

Coffee Naivete:

A Qualitative Analysis of Barista Interviews

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Abstract:

The following qualitative study examines the differences between barista interactions with more knowledgeable customers and less knowledgeable customers. Through interviews and observations, the researcher was able to discover common practices and behaviors with both types of customers. More knowledgeable customers were found to be confident, decisive, and able to use coffee “jargon.” Less knowledgeable customers were found to be nervous, unsure, and longwinded.

Keywords: barista, customer, interaction, transaction, coffee

Introduction

The coffee shop has become an environment with a distinct and (at times) strained culture (Manning, 2008). It has become a place in which weary students and ambitious businesspeople alike congregate to complete various assignments or projects. The common product shared by all of them is *coffee*. The drink itself is fairly simple in its concept: ground beans through which hot or cold water is poured or pressed. However simple the concept, the reality of coffee can be found by anyone who frantically scans a menu at one of the 33,000 coffee shops that dot the United States (Speciality Food News, 2017).

The complexity of coffee drinking reaches its peak in shops that claim to be “Third Wave.” Third Wave coffee refers to a growing movement among coffee drinkers to promote “coffee quality, more direct trade, ... sustainability, lighter roast profiles, (and) innovative brew methods” (www.perfectdailygrind.com, 2017). The First Wave, which was the emergence of popular “grocery-store” coffee brands such as Folgers and Maxwell House, paved the way for the Second Wave. This includes chain café’s, such as Starbucks, Caribou Coffee Company, and Port City Java (Craft Beverage Jobs, 2017).

My introduction into the culture of the modern coffee cafés (particularly Third Wave,) was not the result of an intellectual journey towards the appreciation of cocoa beans or the study of emerging markets. To the contrary, I simply wanted what my grandfather calls “a cup of Joe,” and my thoughts about what I would order did not go beyond *small*, *medium*, and *large*. Instead of this simple conversation, I found myself in a Third Wave coffee shop looking at a crowded menu. My face grew hot, my hands grew clammy, and I could feel the intense stares from the customer’s behind me. The following interaction between myself and the barista was truly awkward, as she tried patiently to help me find something I would like. I eventually rushed

through the choices and settled on a beverage with vanilla in the name. I walked away from the register red-faced, bothered, and embarrassed, but despite this I had managed to order something that I truly liked. Following this experience, I returned to the coffee shop several times and learned more of the coffee jargon each time. I also eventually became friends with most of the staff who kindly answered each of my questions.

This interaction caused me to ponder the differences between individuals who are more knowledgeable and less knowledgeable about coffee. Do more knowledgeable customers spend time discussing the differences of flavor between Ethiopian and Columbian beans? Or are their interactions shorter due to the knowledge and expertise shared by both parties? As someone who has held a retail position and had to work with the public, I was aware of the hidden reactions and opinions of those people in the service industry. While the relationship between a customer and salesperson has been studied extensively, there has not been much focus on the salesperson's control (or lack thereof) during a transaction. The complexity of coffee culture (especially Third Wave,) presents a unique dimension to this interaction and invites further study.

The study of individual interactions between baristas and customers has the potential to yield helpful context for companies and consumers alike. Both of these groups may be able remedy any effects of poor communication during a transaction. Companies will hopefully be able to craft more effective sales strategies, while customers will be able to prepare themselves for uncomfortable transactions. By examining the differences between more knowledgeable and less knowledgeable customers, I hope to reveal commonalities that may be emulated or avoided when interacting with customers of varying knowledge/experience.

In order to contextualize this research, I first situate the study in academic literature surrounding the interaction between salespeople (specifically baristas) and customers of varying

levels of knowledge. My research question arises from this literature. I next outline my research methodology, explaining the use of interviews and observations to answer the research question, and the steps I took to ensure academic rigor. I then present the results of my research, focusing on the differences between the interactions of more knowledgeable customers and less knowledgeable customers.

Literature Review

The interaction between salesperson and customer is necessarily economic in nature. In a relatively limited amount of time, “the sales representative is in the tenuous position of building rapport while dealing with the conflict inherent in overcoming buying objections” (Campbell, Davis, & Skinner, 2006). The retail environment exhibits a literal exchange of products or services for compensation. The two parties (salesperson and customer) are involved in a necessary interaction to receive the desired possession from the other. Due to this, the social exchange theory has been used as a basis of understanding prior to the collection of data.

Though the lens of social exchange theory, there are economic principles which are used to “explain processes such as attraction, integration, competition, differentiation, and opposition” (Knottnerus & Guan, 1997). In other words, this theory proposes that a person’s motivation to initiate or continue an interaction is derived entirely from the desire to participate in rewarding relationships (Cherry, 2019). Within the context of a salesperson-customer relationship the completion of a transaction is the ultimate reward. This necessitates at least *some* interaction between the customer and salesperson. The length or nature of this interaction may vary depending on the customer’s prior knowledge of the product (Agbonifoh & Edoreh, 1986).

The manner in which salespersons interact with their customers is a significant factor in the result of a transaction (Park & Tran, 2018). An analysis of dyadic relationships between salespeople and customers revealed that customer-centric approaches (such as customer-oriented behavior) result in more positive interactions. Customer-orientated behaviors refers to the efforts of the salespeople to prioritize their customer's satisfaction throughout the transaction. These positive interactions then resulted in loyal customers (Park & Tran, 2018).

However, effective customer-orientated behavior requires salespersons to recognize the various transaction contexts and communication styles of their customers. According to Homberg, Muller, and Klarmann (2011), the "purchase situation" of each transaction necessitates a flexible approach from the attending salesperson. This flexible approach extends to whether a salesperson should offer functional orientation or a relational orientation towards a customer. For example, a task-orientated customer would most likely be receptive to a functionally oriented salesperson than a relational orientated salesperson (Homberg, Muller, & Klarmann, 2011). Instead of responding to each customer in a standard manner, effective salespeople are generally able "to recognize different communication styles and to be flexible in dealing with their customers" (Williams & Spiro, 1985, p. 440).

However, even if a salesperson is required to use a script during a transaction, a customer-centric attitude is still effective (Nguyen, Groth, Walsh, & Hennig-Thurau, 2014). The customer's perception of service quality or the attentiveness of the salesperson is dependent on the salesperson's approach, not on the specific script being recited. While an effective salesperson can still utilize a script, those employees with low customer-orientation found that "the negative relationship between the presence of service scripts and the propensity among

customers to return to a service firm and provide unsolicited customer feedback was exacerbated” (Nguyen, Groth, Walsh, & Hennig-Thurau, 2014).

The sophistication and composition of scripts can also influence the sales performance of a transaction (Leong, Busch, & John, 1989). The use of sophisticated scripts, combined with the salesperson’s own background knowledge of the product, was found to be much more effective than the use of scripts which included obviously standardized and non-conversational content. The more effective scripts have been found to include a “more elaborate, distinctive, contingent, and hypothetical” than standardized scripts. Above all, successful transactions have been characterized by the “adaptability” of the attending salesperson (Leong, Busch, & John, 1989).

The ability to discern the most effective means by which to interact with a customer can be divided into two classifications: intuitive and deliberative (Hall, Ahearne, & Sujan, 2015). Intuitive refers to personal similarities, empathy, or experiences which are shared between the salesperson and customer during the transaction. Deliberative refers to intentional efforts on the part of the salesperson to relate to the customer. When the specific intuitive perception is correct, it has been shown to smooth the transaction process. The researchers however, warned “that overthinking, which leads to deliberative inaccuracy, reduces performance” (Hall, Ahearne, & Sujan, 2015).

A salesperson’s accurate perception of a customer can be even more effective if it is followed by a genuine delivery of the sales tactic (Mukherjee & Bhal, 2017). Here genuine delivery refers to the customer’s perception of the salesperson’s sincerity and empathy toward them. Perceived sincerity from salespeople is particularly effective if the customer exhibits high levels of agreeableness, which includes features such as “warmth, sensitivity, courtesy, tolerance, cheerfulness, and sympathy” (as cited in Mukherjee & Bhal, 2017, p. 694).

The level of customer agreeableness obviously depends on the individual customer, but can also be influenced by the actions of the salesperson (Ramsey & Sohi, 1997). If a salesperson engages in effective listening (which includes sensing, evaluating, and responding,) their customers are more likely to react in a more agreeable manner. The effect of this increased agreeableness leads to a greater probability of a long-term relationship between the customer, the salesperson, and the brand itself (Ramsey & Sohi, 1997). The tactics utilized by salespeople is not directly responsible for this relationship but instead produces trust, which in turn influences a customer to interact with the brand more frequently. It was shown that, “when customers feel that a salesperson is listening to what they are saying, it enhances their trust in that salesperson” (Ramsey & Sohi, 1997). The importance of customer-employee congruence is shown through transactions as well. Customer-employee congruence refers to the harmony or compatibility which is experienced between the two parties during a successful transaction. The extent to which customer’s feel a kinship with their salesperson, “plays a critical role in determining customers’ perceptions of the way in which they are treated by employees and their appraisal of all aspects of their relationships with employees” (Jamal & Adelowore, 2008).

The transaction process can be strenuous if a customer is not a part of the “culture” which surround the product (Soloman, 1983). The customer’s themselves are evaluated and placed within the “social nexus” based on their possession or lack of products. These products are also often considered by the customer’s as a part of their identity. During a transaction, the tactics of the salesperson often triggers a positive or negative response based on how the customer defines themselves within the product “culture” (Soloman, 1983).

However, customers now have the ability to discover product information via the internet allowing customers to acquire knowledge of the product before interacting with the salesperson

(Hochstein, Bolander, Goldsmith, & Plouffe, 2019). This empowers customers who are not part of the product “culture” and encourages salespeople to adopt an *information exchange*, which is a Seller influence tactic (SIT.) An *information exchange* describes the process, “where a salesperson engages in back and forth questioning and answering with the consumer in order to acquire and provide the information needed to achieve successful influence” (Hochstein, Bolander, Goldsmith, & Plouffe, 2019, p. 124). This process of purposeful questioning allows the salesperson to adjust their approach to more informed customers, which statistically more likely to purchase a product (Hochstein, Bolander, Goldsmith, & Plouffe, 2019).

The transaction dynamic is also determined by the customer’s perception of the salesperson’s *social reputation*. A salesperson’s social reputation “rests on others’ evaluation of a person’s motivation to get along and to get ahead” (as cited in Echchakoui, 2017, p. 1740). This, combined with the salesperson’s personality and style of sales pitch, can result in a positive experience for the customer and “is a good predictor of sales performance” (Echchakoui, 2017). While creating a social reputation and rapport with the customer, a salesperson is tasked with various roles which such as advisor, broker, and friend (Hohenschwert, 2012). The most common (and important) aspect shared by the various roles of the salesperson is knowledge, both of the product and of the best way to reach different types of customers. While employees are expected to perform the duties connected with these various roles, customer satisfaction is significantly lowered when salespeople are overloaded. However, experienced salespeople using customer-oriented approaches can offset the negative effects of having too many roles (Jha, Balaji, Yavas, & Babakus, 2017).

Interactions between overloaded salespeople and less-informed customers are especially interesting in the context of coffee shop, which has been shown to have its own language and

culture. This culture can irritate those customers who are not knowledgeable with that environment (Manning, 2008) and negatively influence their transaction experience (Krapfel, 1988). However, those customers who are knowledgeable of the culture of coffee are able to assimilate or stand out at will. As Dickinson stated, “Choosing your drink becomes part of the management and justification of your identity” (2019). The possibility of negative experience due to inexperience or lack of knowledge is unfortunate, especially since an effective salesperson offering functional information can help a customer through the “newcomer feeling” (Köhler, Rohm, de Ruyter, & Wetzels, 2011). While the interaction between the salesperson and customer (knowledgeable and not knowledgeable) has studied extensively, the transaction between a barista and customer remains largely unknown. This study seeks to answer the following research question:

RQ1: How does a customer’s prior knowledge of coffee affect the subsequent interaction with the attending barista?

Methodology

In order to discern how a customer’s prior knowledge of coffee and the subsequent interaction with the attending barista, I chose focus my research on Chaleur Method Brew + Espresso. This coffee-shop was chosen for several reasons, the first of which was the relationships I had established with several of the employees. This familiarity allowed me to circumvent most gatekeeping obstacles simply ask the owner of the shop if it were appropriate for me to interview her employees. It was also conveniently situated closely to my home and the University of South Alabama.

In gathering the desired information, I decided to use a mixed method approach. Both interviews and observations were utilized. Principally, I chose to conduct interviews with willing baristas because of the amount of information and perspective that could be given. I was interested in their experience of speaking with dozens of customers, each with varying levels of knowledge and experience with coffee. A total of five baristas were asked to participate in this study. Due to scheduling conflicts, I was only able to conduct interviews with three baristas. For the purpose of confidentiality, they will be referred to as Larry, Irene, and Luna. There only requirement for participating in this study was employment at Chaleur Method Brew + Espresso.

An interview guide was used to provide structure to the interview. The guide included ten questions which were intended to compare the interactions with less knowledgeable customers and more knowledgeable customers. The questions were written to elicit discussion about general interaction, but also to elicit discussion concerning customer openness to suggestions and additional information. Suggestions are defined as specific methods or beverages recommended to the customers. Additional information is defined as elaborations or explanations about products that have been considered or purchased by the customer. To ensure later study, each of the interviews were recorded via iPhone. Before each interview, I asked the participants if I had their permission to record their responses. Once the recording had begun, I again asked the participants if I had their permission to record their responses.

Due to my familiarity with each of the participants, I took a more conversational tone while asking my questions. I also used their body language and facial expressions as cues, and invited them to elaborate on any point if they wished to do so. If their answers were somewhat unclear I requested some clarification or elaboration. I did not set a minimum or maximum time for each interview. Instead, I allowed the participants to take as much time as they felt necessary.

Once each of the ten questions had been answered, I thanked the participants and ended the recording. One of the interviews was conducted at the University of South Alabama in the Communication Building, while the other two were conducted at Chaleur. The locations for these interviews were chosen solely based on the convenience of the baristas.

In addition to the interviews with baristas, I conducted two hour long observations. In order capture as much nuance as possible in the interactions, I focused entirely on the dialogue and body language of the customers and salespersons. The observations were conducted at Chaleur Method Brew + Espresso. This location was chosen because this was where all of the interview participants were employed. While observations alone would not yield enough information to constitute a full study, I felt that my interviews could be supplemented by an examination of barista/customer interactions by a third party. As a frequent customer at the coffee shop and an acquaintance of many of the baristas, I believed I would able to see if the employees' behavior and responses varied depending on the customers.

Interview data was analyzed by multiple reading of the interview transcripts until categories of thought, word usage, and phraseology were found. In like manner, observation data was analyzed by multiple readings of the field-notes until categories of body language, word usage, and phraseology were found. Both sets of data were compiled within a single codebook. This was due to the similarity of the findings and for the sake of simplicity.

Discussion

The cross section of data revealed themes pertaining to the interaction between a barista and a customer. These themes have provided the basis for the sections of the following

discussion. In some instances, multiple categories are used in one section. In these cases, the content of one category provides support or explanation for another.

General customer behavior

All three participants referenced the fact that most customers simply want their coffee. Larry described numerous customers who are exceptions to that rule, “But it's not something that happens that often, but whenever there is an opportunity (to talk) I'll gladly take it.” The talkativeness or receptiveness of a customer appears related to their attitude prior the transaction. This is attributed to “the kind of day they’re having” or “where they’ve been getting they’re coffee”. Larry described the “snobby person, which I don't like” who does not speak much. He also described “the person who just enjoys (coffee) for what it is, and appreciates it.”

Baristas guide customers

All three baristas referred to the aspect of their job which was to lead the customers in the transaction. This aspect of a barista’s interaction was present with both more knowledgeable and less knowledgeable customers. However, the extent to which the customer depended on the advice of the attending barista was found to be greater with less knowledgeable customers. When asked about the openness of less knowledgeable customers to the suggestions of baristas, Larry said, “9 times out of 10 they'll love to take your suggestion and they'll roll with it.”

It appears that that this level of interaction sometimes occurs after the customer seeks out help from the attending barista. Customers usually ask directly or use non-verbal cues to convey their indecision. As Irene described, “They usually look at the menu, say something like "I don't know what I want.”” At other times the customers want specific products which are not offered

by Chaleur. This is because it is a Third Wave coffee shop which is “a different type of coffee shop than what they're commonly used to” as Larry said.

The baristas tended to describe their role in somewhat *detective* terms. The process by which they find an appropriate beverage for a customer was referred to as “going down the menu” or “going down the products”. The search for the customer’s preferred taste was described as a process of elimination. Larry said that they “just listen to the customer, try to figure out what they like, and then from there, work down your menu and try to figure out, okay, so they want something sweet.” Irene also stated,

I'm just like, "Well, do you usually get..." If there's a long pause, I'll say, "Do you usually get sweet things, non-sweet or ..." A lot of times it's, "Well, sweeter." I'll guide them towards like a vanilla or honey cinnamon.

Less knowledgeable customers: unsure and nervous

The baristas indicated that less knowledgeable customers project nervousness. Through body language and the occurrence of “flustered” pauses, the baristas are usually able to determine if a customer knows what they are doing. Irene stated that she could tell if a customer was knowledgeable by the words used and how “unsure” they seemed. Larry also indicated that less knowledgeable customers were incapable of ordering a “certain set of drinks” which would require a level of familiarity with the shop and confidence in themselves.

Nervous, less knowledgeable customers typically ask various questions regarding the size and taste of the beverage. During slower times, Luna indicated that nervous customers can “stand up (at the register) for ten minutes and try to figure stuff out.” Luna described the nervousness of less knowledgeable customers in great detail by describing a typical interaction. She stated,

A less knowledgeable customer would come in, probably try to use the wrong door, and then look a little flustered and embarrassed, put on their reading glasses, come up to the register, look at the menu, be really quiet when I ask them, “hey, how are you?” and be like, “Oh, good.” Kinda seem rushed but it's only because they don't want to look embarrassed because they don't know what they're doing.

More knowledgeable customers: confident and specific

More knowledgeable customers were characterized by their tendency to order specific beverages. While less knowledgeable customers usually order common drinks such as vanilla lattes Larry said that, “there are certain drinks, like the cortado, or macchiato, that really highlights a lot of the coffee's flavors, that most coffee snobs, if you will, they'll order.” All of the baristas indicated that “coffee snobs” will most often enter the shop with a specific idea of what they want to order. Even if some more knowledgeable ask for suggestions, most do not take the advice. As Larry said, “They'll ask you, and you'll go, “You should try this.” But then they'll order something completely different.”

More knowledgeable customers were also characterized by the usage of coffee “jargon.” These types of customers are able to order specific types of coffee beans and have them prepared in a very specific way. If a customer is able to “elaborate with you” about the various types of coffee, the baristas are generally able to tell that they are knowledgeable. According to Larry, more knowledgeable customers are also able to ask questions such as, “where's this coffee from. Or, hey, where is this roaster?” It also seems as if this type of customer is generally in more of a hurry. Luna described a typical interaction between herself and a more knowledgeable customer. She said, “I'll be like, “Yeah, sure. Do you want ...?” And before I even ask half that question they'll probably already tell me what they want. They're pretty direct, I feel like.”

Openness of More Knowledgeable Customers: Suggestions

The baristas described the openness more knowledgeable customers to product suggestions in one of two ways. The first type of more knowledgeable customers are more likely to accept suggestions of the baristas. Both Larry and Irene suggested that this type of customers are prone to believe baristas due to the perception of expertise which is given to the person behind the counter. Irene described this type of customer's reaction as, "Okay, I'll take what you suggest since you actually know about coffee and you can tell the taste." Larry echoed this sentiment stating, "Most people who enjoy coffee, they're going to listen to the opinions of other people, or their recommendations. Cause they know that you're probably one of the biggest critics, yourself." In some situations, more knowledgeable customers have specific brewing methods in mind, but are open to different types of roasts or beans in the beverage. As Irene described, a customer might say "'Well, I want a pour over", or, "I don't know which pour over I want. Which one do you suggest?" And I'll lead them to an Ethiopian and they'll be "Oh, yeah, this is *this* type of Ethiopian."

The baristas also described more knowledgeable customers who were *not* open to product suggestions. Some of these customer's enter their coffee shop and immediately order a specific drink. Luna said that these customers "like to know that they're right when they order things that they know they'll like." Irene echoed this thought, stating that some more knowledgeable customer's reactions to suggestions seemed to indicate, "Well, I know more. I don't need you to tell me." Larry described this type of customer as "educated, they know what they want. They're just there to get their morning cortado."

There are also more knowledgeable customers who will ask for product suggestions from the attending barista, but then disregard it altogether. While it does not reflect most customers of

this type, Larry said there are some who “will ask you, and you'll go “You should try this,” But then they'll order something completely different.” Luna offered a similar account stating,

If they are more knowledgeable about it, they can kinda answer any questions that the lesser knowledgeable people would have. I think it's very rare that they even ask questions. But if they do, they usually go with what they would normally get anyways.

Openness of More Knowledgeable Customers: Information

The participants described more knowledgeable customers as both open and *not* open to additional product information. As Larry described, there are some more knowledgeable customers or “coffee snobs,” who will become involved in “nerdy coffee debates” which could “go on for ten minutes.” During these interactions, both the barista and the customer are often “nerding out,” discussing various questions such as, “Why do you like this coffee? How do you like this coffee? Can you all put it on a single origin espresso? Which one is going to highlight the flavors?” Irene also described this type of customers who discuss the brewing method, roast style, and bean origin, saying “They're the ones that want to talk about that.”

This type of more knowledgeable customers usually want to “dig in” and understand the artfulness of the drink that the barista is preparing for them. As Larry stated, “They want to understand. They want to see why you like this coffee, and why they should like that coffee.” Irene also indicated that more knowledgeable customers are usually excited to discuss the intricacies of coffee. Describing a typical interaction with a more knowledgeable customer, she stated, “We'll kinda talk about the roast or where it's from. And then we'll talk about the method usually. And we'll discuss long methods and coffee in general.”

There are also more knowledgeable customers who are *not* open to additional product information. These customers are characterized by the baristas as desiring a quick and simple transaction experience. According to Larry, these customers will often say something similar to, “I want a cortado,” and, “This is what I want.” These transactions are understandably, “short, sweet, simple.” Luna described interactions with this type of customer as “short and sweet” as well. She also described the interaction by stating, “They'll come in and I'll say, "Hey, how are you?" They'll be like, "Good. Can I have this?"”

Openness of Less Knowledgeable Customers: Suggestions

All three participants described less knowledgeable customers as being open to most product suggestions that are given by the attending barista. All participants attributed this acceptance to the customer's lack of experience with coffee and the perceived expertise of the attending barista. Larry said that less knowledgeable customers are usually “looking for help” and “trust your opinion.” He elaborated by stating, “Whatever you recommend, they'll go for.” Larry emphasized the importance of the barista's delivery of the suggestion saying, “As long as you're confident about it, they generally like to, “Yeah let's try it!”” Irene echoed this statement saying, “A lot of times they'll be like, "Okay, well I don't know anything so I'll just get whatever you tell me to get.”” Luna also offered this viewpoint, “They're going to put their trust in someone who knows what they're doing behind the bar every time pretty much.”

Openness of Less Knowledgeable Customers: Information

The participants described less knowledgeable customers as both open and *not* open to the additional product information. Interestingly, all three barista's described the openness of a less knowledgeable customer in a very different way. According to Luna, the openness of less

knowledgeable customer depends on the individual. While some customers, “just want something and to be left alone,” others come into the shop with the purpose of interacting with people. She described people who the less knowledgeable customers who want the barista, “to talk to them. Sometimes people come out to coffee shops to kinda get the social interaction for the day if they haven't already gotten that.”

While Luna differentiated between the open and *not* open customers, Larry indicated the majority of less knowledgeable customers are “interested.” In his experience this type of customer is open, “to listen and try to understand a little bit more about the coffees. It kind of enhances the experience for them. So I mean, yeah, they love to talk about it. They'll love to listen and know.” In contrast to Luna and Larry's experience, Irene's experience led her to describe less knowledgeable customers as almost always *not* open to additional product information. She said, “They usually don't care. A lot of times, they'll just be kinda like, "Uh-huh", because they just want to sit down. Or they just want their drink.”

Barista Preferred Customer

The three participants were asked which type of customer they prefer to interact with, more knowledgeable or less knowledgeable. Both Larry and Irene said that interactions with less knowledgeable customers are preferable, but their reasons for this conclusion was vastly different. Larry indicated that less knowledgeable customers provided a more preferable interaction because of the possibility of a “personal” conversation. Larry said that, “the non-educated customers are (the) kind...that you get to have really interesting conversations with, because you can talk to them, figure out what they like.” For Larry, discovering more about the person was preferable to getting into “coffee debates.” In his experience, less knowledgeable customers typically, “keep wanting to know more and more.” He would much rather teach

people about Third Wave coffee, and “share that with them. And that's kind of what I think is really cool, personally.”

In Irene’s experience, less knowledgeable customers are less open to additional product information. This limits the length of her interactions with them. This is preferable for Irene, as she stated, “Because then I don't have to talk to them.” While Irene is “just introverted” and does not, “like to talk to people,” she also claims that the lengthy conversation which usually accompanies less knowledgeable customers hinders her job performance. As she stated, “I will go as far as to explain or as much as I need to but I don't like to do a bunch of additional (conversation) because I'm at work. This is not the time to just chat.” Her ideal transaction could be described as, “Let's just (be) quick, get it done, give your latte, we're good.”

Luna’s preferred customer, “depends on the day.” Depending on the circumstances of the day, she will not, “feel like socially interacting with someone and having to explain the same things over and over again.” However, if she is having a “people person day,” she expressed that she “will go out of my way almost to make sure they know,” or be well informed regarding their coffee. As Luna described the act of helping less knowledgeable customers, she said “That is part of our job. But also, some days it's really nice to get people that just know what they want and ask you about coffee knowledge that a lot of people don't ask you about.”

Observation Findings

During the two hours of observation conducted at Chaleur, I witnessed and recorded seven interactions. Based on verbal and non-verbal cues, five of these interactions were with more knowledgeable customers while two were with less knowledgeable customers. Without exception, all of my findings from these observations paralleled those from the interviews. I

found that more knowledgeable customers approached the register confidently and ordered specific drinks. Each of the five interactions with more knowledgeable customers were not more than two minutes. Both of the interactions with less knowledgeable customers were much longer than those of the more knowledgeable customers. The dialogue of the interaction also included more questions such as, “Do you yall have any alcoholic drinks?” and “Um, what cocktails to you have?” In one of the interactions, the customer accepted the barista’s suggestions without question, and continued to talk to him about the beverage.

Conclusion

The data collected through the interviewing of baristas and observations conducted in Chaleur Method Brew + Espresso revealed much about the differences between more knowledgeable customers and less knowledgeable customers. Those customers who are less knowledgeable were generally found to ask more questions, have lengthier interactions, and be less confident than more knowledgeable customers. These findings confirm the conclusions of Agbonifoh & Edoreh (1986), as the lack of knowledge caused the length and nature of the conversation to be significantly different than those of more knowledgeable customers. More knowledgeable customers, as determined by Dickinson (2019), were able to assimilate into the environment of the coffee shop and conclude their transaction quickly if they wished to do so.

Within the context of the social exchange theory, the more lengthy interactions and higher number of questions asked by less knowledgeable customers can be explained as the necessary exchange of information. Since less knowledgeable customers lack the experience to choose from the seemingly complex menu, they are forced to participate in the interaction with the attending barista. However, the more knowledgeable customers have no such need and are able to choose whether or not to participate in a lengthy coffee debate with the barista. As Hall,

Ahearne, & Sujan (2015) concluded, the baristas (or salespeople) were generally able to determine which customers were more knowledgeable and adjust their approach accordingly.

The importance of the barista's (or salesperson's) delivery and demeanor, as examined by Echchakoui (2017), was demonstrated by the responses collected from Irene and Larry. Irene reported that her experiences with less knowledgeable customers led her to believe that they were generally not interested in discussing the products in detail. However, the posture and personality of Irene, who professed to being introverted, may have influenced her customers. Larry, who said that he enjoyed discussions with less knowledgeable customers, reported that they were happy to discuss the characteristics of coffee products. The difference in Larry's and Irene's reporting underscores much of the findings from the interviews and observations. While there are obvious themes to be found within the research, the result of each interaction is dependent on the personalities and attitudes of both the barista and the customer.

This study showed that salespeople are often able to tell if a customer is knowledgeable. This suggests that Hochstein, Bolander, Goldsmith, & Plouffe (2019), were correct in their suggestions that employees effectively use an interactive approach. The exchange of information explained in their study largely parallels the reality of barista/customer interactions at Chaleur Method Brew + Espresso. Their observations regarding customers' ability to research products before the transaction is applicable in this context. Since a lack of knowledge experience can produce feelings of irritation and confusion, customers can easily search the internet for coffee information. By doing so, customers can make a smoother experience for themselves and the baristas.

These findings reflect the larger need of human beings to be knowledgeable and in control. Depending on the personality or worldview of the individual customer, the acquisition of

knowledge /experience can be varying levels of difficult. As the barista interviews attest, customer openness and approachableness generally influenced the translation in a positive way. This suggests that other everyday, common situations may be made easier with a more open/approachable demeanor or perspective.

Limitations and Future Research

This study was limited by the small number of interview participants and limited amount of time available for observations. Future research would benefit from a larger number of participants, which could include baristas from multiple coffee shops as well. A greater number of observations would also be beneficial, since only seven interactions were able to be documented. Subsequent studies would also benefit from the inclusion of customer interviews. Due to employee objections, this was not possible in this study.

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Appendix A

Codebook

Category	Example	Codes included in category
Baristas guide customers	“It's our job to help customers out and match something that we offer with something that we believe they'll enjoy.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -don't know what they want -translate (what they like) -what they are looking for -match something they'll like/need -they know you're a critic -have question/if they have question -know what their doing -help the customer get something they like -try this/you'll like this -we don't have that -figure out what they like -go down menu/describe product -what they want -do you usually get
Interaction with most customers are short and simple	“I would say most of the time customers are just coming in to get their drinks.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -most times -most people -happens often
Third Wave coffee is different	“It' a different type of coffee shop than what they're commonly used to.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -type of coffee -type of coffee shop -other shops
More knowledgeable customers have specific orders	“Typically people who are more knowledgeable about coffee...they're going to order a certain set of drinks.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -certain set of drinks -know what they want -customer says “I'll do this.” -customer says “I'll do this instead.” -customers order differently from barista suggestion -customer says “I'll have...” -know what they want
More knowledgeable customers use coffee “jargon”	“So like if they order just a single shot of espresso, or a macchiato, or cortado, or a pour-over.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -uses specific product names -elaborate about the coffee -names roasting techniques -names regions of coffee production -discusses brew method

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -reference to in-depth conversation -knowledge of serving sizes
Less knowledgeable customers are open to suggestions	“Most of the time... whatever you recommend they'll go for.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -trust baristas opinions -accept barista recommendations -listen to baristas if they sound confident -recognize their own naiveté
Less knowledgeable customers are open to additional information	“Whereas, other people want you to talk to them,”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -customer is interested -listen to baristas -try to understand -enjoy talking about coffee -enjoy learning about coffee -customers want to be spoken to -naiveté makes them dependent on additional information -ability to discuss coffee without interruptions
Not all less knowledgeable customers are open to additional information	“There are, of course, there's always those few that just, “Dude, just give me my coffee.””	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -customer only wants coffee -does not care about specific information. -too early for in-depth conversation -want to drink not talk -want to be left alone
More knowledgeable customers are open to suggestions	“Most people who enjoy coffee, they're going to listen to the opinions of other people, or their recommendations.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -customers will respect the suggestion of a fellow enthusiast -customers like trying products from different brewing methods -customers trying to shake up their routine
Not all more knowledgeable customers are open to suggestions	“They can kind of answer any questions that the lesser knowledgeable people would have.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -ordering something other than what barista offered -customers know what they want -customers do not need any help

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -customers order what they want regardless of suggestions -customers want to know they are right about coffee
More knowledgeable customers are open to additional information	“They're the ones that want to talk about that.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -customers enjoy talking about coffee -customers are interested in expanding their knowledge of coffee -customers want to know more about specials
Not all more knowledgeable are open to additional information	“I'll tell them like light roast beans have more caffeine and I've been shut down immediately.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -customers want to know that they are right -customers want to be left alone
Less knowledgeable customers are more nervous than more knowledgeable customers	“If they seem unsure, a lot of times it means that they probably don't know as much.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -how they present themselves -more confident -customers know what they're talking about -unsure -frustrated -embarrassed
Interaction is affected by customer's attitude	“They can be a more snobby person, which I don't like. And then you have the person who just enjoys it for what it is, and appreciates it.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -attitude -snobby -appreciation -personality -circumstances of the day -not in the mood to talk
Prefer interactions with less knowledgeable customers	“You have the ones you don't know, and you want to share that with them. And that's kind of what I think is really cool, personally.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -able to watch them learn -eager to learn -want to know more -make them feel valued -socialize -allows barista not to talk so much (depending on the customer)
Prefer interaction with more knowledgeable customers	“Sometimes I don't feel like socially interacting with someone and having to explain the same things over and over again.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -there is not as much talking -barista has a job to do -less repetition of the same information