Case Analysis
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Starbucks Corporation:
Can Customers Breastfeed in a Coffee Shop?

Situation Summary
In Maryland in October 2004, after receiving several complaints from offended customers, a Starbucks’ employee asked Lorig Charkoudian to relocate to the bathroom or cover up while she breastfed her baby in the coffee shop. Charkoudian responded by gathering 30 mothers to breastfeed at the Starbucks location a month later. The mothers, along with Charkoudian, argued that covering feels uncomfortable for the baby and belittles the importance of a natural act such as breastfeeding. They also highlighted that mothers represent a large portion of Starbucks’ clientele.

Laws and Starbucks’ Reaction
Before the “nurse-in,” Starbucks did not have an official breastfeeding policy. The state of Maryland, however, passed an Act in 2003 prohibiting that anyone stop mothers from breastfeeding in public or private settings. In response to the state’s law, Starbucks spokeswoman, Audrey Lincoff, stated that its employees would inform any offended customer of the Maryland law and to avert their attention elsewhere.

Starbucks’ Employee Messed with the Wrong Mama
Lorig Charkoudian just happened to be an experienced and educated leader in a number of social movements, public demonstrations and confrontations. She was voted one of Maryland’s Top 100 Women. Charkoudian, unsatisfied with Lincoff’s response and knowing how to lead and convince others to follow, launched a website to allow mothers to send letters to Starbucks’ chief executive in efforts to allow breastfeeding in all of the company’s United States locations.

What Would Have Happened Today
Ten years later, we face the reality of social media. These platforms can be either obstacles or opportunities depending on who exploits them, how they are utilized and for what reason. There are also strong initiatives in act to increase the number of mothers who breastfeed and laws to further support their right to do so in public settings.

Maryland Laws Regarding Breastfeeding
Since 2003, Maryland remains one of the 46 states that permit mothers to breastfeed in any public or private setting. Maryland’s law prohibits anyone from restricting or limiting this right. Starbucks has promised to abide by the national and state laws in which their coffee shops reside. Both the laws and Starbucks’ policy have not changed in response to Charkoudian’s nurse-in and have stayed consistent over the 10 years.

Breastfeeding and Social Media
We analyzed various websites, blogs and social media outlets to get a sense of how breastfeeding is portrayed on social media along with rules and regulations among each
outlet. According to our research, breastfeeding is a pressing issue within the social media world. From breastfeeding selfies to regulation changes, avid mothers push for greater acceptance of the natural act. So pressing in fact, Facebook changed its policy regarding breastfeeding photos to allow photos with both breasts exposed. These photos are no longer considered explicit.

**Mommy Bloggers**
In today’s society, mothers venture into the world of blogging and should not be underestimated. According to Jasmine Henry, in 2012 there were nearly 4 million active mommy blogs with 500 reaching national audiences. Henry states that mothers control 2 trillion dollars of US purchases each year and also make most of their home’s purchasing decisions across all demographics. Mothers consider other mothers to be the best source of recommendations, lead them to make decisions based on word-of-mouth promotion.

**Starbucks and Social Media**
Along with its company website, Starbucks' social media strategy consists of 6 platforms. These are comprised of Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, G+, Youtube, and My Starbucks Ideas.

**Modern Day Similar Cases**
**Delta Airlines**
Passenger Lindsay Jaynes tweeted at Delta Airlines’ @DeltaAssist account prior to her flight requesting information on its breastfeeding policy. Delta Airlines responded with, “Unfortunately you are not able to breast feed if you don’t have a cover up. I’m sorry.” Twitter blew up following Jaynes’ reaction regarding laws stating that she should be legally allowed to breastfeed in public without a cover. ABC News comments that, “Everyday people and breastfeeding advocates jumped in, demanding an apology and clarification from the airline.” The situation resolved when the main Delta Airlines account @Delta tweeted the statement, “Delta welcomes breastfeeding mothers and babies on our flights. We sincerely apologize for the misinformation.”

The Delta Airlines situation presents a bad corporate case of misinformation and lack of communication within the Delta Airlines public relations team. Both the 2004 Starbucks case and the 2014 Delta Airlines case produced a strong response and reaction from pro-breastfeeding mothers and other advocates. Social media was the primary source of the situation and allowed the Delta Airlines case to spread across the world.
Canada Starbucks
At an Ottawa, Canada Starbucks location in July 2014, a male employee received a complaint about a customer breastfeeding without a cover in the café. Instead of telling the mother to stop breastfeeding or cover up, he provided the new mother with a free coffee on the house for her trouble. Once the story went viral, corporate Starbucks responded with a statement. Spokeswoman Laurel Harper stated that Starbucks does not have an official policy on breastfeeding in its locations, but rather a policy, “About making customers feel welcome.” Harper comments, “We empower our local partners to reach a decision about how best to make a customer’s experience a positive one.” Starbucks has its locations abide by the local laws regarding breastfeeding that apply to them.

The 2014 Starbucks case corresponds with the 2004 case for the same corporation regarding its corporate policy on breastfeeding. Starbucks did not have an official policy in 2004, nor does it have one today. Its statement in 2004 read, “Starbucks complies with all applicable state and local laws regarding breastfeeding.” Starbucks displays good public relations tactics by staying constant with its policies and released statements.

Research
(Data in Appendix)
Interview
Interview with Mommy 1
We conducted an interview with 28-year-old Mommy 1 from Davidsonville, MD now raising her 13-month-old son in Eugene, OR. Mommy 1 breastfed in public once and said her top reason for not breastfeeding in public is wanting “privacy and causing discomfort or distraction to others.” When asked how she would feel if someone asked her to stop breastfeeding or took a picture to post on social media, mommy 1 said, “I would probably feel bad for making them uncomfortable and I would feel embarrassed if someone took a photo of me breastfeeding in public.” She would not show support for a pro-public breastfeeding campaign via social media interaction: “I do not believe in publicly advocating for either side because I don’t think either side is necessarily wrong.” Mommy 1 said she would not feel comfortable breastfeeding in Starbucks because it is “too public and too close to others.”

Interview with Mommy 2
We conducted an interview with 22-year-old Mommy 2 from Springfield, Oregon where she currently raises her 9-month-old son. Mommy 2 feels uncomfortable when breastfeeding in public and says she receives weird looks. She gave an example of a time when she was nursing at Red Robin and felt judged by an older woman. In response and irritation, mommy 2 told the woman to look away. Mommy 2 feels strongly that breastfeeding is healthy for both her and her son and that the health benefits outweigh any judgments. She states in conclusion, "My son has no idea, to him it is nothing more than his food source. Why should I deny him the same treatment as the person having a burger in the next seat?"

Interview Analysis
By analyzing the mothers’ responses to our questions, it is obvious that there are mixed emotions and viewpoints regarding public breastfeeding. From a mother’s perspective, it can either be a natural act that is okay for the public eye or an inappropriate act to be done in private.

Survey Results
We conducted a survey asking non-mother participants to answer two short answer questions about their reactions to seeing someone breastfeed in public. The first question asks, “How do you feel when you see someone breastfeed in public?” and the second asks, “Do you react on social media if you see someone breastfeed in public? If so, how?” Out of six responses, the results showed commonalities in reaction.

Four out of the six responses to the first question mentioned that seeing a mother breastfeed in public makes them feel “uncomfortable,” while only one response stated they were ok with the action. Another response detailed that their reaction depends on, “How they go about it, but most of the time I think it should be done in private.” Five out of the six responses asking if they would respond on social media said they would not take to any platform of social media after seeing someone breastfeed in public. One of the responses stated, “I might make a funny tweet about it.”
Through this survey, we determined that people who do not breastfeed themselves tend to not appreciate mothers breastfeeding their children in public; specifically, it makes the majority of people feel “uncomfortable.” None of the responses explicitly comment on a belief of whether or not mothers should legally be allowed to breastfeed in public.

**Hypothetical 2014 Situation Summary**

By analyzing our research, we developed a hypothetical situation that may have occurred if the situation was in 2014.

In Maryland on October 2014, a Starbucks’ employee asked Lorig Charkoudian to relocate to the bathroom or cover up while she breastfed her baby within the coffee shop after receiving several complaints from offended customers. The employee also observed a few customers snapping photos of Charkoudian, posting them to Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat. Charkoudian responded by utilizing various social media platforms to organize a nation-wide Starbucks “nurse-in.”

Charkoudian initiated a #NurseatStarbucks campaign encouraging all mothers to take breastfeeding selfies at their local Starbucks locations and tag them on all social media platforms. The campaign went viral and mothers in every state got involved. Not only did they post on social media, but also some even wrote about it on their blogs. The mommy bloggers went even further to create their own campaigns and conversations on their personal platforms. Some even took advantage of Facebook’s new loose guidelines permitting nursing photos featuring both bare breasts.

In response to Maryland’s breastfeeding law, Starbucks spokeswoman, Audrey Lincoff, stated that its employees would inform any offended customer of the Maryland law and to avert their attention elsewhere. Starbucks’ social media team initiated a Mother’s Appreciation campaign posting all things mommy-centered with the #StarbsMommys hashtag. Along with the social media campaign, every Starbucks in the United States hosted Mother’s Appreciation Day on Mother’s Day. Mothers with their children will be given a free drink of their choice and entered in a regional raffle to win a Starbucks gift basket. This event happens annually.
Citations


Appendix

Interview Transcript (Mommy 1)

Q: Do you have children? How many?
A: Yes, a boy age 13 months.

Q: Have you breastfed in public? How frequently?
A: Yes, one time.

Q: What are your top reasons for breastfeeding in public? Or top reasons for not?
A: My top reason for not is privacy and causing discomfort or distraction to others.

Q: Have you witnessed someone else breastfeed in public? Did it cause you or others discomfort?
A: Yes and yes.

Q: If you were breastfeeding in public, how would you feel if someone asked you to stop or took a picture/snapchat of you to post on social media?
A: Depending on the situation I would probably feel bad for making them uncomfortable and I would feel embarrassed if someone took a photo of me breastfeeding in public.

Q: Do you use social media?
A: Yes

Q: Would you feel comfortable posting your opinions about public breastfeeding on social media? Why or why not?
A: No, it’s an individual decision. I don’t find social media to be the appropriate place to share my personal beliefs or opinions.

Q: Would you show support for a pro-public breastfeeding activist via social media interaction? Why or why not?
A: No, I don’t believe in publicly advocating for either side because I don’t think either side is necessarily wrong.

Q: Would you feel comfortable breastfeeding in Starbucks? Why or why not?
A: No, too public & too close to others

Q: Would you be likely to engage in public activism to support or fight public breastfeeding? Why or why not?
A: No, I think it is a personal decision of comfort and neither side is wrong.

(Mommy 2)

Have you ever felt uncomfortable breastfeeding in public settings?
Yes, red robin some older lady was being very judgy with her looks and I just told her to look away. And then when I’m out and I’m breastfeeding people will give me weird looks. I made a pretty big scene in Red Robin when this lady wouldn’t stop giving me dirty looks. I believe it’s nature, and it’s natural. We shouldn’t be judged for feeding our children. The benefits for baby and mom from breastfeeding should outweigh anyone’s judgmental look on showing what some would call an inappropriate body part. My son has no idea, to him it is nothing more then his food source. Why should I deny him the same treatment as the person having a burger in the next seat.

Have you ever been told to go somewhere private?
I have never been asked by an employee to go somewhere else.

Survey Results

Q1

How do you feel when you see someone breastfeed in public?
Answered: 6  Skipped: 0

-Responses (6)  Text Analysis  My Categories

PRO FEATURE
Use text analysis to search and categorize responses; see frequently-used words and phrases. To use Text Analysis, upgrade to a GOLD or PLATINUM plan.

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Showing 6 responses

If I use a blanket or something to cover it I have no problem. But when they just pull out their whole boob it’s uncomfortable.
10/9/2014 7:15 PM  View respondent’s answers

Depends how they go about it, but most of the time I think it should be done in private.
10/9/2014 2:37 PM  View respondent’s answers

Uncomfortable (unless they’re using a blanket)
10/9/2014 1:51 PM  View respondent’s answers

It’s fine.
10/9/2014 1:14 PM  View respondent’s answers

Very uncomfortable
10/9/2014 12:34 PM  View respondent’s answers

It makes me uncomfortable, especially if they are doing it in a busy area.
10/9/2014 12:20 PM  View respondent’s answers
Do you react on social media if you see someone breastfeed in public? If so, how?

Responses (5)  Text Analysis  My Categories

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Use text analysis to search and categorize responses; see frequently-used words and phrases. To use Text Analysis, upgrade to a GOLD or PLATINUM plan.

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Showing 6 responses

**No I do not**
10/9/2014 7:15 PM  View respondent's answers

**No**
10/9/2014 2:07 PM  View respondent's answers

**No**
10/9/2014 1:51 PM  View respondent's answers

**No**
10/9/2014 1:14 PM  View respondent's answers

I might make a funny tweet about it
10/9/2014 12:31 PM  View respondent's answers

**No**
10/9/2014 12:20 PM  View respondent's answers