sharing anti-Starbucks emotions, that is, to be against capitalism. "They sanctify local coffee shops as outposts of realpolitik actions where like-minded individuals can collectively challenge prevailing corporate power structures, enact a progressive vision of a just and sustainable economy, and defy the alienating forces of commercialization". The local cafes gain anti-capitalism status by displaying elements that genuinely reflect local culture, creativity, and positive values. Its diversified cultural atmosphere can not only attract people with political aspirations but also indicate the acceptance and tolerance of those who are excluded and politically marginalized from mainstream society [24].

To summarize, the coffeehouse, taking Starbucks as an example in this article, is an economic sector, however, its strategic approach goes far beyond the economic sphere. It is trying to construct Starbucks as a third place and a community, it says, Starbucks breaks away from the economic market positioning of coffee and coffee shops, but is a pure space with little incidental consumption significance, though the customers may not go along with the conceived direction. Concerning my observation, Starbucks is an inorganic combination and people come here for their purposes embedded in the social structures.

3 METHOD

The field spot is a Starbucks store in a small and less developed city called RiZhao, Mainland China. This coffee shop is at the entrance of the central mall located in the city center. At the same time, there are no more beverage storefronts with such a broad space as that of Starbucks.

Data from the fieldwork was collected via in-depth interviews within two months. The interviewees were identified at the field sites. Each interview segment began with general questions such as personal background, age, current job, and the nature of the job. Then the interview is followed by questions about the Starbucks in question, such as why they show up there. The intention of this question was clear, as the interviewer would use different questioning styles for different personalities, such as casual conversation questions to elicit answers for a wary interviewee.

If the interviewer's reasons for being at Starbucks point to Starbucks-related elements, the interviewer will analyze with them the reasons for frequenting Starbucks; on the contrary, if the reasons expressed by the interviewee are more related to themselves, the interviewer will dig into the factors behind the interviewees. Interviews were also conducted with store managers because of the close relationship between store managers and Starbucks' strategy implementation.

In-depth interviews. Discussing when the interviewer states a reason allows the interviewee to re-establish what he or she thinks and ensures that the interviewer is receiving the correct information accurately.

Interviews ensure that there are no interruptions. The interview process is as chatty as possible, with the interviewer reassuring the interviewee that they do not have to remain too formal to ensure that the interviewee's thoughts are not guided by the interviewer or trying to get closer to their imagined answers; a relaxed mood also helps to help the interviewee's thoughts develop.

The analysis of the interview distinguishes two types of members in the Starbucks space. Both of them are regular visitors, nonetheless, have detached from consumer status, it says, they come here for other purposes rather than for consumption. The following analysis will first explore two categories of people who treat Starbucks primarily as a third space role, and their behavioral meanings. The interaction between the behavioral purpose and the Starbucks environment will be then examined.

4 Analysis

Cluster 1: Leisurer. This group of people is working at Starbucks while seeking a relatively joyful and relaxing environment for entertainment purposes. Four members are interviewed which consists of two college students and two adults who have stepped into the market and have a career.

The first interviewee is a female college student studying abroad in Australia, majoring in urban planning. She holds the local citizen identity and were spending her summer vacation in her hometown. In contrast to the study environment she chose in Rizhao, she rarely visited Starbucks in Australia, but instead went to the school library and local private cafes. In Rizhao, the public library is always booked full by people who are studying for public examinations and the network is poor, and unfriendly to the work that requires the internet to search for information. Therefore, she studied at Starbucks in her hometown and there are also extra benefits contributing to the choice of Starbucks. Starbucks as a public space is crowded and

noisy which seems to be a negative effect however is the key point for her staying here.

As an international student, self-study time is too long and one has to study on the computer for a long time. What is more, there are online classes under the epidemic these years, so students are supposed to watch online lecture videos for a long time, which is hard for them to maintain. However, there is always a feeling of being monitored and supervised by people in the café, the public setting, and one's behaviors will be consciously or unconsciously regulated, so the purpose of studying for a long duration can be achieved. When the interviewee gets to a state where she can't study any longer at home, she will set out to Starbucks where the best state to study is not expected since the environment at Starbucks is, according to her, more casual and entertaining.

The second interviewee is a male college student who has a similar situation to the first interviewee. He stayed in Rizhao for being constrained by the pandemic, so he attended many online lectures too. He reckoned Starbucks as a place that is neither too serious making the learning process too painful, nor too casual losing the willpower to learn. According to the nature of Starbucks café recognized by him, the nature of tasks that he usually worked on is accordingly patterned. This interviewee distinguished two types of work the creative one and the systematic one. Creative works include video editing and university lectures of the foreign educational system while systematic assignments contain IELTS test tutorials of the domestic educational system. When doing creative tasks, he preferred Starbucks as the studying environment while doing other more serious jobs in much quieter places as attention is highly required.

The third interviewee is a Self-Media E-Commerce, and he comes from Beijing which is a prosperous city in Mainland China. The nature of his job is free and can work from anywhere, and though he has a studio here, he comes to the Starbucks near the workshop frequently. The reason is that he loves the buzz of noise at Starbucks since moving from the studio to a new environment, such as Starbucks, allows for brain refreshing and a burst of inspiration. He treats Starbucks as both the entertainment place and business sphere, and this consideration can be flexibly changed concerning his purpose.

The fourth interviewee also has a job with mobility in the workplace. No matter on a business trip or working in local areas, he looks for cafes, mainly Starbucks, to obtain his work. Except for the spaces that Starbucks and private coffeehouses provide, he also enjoys interacting with other customers and managers. Whereas, to be noticed, he considers Starbucks a relatively formal place so he comes here for doing work.

The coffee is not their main purpose for showing up at Starbucks, and the spaces offered can fulfill their need to work here. It is not hard to tell that they all admit Starbucks as the third place where the atmosphere is between seriousness and coziness. In that case, people with tasks come here seeking a balance between the harshness of work and the relaxation of leisure time, and the strangeness of public spaces and the intimacy of private sectors. Going beyond the Spaces after the

analysis, Starbucks is a perfect sphere to conduct both creative works and boring tasks, which is maintained by two factors:

According to the analysis of two college student interviewees, facilities like libraries and fulfilling the need of studying quietly are lacking while their variety is also absent like public places act as semi-formal third places. However, these types of resources can be re-maintained once students come back to their universities, so the shortage of institutional resources is a temporary and inconsistent issue for them.

The nature of visitors' tasks undertaken can be coherent with the environment or can be corrective, reaching a balance. At the Starbucks coffeehouse, the high-speed change of human voices and notes of background music makes people's minds extremely flexible and excited. This benefit helps customers to enjoy creative work, to feel comfortable in an environment that is consistent with their nature of work, or to neutralize the drudgery of work through the dispersion of the environment, but the preconditioning is this dispersion does not disturb the quality of their results.

Cluster 2: Wanderer. This type of people is isolated and marginalized by the main society so they lagged at Starbucks rather than other public or private places. Most of them are sensitive, alert, and not easily approached so two persons under observation are interviewed by a direct but imperceptible way or indirect means of knowing.

The first interviewee is a recent college graduate of a local university. Her hometown is a nearby city and she is now staying at her elderly sister's home in Rizhao. The accounting major faced unemployment right after she graduated, not only because of the fierce competition in accounting but also because there were so few jobs in Rizhao. When asked why she didn't go looking for a job, she said that she had also actively looked for a job, but after arriving for the interview she found that it was false advertising - the personnel department chooses to lie about the job content and salary to meet the KPI of the number of interviews, for example, the advertisement said that the recruitment of accounting, but in fact, it was to do the front desk, and even to cover the company's health.

After experiencing many disappointing interviews, she decided to lag in Starbucks and swipe her phone for the rest of her life because of learned helplessness. Because if she didn't go looking for a job, she would be criticized by her family for staying at home and not doing anything, so she rode her motorbike a long way to Starbucks every day, in order to avoid her neighbors.

Another interviewee is a middle-aged man dressed in dirty. He rejected to talk with the interviewer, but his story is told by the store manager. The manager said he came to Starbucks every day for a whole day not talking to everyone, however, he sometimes help with the staff like opening the sunshade of the open-air storefront and she considered this a kind of interaction.

The analysis indicates that Starbucks means a shelter for them since they are oppressed and ostracized in this place. Starbucks indeed plays the role of the third place by providing a place that neither belongs to the domestic domains nor the mainstream society, who are the perpetrators:

Members of society will be excluded by companies and organizations if they are deficient in educational attainment, experience in a certain domain, and social capital.

Socially disadvantaged people failing to gain the acquired achievements may face worse situations and even trap in a loop influencing capital for their offspring.

Not only do they marginalized by society and institutions, but also by the private sector, the home when they are trying to step back to the original institutions. The social expectations cause pressure on those not fulfilling the communally respected norms, and one way to release or escape the stress is to stay at other places excepting from home and the workplaces.

5 Discussion: Interaction Between Social Structures and Individual Needs

The definition of the third place can be extended. In this research, Starbucks provides the third place as the space caused by the extrusion of the other two places. In the context of the leisure state workers the two counterparts are the workplace/ university and the home, while on the condition of the wanderer, the two places refer to mainstream society and home. Thus, members here are experiencing their transition process, that from one state to another state. The leisure state workers are under a state of insufficient initiative and cannot devote the best status to their assignments, at the same time, the wanderers are in a state of isolation and alienation and are not able to integrate into the main society. Both groups of people will leave once personal purposes, the transition, is achieved. However, to be noticed, the Leisurers' transition is proactive and short-term whereas Wanderers' transition is forced and long-lasting.

Starbucks is always trying to promote a sense of community through various strategies which serve as social structures. According to the manager, Starbucks' efforts to build and maintain the community by treating customers as members of the community and urging interaction between customers and store associates in the store. It includes doing community service in the name of Starbucks accompanied by photos posted on the walls of the store, as well as free sampling events, and setting up seating in the payment area to encourage guests to chat with the barista. It seems to be good news for the two groups of people, especially the wanderers since still there is a place, Starbucks, that could receive them and even try to build a sense of community that can benefit their transition process. Whereas, Starbucks fail to make it. Whether or not members of the cafe are integrated into the Starbucks community depends entirely on individual initiative. Store associates are only proactive at the level of convening events, not at the level of actively seeking out people to interact with in informal settings. So especially for the wanderers' group, those who do not feel like interacting with others since they get used to a pattern of being socially isolated, it is not very likely for them to receive much sense of social acceptance. Furthermore, by identifying the location they sit near the door, we can sense their subconscious intention to be ready to escape at any time and just stay in the Starbucks space temporarily.

6 Conclusion

To sum up, everyone belonging to these two groups chooses Starbucks result of their purposes, in other words, the individual needs, not because Starbucks shapes customers' behaviors. For Leisuers, the environment could be a semi-serious place or a totally pleasing space depending on visitors' own intentions rather than formed or decided by Starbucks itself, and for Wanderers, Starbucks can be the shelter away from home and social institutions as they defined. Though both are facing the problem of shortage of institutional resources, there are differences between the two groups of people Leisurers adapt to and enjoy the creative environment so they are named Leisurers, while Wandered are passively squeezed into this space.

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