

# *Offline and Online Coffee Promotion. Case Study: Starbucks*

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**Abstract:** *The present paper aims to present the promotional strategies employed by Starbucks to promote an American model of coffeehouse in the Romanian context. Both offline and online promotional activities are undertaken by the company, which succeeded in maintaining the consumers' attention and love even during difficult times, such as the impossibility to serve customers indoors at the peak of COVID-19 pandemic. Communicational strategies are interesting both for identifying the specificity of Starbucks as a brand, and for the business communication in general.*

**Keywords:** *brand, coffee, online and offline promotion, Starbucks, unique.*

## **1. Introduction**

This topic was approached as promotion, both offline and online, is constantly present nowadays. Promotion has a history that will be analysed in this paper and which will show that it has had a significant evolution. Throughout the time, it has been considered that promotion consists of price reductions, highlighting the qualities of the new product or service, convincing the consumer that s/he needs that

product or service, but Philip Kotler, in his book *Marketing Management* (1997: 756), brings forward an innovative idea, according to which, through promotion you have to "communicate in a real way with both current and potential customers". From this perspective, promotion even means creating a close link between the consumer and the new product or service's company. At the same time, until the advent of the Internet, the public was targeted by promotional activities through television, print press and radio. Moreover, Malcolm McDonald (2010) argues that promotion is extremely important for a brand and is a strategy through which "the organisation tries to achieve its goals". Another author who supports this idea is Mihai Coman. In his book, *Introduction to the Media System* (2007: 59), he states that "it [promotion] urges a certain action, which responds to the interests of those who proposed it".

Another thing that underlied this study was the fact that the promotion is presented as "a useful and necessary action". In other words, it can be said that promotion is one of the methods that should not be missing from a brand's strategic plan. Nowadays, online promotion wreaks havoc among potential consumers. The public is bombarded with advertisements about products or services with every click and every browsing in the online environment. Social networks work hand in hand with online promotion. Scott (2010: 51) lists some advantages of online promotion, namely, good market coverage, combines image, sound and movement, appeals to all the senses, enjoys a high level of attention, unlimited time and space. On the other hand, he also emphasises the fact that we must be careful not to get oversaturated, because he believes that "many people consider that the growing number of brutal attempts to sell them something is a real nuisance". We may find that the promotion irritates the consumer when s/he no longer reacts to it, avoids it, rejects it, criticizes it or even gives up on that brand. This can be seen as the attention paid to an online promotion means the thin line between success and the loss of the

potential consumer. Confusing desires with real needs is a mistake that big brands use to ensure their sales growth.

## **2. Research method**

To collect the desired results, a questionnaire was used as the research method. First, the questionnaire was applied in order to understand the consumers' preferences. Based on the questions prepared in advance, more details, the consumers' preferences and wants as well as the less positive aspects viewed from the customer's point of view were taken into account.

The tool used for the research was the online questionnaire. The topic of the questionnaire was the "Analysis of several aspects regarding the coffee consumption of a famous brand: Starbucks". It was distributed via Isondaje, a Romanian platform, for a period of 4 weeks (22.12.2020-12.01.2020). It consisted of 23 questions, 5 of which requested general facts. The data were collected in January 2021 and the responses were gathered strictly from the Starbucks products' consumers. This questionnaire reached the respondents through social networks, being sent directly by the author through a private message to those who proved to be active on the social network pages of the brand. As far as the number of the respondents was concerned, there were 60 people involved in this process. The research had two main objectives:

I. To find out the consumers' opinions on several aspects of the Starbucks brand

II. To find out the reasons why consumers choose the Starbucks coffee

The results obtained were grouped, analyzed and interpreted, as it is shown in what follows.

## A. First objective

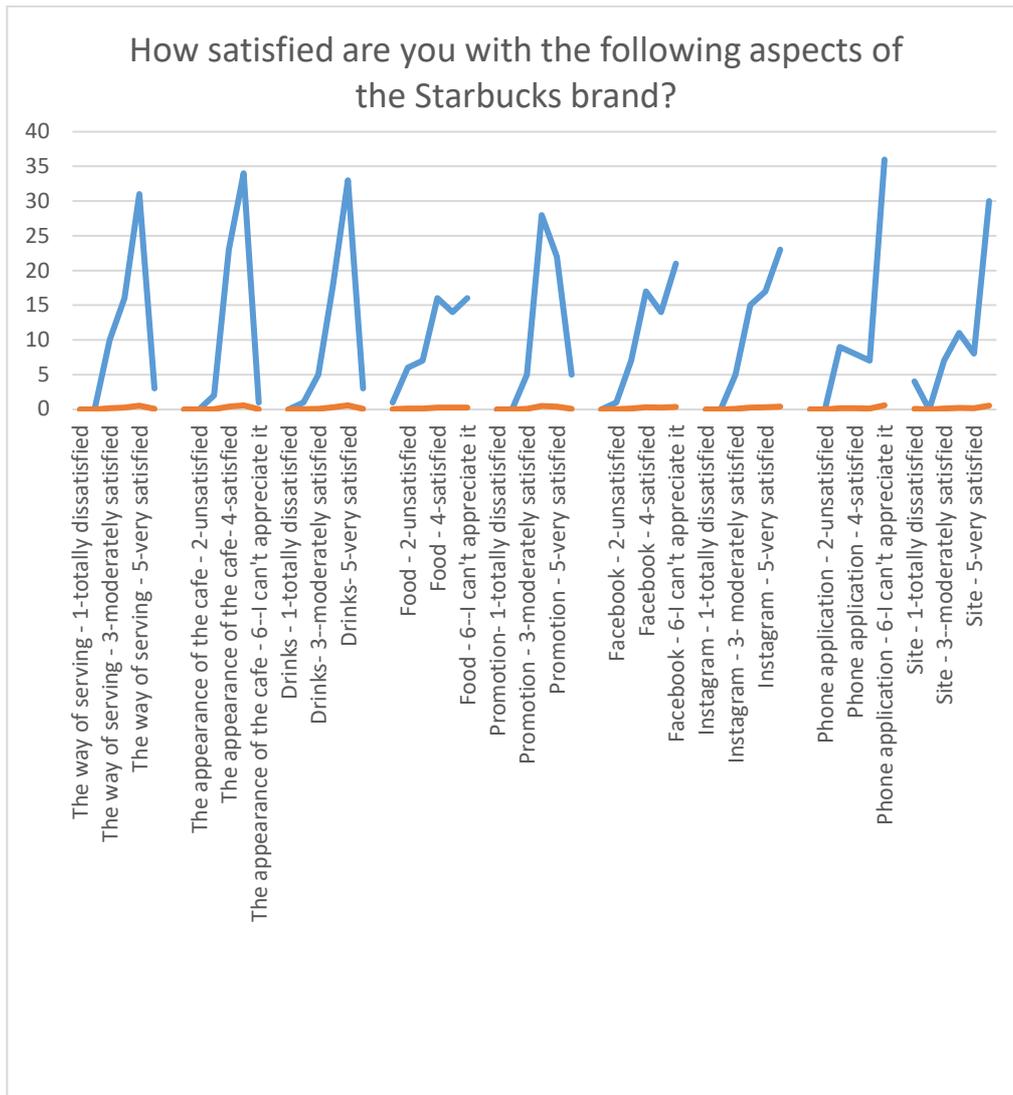


Fig. 1

As regards the provision of a score from 1 to 5 on *how to serve*, 51.7% answered that they are very satisfied, in terms of the *cafe* we have a majority of 56% respondents, who answered that they are very satisfied, the *drink* recorded a majority of 55% for very satisfied, the *food*

was rated with an equal percentage of 26.7% between satisfied and cannot appreciate. For the *promotion*, the majority of 46.7% respondents said they are satisfied, while in terms of *Facebook*, the majority of 35% answered that they cannot appreciate, the *Instagram* page received the same rating as Facebook with a majority of 38%, the *phone application* is not known by a majority of 60%, the *site* is not known by a majority of 50%. Following the answers, it is clear that changes and improvements still need to be made in terms of social networks.

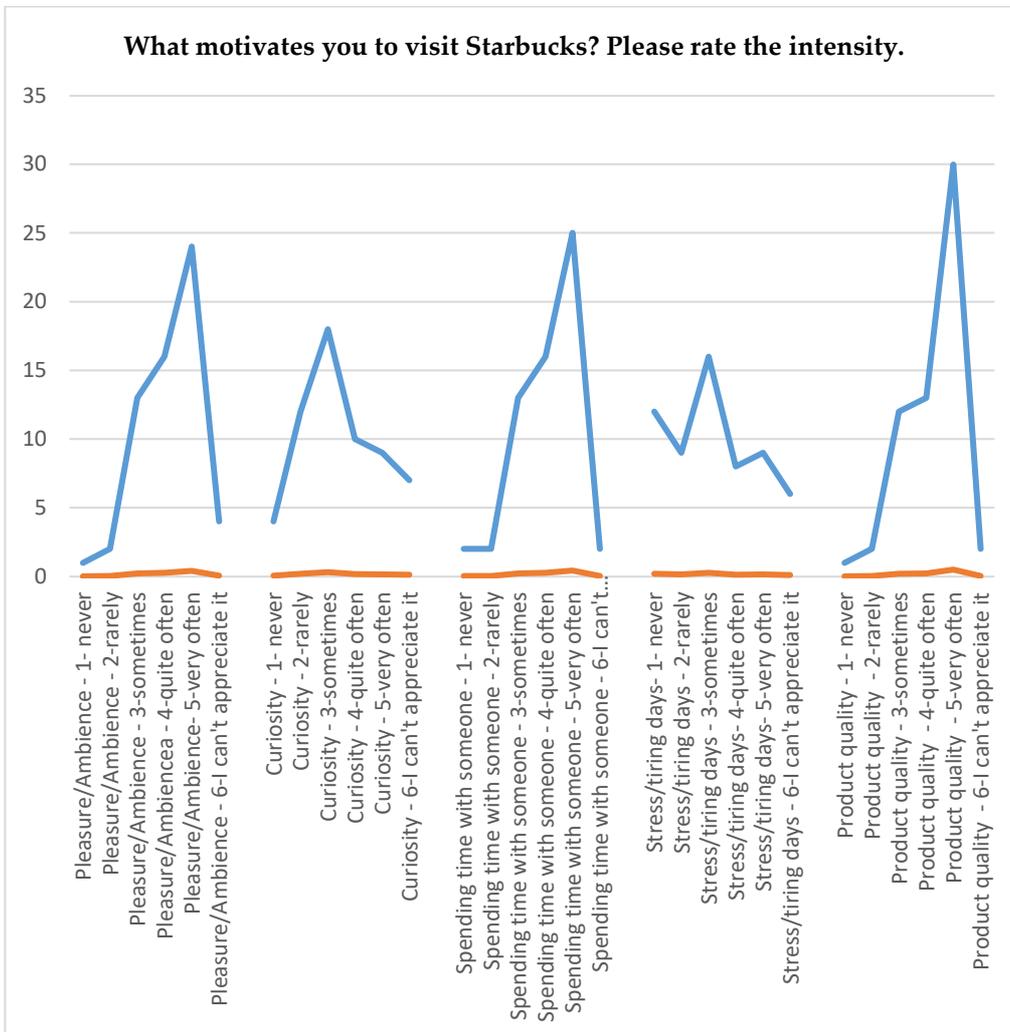
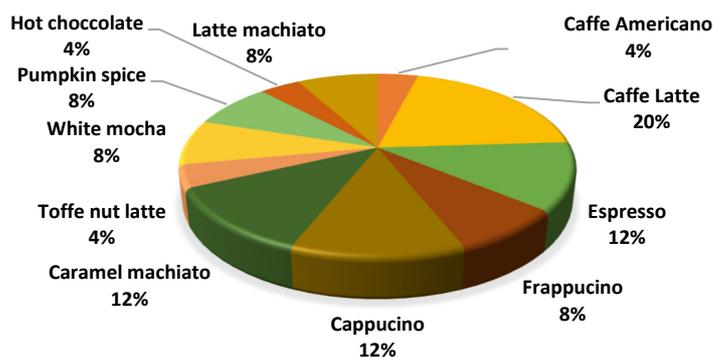


Fig. 2

The reasons why most respondents choose Starbucks, were noted as follows: *pleasure* and *ambiance* 40% very often, *curiosity* 30% sometimes, *spending time with someone* 41.7% very often, *stressful / tiring days* 26.7% sometimes, *product quality* 50% very often. Obviously, most people choose Starbucks because of the quality of the products, the time they spend with someone, the ambiance of the cafe, the curiosity and, last but not least, because of the tiring days.

**From the starbucks product range, which coffee do you drink most often?**



**Fig. 3**

Out of the desire to have a clear answer regarding the assortment of the coffee consumed most often by respondents, a free question was created, which was answered as follows: 20% consume *Caffe Latte* most often, at an equal percentage of 12% are those who consume *Cappuccino* and *Caramel machiato*, also at the same percentage of 8% are those who consume *Pumpkin spice*, *White mocha*, *Frappuccino*, *Latte machiato*, and the remaining 4% for each assortment consume *Hot chocolate*, *Caffe Americano* and *Toffe nut latte*.

Would you like to see an online or an offline promotion campaign?

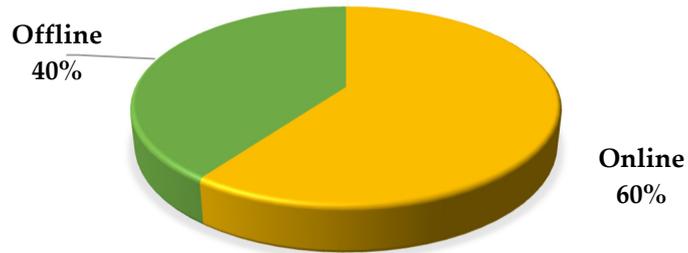


Fig. 4

A predictable response of a majority of 60% is that they want to see a promotion campaign in the *online* environment and a percentage of 40% in the *offline* environment.

### B. Second objective

What makes you buy A starbucks coffee at the expense of other brands?

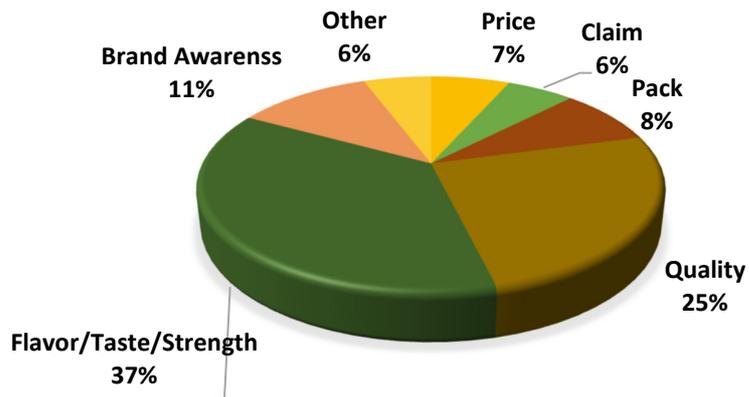


Fig. 5

Analyzing the coffee's uniqueness, the majority of 37% answered that they choose this brand to the detriment of others because they like the *flavour / taste / strength*, then 25% are attracted by the *quality of the coffee*, a fairly high percentage of 11% are attracted by *brand awareness*, 8% by *packaging*, 7% by *price*, 6% are convinced by the *advertisement*, and 6% gave *other arguments*, e.g. they have unique products, variety, the cafe is close to home, the combination of tastes.

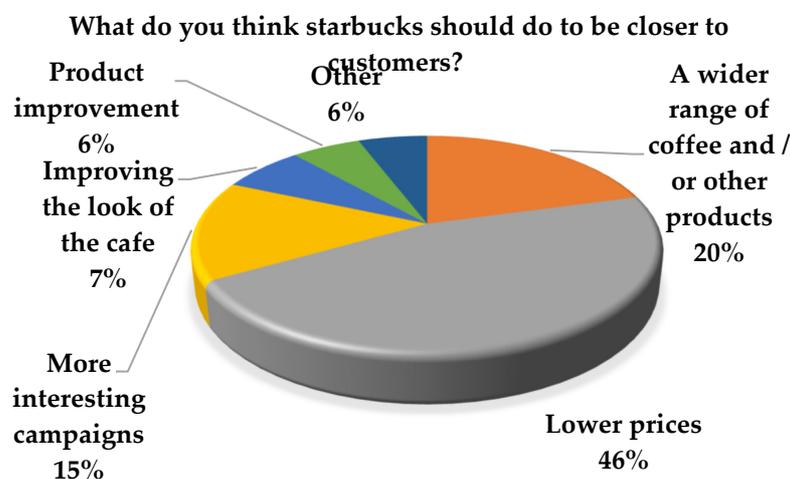


Fig. 6

In order for Starbucks to be closer to customers, the customers believe that the Starbucks brand should first *reduce prices* (46%), then 20% believe that they should have a *wider range of products*, 15% want to see more *interesting campaigns*, 7% are not exactly satisfied with the design of the *cafe*, 6% believe that the *current products should be improved*, and 6% cited *reasons* such as employee-customer interaction, better reward system, the introduction of vegan products, offers and the removal of some products from the menu.

**How important is it for you when you buy Starbucks coffee that your name is written on the plastic cup?**

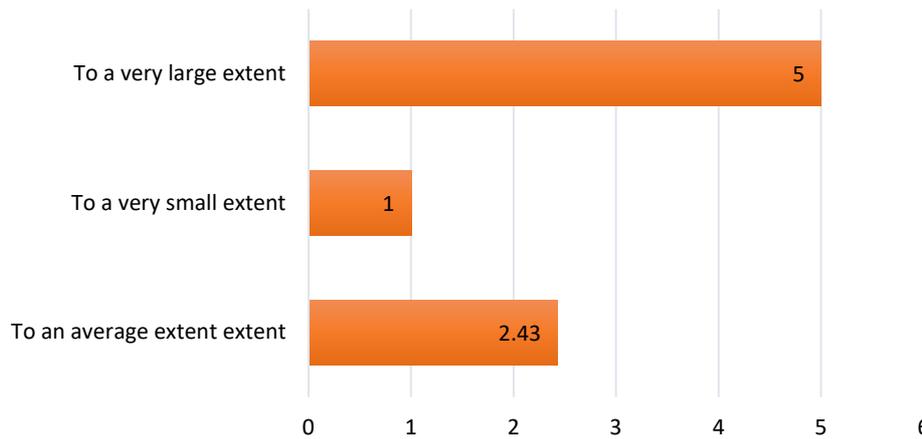


Fig. 7

Wanting to know to what extent *writing your own name on the drink* determines the purchase of a drink, an average of 2.43 was recorded, of which 23% to a very small extent, 12% to a certain extent, 11% to a large extent, 9% to a small extent and only 5% to a very large extent. Certainly, there has been a change over the years; therefore, most consumers have placed this aspect among the last ranking places when they buy coffee.

**Do you think that adding different types of coffee for a certain season (E.G. Gingerbread latte for the cold season) is a move that makes you buy a Starbucks drink?**

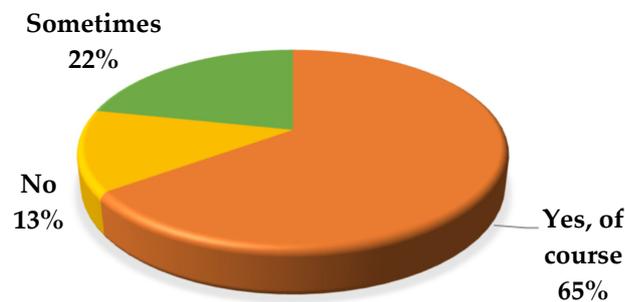


Fig. 8

65% believe that the strategy of *adding different types of coffee for a certain season* is a move that leads them to buy Starbucks coffee, 22% said they sometimes buy coffee for this reason, and 13% said they are not convinced by this move.

### **3. Results**

As for the first objective - to find out the opinion of consumers on several aspects regarding the Starbucks brand -, it was found that the design of the cafe was appreciated by 88.3% as the most suitable place to serve coffee, and at the same time, the atmosphere and ambiance in the cafe make the consumers drink the brand's products. The way of serving was appreciated by the vast majority of the respondents. As far as the social networks, the website and the application on the phone are concerned, surprising answers were recorded. Among those listed, the most appreciated platform was the Instagram page, which enjoyed a higher appreciation than Facebook. It can be thus inferred that the brand should be much more active on the Instagram page, the customers being more attentive to their activity in this application, and a promotion on this social network page would be a beneficial action for the brand. An unsatisfactory response was the one recorded regarding the site and the application on the phone. Both are not known by many customers and the respondents selected the "I cannot appreciate" option in a percentage of 60% for the application on the phone and 50% for the site. Certainly, it can be observed that these two aspects need to be improved, even completely changed, and rebuilt from a different perspective.

Among the reasons why most consumers visit the Starbucks Cafe, the most appreciated reason was the quality of the products. In terms of consuming a favourite range of coffee, the winner was Caffe Latte, followed by Cappucino and Caramel Machiato. Also, as it was expected, asking if they want to see more of an online or offline campaign, most respondents have chosen the first option. In other words, an online campaign is how you can reach a large percentage of potential customers.

From the point of view of the second objective - to discover the reasons why customers choose the Starbucks coffee -, it was found out that the flavour / taste / strength, the quality of the products and the fame of the brand play a very important role. These are the main reasons consumers choose the Starbucks coffee for. At the same time, when asked if they consider that the addition of different types of coffee that are representative for different seasons makes them buy them, they answered in the affirmative. It can be deduced that this action attracts customers, only that the preferred range of coffee, namely PSL, should be present in the environment for a longer period of time. Moreover, Starbucks needs to improve the product design, to lower prices and to introduce a wider range of products and offers, and in addition, to pay more attention to promotional campaigns. On the other hand, the customer's name written on the cup is no longer a big reason to go to Starbucks.

Furthermore, as for the first objective - *the analysis of several aspects regarding the Starbucks brand*, they need to improve the aspects related to the products, the applications through which they reach customers as well as the way of serving. At the same time, in order to attract more customers, they should think about prices reduction and the introduction of new offers, about the cafe and its atmosphere as well as about the online campaign. For the second objective, it can be concluded that *the main reason for choosing the Starbucks coffee* is its quality. Most respondents are heavy consumers of coffee, this aspect being beneficial for the brand. Pumpkin Spice Latte is everyone's favourite and is highly sought after. Certainly, the introduction of this coffee all year round would increase the number of Starbucks customers.

## **Conclusion**

The current and excessive trend of business promotion is a successful method that is used to attract the attention of the target audience. We live in an era where the means of influencing the consumerism of the population are used every day in all possible forms. We talk about TV

commercials, commercials, the flooding of social networks with various commercials promoting trends - what it means to be fashionable, what you need, what you need to do, what represents you, etc.

The promotion has passed in time from paintings on the walls, to people shouting the qualities of their products, to appearing in the newspaper, to advertisements on glass, and to what we now call online promotion. Therefore, it can be seen that promoting means doing something to grow, to become visible among consumers, to make it unique and desired.

All in all, it can be posited that Starbucks is a strong brand, with a well-known and appreciated fame. The consumers of Starbucks products are largely satisfied with this brand, on a general note, but there is still room for improvement.

In other words, Starbucks has earned the trust of customers by being present on the market for many years and by maintaining the core values of the brand, but also by continuously improving itself.

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