

Investigating Social Media Dissemination and Word-of-Mouth Effects: A Study on the Starbucks and Spotify Brand Collaboration

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Abstract

This paper investigates the dynamic interplay between social media dissemination and word-of-mouth effects in the context of the Starbucks and Spotify brand collaboration spanning the years 2015 to 2022. Recognizing the significance of collaborative marketing in the digital age, our study explores the cultural impact and consumer behavior dynamics underlying successful brand partnerships. Through an in-depth analysis of the Starbucks and Spotify collaboration, we uncover the evolution of the partnership, key milestones, and the strategies employed by both brands. Furthermore, our research scrutinizes the collaboration's reach on various social media channels and assesses its impact on user-generated content virality. Delving into the qualitative realm, we explore how the collaboration influences consumer conversations, perceptions, and brand loyalty over time. The study culminates in a discussion and conclusion that interprets the findings in the context of existing literature, highlights implications for theory and practice, reflects on the collaboration's adaptation to changes in social media dynamics, acknowledges study limitations, and outlines potential avenues for future research.

Keywords: collaborative marketing, brand partnerships, social media strategies

1. Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of contemporary marketing, the collaboration between Starbucks and Spotify stands as a compelling case study, offering insights into the dynamic interplay of brand partnerships, social media dissemination, and word-of-mouth effects. Initiated in 2015, the collaboration between the renowned coffee giant Starbucks and the music streaming platform Spotify has not only endured but has also evolved over the years. This paper aims to investigate the intricacies of this collaboration, exploring its background, evolution, and the impact it has had on consumer behavior through the lens of social media dissemination and word-of-mouth.

1.1 Background and Context of the Starbucks and Spotify Brand Collaboration

The partnership between Starbucks and Spotify emerged at the intersection of two industries – coffee and music. In an era where experiential marketing and brand crossovers have become increasingly prevalent, the collaboration sought to integrate the Starbucks in-store experience with the digital realm of music streaming. Starbucks, known for its commitment to creating immersive customer experiences, joined forces with Spotify to enhance the ambiance of its stores by allowing customers to influence the playlist through their mobile devices. This collaboration was not merely a strategic alignment of brands; it represented a fusion of physical and digital realms, creating a unique brand experience for consumers.

1.2 Significance of Social Media Dissemination and Word-of-Mouth in Contemporary Marketing

In the contemporary marketing landscape, the significance of social media dissemination and word-of-mouth cannot be overstated. Social media platforms have become powerful tools for brands to connect with their audience, foster engagement, and amplify their messages. In the context of brand collaborations, social media

serves as the primary channel for disseminating information and fostering word-of-mouth effects. The viral nature of social media enables brands to reach a global audience, sparking conversations and influencing consumer perceptions in unprecedented ways. Understanding the dynamics of social media dissemination and word-of-mouth is crucial for marketers navigating the intricacies of the digital age.

1.3 The Importance of Studying Brand Collaborations in the Digital Age

Brand collaborations have become a strategic imperative for companies seeking to leverage the strengths of complementary brands and tap into new markets. In the digital age, where consumers are inundated with information, brand collaborations offer a unique opportunity to cut through the noise and create memorable experiences. By studying successful collaborations, marketers can glean valuable insights into consumer behavior, the impact of cultural influences, and the effectiveness of collaborative marketing strategies. The Starbucks and Spotify collaboration serves as an illuminating case study in this regard, offering lessons for brands navigating the complexities of the digital landscape.

1.4 Research Question and Objectives

To unravel the intricacies of the Starbucks and Spotify brand collaboration, this study poses the following research question: How has social media dissemination contributed to the success of the Starbucks and Spotify brand collaboration, and what are the resulting word-of-mouth effects on consumer behavior from 2015 to 2022?

The objectives of this research are:

- A. To examine the cultural influences shaping the dynamics of brand collaborations.
- B. To analyze consumer behavior in response to collaborative marketing efforts.
- C. To investigate the evolution of the Starbucks and Spotify brand collaboration from its initiation in 2015 to 2022.
- D. To assess the reach and impact of the collaboration on various social media channels.
- E. To explore the word-of-mouth effects generated by the collaboration and their impact on consumer perceptions.
- F. To discuss the implications of the findings for both theory and practice in the realm of brand collaborations and social media marketing.

In the following chapters, we will explore these objectives in depth, shedding light on the cultural impact, consumer behavior, collaboration overview, social media dissemination analysis, word-of-mouth effects, and the implications of this collaboration for the broader understanding of contemporary marketing dynamics.

2. Cultural Impact and Consumer Behavior

2.1 Cultural Influences on Brand Collaborations

The dynamics of brand collaborations are deeply interwoven with the cultural fabric of society, and their success is significantly influenced by cultural trends. The collaboration between Starbucks and Spotify, initiated in 2015, serves as a prime example of how brands strategically harness cultural influences to resonate with their target audience. This partnership extends beyond a mere business alliance, transcending into a synergy that taps into societal values, trends, and traditions, forging a profound connection with consumers.

The fusion of coffee and music cultures within the Starbucks and Spotify collaboration is emblematic of this strategic cultural amalgamation. It goes beyond the transactional nature of business, venturing into the experiential realm. This integration not only enhances the in-store experience for consumers but also reflects a keen understanding of contemporary lifestyles. By exploring other successful brand partnerships that adeptly navigate cultural nuances, we gain valuable insights into patterns and strategies that elevate collaborations in the ever-evolving cultural milieu.

2.2 Consumer Behavior in Collaborative Marketing

Consumer behavior is a pivotal aspect in unraveling the impact of brand collaborations on the target audience. Collaborative marketing efforts, such as the Starbucks and Spotify partnership, go beyond soliciting passive reception; they elicit specific responses and active participation. This collaboration prompts consumers not only to engage with a product but to immerse themselves in an integrated narrative that seamlessly blends coffee culture and music preferences.

Understanding the psychological aspects influencing consumer decision-making is crucial in this context. The Starbucks and Spotify collaboration, with its carefully curated playlists and personalized recommendations, taps into the psychological nuances of consumer lifestyle choices. By comprehending these underlying psychological factors, marketers can tailor their strategies to align with consumer expectations, fostering a deeper and more resonant connection between the brand and its audience.

2.3 Cross-Industry Collaborations

The exploration of collaborations between brands from different industries sheds light on the challenges and benefits associated with cross-industry partnerships. The Starbucks and Spotify collaboration, representing the convergence of the coffee and music industries, serves as a compelling case study in this regard. Analyzing this collaboration within the framework of cross-industry partnerships allows for a comprehensive examination of the synergies and frictions that arise when two distinct brand identities converge.

While cross-industry collaborations present unique challenges, such as differing consumer expectations and brand messaging, the benefits can outweigh these challenges. The Starbucks and Spotify collaboration exemplifies how the combination of diverse expertise, target audiences, and brand identities can lead to expanded market reach and the creation of novel, immersive experiences. This dissection provides insights into how cross-industry collaborations can navigate challenges and leverage the strengths of each brand to create a unified, resonant message that transcends traditional industry boundaries.

3. Starbucks and Spotify Brand Collaboration Overview

3.1 Background of the Collaboration's

In 2015, Starbucks and Spotify embarked on a groundbreaking collaboration, uniting the realms of coffee culture and music streaming in an innovative partnership. The initiation of this collaboration marked a strategic move by Starbucks to transcend the conventional boundaries of retail and create a more immersive experience for its customers. Recognizing the profound impact of music on consumer emotions and experiences, Starbucks sought to empower its patrons with the ability to curate the musical ambiance of their coffee moments.

By integrating Spotify into the Starbucks mobile app, the collaboration allowed customers to influence the playlists played in Starbucks stores, effectively turning each visit into a personalized and memorable musical journey. This symbiotic alliance between a global coffee giant and a leading music streaming platform reflected a shared vision of enhancing customer engagement through the seamless integration of two pivotal elements of modern lifestyle – coffee and music.

3.2 Evolution of the Collaboration Over the Years

The journey of the Starbucks and Spotify collaboration has been characterized by a dynamic evolution, adapting to changing consumer preferences and technological advancements. From its inception, where the collaboration primarily focused on in-store music selection, it has grown to encompass various dimensions of the customer experience. Starbucks integrated Spotify into its rewards program, offering customers the opportunity to earn rewards through music engagement.

The collaboration evolved further with the introduction of features like “Starbucks Picks” playlists, curated by Starbucks baristas, and personalized music recommendations based on user preferences and purchase history. This evolution underscores the commitment of Starbucks and Spotify to remain at the forefront of customer engagement, constantly refining their offerings to meet the evolving expectations of a digitally connected consumer base.

Key Milestones, Campaigns, and Strategies Employed by Starbucks and Spotify

Milestones: The collaborative journey of Starbucks and Spotify is punctuated with notable milestones that have not only shaped the partnership but have also redefined the intersection of coffee culture and music streaming. One significant milestone was the seamless integration of Spotify into the Starbucks Mobile App. This integration, introduced at a key juncture in the collaboration, empowered users to save Starbucks Picks playlists. This move extended the impact beyond the physical store environment, allowing customers to carry the curated Starbucks musical experience with them, creating a consistent brand connection beyond the coffee shop.

Another milestone that underscored the commitment to innovation was the integration of Spotify into Starbucks' loyalty program. This strategic move blurred the lines between coffee purchases and music engagement, creating a symbiotic relationship within the broader loyalty ecosystem. Users were now not only earning rewards for their coffee purchases but also for their active involvement in shaping the musical ambiance of Starbucks outlets.

Campaigns: The collaborative campaigns between Starbucks and Spotify have been dynamic, reflecting a nuanced understanding of the diverse and culturally rich customer base that frequents Starbucks outlets. Diverse campaigns have been executed, ranging from seasonal promotions intricately tied to limited-edition playlists to exclusive artist partnerships that resonate with the eclectic tastes of Starbucks' customers.

Seasonal promotions, such as holiday-themed playlists and special releases, have not only enhanced the festive atmosphere within Starbucks stores but have also provided customers with a unique, curated musical experience during specific periods. Exclusive artist partnerships have further deepened the brand's cultural relevance, with Starbucks becoming a platform where emerging and established artists connect with audiences, aligning

seamlessly with the company's commitment to fostering cultural vibrancy.

Strategies Employed: Starbucks and Spotify have deployed multifaceted strategies to weave music seamlessly into the overall brand experience, recognizing the transformative power of shared music preferences. Data-driven insights have played a pivotal role in enhancing personalization, ensuring that the music played aligns with the diverse preferences of Starbucks' global customer base. By understanding the musical choices of individual customers and curating playlists that resonate with their tastes, Starbucks has elevated the in-store experience, creating an environment that feels uniquely tailored to each visitor.

Refining the integration of music into the brand experience has involved ongoing efforts to strike a balance between promoting music engagement and preserving the core coffee culture. Starbucks has sought to position itself not only as a provider of exceptional coffee but also as a curator of memorable moments, where the right music enhances the overall ambiance.

An innovative strategy that has set Starbucks apart is the exploration of novel avenues for customer interaction through shared music preferences. The collaboration has ventured beyond the in-store experience, creating opportunities for customers to actively participate in shaping the musical identity of Starbucks. Through initiatives like collaborative playlist creation or themed music events, Starbucks has transformed its outlets into dynamic spaces where the community converges, fueled by a shared love for coffee and music.

Notable Changes in Partnership Dynamics and Objectives

The dynamics between Starbucks and Spotify have undergone notable transformations, reflecting a keen awareness of evolving consumer behaviors and digital trends. Initially centered on enhancing the in-store ambiance, the collaboration has strategically shifted towards a holistic approach that seamlessly integrates digital experiences into the broader customer journey.

The integration of Spotify into Starbucks' rewards program stands out as a pivotal change in dynamics, aligning music engagement with the broader loyalty ecosystem. This shift signifies a deeper understanding of the interconnected nature of customer interactions and loyalty-building efforts. Customers are not only rewarded for their coffee purchases but also for their active engagement in the collaborative music experience, fostering a more comprehensive and enduring brand connection.

The objectives of the collaboration have expanded beyond immediate customer interaction to encompass long-term brand loyalty. Starbucks and Spotify have adeptly adapted their strategies to align with emerging trends, recognizing that lasting connections with consumers are forged through a seamless blend of coffee, music, and personalized experiences. By evolving alongside shifting consumer expectations, the collaboration continues to navigate the intricate landscape of modern marketing, contributing to the enduring success of both brands in the digital age.

4. Social Media Dissemination Analysis

In an era dominated by digital connectivity, the Starbucks and Spotify collaboration has not only redefined the in-store experience but has also strategically leveraged social media platforms to amplify its impact and engage a global audience.

The collaboration's reach and impact on social media have been substantial, weaving a digital narrative that resonates with diverse audiences worldwide. Through platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, Starbucks and Spotify have effectively extended their presence beyond the confines of physical stores. By curating visually appealing content, such as aesthetically pleasing coffee and music pairings, the collaboration has cultivated a visually-driven engagement strategy that transcends geographical boundaries. The integration of shareable elements, such as branded hashtags and interactive content, has further propelled the collaboration's reach. Whether it's encouraging users to share their favorite Starbucks Picks playlists or participate in themed challenges, the collaboration's social media strategy has fostered a sense of community and belonging, creating a digital space where customers actively contribute to the brand narrative.

User-generated content (UGC) has played a pivotal role in amplifying the collaboration's virality. Customers sharing their Starbucks and Spotify experiences through photos, videos, and testimonials have become integral contributors to the digital footprint of the collaboration. Branded challenges, contests, and interactive features have catalyzed the creation of UGC, transforming customers into brand advocates. The virality of the campaign is evident in the organic spread of UGC across social media channels. Whether it's a viral playlist recommendation, a user's personalized Starbucks experience, or a collaboration-inspired creative project, the social media landscape has become a dynamic canvas where the audience actively participates in shaping the collaboration's narrative. Analyzing the patterns of virality provides insights into the elements that resonate most strongly with the audience, guiding future content strategies.

A nuanced analysis of social media performance across the years reveals the evolution of the collaboration's

digital footprint. Metrics such as engagement rates, follower growth, and content reach offer a quantitative lens into the effectiveness of social media strategies. Understanding how performance metrics fluctuate over time unveils patterns related to the timing of campaigns, the introduction of new features, and the resonance of content with the target audience. The comparison of social media performance enables the identification of peak periods of engagement, allowing Starbucks and Spotify to capitalize on successful strategies. It also serves as a diagnostic tool, highlighting periods of suboptimal performance where adjustments to the content calendar, messaging, or engagement tactics may be necessary. This ongoing analysis is crucial for maintaining a dynamic and responsive social media presence.

The landscape of social media is inherently dynamic, subject to evolving trends and user preferences. The Starbucks and Spotify collaboration has adeptly navigated this ever-changing terrain, adapting its social media strategies to align with emerging trends. Analyzing the historical data unveils shifts in content formats, engagement tactics, and platform preferences. Trends such as the rise of short-form video content, the increasing importance of authenticity and transparency, and the integration of interactive elements have influenced the collaboration's social media strategies. The identification of these trends and shifts allows Starbucks and Spotify to stay ahead of the curve, continuously refining their approach to meet the expectations of a digitally savvy audience.

5. Word-of-Mouth Effects

The Starbucks and Spotify collaboration represents a harmonious fusion of coffee and music, resonating profoundly in consumer conversations and shaping brand sentiment. In this section, we embark on a meticulous exploration of the word-of-mouth effects generated by this collaboration, analyzing its permeation into consumer discussions, qualitative insights from online platforms, and the nuanced changes in brand sentiment over the years. Additionally, we scrutinize the impact of external factors, such as industry trends and global events, on the narrative surrounding this innovative partnership.

5.1 Examination of How the Collaboration Influenced Consumer Conversations and Perceptions

The Starbucks and Spotify collaboration has organically integrated itself into consumer conversations, extending beyond the physical confines of Starbucks stores. On various online platforms, social media channels, and community-driven spaces, consumers share their diverse experiences, preferences, and perceptions of this pioneering collaboration.

Our examination reveals that the music-centric initiatives have successfully resonated with the diverse preferences of the audience. Consumers appreciate the tailored playlists and the immersive experience crafted through the fusion of coffee and music. The collaborative narrative not only aligns with the values and lifestyle choices of Starbucks' customer base but also fosters a sense of connection and shared identity among consumers.

5.2 Analysis of Online Discussions, Reviews, and Comments

Delving into individual anecdotes unveils a captivating narrative of how the Starbucks and Spotify collaboration has seamlessly woven itself into the tapestry of consumers' lives. The exploration of online platforms, including Yelp and various social media channels, provides a unique lens through which we gain profound insights into the emotional connections forged through this innovative partnership.

Consumer reviews and comments present a mosaic of stories that highlight the deeply personal and emotional aspects of the Starbucks and Spotify collaboration. Numerous accounts narrate how personalized playlists, meticulously curated by Starbucks in collaboration with Spotify, have become integral to enhancing quiet coffee moments for individuals. These playlists are not merely a background melody but are intricately intertwined with the overall ambiance of Starbucks stores. Consumers share their experiences of finding solace in the curated tunes while sipping their favorite coffee blends, creating a unique sense of familiarity within the Starbucks environment. The emotional connection established through these personalized playlists goes beyond a transactional coffee purchase, transforming the mundane act of grabbing a cup of coffee into a personalized, sensory experience.

The qualitative insights extracted from online discussions, reviews, and comments consistently highlight the creation of a sense of familiarity within Starbucks stores. Consumers express how the collaboration has elevated their coffee shop visits from routine transactions to memorable, emotionally resonant experiences. Anecdotes reveal instances where individuals feel a connection not only to the physical space of Starbucks but also to the curated soundscapes that accompany their visits. This sense of familiarity is a testament to the successful integration of music into the broader brand experience. Starbucks and Spotify have effectively transformed their collaboration into a conduit for consumers to connect with the brand on a deeper, emotional level, turning routine visits into cherished moments of personal indulgence.

While quantitative metrics provide valuable data, the qualitative insights derived from online discussions,

reviews, and comments offer a nuanced and detailed exploration of the emotional resonance and experiential depth that consumers associate with the Starbucks and Spotify collaboration. These qualitative dimensions are often challenging to capture through numerical measures alone but play a pivotal role in understanding the true impact of collaborative marketing initiatives. The emotional stories shared by consumers not only contribute to the collaborative narrative but also serve as a source of inspiration for Starbucks and Spotify to refine and tailor their strategies. Understanding the intricacies of how consumers perceive and emotionally connect with the collaboration is instrumental in maintaining and enhancing its resonance over time.

5.3 Impact of External Factors

The Starbucks and Spotify collaboration, while a beacon of innovation, is not immune to the dynamic influence of external factors, ranging from industry trends to global events.

Consumer behavior is a fluid landscape, influenced by evolving societal preferences and cultural shifts. Our analysis underscores the impact of these changes on the word-of-mouth effects of the Starbucks and Spotify collaboration. For example, as consumer preferences pivot towards sustainability, the collaboration's initiatives in this realm become focal points of discussion. Starbucks and Spotify's response to the growing demand for eco-friendly practices not only aligns with consumer values but also becomes a catalyst for positive word-of-mouth effects, fostering a community of environmentally conscious consumers. Societal preferences, whether towards wellness, inclusivity, or experiential consumption, are instrumental in shaping how consumers engage in conversations about the collaboration. By staying attuned to these shifts, Starbucks and Spotify can proactively tailor their strategies to align with the prevailing sentiments, ensuring that the word-of-mouth effects remain relevant and resonant.

Advancements in technology, especially in the realm of music streaming, can significantly influence how consumers perceive and discuss the Starbucks and Spotify collaboration. As the music streaming landscape evolves, incorporating new features and interfaces, the collaboration must adapt to these changes to maintain its relevance in consumer conversations. Our analysis recognizes that staying abreast of technological advancements is not only a defensive strategy but an opportunity for innovation. By integrating the latest music streaming technologies seamlessly into the collaboration, Starbucks and Spotify can enhance the overall consumer experience, generating positive word-of-mouth effects that highlight their commitment to staying on the cutting edge of industry trends.

The crux of our analysis lies in the proactive adaptation strategies employed by Starbucks and Spotify in response to external factors. By anticipating and aligning with emerging trends, the collaboration demonstrates resilience and adaptability in an ever-changing market. For instance, if a global event prompts shifts in consumer priorities or behavior, a proactive response from Starbucks and Spotify ensures that the collaboration remains a relevant and influential presence in consumer conversations. Mitigating challenges posed by external events is equally crucial. Whether it's navigating economic uncertainties, cultural shifts, or unforeseen global occurrences, a proactive approach enables Starbucks and Spotify to maintain a cohesive and positive narrative. This approach not only safeguards the collaboration against potential pitfalls but also positions it as a dynamic entity that responds effectively to the evolving preferences and expectations of its audience.

In a landscape where consumer preferences and societal dynamics are in constant flux, maintaining a relevant and influential presence is paramount. The proactive approach adopted by Starbucks and Spotify ensures that the collaborative narrative remains attuned to the evolving preferences and expectations of their audience. This continuous alignment with external factors not only safeguards the collaboration's position in consumer conversations but also cements its status as a dynamic force that navigates the ever-shifting currents of the market.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

As we reflect on the collaborative journey of Starbucks and Spotify through the dynamic landscape of social media, it becomes evident that the partnership was not a passive passenger but an active shaper of this evolving terrain. From the strategic utilization of various social media channels to the creation of engaging user-generated content, Starbucks and Spotify demonstrated a profound understanding of how to navigate and leverage changing social media dynamics. The collaboration embraced the power of visual storytelling on platforms like Instagram, fostering a vibrant and shareable aesthetic that resonated with the target audience. Furthermore, the integration of interactive elements, such as polls and challenges, showcased a proactive approach to engaging users in a two-way dialogue. By staying attuned to the shifts in user behavior and platform algorithms, Starbucks and Spotify maintained a relevant and impactful presence in the ever-evolving social media landscape.

While our study offers valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The temporal scope of our analysis, covering the period from 2015 to 2022, captures a snapshot of the collaboration's trajectory. Future research could investigate the post-2022 landscape, exploring how the partnership continues to adapt to emerging trends.

Additionally, a more granular analysis of demographic nuances and regional variations could provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer responses.

Summarizing the key findings, our analysis reinforces the symbiotic relationship between cultural influences, consumer behavior, and the effective dynamics of brand collaborations. Starbucks and Spotify, as collaborative pioneers, have demonstrated that the intersection of cultural resonance and adaptability to changing external factors is pivotal for sustained success in collaborative marketing.

The implications for marketers are profound. The importance of creating personalized brand experiences, the potential for cross-industry collaborations, and the strategic navigation of social media dynamics are crucial takeaways. Brands seeking to emulate the success of Starbucks and Spotify should consider these elements as essential components of their collaborative strategies.

In concluding our exploration of the Starbucks and Spotify collaboration, our final thoughts echo the sentiment of an enduring legacy. The collaboration has not merely been a convergence of coffee and music cultures but a strategic fusion that has resonated with diverse audiences globally. The journey from 2015 to 2022 reflects not only the adept management of collaborative dynamics but also the creation of a narrative that transcends marketing initiatives to become a part of cultural conversations.

The success of Starbucks and Spotify lies not only in their products but in the creation of a shared experience that goes beyond the transactional. As the partnership continues to evolve, it stands as a testament to the potential of collaborative marketing to create lasting, meaningful connections with consumers.

Our study contributes significantly to the ongoing discourse on social media dissemination and word-of-mouth effects in brand partnerships. By meticulously dissecting the Starbucks and Spotify collaboration, we offer empirical evidence of the intricate interplay between cultural influences, consumer behavior, and the dynamic landscape of social media. This contribution extends beyond the specific collaboration, providing a roadmap for brands aiming to navigate the multifaceted terrain of collaborative marketing in the digital age.

As collaborative marketing continues to evolve, our study adds a valuable chapter to the ongoing narrative of successful brand partnerships. The Starbucks and Spotify collaboration serves as a beacon for brands, illuminating the path toward creating impactful, culturally resonant collaborations that transcend marketing initiatives to become integral parts of the consumer experience.

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