**Observer**:

Joshua Archer

**Location**:

Starbucks Coffee Shop, 1716 E. Cotati Ave, Rohnert Park, CA

**Time segments:**

I spent 90 minutes sitting in Starbucks, in a chair to the side of the main room, giving me full view of most of the store. I observed somewhat continuously, as it took me a while to type down what I was seeing, but I recorded the time intervals along the way to give a sense of what was happening when in the narrative. In my raw notes, I mark down time segments in 2-10 minute intervals, depending on the length of time it took me to type in my observations.

**Observations:**

The environment in the Starbucks was typical of the chain, with an L-shaped layout; on the short side of the ‘L’ were several tables, some short with 2 or 4 chairs, and one long table set up as a work/meeting space, 8 chairs, and electrical outlets available for those on a computer. On the long side of the ‘L’ was the order counter, with a small cold case filled with food items, and a glass-enclosed display for baked goods on top. There were two registers, and a barista area. Across from the registers was a coffee station filled with things to add to drinks, and a few garbage cans. There were several kiosks as well, filled with coffee beans, or other items to purchase. The place was clean and friendly, but filled with periodic industrial noises of the blender whirring, or a high-powered exhaust fan that ran off and on the entire time I was there. In the corner of the ‘L’ was a grouping of padded comfortable chairs with little tables between. These were movable to form one or more conversational circles. I chose one of these seats to sit in, because it provided the best view of the entire café, and because the seats were the most comfortable, and I knew I’d be sitting for a while during my observations.

When I started my observations, there were already six people in the café – 4 men and 2 women. All of the subjects were sitting either at work desk type tables provided for small groups to meet, or in comfortable padded chairs set in a conversational arrangement, or at small two-person tables designed for dining. Of all the customers that were present in the café while I was observing, five of the six initial individuals stayed the longest, with everyone else coming and going, and staying only briefly (2 minutes average). By the time that I left, however, all but one of the original four had left.

When I arrived, there were five staff workers on duty, but one soon went home, and I observed that the number of staff averaged at four for the entire duration. There were several staff changes in that duration, but the count remained at four.

Of the customers that visited the café during my period of observation, they were overwhelmingly female: the average was two-to-one women to men (30 women and 2 little girls compared to 15 men). Of the 54 customers, 40 of them were white, and the others were a combination of individuals of Latin or Asian descent, with a single African-American patron. Most of the customers appeared to be in the age range of 20-30, with a number of outliers in the 50-60 year range, and 2 girls of 5 or less.

The clothing worn by most that came into the café was casual, often appearing to be athletic sportswear. Only a few individuals came in with clothing that was business attire. Most of the clothes and accessories were of moderate value, and the implied socio-economic status of those that came in appeared to me to be most likely middle to upper-middle class.

The behavior for most of those that came into the store was similar – to either go straight to the bathroom first (mostly women), or to go to the counter to order a drink. After they order their drink, most often they would look at their smart phone and/or talk with a companion, but not with strangers. On the rare occasion, a staff member would talk with a customer for more than the time that it took to obtain their order. The person would then wait near the barista, or near the coffee station, and some would sit down at a chair while they waited for their coffee to arrive. It seldom took longer than 2 or 3 minutes for drinks to be created and served, at which point the ‘customer’ would take their drink, and more often than not they would add something to it at the coffee bar, such as milk, cream or sugar/sweetener. Then, after being satisfied with his or her beverage, the customer would in most cases leave, or less commonly, they would find a free table or chair and sit. Those that did stay tended to stay for longer than 30 minutes.

Of the 54 patrons, over 30 had some sort of smart phone device in their hands, and of those, most of them engaged in using their device, mostly observing the screen and pressing on the screen interfaces. Most were alone, but even those patrons that were with others continued to use their smart phone device either without interacting with their companions, or while simultaneously talking to their companions.

For the most part, patrons were purchasing coffee drinks only, with only a few buying other food items.

Most of the patrons were by themselves – of the 54 observed individuals, roughly 30 of them came in alone, with the others being in pairs or in groups no larger than 4 or 5.

**Conclusions:**

It appeared to me that the demographics were mainly middle class, more women than men, of an average age range of 20-30 years, and most of these people had smartphones. From their dress and demeanor, I assumed most of the customers I observed were SSU students coming over for a cup of coffee or other beverage, but this was not a universal demographic. There also appeared to be a relevant but somewhat smaller population of people in their 50’s or older that used the space in Starbucks as a sort of office for working. Of those that spent time in Starbucks to work on their computers, only one was in their 20’s, and the others were in their 50’s or older. That being stated, the majority of individuals came in to purchase a beverage and to leave. Some very few stayed to consume their beverage or to talk with another individual.

Most people that came in were very efficient in their transactions, telling the staff person working the register what they wanted, waiting for their drink, making any modifications that they desired, and leaving. Cellphone use was quite prevalent. Talking was kept to groups that came in together, for the most part, and very few people decided to stay and sit. Very few people actually were engaged with printed material – I observed only one person of the 54 reading printed material on actual paper, and he was in the age bracket of 50’s or older. Everyone else that was consuming media was either engaged with their smart phone, or using a computer or a tablet device. Everyone else was either in conversation with a companion, or quietly waited for their drink, and then left.

In general, I found it difficult to organize my thoughts around my observations while recording them, as I was trying to type down what I was seeing as quickly as I was observing. I had not formed any previous questions in my mind before sitting down to observe, so I wasn’t quite sure on what I should focus. I found myself noticing base demographic information that might lead me to some sort of assumptions about the subjects – age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, etc. I also tried to pay attention to individual behaviors; such as if the customers were alone or in groups, if they were interacting with anyone or quiet, and with the observation of many cellphones in hand, I began to formulate a question around technology use while in line or waiting for their beverages. I think if I had spent more time ahead of my observations formulating both questions that I might be interested in answering, or putting together a form for recording my observations, things might have moved more slowly. I also found it difficult to track the specific individuals in my observation once my notes were completed, which leads me to think I should have numbered them in the field notes as I observed them. I also chose to type up my field notes as I recorded them, which might have slowed me down from just recording them longhand on paper.

Since I was only observing without interaction, I had to make all of my assumptions based on the way that individuals looked, and how they interacted with others. I could not ask any sort of revealing questions, so any assumptions about socio-economic status, or background were suspect and based on my own personal bias filters and how I judged these individuals based on their dress and behavior. Having been in other cafés at other times, with my own understanding of background and place, knowing that this café was right across the road from the university, my assumptions might be more accurate than a pure guess, but again, I cannot be sure of my assumptions.

Also, because I held only one observation session, at one specific time for 90 minutes, it is very difficult to say anything in general about the population I observed; any assumptions I might make have to be confined to the small sample of individuals in that specific period of time. In general, I found the experience somewhat dissatisfying, because there wasn’t any question I was attempting to answer, and there wasn’t a great deal of data for me to analyze and from which to make assertions. It felt that anything I might have to say would come mostly from my own personal bias and filters.