Observational Exercise

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**Introduction**

This observation was conducted on Saturday September 29, 2018 at 3:30pm at a B & N Café featuring Starbucks in Northern New Jersey. It is a popular place for people of all ages to study, conduct professional work, leisure reading, and/or socializing with friends and family. The researcher’s interest during this observation was to see how customers of the B & N Cafe used technology during their visit. All observation jottings were typed on a laptop and organized as listed below. The observer aimed to be as discreet as possible and typed the jottings as he saw them. Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, (2014), state that certain events and impressions should be written down as they are occurring to preserve accuracy and detail.

**Jottings**

* B & N Café Saturday 3:30pm
* Walkthrough conducted, individual customers sporadically at specific sections
* Business section – five people
* Bible/Religious sections – six people
* Technology section – eight people
* Self-help section - four people
* Two floors
* Four escalators
* Kids book/toy area filled primarily with dad’s (8) and their daughters
* Primary location of customers at the café location
* No clear separation between the café and the store
* 40 tables – two seats per table
* Consistent flow of customers 7-10 people on line
* No place for customers to sit, everyone at tables is a customer doing work, tables are occupied for more than an hour
* All tables are taken
* Tables are very close to each other
* Bright and colorful décor
* Spanish mambo music playing in the background
* Huge glass display with various baked goods and sandwiches
* The majority of orders are just drinks (coffee, tea, water)
* No one at the tables are eating
* Bright, spacious eating area
* Two elderly men have tablets
* Man, dark hair (mid 30s Hispanic with glasses) day dreaming 15 minutes, 4 huge books stacked in front of him
* Diverse ethnicities
* Wide range of ages (10-60s)
* College students
* Career professionals
* Families
* Senior citizens
* 18 men 15 women
* Technology (iPad, tablets, MacBook, laptops)
* Use of phone while working
* Multiple books/multiple documents
* Parents working/kids reading (goosebumps)
* Majority of people ordering coffee or drinks, take it to go
* Single tables – individuals on phone and laptop
* Tables of two or more – sharing pics/videos on phone
* Laptops open but people not using (phones primary use)
* Two women (mid 20’s) grey sweat suits, no technology visible, non-stop laughing/conversating
* Two men sitting face to face with tablets facing each other but not in use, primarily conversating
* 20 minutes of conversations and no use of face-to-face tablets by the two men
* Everyone drinking coffee have a cup of water or bottle of Fiji water
* Seven individuals at tables leave their technology and books at the tables for more than 10 minutes
* Individuals who left come back with books, but begin to use their phones
* African American woman (mid 40s) dressed conservatively with tablet, 45 minutes swiping up and down
* Elderly man (Ex-military) with veteran’s hat on tablet consistently engaged with device. No cell phone in sight.
* African American man (mid 40s) bald, black glasses, engaged with tablet for 45 minutes. No cell phone in sight.
* 22 people on cell phones despite having book, or laptop/tables open
* Six pairs of women sitting at tables sharing their phones while conversating
* All women with laptops have MacBook’s
* All men have laptops or tablets
* All children are using cell phones, while the adult is reading or writing
* Mom in Hispanic family talking to child and asking a question, no response, child is on a mobile device
* Dad in in Caucasian family telling child, “Get your feet of the chair”. No response, child is on a mobile device
* All customers who have a laptop, have earbuds or headphones on and plugged into a mobile device
* Woman (late 40s) and elderly man looking for a place to sit after ordering coffee, no seats available
* Elderly Hispanic cleaning lady pacing back and forth throughout the seating area looking for spills or areas to clean
* No visible evidence of notebooks, pens, highlighters, etc. by any of the customers seated doing work or studying
* Majority of the same people seated during observation period
* Two children on cell phone while dad is on laptop

Figure 1 below displays the observational setting at the B & N Café in Northern, NJ on September 29, 2018.



Figure 1. *Observational Setting*

**Full Observational Notes**

**Time, Date, and Place of Observation:**

September 29, 2018, 3:30pm

**Research Question:**

How do customers of B & N cafe use technology during their visit to the store?

Upon arriving to the store, I walked into numerous kiosks of books on sale. The store can be a bit overwhelming as the variety of merchandise is endless. It feels like a maze and if you do not know the location of what you are looking for, you will definitely have to ask for help. The store has two floors with multiple escalators on each side. B & N sells just about anything, not just books. With the intent to conduct this observation, my first approach was to conduct a full walkthrough of the store to identify my best possible observation setting to collect the data that would support my research question. As I am walking around, I notice that not just one area is filled with customers. I walk through the business section and there are five people in the area. The self-help section has four people in the area. The technology section has eight people in the area. The religious/bible section has six people in the area. I decided to take the escalators to the second floor to continue my search of the ideal observational setting. As I get off the escalator, I walk into the kids’ toy area and reading section. Eight dads and their daughters occupied this section.

I did not have much luck looking for the ideal observational setting in these areas because no one was using technology or conducting any type of work, they were simply shopping. As I took the escalators back to the first floor I noticed that the area that was most occupied was the B & N Café featuring Starbucks. There is no clear separation between the café and the store so I was curious to know if people were allowed to sit in the seating area if they did not make a purchase from the café. A customer or their belongings occupied every seat. The café area had 40 tables with two chairs per table, but every table was occupied. The décor was bright and colorful and Spanish mambo music was playing in the background. The line at the register had about seven to ten customers on line in front of a huge glass display filled with baked goods and sandwiches, but customers mainly ordered beverages and took it to go because seats were not available. I walked around several times waiting for a table or chair to be free and after half an hour of circulating, I got a chair. As I sat down, I noticed that no one sitting at the tables were eating despite the café have the bright spacious eating area. Everyone was drinking coffee and have a cup of water or bottle of Fiji water.

As I begin my observation, I notice that customers sitting at the café were very diverse in many aspects. The population was comprised of Caucasians, African Americans, Hispanics, and some Asians. They ranged in ages from adolescent to late 60s. The population was also comprised of college students, career professionals, families, and senior citizens. As discreet as I could be I counted 18 men, 15 women, and various children scattered throughout the café. The types of technology observed were iPads, tablets, MacBook, and laptops. All of the women who had a laptop used a MacBook, the men had a pc laptop or a tablet, and children used mobile devices.

Most of the customers siting at the café had multiple books and/or documents in front of them. Twenty-two people were using their mobile devices despite having books, or laptop/tables open if front of them. The majority of those who had a laptop or tablet open were not using them. They were primarily using their mobile device. All of them had ear buds/head phone plugged into their mobile device. I noticed that there was no visible evidence of notebooks, pens, highlighters, etc. by any of the customers seated doing work or studying. The tables with families were comprised of parents doing some type of work with their technological device and documents, while the children were reading or on a mobile device. The children at the table in front of me read Goosebumps and Diary of a Wimpy Kid.

Tables with one individual mainly sat with the laptop open but the individuals were on their phone. Tables with two or more individuals had laptops open but mainly spent their time sharing pictures on their phones. Seated to my right were two women in their mid-20s’ wearing grey sweat suits and had no technology visible. They seemed to be having a good time as the consistently held a conversation and laughed non-stop. There were two men seated at the table in front of me and they were sitting face to face with tablets facing each other but the tablets were not in use, the men were primarily conversating. Twenty minutes of conversation went by and no use of the face-to-face tablets by the two men was visible. I also observed a bald African American man with black glasses on my far right who seemed to be engaged with his tablet and documents since I began the observation. He was not using earbuds nor did he have a mobile device out in the open. Seated beside the African American man was an elderly Caucasian man (Ex-military) with a veteran’s hat on and a tablet in which he was consistently engaged with. He also did not have earbuds or a mobile device in sight. On my far left side was an African American woman (mid 40s) dressed conservatively with a tablet and she spent approximately 45 minutes swiping up and down on her tablet. She did not have earbuds or a mobile device in sight.

Next to this woman was a Hispanic man in his mid-30s with dark hair and glasses who seemed to be day dreaming for about 15 minutes. He had four huge books stacked in front of him. As I continued to observe, I noticed that six pair of women sitting at their tables were simply conversating and sharing their mobile devices.

When observing the families, I noticed that all children were using mobile devices while the adult was reading or typing. A mother in a Hispanic family was talking to her child and asked him a question, but she got no response, the child was on a mobile device. A father in a Caucasian family told his child, “Get your feet of the chair”. The father got no response; the child was on a mobile device. Two elderly individuals sitting with a family were using their tablets, while two children were on their mobile device while the father was on a laptop.

Forty minutes into the observation, I noticed that seven individuals at their tables left their technology and books at the tables for more than 10 minutes. The individuals who left, come back with books, but begin to use their mobile devices. The majority of the people seated remained seated during the entire observation period. A Hispanic woman in her late 40s and elderly man looking were looking for a place to sit after ordering coffee, but no seats were available.

**Analytical Section**

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| Observation Notes | Coding |
| Upon arriving to the store, I walked into numerous kiosks of books on sale. The store can be a bit overwhelming as the variety of merchandise is endless. It feels like a maze and if you do not know the location of what you are looking for, you will definitely have to ask for help. The store has two floors with multiple escalators on each side. B & N sells just about anything, not just books. With the intent to conduct this observation, my first approach was to conduct a full walkthrough of the store to identify my best possible observation setting to collect the data that would support my research question. As I am walking around, I notice that not just one area is filled with customers. I walk through the business section and there are five people in the area. The self-help section has four people in the area. The technology section has eight people in the area. The religious/bible section has six people in the area. I decided to take the escalators to the second floor to continue my search of the ideal observational setting. As I get off the escalator, I walk into the kids’ toy area and reading section. Eight dads and their daughters occupied this section.  I did not have much luck looking for the ideal observational setting in these areas because no one was using technology or conducting any type of work, they were simply shopping. As I took the escalators back to the first floor I noticed that the area that was most occupied was the B & N Café featuring Starbucks. There is no clear separation between the café and the store so I was curious to know if people were allowed to sit in the seating area if they did not make a purchase from the café. A customer or their belongings occupied every seat. The café area had 40 tables with two chairs per table, but every table was occupied. The décor was bright and colorful and Spanish mambo music was playing in the background. 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As I continued to observe, I noticed that six pair of women sitting at their tables were simply conversating and sharing their mobile devices.  When observing the families, I noticed that all children were using mobile devices while the adult was reading or typing. A mother in a Hispanic family was talking to her child and asked him a question, but she got no response, the child was on a mobile device. A father in a Caucasian family told his child, “Get your feet of the chair”. The father got no response; the child was on a mobile device. Two elderly individuals sitting with a family were using their tablets, while two children were on their mobile device while the father was on a laptop.  Forty minutes into the observation, I noticed that seven individuals at their tables left their technology and books at the tables for more than 10 minutes. The individuals who left, come back with books, but begin to use their mobile devices. The majority of the people seated remained seated during the entire observation period. A Hispanic woman in her late 40s and elderly man looking were looking for a place to sit after ordering coffee, but no seats were available. | Stocked Merchandise/Overwhelming  Customers located sporadically  Heavily occupied/Busy  No place to sit for customers  Coffee Drinkers/Not Food  Diversity/All Aspects  Variety of Technology  Women - Mac  Men – laptop/tablet  Books not in use/Technology not in use  Mobile device primary use  Children on mobile device  Books not in use/Technology not in use  Mobile device primary use  No technology/Simple conversation  No technology in use/Simple conversation  Technology in use/No mobile device or earbuds  Technology in use/No mobile device or earbuds  Books not in use/Technology not in use  Simple conversation/Mobile device in use  Parents working/Children on mobile device  Children on mobile device  No place to sit for customers |

**Findings**

As the observer in this field study, I am in the position as a doctoral student trying to identify how customers of B & N use technology during their visit to the store. The only experiences with the B & N stores is when I have had to buy a book on short notice, otherwise I would buy it on-line. I chose this store because on the occasions that I have shopped at the store, I notice that people would be studying or doing work and I wanted to see how they were using technology during this time. This observation was conducted very discreetly as I myself was a student doing coursework.

My jottings were comprised into field notes, which were then analyzed in support of the research question. I then used codes to represent the specific situations or instances.

My findings reveal several common themes. First, I have identified that although people go to B & N to study/work and have a laptop/tablet/books in front of them, they rarely use it. In most of the occurrences observed, the individuals seated at the tables did not use their laptop/tablet/books; instead they were using their mobile devices with earbuds/headphones plugged in.

A second finding is that the individuals who seemed the most engaged with their work or laptop/tablet while working, did not have a mobile device or earbuds/headphones visible. These individuals seemed focused with the task at hand and had no other form of technological distraction.

A third finding during this observation was that all children primarily used a mobile device as their form of technology use. While parents were working or reading, children used mobile devices. In some instances, parents could not get a response from the child when a question was asked because the child was too focused on the mobile device.

A forth interesting finding, was that the most consistent and engaging conversations between individuals observed was when they did not have any form of technology in front of them or had it, but did not use it. In some instances as noted in my field notes women were having consistent conversations by simply sharing their mobile devices.

Overall, in response to the research question posed, most of the customers of B & N who come to study/work use technology primarily using mobile devices. Although, they may bring laptops or tablets with them to the store, the majority of the time spent is on their mobile devices. Customers who seemed most engaged with their laptops/tablets did not use their mobile devices or earbuds/headphones.

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