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Master's Thesis  
Academic Year 2023

Brewing Strong Relationships through Coffee  
with the “Blooming Post”: A Service Design to  
Support the Growth of Sustainable Coffee  
Communities



Keio University  
Graduate School of Media Design

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A Master's Thesis  
submitted to Keio University Graduate School of Media Design  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Media Design

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Abstract of Master's Thesis of Academic Year 2023

Brewing Strong Relationships through Coffee with the  
“Blooming Post”: A Service Design to Support the Growth  
of Sustainable Coffee Communities

Category: Design

Summary

In recent years, coffee has seen significant developments. The era of so-called third-wave coffee has brought with it ways for consumers to engage with coffee that were once unthinkable. Direct mail coffee subscription services, world barista competitions, fair-trade, and the globalization of markets have created a landscape where coffee has become one of the most valuable beverages in the world. Unfortunately, much of this value is not seen by coffee farmers. With all of this development, there has been little progress in developing ways for consumers to learn about and support coffee farmers in an effective way.

In this paper, we outline the design of the “Blooming Post”, a service that allows coffee consumers to share meaningful coffee experiences with their friends, family, or partners, while also sharing the stories of the direct-trade partnerships of the farmers and baristas that made that experience possible. This is accomplished through a system of value co-creation through experience sharing that is facilitated by a system of gift-giving and receiving.

To develop and validate the concept, ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in Santa Cruz, California as well as Tokyo, Japan. Design experimentation was tested explicitly in two Tokyo Coffee Shops: Seven Years Coffee and Kopikalyan Japan. Interviews and user experiments were continuously carried out to determine the designs effectiveness throughout the iteration process. Ultimately, this design proposes a service that can be implemented into third-wave coffee shops in order to grow the third-wave coffee community and strengthen connections between coffee consumers, coffee shops, and coffee producers.

Keywords:

service design, community, experience sharing, ethical consumerism, coffee

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

“The best Maxim I know in this life is, to drink your Coffee when you can, and when you cannot, to be easy without it. While you continue to be splenetic, count upon it I will always preach. ”

- Jonathan Swift (1843). “Works: Containing Interesting and Valuable Papers Not Hitherto Published”, p.57 [1]

### 1.1. Research Background

Since its discovery in Ethiopia 1200 years ago, coffee has traveled a long and fascinating journey, shaping and being shaped by historical events and cultural shifts. From the boycott of English tea in 1773 that would precipitate the American Revolution to the mid-century coffee houses and 24-hour diners to today, coffee shops have become a staple to modern society. Over the years, the role of coffee has constantly been transforming and adapting to the lives of those who consume it.

During the late 20th century, coffee became more than just a commodity. The “second wave” of coffee saw the emergence of massive, mainstream coffee institutions, such as Starbucks. These institutions shifted the mainstream perception of coffee from a drink purely for the utility to one of both utility and leisure. [2] With the second wave, there was a greater emphasis on the experience of consuming coffee and the nuances of its flavors. Coffee would now be a prominent feature of modern culture. This new combination of convenience, utility, and leisure would create a coffee culture that persists today.



Figure 1.1 NBC hit show “Friends”, prominently featured coffee shop set  
(Image Credit: Warner Bros. [?])

Now we exist in the so-called third-wave of coffee. Wherein focus is spread across the entire coffee supply chain, from farm to cup, to better ensure not just a better tasting cup of coffee, but better working conditions for farmers, more sustainable business practices for the environments, and more enriching experiences for the consumer.

This paper explores the potential of a service-design approach in increasing consumer engagement in and knowledge of the coffee industry to enable consumers to make informed and ethical purchasing decisions. Specifically, the author focuses on actor relationships between coffee origins, coffee shops, baristas, and consumers.

Research in the coffee industry has traditionally focused on addressing pressing supply-side industry issues, such as climate change, fluctuating market prices, and infrastructure development. While undeniably important, it has left considerable room for design research in consumer communication.

Unlike products manufactured in highly automated factories, coffee is cultivated over many years and involves entire communities working together to bring a

quality product to the market. Too often, this effort across the supply chain is lost in translation before the final transaction between the coffee shop and the consumer. To propel the coffee industry into the hypothetical “fourth wave” of coffee, breaking down the opaque barriers inherent to large industries, and fostering a community between coffee farms, shops, and consumers is crucial. By leveraging service design principles, consumer psychology, and sociological theory, it is possible to bridge this gap and create meaningful interactions that enable consumers to appreciate the efforts, stories, and craftsmanship behind the coffee they enjoy.

## 1.2. Design Outline

Taking the above into account, in order to begin making steps into the next wave of coffee, the author proposed the “Blooming Post” service design. “The Blooming Post” is a service that allows “coffee connoisseurs” to send personalized postcards to their friends, serving as both an invitation and an introduction to the broader world of third-wave coffee. The design promotes ethical coffee consumption by fostering the growth of the third-wave coffee industry from within. It achieves this by introducing casual coffee drinkers to new and exciting coffee experiences through a system that capitalizes on the existing social capital between farmers, coffee shops, baristas, coffee connoisseur, and their friends. To this end, the Blooming Post features several elements that allow users to create this community growth. The first is to create a new channel for coffee connoisseurs to share their love of coffee with their friends in an easy and impressive way. When a coffee connoisseur has had a memorable experience at a coffee shop and feels they want to pass this experience along to someone else, they are given a chance to imbue their experience together with the stories of the barista and farmer through the use of personal messages. Then, that message is sent to the recipient, along with a ticket for a cup of coffee paid in advance. This creates a second life for the coffee journey; where typically the journey would end once the customer has finished their coffee, it now travels on to a new coffee consumer, with the first coffee consumer as the bridge. Subsequently, the receipt of the postcard by the receiver kicks off a new form of coffee journey in which the role of the coffee

farmer and coffee shop is placed at the forefront rather than as an afterthought. The recipient is extended a personal invitation into a “third-place” [3] that has proven to be a valuable asset to the sender, as well as a complimentary coffee to create a no-pressure, special experience for the recipient. If the recipient likes their experience as much as the initial sender, they can become a sender themselves, further proliferating the coffee journey and expanding the local coffee community.

The value of the Blooming Post is based on primary foundational concepts relevant to consumer behavior as it relates to coffee. The first is the theory of bridging and bonding social capital, first proposed by Robert D. Putnam. [4] In his pivotal work, *Bowling Alone*, Putnam describes social capital as “the connections among individuals” necessary for traversing “diverse social cleavages” and also “getting by” or “getting ahead” in any given social context. Becoming a connoisseur of any craft or activity requires some effort to traverse the “social cleavage” as to become a connoisseur, one must possess a certain level of relevant knowledge, social connection, or skill that sets them apart from a casual participant of said craft or activity. The same goes for engaging with third-wave coffee in a meaningful way. Coffee is a deep and complex crop that represents much more than just the beverage itself. In order to make this traversal more accessible, it is important to leverage those existing bridging social capitals. And to further strengthen those new connections once the social cleavage has been overcome, bonding social capital must be utilized as well. To this end, the concept of experience sharing [5], built on Vargo and Lusch’s service-dominant logic [6] is used to actuate those bridging connections, and the theory of third-place is used to facilitate those bonding connections.

### **1.3. Research Field: Tokyo, Japan and California**

The primary research and design testing for this project took place in two locations: Tokyo, Japan, and Santa Cruz, California. These cities are renowned for their vibrant coffee scenes, making them ideal settings for understanding the current landscape of coffee consumption. Within these cities, it is easy to find many high-quality third-wave coffee shops, each offering unique perspectives and approaches to delivering exceptional coffee experiences.

What sets Tokyo and Santa Cruz apart is a strong consumer base of coffee drinkers who exhibit varying levels of dedication and appreciation for the beverage. This diversity creates a rich environment for conducting ethnographic research.

In recent years, Tokyo and Santa Cruz have played pivotal roles in advancing and popularizing the third-wave coffee movement. Tokyo, in particular, stands out due to its unique coffee culture, boasting an impressive array of high-quality coffee shops. From independent freelance roasters to mid-sized local brands and even globally recognized household names in the world of specialty coffee, Tokyo offers a diverse range of coffee experiences that cater to every taste and preference.

The Tokyo coffee scene is a hot spot for coffee development, ranging from traditional second-wave coffee culture to cutting-edge third-wave brewing shops and innovations, and often blending the two. The city serves as a hub where coffee connoisseurs, industry professionals, and coffee farmers worldwide converge to showcase their craft and share their passion. This unique blend of influence and expertise makes Tokyo an exciting location for exploring and developing solutions to the consumer issues surrounding coffee.

Santa Cruz, California, on the other hand, is one of the progenitors of third-wave coffee, home to some of the most well-known third-wave coffee shops, such as Verve Coffee Roasters, which now also has several locations in Japan. The city is known for its progressive and environmentally conscious values. These values are core to the ethos of third-wave coffee. With its proximity to Central and South America, Santa Cruz has easier access to direct trade partners. Further, sustainable coffee practices and community-driven initiatives mean that there is potential for more public awareness to the social issues facing the coffee industry. The local coffee scene in Santa Cruz embodies the spirit of the third-wave movement more and more, emphasizing the traceability and quality of the coffee beans while fostering solid connections between coffee shops and their surrounding communities.

By focusing on these two distinctive coffee landscapes, this research project capitalizes on the strength of their respective coffee cultures. Tokyo's dedication to progressing the craft and its broad spectrum of coffee offerings, coupled with Santa Cruz's community-driven, social approach and commitment to sustainability, provide a strong field for addressing the social issues in coffee.

## 1.4. Research Methods

This study is based on ethnographic research tenants. The design for the Blooming Post was achieved after a series of different design concepts and surveys, testing individual features relevant to green marketing with users. The initial motivation behind this study was to explore effective ways to facilitate “ethical consumption” in the coffee industry from the consumer’s end. As such, the author used keywords such as ethical, sustainable, and community from the outset to direct their initial research. While those core concepts remained unchanged, the shape and approach of the design varied frequently across the research. However, as will be discussed further in Chapter 3, conducting research and observing common traits among the results of each survey and experiment steadily lead to a concise design that addresses the initial design goals well. This method was also important for finding a design that could smoothly fit into an extremely large and important industry such as the Coffee industry, as whatever design would be proposed to business owners or baristas could not impede their ability to conduct business as usual. This required extensive interviewing, surveying, and validation from stakeholders all across the coffee industry supply chain. While this would remain an obstacle for a large portion of the research period, ultimately, it would lead to a design that was welcomed by the businesses that agreed to be test sites for the final experiments.



## Chapter 2

# Related Works

In this section, we will delve into fundamental concepts that form the foundation of the Blooming Post design. The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the discrepancies between consumer intention and behavior regarding ethical consumption. We will analyze why consumers may express a willingness to adhere to ethical standards in their purchasing decisions but fail to follow through in practice.

To bridge the gap between intention and action, we will explore key consumer behavior and psychology concepts. One such concept is the bridging and bonding theory of social capital, highlighting the significance of social connections and networks in influencing consumer behavior. We will also examine the role of consumer education in “green marketing” and how it contributes to fostering ethical consumption patterns.

Additionally, we will explore the implications of the third-place theory, which emphasizes the importance of creating welcoming and engaging spaces where consumers can connect with their surroundings. By understanding this theory, we can identify opportunities to enhance the coffee shop experience and design interventions encouraging ethical consumption.

Furthermore, we will analyze the coffee shop space and its consumer journey. By identifying areas for implementation and creation accessible to the average consumer, we can actively involve them in the ethical consumption process. By expanding our knowledge of these concepts and exploring their interplay, we can develop a comprehensive framework for the Blooming Post design that effectively engages consumers and fosters ethical coffee consumption practices by creating coffee connoisseurs.

## 2.1. What is Ethical Coffee and How is it Understood by the Consumer?

Consumers can be seen as buyers, the producers of waste, or the consumers of resources. As such, specific strategies that take into account these various social roles must be utilized in order to transform the average consumer into what can be considered a "sensible" and "sustainable" consumer. [7]. In the world of coffee in particular, the decision of the average consumer has implications at an international level, affecting the lives and livelihoods of people oceans away. Therefore, it is imperative that developed economies to push their consumers towards sustainable mindsets and behaviors. To that end, let us analyze the specific strategies and issues that have been considered for the design of the Blooming Post.

The intention-behavior gap is a well-documented phenomenon wherein consumers express concerns about the societal and environmental impact of their consumption habits but struggle to translate these intentions into actual behaviors. This phenomenon occurs as consumers employ cognitive mechanisms to rationalize and justify their decisions as morally acceptable in the present moment. [8] because consumers can "neutralize" the dissonance caused by behavior gaps by reasoning their decisions "acceptable" at the moment [9]. Rahul Govind et al. endeavored to further explain existing behavior gaps via the impact of implicit and explicit attitudes - consciously and subconsciously expressed attitudes, respectively [10] - on brand preference and choice. [11] They found that the existence of information does lead to a readjustment of explicit attitudes but that these changes in explicit attitudes do not affect a shift in choice. However, implicit attitudes guide choice in both the short and long term. As such, a person's internal feelings are the most important target for designing a marketing approach and service design to promote ethical consumption. This implies a more enduring and long-form strategy for affecting and maintaining implicit behavior shifts within consumers. One way to change these implicit behaviors could be to look at consumers' social in-groups. The research of Pinto et al. supports the idea that consumers, when able to use concrete-construal - understanding that something temporally is near to the subject [12] - to process information, tend to make ethical purchases consistent with their social in-group. [13] White et al.

assert that consumer knowledge is relevant across various factors for changing consumer habits, such as knowledge of social norms, information comprehension, and value comprehension. This measure of intelligence and knowledge can be seen as inputs that are necessary to achieve a level of connoisseurship within coffee. [14] Building on this, Bartolini et al., in their research of the consumption behaviors of connoisseur consumers of coffee, found that, because of their unique consumption practices, connoisseurs are more likely to perceive and implement sustainability when compared to the general market. [15] Further, when thinking of methodologies for helping consumers achieve a level of connoisseurship, Ungemach et al. found that framing can play a large role in how information is accepted among different demographics in the context of sustainable marketing. [16] Thus, when analyzing different goals that motivate different consumers, we must determine what type of messaging will be most impactful.

## **2.2. The Current State of Consumer Sustainability Messaging in the Coffee Industry**

Since their inception, Sustainability Certifications (SCs) such as Fairtrade International, Smithsonian Bird Friendly Certifications, UTZ, and USDA Organic have become well-known. Over time, the market share of fair trade products has increased dramatically. [17]

Fair-trade primarily functions at the producer level of the supply chain. These different certifications do their best to ensure better prices, and working conditions, for farms selling their beans to different buyers. However, while the certifications serve to improve conditions, they do not necessitate that conditions are sustainable for farmers, and depending on the size of the farms, the discrepancy can be great.

Fair-trade systems are a market-based approach that attempts to stabilize prices between farms and the buyers of raw coffee in return for the farms agreeing to operate according to ethical standards outlined by the association. Because it is a market system between buyers and sellers of raw coffee, there is very little interaction between fair trade organizations and consumers. Fair-trade is not perfect, but it is a well-known and generally accepted method of signaling to

consumers that a product may be an ethical alternative. Unfortunately, fair-trade can also often be marred by the presence of false certifications or confusing green labeling. [18]

### **2.2.1 Direct Trade**

Coffee that has received a legitimate form of sustainability certification can be a good alternative to most un-certified options. [19] However, for coffee producers, simply receiving certification for their farm is not a panacea. This is particularly true when considering smallholder farms. For these producers, the absence of protection against price fluctuations based on market demand can remain a major problem. [20]

It has been shown that the most effective way of ensuring maximized and consistent value share and transparency through the supply chain is via direct trade partnerships with roasters and coffee shops. [21] Direct trade coffee is “The direct and long-term relationship between the agents, based on the principles of trust and transparency.” [22] Within the coffee industry, direct trade is generally considered a long-term, mutually agreed-upon partnership between a coffee producer and a coffee roaster or coffee shop. These partnerships are not standardized and are tailor-made to be in the best interest of both parties.

Instead of relying solely on a fair trade logo, consumers should choose coffee from shops that have explicitly stated direct trade partnerships or source their coffee from importers or roasters that maintain direct trade partnerships. Further, more proactive and engaging means of developing consumer behaviors in this direction must be explored if a more ethical coffee industry is to be achieved.

### **The Benefits of Coffee Connoisseurship**

A 2019 study by Purnomo et al. showed a reinforcing effect on the level of coffee knowledge among personnel working in a coffee shop, as well as the capability of third-wave coffee shop owners to improve sustainable consumption of coffee, stemming from the presence of connoisseur consumers. [23] Increased knowledge of and support for the above-mentioned issues of fair-trade and direct-trade, as well as general knowledge of coffee production, can motivate management to match

their design to the tastes and preferences of connoisseur consumers, which includes sourcing coffee from more sustainable sources, providing more transparency, and creating the opportunity for an overall more informative and sustainable consumer environment.

## **2.3. The Role of Social Bonds in Developing New Behaviors**

### **2.3.1 Bridging Social Capital**

In order to help consumers reach a higher level of understanding and access to this realm of “connoisseurship”, there must be an effort to understand people, their connections, and how communities are built. To this end, Robert Putnam’s theories of bridging and bonding social capital were explored. In his research, Putnam describes the ability of bridging social capital to build connections between people and traverse social gaps and barriers that may exist as a result of culture, race, circles, or other key identifying features, helping to create a sense of shared identity. [4] For the Blooming Post, the presence of these different social capitals between coffee connoisseurs and casual coffee drinkers could imply the potential for knowledge-sharing, experience-sharing, and introduction. Through Putnam’s work, it has become well-understood that the different social circles, places, and activities people choose to engage in can solidify identities. In the next section, we will see how we can understand Oldenburg’s third-place theory through the lens of Putnam’s social capital theory.

### **2.3.2 Third-Place Theory**

The concept of third place, discussed at length by Ray Oldenburg in his book “The Great Good Place,” suggests the need for additional social environments outside of either the home or the workplace. These third-places serve as community hubs wherein people can gather, often in public, and build their social connections. [3]. The coffee shop has long since been used as a common example of a third place where people enjoy coffee, engage in conversation, and build relationships. The

third-place theory outlines a series of key features necessary for a place to become a “third-place.”

- **Accessibility:** They are open and easily accessible to people of all backgrounds and social classes.
- **Regular clientele:** They have a core group of regulars who establish a sense of familiarity and create a welcoming atmosphere.
- **Conversation:** They promote and facilitate conversation, dialogue, and social interaction among patrons.
- **Neutral ground:** They are considered neutral spaces where people can set aside their personal and professional roles.
- **Low cost or no cost:** They are affordable or free, allowing individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds to participate.

There is an interesting implication to be explored when it is considered that while these traits may be objectively defined, it may be subjective as to whether or not an individual feels that a particular place actually exhibits these traits.

We can further understand Oldenburg’s theory of “third-place” through Putnam’s theory of bridging and bonding social capital if we pay special attention to the concepts of “regular clientele,” “conversation,” and “neutral ground” by understanding how people value their attachment to place. In their survey study of place attachment among coffee shop goers in Manila, Tumanan and Lansangan found that attachments to places exhibited among patrons tended to vary based on the amount of exposure to the given place. [24] Tumanan also found that the above characteristics outlined by Oldenburg are typified in a coffee shop setting. The inherently social and community-based nature of these characteristics suggests the possibility of bonding social capital to be a factor of the level of place attachment and thus reveals an opportunity for such connection to be explored in the context of this study.

## 2.4. Experience Sharing and Gift Giving

The Blooming Post uses the concept of value co-creation through experience sharing. This concept was developed by Chen et al. and built off of the actor-to-actor point of view developed by Vargo and Lusch in their theory of service-dominant logic. Chen and his team viewed experience sharing as “value creation for the direct benefit of others.” They split this concept into two parts. First, “value-in-experience” describes the effort-based meaning of value creation. Second, “value initiators” describe actors who perform the experience sharing.” [5] The Blooming Post integrates this expanded service logic framework in implementing value co-creation. Namely, the “value initiator” is realized through the Blooming Post Sender’s role of performing effortful actions of writing a message and sending a gift to a specific receiver. The “value-in-experience” is realized through the collaborative nature of the Farmer, Barista, and Consumer coming together to weave a story of experiences and share it with the receiver.

These concepts of bridging social capital and experience sharing are tied together through a mechanism of gift-giving. Gift-giving, the act of a gift giver selecting and delivering a gift to a recipient, can be seen as a “value-in-experience” since, as Belk describes, choosing a gift for another person can be a “very deliberate and highly involving type of consumer choice.” [25] In the case of the Blooming Post, the gift is the Postcard which will be described in detail in Chapter 3. The design of the gift followed the design philosophy that a gift should be visible, pleasurable, considered a social obligation, and include opportunities for acknowledgment and reciprocation. As well as designed around the five stages of the gift experience: preparation, exchange, reveal, use, and reflection. [26]

## 2.5. Research Implications for the Design of Blooming Post

The above research demonstrates the importance of many vital elements contributing to a consumer’s capacity to become an “ethical” consumer. Beginning with the individual level of consumer education, it has been shown that an individual’s level of knowledge surrounding the product they consume is a significant

indicator of whether or not their behaviors will follow any ethical intentions that may be present. The importance of this consumer education is reinforced by how consumer-facing sustainability efforts, such as fair-trade, within the coffee industry have been implemented. While fair-trade and similarly certified products have increased in market share dramatically, the extent to which each certification assists still needs to be clarified to many consumers. This opaqueness is compounded by the presence of illegitimate “green-labeling” that mimics these certifications. As such, further literacy on the coffee industry and the relevant sustainability certifications may be required for consumers to maintain consistent ethical behaviors. Further studies reinforced this by showing that a level of “connoisseurship” increases consumers’ likelihood of being “ethical.” It was also shown that the presence of connoisseur customers could lead coffee shops to operate more sustainably. However, becoming a connoisseur requires time, effort, and community. Putnam’s theory of bridging and bonding capital suggests that social connections can be leveraged to smooth the transition of newcomers and casual coffee drinkers to entering largely “connoisseur” dominated third places and further use those bonds to maintain newcomers’ interest in sustainable coffee into the future.



# Chapter 3

## Design

### 3.1. Blooming Post

The literature review revealed a need to explore a design philosophy aimed at increasing social and personal engagement in coffee as a daily routine to encourage ethical consumerism in the coffee industry. It follows that the design proposed is a service that can seamlessly enter the consumer journey of what has been defined as a coffee “connoisseur” while also being attractive to “casual” coffee drinkers. The blooming post encourages users, both casual and connoisseur, to share their great coffee experiences with friends and family by joining farmers and baristas in sending an invitation in the form of a message card. When the sender’s intended recipient receives the card, they will be greeted immediately with the faces and messages of the farmer and barista partnered with the Blooming Post, signifying the start of the new user’s journey. Within the card, the recipient can see a message from the sender, messages from the barista and farmers, more detailed information about the coffee being offered, and the story of how the coffee farm and coffee shop came together. Finally, the recipient receives an invitation to the coffee shop and a ticket for a free cup of coffee as a gift from the sender.

With Blooming Post, coffee producers, shops, and customers are brought together to create a new coffee community centered around mutual benefit and understanding. The end of one customer’s journey marks the beginning of the next, wherein a friend, a farmer, and a barista invite the new coffee drinker to explore sustainable and delicious coffee and inspire deeper understanding and connoisseurship of the coffee industry. This turns what would be an isolated and finite experience of a visit to a coffee shop into one that creates community and opens the door for new people to discover new coffee. These are the first steps in making

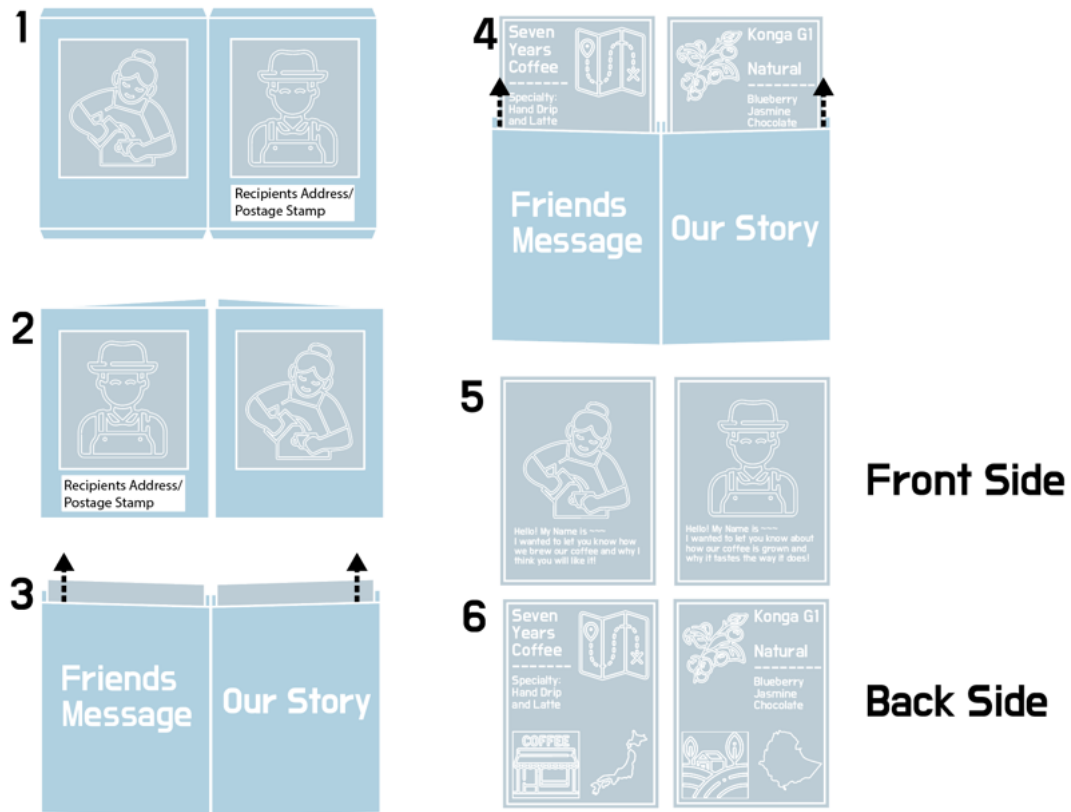


Figure 3.1 Blooming Post - Postcard Breakdown

the casual coffee consumer active in growing the coffee community and increasing the level of sustainable consumption in the coffee industry.

### Blooming Post Design Flow

First, users go through the user journey as defined by the cafe. The service will not impede or modify the coffee shop’s intended process regarding the customer ordering or experiencing the coffee shop. When the coffee drinker decides to share their experience, they can access the Blooming Post message page via a QR code on their phone. Here they input a message for their friend and their friend’s address, and can choose to add any photos of themselves, the coffee shop, or the coffee. These personal touches are then added to the Blooming Post postcard alongside the prepared pictures, messages, and information provided by the barista

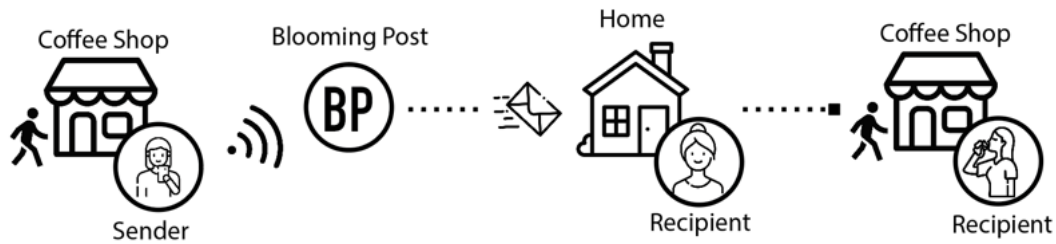


Figure 3.2 Blooming Post - Postcard Journey

and the farmer. The Blooming Post is then printed off-site and mailed to the intended recipient by the service. Users can also receive the Blooming Card at the shop, input their personal touches by hand, and mail the card themselves. At this point, the journey for the sender is over, and the journey for the recipient is about to begin. The recipient user, sometime later, receives the blooming postcard and is personally invited to a cup of coffee at a new coffee shop, a gift of the sender.

When customers visit a third-wave coffee shop, they enjoy an entire experience. These experiences leave lasting impressions that create regular customers and a preference for higher-quality coffee. Many customers enjoy these specialty experiences by taking pictures, sharing on social media, or simply enjoying the atmosphere or conversing with the barista or other customers. As such, there are many inputs to consider in creating a memorable cafe experience for customers. The coffee shop, the coffee producers, and the customer themselves all play a part in determining what kind of experience the customer will have. This, in turn, creates memorable experiences for the customer and the coffee shop. With Blooming Post, these personal experiences are extended to those important to the user, completed as an invitation for the recipient to come and create their own new, memorable experience.

### 3.1.1 Actors

The coffee industry is one of the world's largest industries, comprised of many stakeholders and actors, both large and small. The Blooming Post service design primarily focuses on a few major actors:

- Consumer
- Barista
- Coffee Shop
- Producer (Farmer)

#### Consumers

The target demographic of consumers for the Blooming Post service design is coffee consumers in metropolitan locales with relatively easy access to third-wave coffee shops. Ethnographic research and fieldwork were primarily conducted in Tokyo, Japan, Los Angeles, California, and Santa Cruz, California. However, coffee consumers are not a monolith. Consumers are people, and each person has a unique and fluctuating set of wants and needs that they hope to have fulfilled by the services they partake in.

Later in this chapter, we will discuss some common identity traits among these individuals that served to inform the design process of the Blooming Post and prior experimentation and prototyping. Consumers serve a critical role in the coffee industry in that they are the primary source of revenue for coffee shops, coffee roasters, coffee farms, and those stakeholders that play a part in connecting these actors. As such, developing a strong consumer base is critical for the success of coffee shops and coffee farms. However, consumers are not professionals and are limited in their ability to understand the coffee industry.

In order to encourage ethical consumption among consumers, it is necessary to engage consumers in their coffee journey beyond that of a “paying customer.” Consumers must be well-informed enough to make responsible choices about where they purchase their coffee.

## **Baristas**

Baristas are the face of the coffee shops in which they work. They are also the last point of contact for the coffee before it reaches the customer. This means that the barista is the delivery person for the value and message upheld by the coffee shop and coffee farmer. To leverage this, in the Blooming Post, the role of the barista is accentuated to create a personal connection and bridge between the consumer and farmer. A barista providing impressive service is a far different experience than a poor barista, a grocery store attendant, or an automated coffee maker. Without the barista, a consumer could still receive their coffee, but the chances that an impressionable experience can be made decrease as the personal touch is lost.

## **Coffee shops**

Coffee shops represent the most critical role in connecting coffee to the consumer. Coffee shops with direct trade source their coffee directly from the farms. They are then tasked with roasting that coffee and brewing it to a quality that represents the best of what both the farmer and the coffee shop have to offer to the consumer. On top of just the quality of the coffee, coffee shops are responsible for providing a solid customer experience to the consumer.

Coffee shops included in this service were selected based on those with a direct trade agreement with a coffee farm. This ensures that the coffee being purchased comes from a transparent source and mutually benefits both the coffee farmer and coffee shop, as described by the literature on the benefits of direct trade coffee. While it is standard for specialty coffee shops to source their beans from various origins, farms, and importers, it is becoming increasingly common for small and mid-sized independently owned specialty coffee shops to have one or two selections from direct partnerships with farmers.

Currently, it is difficult for coffee shops and farmers to effectively market beans acquired through direct trade contracts outside the coffee shop. Instagram and other online marketing channels do not provide adequate incentives to attract new consumers not already interested in keeping up to date with the coffees offered at any particular coffee shop. This puts added strain on the ability of farms and coffee shops to carry out direct trade partnerships as it is typically more expensive

for coffee shops, and thus ideally, such coffees are sold at a higher price.

### **Farmers**

While coffee shops represent the most essential link in connecting coffee to consumers, producers represent the most critical actor in the coffee industry as they are the ones that spend years growing the coffee. Historically, farmers have received the least exposure once the coffee is sold. This means that consumers rarely see anything about the farmers of coffee save for broad information about the origin, such as the country that the coffee comes from. Naturally, there is far more to growing coffee than just the country of origin. Farmers are subject to natural weather conditions, levels of government stability, quality of infrastructure, markets of skilled workers, fluctuating market prices for coffee, unacceptable labor conditions, and more. To make matters more difficult for small and mid-sized producers, significant competition and fluctuating market prices create a landscape where coffee is sold very cheaply by farms relative to the price set in coffee shops or by coffee roasters. This creates a scenario where the coffee industry's most labor-intensive, time-consuming, and risky role is also the most poorly compensated.

Coffee Roasters must often spend years of consistent communication and collaboration to establish strong direct trade relationships with farmers. Trust and cooperation are the foundations for these relationships in the world of third-wave coffee, leading to the most successful and renowned third-wave coffee shops and coffee farms. With Blooming Post, coffee shops can extend their good relationships with their customers and introduce them in a way to the coffee farmers whom they have spent so much time and effort developing bonds with. In turn, coffee farmers will have a novel channel through which they can communicate their values and messages directly to those who will be the ones to drink their coffee.

## **3.2. Design Process**

The coffee industry is immense. As such, in attempting to understand clearly what areas could best present an opportunity for impact, it was critical to understand

the views and circumstances of actors all along the supply chain. The initial concept at the beginning of the design process was to create “a design to encourage sustainability” among coffee consumers. The next wave of coffee will, in part, be defined by the evolution of the relationship between producers, roasters, coffee shops, and consumers. However, it was not immediately obvious how to design for this goal. Understanding more fully what such a service would resemble or how it would function would first require significant ethnographic research. To this end, interviews were conducted with farmers, importers/exporters, roasters, coffee shop owners, managers, baristas, and consumers. The first steps for such research would occur within local coffee shops in California and Tokyo.

The Blooming Post’s objective is to help consumers care about where their coffee is produced so that they can make more informed choices on where to purchase their coffee. In order to achieve this, Blooming Post relies on the concept of social bonds. Over many iterations of a design to foster interest in coffee communities, it became clear that, rather than interrupting a user journey by implementing new behaviors or thought processes, we should inspire users to embark on the journey to discover great coffee. This is achieved by transforming the final impression of one coffee drinker into the first impression of a new coffee drinker, inviting them into a community in the context of the coffee farmer, the coffee shop, and the recipient’s friend.

- Step 1: Sharing the Experience: Beginning with coffee connoisseurs and enthusiasts, incentivizing them to share their coffee experience directly with those closest to them.
- Step 2: Reordering impressions: Reorder the consumer experience by introducing the relationship between the farmer and the coffee shop as the critical factor in bringing quality coffee to the consumer.

The recipient is introduced to faces, names, and a story; through this, they are invited to enjoy coffee at the shop. Through the motivation of being invited to a free cup of coffee by a friend, new coffee consumers can begin their coffee exploration and discover their “cup,” setting them on their way to becoming coffee connoisseurs. Step 3: Introducing social incentive: By providing social

motivations through gift-giving, coffee connoisseurs will be the bridge for new consumers to be introduced to higher-quality, sustainable coffees.

### **3.2.1 Design Process - Methodologies and Order of Design Development**

The preliminary design process consisted primarily of survey and interview-style data collection among varying stakeholders within the coffee industry. The very early stage focused on market research in and around Coffee shops in both Tokyo and California to understand what issues were the most ubiquitous in coffee communities. Initially, the keywords “sustainability” and “ethical” were decided upon, and initial interviews were conducted with coffee shop goers, baristas, and managers. Small and mid-sized, third-wave coffee shops were decided on as third-wave consumers are typically more invested financially, time-wise, and socially in their coffee than those that frequent major second-wave chains such as Starbucks. The coffee industry being a global industry with many complicated inter-related issues meant that the design concept had to begin very broadly to hone in on a topic that was considered necessary, had not yet been effectively designed for, and could be discussed within the scope of this paper. As such, many different prototypes and designs were introduced and discarded throughout the process of refinement and iteration.

One such example was the early focus on disposable cups, which had been brought up as an issue by several baristas in different coffee shops in both California and Tokyo. This led to a design concept for “a service design to encourage reusable cup use.” However, as was discovered in further interviews, a comparable level of concern was not shared by the customers of these shops. Further, the novelty of sustainable cup designs was in question as it is an issue that has been explored at length and is continuing to be explored by large organizations. Further field research would reveal the final design concept of “a service design to encourage concern for coffee producers” after finding that the issue of origin was shared across third-wave coffee shops and third-wave coffee consumers and that there had not been significant development toward solutions for this issue that involved the consumer directly.



This would lead to the initial design of the Beanbook, an educational book designed to inform users about general helpful information about coffee origins and challenge them with different activities that act on that knowledge in a cafe setting. Ultimately, this design would be discarded in favor of one focusing on social connections and minimizing disruption to the coffee shop journey.

### **3.3. First Observations: User Experience and Engagement**

To begin the design ideation, we began with interviews and surveys to develop our understanding of how coffee drinkers perceive the issue of sustainable coffee sourcing and ethical consumption. In a pool of 22 participants surveyed, we field questions that could determine levels of familiarity with coffee. Questions such as how many individual coffees do participants drink per week, how often is that coffee made at home compared to purchased elsewhere, and what type of coffee is purchased (e.g., canned coffee, coffee beans, ground coffee, coffee pods, or instant coffee), where that coffee is typically purchased, how much is spent on coffee in a week, and whether or not participants are typically aware of more detailed aspects of their coffee (e.g., origin, process, or roast level).

Some key insights were gathered from these initial surveys. The first insight is directly related to the issue of Fair Trade in consumer perception. Out of those surveyed, only 27 percent believed that they pay attention to coffee certification labels and that those labels play a role in their coffee purchases. Whereas 66 percent believed the price they pay for coffee influences their choices. Another key insight was that the preferred place to buy coffee was split evenly between grocery stores and dedicated coffee shops.

#### **3.3.1 Itoma Cafe**

From the ‘customers’ end, the Itoma cafe would function as a simple to-go cafe where one can regularly come and order a simple, quality cup of coffee. Independently operating a coffee stand would facilitate ethnographic research from the perspective of cafe owners and employees rather than just consumers’ perspec-

tives. It also functioned as a realistic environment to roll out and test different solutions related to research questions about the tendency for sustainable habit formation and consumer education. Finally, it allowed for direct feedback, both visually and verbally, in real-time, rather than relying solely on digital surveys and simulations. Key observations were noted down daily and summarized in weekly reports that would be used to hone in on the dispositions of different coffee drinkers.

It was discovered that customers would visit the coffee stand for various reasons. Some users were looking for social interaction with the barista, while some were looking for their daily cup of coffee. Others were looking to get away from their work and take a break. However, in many cases, a genuine, more profound interest in the coffee could be formed through simple interactions with the barista. From here, we were able to refine other potential user personas that would be the foundation for the final prototype designs.

### **3.3.2 First Workshop: Brewing Workshop and Immersive Storytelling**

After interpreting the results of the preliminary surveys and interviews, an interactive user workshop was designed to target what we believed were key weaknesses in the understanding of coffee sourcing by the average coffee consumer. We explored cultural education, storytelling, and physical engagement through a small-scale coffee brewing workshop. The workshop was built with a heavy emphasis on immersing participants in the cultural context of specific coffee origins in order to encourage coffee drinkers to engage emotionally with the culture that their coffee is originating.

The workshop design included

- Ethiopian Jazz and an Ethiopian Children's Story,
- A looping video of a typical Ethiopian Coffee Farm, and
- An illustration of an Ethiopian coffee farmer that could be used to measure the amount of coffee that would be used to brew.

Users were first briefed on the sensitive issues affecting coffee farmers in Ethiopia and how their differing purchasing decisions could positively and negatively affect those situations. Afterward, every participant was prepared with a small pour-over coffee brewing kit and would be instructed on how to brew a coffee shop-style coffee on their own. During the time of measuring and grinding their coffee and boiling water for the brew, participants were made to listen to contemporary and popular music generally listened to by people living in Ethiopia. The music was meant to change the workshop atmosphere while the participants focused on ensuring their measurements and preparations were correct.

Once preparations were complete, participants were instructed on a basic coffee shop-style pour-over recipe they could replicate. Once the coffee was brewed, participants instinctively wanted to taste the coffee that each other had made. They pointed out subtle and significant differences derived from inconsistency between each participant's brewing method. Once participants had finished tasting, they were instructed to enjoy their coffee while listening to a traditional Ethiopian children's story read aloud. After completing the workshop, users were given a survey to gauge their level of immersion in the process and describe their feelings during and after.

Among the responses were:

- "Intrigued when I realized our coffees tasted different."
- "It was really fun and felt connecting with other students."
- "Excitement to be making something with my hands, curious about the history behind it and joy when we got to taste the brew at the end of the workshop."
- "happy, everyone was enjoying the whole session."

This was an early sign that, given an effective process, coffee experiences could work to connect people in ways beyond sitting and drinking together and that social engagement could be an impressionable feature of a design for sustainable coffee consumption.



Figure 3.3 Workshop Kit



Figure 3.4 Workshop Participants



Figure 3.5 Itoma Cafe at the KMD Forum

### 3.3.3 KMD Forum

The KMD Forum was an opportunity to implement the ITOMA Cafe observational model at a public scale, wherein a more comprehensive variety of customers with broader personality traits and backgrounds would have a chance to engage with the barista and learn more about coffee.

Passersby had the opportunity to purchase coffee from the ITOMA cafe baristas and receive an in-depth explanation about the coffees available. This functioned as an opportunity to do more ethnographic observations in a controlled setting (the ITOMA coffee stand) in a general population setting.

This proved to be a valuable research outing as the findings generally echoed what had been found in the ITOMA cafe and in interviews with consumers in California and Tokyo. Some people have a genuine interest in coffee but lack more profound knowledge of the topic. Some appreciate coffee shops as a “third space” where they can partake in personalized actions (work, socializing, relaxing), some are casual coffee drinkers who take what they can get, some are home brewers, and some don’t drink coffee very often.

## 3.4. Contextual Design Process

### 3.4.1 Identity Model Construction

As outlined by Holtzblatt et al. in Contextual Design, the identity model was chosen to identify best and outline the “elements and personal values” gathered across users to create identity elements. [27] As the identity model is concerned primarily with pride, self-esteem, or personal values relevant to the activity, using this model becomes well reinforced by the personal values and social influence criterion described in the SHIFT marketing for sustainable behaviors (White et al.) Identity Elements were given a name, summary, catchphrase, and associated “give me” statements to understand better the different demographics within the coffee market, where they are similar, and where they differ.

Following is an Identity Model that explores both self-identification features (“I am”) of different types of coffee drinkers as well as the relative needs of different types of coffee drinkers (“I need”):

- **I Am:**

***An Avid Explorer:*** I like to visit as many coffee shops as I can in my free time. I have fun being to places that I have never been to before and keep a running list on Google Maps of coffee shops that I have been to or want to go to. The taste of the coffee does not concern me as much atmosphere of the shops. I enjoy good experiences.

***Catchphrase:*** “I always like to find a new experience.”

***A Daily Commuter:*** I got to the same coffee shops and grocery stores. I drink the same coffee from the same places because they are convenient, taste alright to me, and fit well into my routine. I typically grab my coffee alone and move on to the next task that I need to accomplish for the day.

***Catchphrase:*** “I don’t want anything to change.”

***In Case of Emergencies:*** I only drink coffee when I absolutely need to. I may have a deadline coming up and need to pull an all-nighter. Or, I may need to stay awake for a long journey ahead. In any case, when I choose to

drink coffee, anything will do. It is the caffeine that I need the most, and am not here to enjoy the flavor or the experience of the coffee.

**Catchphrase:** “I’m going to need a coffee...”

**An Occasional Enjoyer:** I enjoy going to coffee shops with friends or if I need to pass some time, study, or do some work. I may only go to a coffee shop once or twice a week, but I enjoy the experience and like to drink my coffee in the shop whenever I go. If I had a choice, I would

**Catchphrase:** “Sure, I could go for some coffee right now.”

- **I Need:**

**A trendy experience:** I go to coffee shops that I see are very popular. I probably saw the shop on TikTok or Instagram and am excited to go and see what all of the excitement is about!

**Catchphrase:** “If I can’t share it on Instagram, then I am not going.”

**A place to hang out:** I want to make sure that wherever I go will have a place where I can sit and relax. Sometimes I like to sit with friends, sometimes, I like to get some work done, and sometimes I just like to listen to music or read the news.

**Catchphrase:** “I’ll be at the cafe this afternoon!”

**Coffee at Home:** I do not like going out often, and am usually too busy to stay at a coffee shop. I normally buy coffee that I can make at home by myself.

**Catchphrase:** “How can I make better coffee at home?”

### 3.4.2 Personas Derived from Identity Model

From the identity model, two primary personas were able to be derived in order to develop design for: The Coffee Connoisseur and the Casual Coffee Drinker. These

personas were developed and given full-sheet spreads for which to refer to during the design process. This pages can be seen in Figures 3.4 and 3.5 respectively.



## Moe: The Coffee Connoisseur

Moe is a passionate and dedicated individual. She has a handful of hobbies and interests that she takes very seriously and devotes time daily into her responsibilities as well as the things she loves to do. Her art "requires time and effort to be the best that it can be." Moe is confident in her skills and appreciates the people and places around her that express a similar level of care and confidence in whatever they are doing.



Moe is actively trying to deepen her understanding of the things she is interested in. When she goes to a coffee shop, she has very specific reasons of why she has chosen to go to a particular coffee shop for that day. She likes to "go to places she has never been to before, try coffee's from origins she hasn't tried before." As a designer, she is also invested into the spacial aesthetics of the coffee shops that she goes to. She takes a whollistic approach to her enjoyment of things and feels that that is how she "can get the most out of the experience."

Being a passionate individual, Moe also like to share her interests with her friends. She commisions art, goes to exhibitions, and frequently engages in different projects with her friends in order to produce things that she finds valuable. The same effort is placed into her social relationships. Living in the city, Moe stays well connected with several friend groups that gather around different interests.

Moe has favorites. A favorite restaurant, a favorite coffee shop, a favorite movie, a favorite songs, a favorite gallery. These are the places and things that bring her comfort, inspiration, a sense of community, or a sense of belonging. She fits these favorites of hers into her weekly routine as a "source of calm."

### Cool Characterization:

- Deep Design
- Connect with Friends
- Express a unique quality

### Life Tasks:

- - Excel at work
- - Constant improvement in hobbies
- - Social life

### Demographics:

- -Any Gender
- -20s or 30s
- -Single or in a relationship
- -Lives in the city
- -Middle class

Figure 3.6 Persona Created for "Coffee Connoisseur"

## Jerry: The Casual Coffee Drinker

Jerry is a young, energetic recent graduate who always has something on his plate. He is smart, driven, and likes keeping busy. Jerry also likes sharing his time with his friends and tries to stay up to date socially. He normally drinks coffee as a means of maintaining his energy, though, at this point, coffee is just as much a part of his daily ritual as it is a energy boost. Jerry is familiar with all of the most common coffee chains, and normally just goes to the same places that are along his commute, or, if he is really in need, he'll grab an instant coffee from the convenience store or vending machine.



Jerry is always engaged in some activity. Whether he is on his commute to school, in the middle of a work meeting, or spending the evening with friends, Jerry always has something on his plate. Jerry is productive and has become accustomed to having one cup of coffee a day, maybe two if he has a particularly heavy workload.

The coffee Jerry chooses to drink is a reflection of his hectic lifestyle. He does not have a regular coffee shop that he frequents, usually opting to grab whatever is most easily available - "I need caffeine and I like coffee. I like some coffee more than others, but if I'm short on time then I will grab whatever is easiest." Sometimes that means a large coffee chain, sometimes it is a canned coffee from the convenience store, and on days where he is working from home he has a nespresso machine that gets the job done.

When he is with his friends, Jerry is no stranger to going out. He loves nice dining experiences with friends. Going at least once a week to find a new spot for him and his group to take nice pictures to upload to their social media accounts - "...finding nice restaurants is so much fun." If he isn't going out, he is inviting people in to cook them a nice meal.

For Jerry part of being a busy adult living in the city is taking some time to enjoy the things that he works to achieve. For this reason Jerry values new, quality experiences.

### Cool Characterization:

- Simple Design
- Connect with Friends
- Brings Friends Together

### Life Tasks:

- - Excel at work
- - Do well in school
- - Social Life

### Demographics:

- -Any Gender
- -20s or 30s
- -Single or in A relationship
- -Lives in the city
- -Middle Class

Figure 3.7 Persona Created for "Casual Coffee Drinker"

## 3.5. Industry Interviews

### 3.5.1 Interview With Dulce Venancio - Green Coffee Trader at Cat and Cloud Coffee, Santa Cruz, CA

I feel really small and really incapable of making any change. This is such a huge thing. And he was like, yes, I understand that, that's valid, but you got to think about the importance of everything that you're doing currently and how that's going to affect the whole chain. So it's like if I can do my job properly and I can order proper green, I can make it enough to where there's enough cushion, where I can help others. So I think what you're doing is really great and I resonated a lot.

In your opinion, what is one way consumers can come to support origins?

Yeah, it's really hard if the consumer has no idea and they're not willing to go out and figure out where research it. Right, yeah. At the cafes what we try to push is just. Like we're the face of not only cat and cloud, but our producers.

And it's our job as gateway. We're supposed to be a welcoming door for people in specialty. So it's just like, you can come in and get a cup of coffee. We call it The Answer, and it's a blend of Ethiopia, Colombia, Brazil, but it's the answer. The answer to all your coffee needs, regardless of you drink super dark roast Folgers or, like, instant coffee or, like, specialty coffee. This cup is for you. And the reason we created that cup is so that we can talk to people about it. We can make it easy for them to enter the doorway of coffee and then be like, oh, you like it here? A little more. Oh, you like it here. The whole world of coffee. And I don't know, slowly introduce it without just being like, this is 7 dollars because these people worked on it. I don't know. It's like being gentle about the way we push with consumers, but I think would also really help. Yeah. So I guess to dial in the

question for me, and the answer is, if the consumer doesn't care, no matter how much we try as a shop, it won't work.

But if they care already and they come into our shop, I think one of the big things is our culture, too. And hospitality is really important, at least for us, too, because anyone can come in, and if we make them feel special, if we make them feel welcome, if we show them that coffee is really great, maybe they'll be intrigued and come back. I think we emphasize this is just me in this perfect world. If we were to emphasize hospitality and as a barista or a concierge, we dialed in our information and kind of like, meet people where they're at and think of them as like, I want to teach you everything.

You just have to be willing to want to ask or learn. I don't know. It's a give-and-take.

What role does Cat and Cloud take as a cafe in communicating those ideas to customers? And when communicating with farmers, do they ever express their wishes or ideas on how to connect with the people that are drinking their coffee?

Yeah, that's one of the reasons why it felt so heavy sometimes. Because when I went to Mexico, we met one of the producers for the first time. This was his first time selling his coffee to an organization, because before that, he would sell that to people called that would come to the region of Mexico and they'd be like, okay, this is what we're going to pay you for your pound of coffee. And it's just a bit more than the sea market. Okay? I mean, a lot of the farmers, some farmers choose to do co-op. Some farmers have a direct relationship, but there are some that have no idea of the supply chain and are just selling the coffee. That's their only income, and that's the only way they know because of inheritance. That's just the world they've always been in. But they don't know that there's so much more. And that's a part of what Azahar is trying to do, which he works with in Mexico And Azahar just overall, even in Colombia, they educate their

producers how to maintain their trees, how to clean them properly, how to be more efficient about their process so they can get a cleaner cup, or they can get a cup with higher point average.

We all want to make this better. But, yeah, that was another thing that I noticed. There's a lot of. Earlier. There's a lot of mistrust sometimes, so. It's like gaining their trust got you. And building that relationship. It's like, one day, we want to buy your coffee. We want to make it sustainable for you, like a sustainable living income. And we can buy one bag of coffee for 7 dollars a pound, but that's not sustainable for us as a business. And even though it's like the prosperous living income, it's not sustainable for the rest of us as a business. And if we decide to indulge everyone in that, then we won't have a Cafe, and it's just like, we'll go through it less, we'll sell less, and we'll be able to give less back. So we have to find that nice middle ground.

What is your view on sustainability certifications?

When I went to Columbia, there was a whiteboard, and the prices change all the time because it's a commodity and people like people in New York just move it. Yeah, it's just insane. The Rainforest Alliance gets them a better price, but overall, the thing that gets them the best price and the consistent price, and a stable price is direct relationships. That's ultimately, I think those labels, in my opinion, those labels make consumers feel better when they purchase a bag, but I don't think it necessarily affects the producers the way they think they're purchasing that bag.

This interview highlighted the unique challenges facing Coffee shops in developing strong relationships with coffee producers. Even though most third-wave coffee shops want to make a positive impact on the coffee industry both socially and environmentally, it typically takes years of repeat business to develop the level of trust necessary to create a durable direct trade partnership.

Moreover, communicating the importance of those direct relationships to consumers in an effective way requires an entirely different approach. This is discussed further in the following interview with Eli Ungerecht.

### **3.5.2 Interview with Eli Ungerecht - Store Manager at Cat and Cloud Coffee, Santa Cruz, CA**

**Interviewer:** I'll just start off by asking what is your role at Cat and Cloud?

So I am a retail coordinator, so I essentially coordinate the retail stores. I'm a manager for Cat and Cloud. I run the day-to-day, I schedule school and do pretty much all the operational stuff and that's second priority to me. The main thing that I do is I'm really someone that dives into the culture and I'm someone that teaches our team what it's really like to create the show and create an environment for our guests to come in and just be excited to have that interaction with us.

I'm in there about every day I'm working with the team and we're constantly we pursue better as one of our values. Every day we're constantly doing something to pursue better whether it's like working on something operationally or like we're walking on every drink.

What is your perception, talking to customers every day, of their understanding of where coffee comes from?

So every day, we'll have about four to five coffees on drip offered all day. And they'll range from, like, three of our blends the night shift, the answer in the friend zone, to also having two single origins. So every month, maybe even every two months, we'll have a single origin that we're featuring that month. So right now, it's the Kagamalini from Kenya. And we'll also have a concierge choice every day where they get to offer what they want to pick as the coffee that they want to represent that they like that day.

So something that we've often, like when I first started, the vocabulary wasn't there for everybody, but we've started really pushing it over the past couple of years is, like, anytime we talk about the coffee, we talk about the farmer. Because we have so many different producers and farmers, and we'll have, like, three Kenyan coffees at a time, or like, three Costa Rican. So when the guest comes through and asks what we have for coffee, and we tell them, like, oh, I have a Costa Rican. Here you go. And then the next day, they come in, and they're like, oh, I had a Costa Rican yesterday. Can I get that today? And they're like, cool. We have three of those. We've made sure to mix that. And we're like, cool, yeah, we have the Calcutta device and just different things like that, where we just make sure to constantly use the name of the producer, like the Pedro Moreno, we have the Damian Chavez, and those are multiple different Honduran coffees. And so we strive to make sure people know where they're getting it from, but also the producer's name, because we want people to kind of be able to build it up, too. And we've kind of even seen it in the community.

I don't see it every day necessarily, where they're using the names of the producers, but I know that one of my managers had a story where he was at a pizza place and he heard the people in front of them talking about like, oh, did you have the Neil and Guzman at Cat and Cloud the other day? That's the fact that people are starting to even pick up on the terminology of using the producer's name instead of the place of the coffee. I think it's really cool. And that's something we're trying to push through the consumer side.

What kinds of people do you see normally asking these questions?

I feel like it's only really. The people that are either in the coffee community pretty deeply already or that work at other cafes tend to come in and really ask questions about the producers, like, more in a deeper level. But the day-to-day guests, I feel like, tend to ask questions about how it's made and what makes it taste the way it is and stuff like that.

In your eyes, what role does the brick-and-mortar storefront play in the connection between the farmers and the consumers?

We touched on it a little bit. But just more specifically, I feel like an honest real answer is that we, as the front consumer people, should be the ones making guests excited about that. Um, and I think we're starting to try to figure out ways to do that, like making guests, like, want to ask questions about the producers in different ways.

Like, right now, I think I can see a Cat and Cloud bag back there. And, like, it tends to have the origin of the producer of the coffee underneath the origin. Like the origins. The big letters. Producers. Lower. And I know with our new design of coffee bags, we're going to be making it the opposite. Producer is going to be the big name, the origin is going to be smaller. So we're trying to create that vocabulary for guests to come in and be like, hey, can I get the Pedro Moreno today? And I feel like that'll kind of open up the door to more conversations in those realms because when people see the origin, they just so grab the bag and roll. But I feel like the names of the producers might strike more conversation.

What are your thoughts on Sustainability Certifications?

I've heard when we've talked about Fair Trade that we personally don't think it benefits the producers and farmers enough. And that's why we started the Best Friends Club. We started with Honduras, but eventually, we want to branch it out to other places. We just need to build those stronger connections there. That's why with the Best Friends Club, that'd be bags like a dollar more and that dollar goes directly to that producer, is because we felt like I think it's like a tiny percentage or whatever it is for fair trade. I don't know the exact logistics for it, but it just wasn't actually benefiting them enough. And so raising our bags by a dollar and then sending them a dollar from each bag actually gave them money to be able to produce more coffee.



And it just gave them money faster, I feel like, versus maybe.

Fair trade over the long run might be beneficial, but it just didn't seem like it was doing enough for them right now, from what it seemed like, from my perspective. Yeah. In the future, our goal is to try to have, like I said, more of like a Best Friends Club or more different styles like that. To be able to have a dollar from every bag, like different things go, to be able to benefit the producers directly rather than just a partial percentage of what it was.

This conversation with Eli most prominently outlines the importance of creating a strong social connection between the Barista, as the face of the store, and the customer. Ideally baristas should have a relatively high-level of knowledge and enthusiasm and further be able to communicate that to the customer. This is another instance where bridging social capital is important as it is connecting the values and relationship between the coffee shop and the farmer through to the customer using the barista as a bridge.

The following Interview with Richard Sandlin discusses the effectiveness of current alternatives to personal connections and how effective they are in developing understanding among consumers.

### **3.5.3 Interview with Richard Sandlin - Import/Export at Royal Coffee, Oakland, CA and Hong Kong**

**Interviewer:** Thanks for agreeing to speak with me. Could you tell me a little bit about your role at Royal?

So we are import export, so that means we make green coffee purchasing possible so when you think of a coffee roaster, whether a big roaster, with the exception of a few multinationals, all the way down to the tiniest of micro roaster, whether in Tokyo or in the Bay Area, like a cat, and Cloud, who I would consider a large micro roaster, but not a large roaster. They have to work with an importer of some capacity. Now, there are very few that don't, but the vast majority do. And

even when you see direct trade, 99 times out of 100, that's going to be facilitated by someone like Royal Coffee. And so Royal Coffee, we're sourcing coffee, we're importing coffee, and then for international accounts, we'll export coffee as well. So, for example, if I sell to a roaster in Tokyo, it'll get exported either directly from Ethiopia, directly to the port of Oklahoma, or from Ethiopia to here and then sold from California to Japan.

As an importer, you must be interacting with coffee producers quite regularly. Can you tell me a bit about that experience?

Yeah, I think definitions are important. The terms producer and farmer are often used. They're confused sometimes. A producer does not necessarily mean someone who grows coffee. And to understand that, you have to understand the trade. So without getting too much into the weeds, because every country is a little bit different, but you have an actual fruit farmer. So coffee is the seed of the fruit. Now, that person might, let's just assume that they own the land here. They would be a farmer. Well, that person may or may not hire workers to help them pick their fruit at the end of the harvest, right?

Now, you have a farm worker, right? There's a difference. Someone owns the land. Someone hires help. So you have a farmer and a farm worker. That farmer may or may not be involved in a cooperative. That farmer may or may not export. That farmer may or may not be involved in direct selling. They might sell to someone locally who processes it, depending on where they are. In some countries, they sell cherry. In some countries, they sell parchment. And it differs by every single country. So then you have the exporter, which in some cases might have to do with farming whatsoever.

In coffee, we were interested and excited about traceability and transparency. So you have to think there's a farmer, there's a farm worker,

there's a processor, there's an exporter, and sometimes these are all one and the same, but rarely there usually aren't. Now, in the case of cooperatives or things like that, there might be more, and that's where you're going to delve into the world of, like, fair trade and things like that. But it's important to define these terms. So the vast majority of higher-end coffee shops, specifically, the vast majority of people, aren't thinking about that, especially a hired person, right? They're like, oh, this coffee is from Guatemala, or this co-op is from Wayweightananga, or this coffee is from Osobagri, the name of the cooperative. Or, this is a single farmer who's also a part of the Osogary cooperative. Right? And so all four of those things are actually saying the same thing, right? It's a Guatemalan coffee, but it's just about how much, you know.

Very interesting

I think one thing, just as someone who loves coffee like yourself, the thing that you have to think about is traceability and transparency is not always, but often related to price. And just because we have traceability doesn't mean it's the kind we want, right? But typically, the more expensive a coffee is, the more everyone's going to know about it because, usually, those things come at a cost. Every coffee has a story, but not every coffee has a story that is as attractive as others.

And so, with a supply chain as complex as this, that begs the question of how do we better connect people to it?

Obviously, direct trade and fair trade have a huge part in that. Fair trade is, of course, a third-party movement. There's a group in Japan, in the US. And Europe, who certifies and promotes direct trade, can kind of mean whatever you want it to mean. You could say anything. Direct trade you can't prove or disprove. But celebrating coffee through single farmers, through cooperatives, through progressive estates, those kinds of transparency and focusing on that realm is really

easy to do.

Looking at macro coffee, Brazil, Vietnam and just these large, massive states the size of some countries that might employ tens of thousands of farm workers, getting transparency and traceability there's probably impossible.

Richard then goes on to talk about his experience with the Japanese coffee community.

I think one thing that's super unique about Japanese coffee specifically is the amount of passion and care, which is just that your average coffee worker is going to put into it is just so much different than other parts of the world. We've all been to a Starbucks at some airport somewhere, and it's like dude, what did you do? Where if you go to a Starbucks anywhere in Japan, it's served as if it were a 90-plus Geisha. It's cool, right?

And how about what you have experienced directly working with different farms and cooperatives?

Yeah. And so farm workers, like, even in coffee farms that might be celebrated, they may be treated well, they may not. But higher prices, for one thing, that I try to always express to coffee roasters, is just because you're paying X per pound per kilo for coffee doesn't necessarily equate to better pay for workers better working environment.

It's the same way, like when you pay more for a television set at Best Buy; it doesn't equate to whether or not the employees at Best Buy make more or not. Right. And so we have to think of coffee in that same way.

And it's really complex. And unlike other industries, you're talking about a product that's produced a little bit differently across multiple different parts of the world. Right. And the way a farm set up works in, say, Central America, which is predominantly small pots of land, is

so much different than Brazill, where it would remind you of driving through cornfields in Nebraska and much less what you might expect when you see these beautiful images. And it's really complex.

How would you recommend that people go about figuring out whether or not the coffee they are buying is ethical?

Sometimes it is a yes and approach, and I think, for whatever reason, sustainability and coffee have been an either-or. And so I think your approach of, like, is it a relationship? Is it a relationship or certified? You're probably going to get something pretty darn good. Yeah. It's a great place to start. But once you unpack those things, it gets a little trickier.

Richard goes into great detail about the differences between coffee farms, producers, cooperatives, and other "coffee-producing entities" and how difficult having any form of transparency into that end of the supply chain truly is, as well as the logistical and categorical complexity that is inevitable when it comes to shipping coffee between different members of the supply chain until it finally reaches the coffee shop or roaster. This interview impresses the need for a relatively high level of comprehension of the issues within the coffee industry, which can likely only come from reaching a level of connoisseurship. [?]

### **3.6. First Prototype: Educational Artifact Beanbook**

The Beanbook is an educational activity-based service designed to develop ethical coffee consumers by addressing knowledge gaps and behavior inconsistencies. It motivates users to learn more about coffee, provides prompts for sustainable purchasing decisions, and promotes self-consistency. The design objective was to bridge the information gap by offering insights into coffee production and enable consumers to engage with baristas for further details. The visually stimulating,



Figure 3.8 Beanbook Artifact

easy-to-follow design prompts sustainable actions and enhances consumer knowledge and learning, pushing them toward the status of connoisseur. The Beanbook includes coffee origin introductions, challenge pages, and tips and tricks for consumer engagement and exploration.

### **Motivation**

The first design point of the Beanbook is to spark motivation for consumers to learn more about their coffee. Fostering intrinsic motivations among consumers is vital for developing long-term behavioral changes. To this end, the Beanbook design follows the sustainable marketing principles [7] to help guide coffee consumers through a journey that develops their interest in an engaging way.

### **Prompting**

Prompting, the use of messages given before a behavior occurs, has been shown to affect sustainable behaviors positively. [28] Using these prompts to remind consumers of their current cheerful disposition towards sustainable purchasing decisions, the Beanbook is a persistent prompt for consumers. To this end, the Beanbook has been designed to be visually stimulating, relatively simplistic, and easy to follow as an educational tool.

### **Self-consistency**

Pre-use surveys revealed the persistent behavior gap among users. Among users surveyed, none would willingly admit to not being an ethical consumer. In practice, people want to be internally consistent. [7] Consumers want their behaviors to match their beliefs, even if this is not always true. It is easier for consumers to be consistent when they possess the knowledge to do so, particularly when it comes to products with deep knowledge pools, such as coffee.

### **Information, Learning, Knowledge**

Consumer studies by Gifford and Nilsson in 2014 showed that consumers are less likely to participate in sustainable actions if they do not know about the relevant issues and how their actions may have benefits or consequences. [29] The coffee industry is incredibly complex and varied, and consumers can not be expected to learn about these issues passively, given existing mental models. Ironically, information overload is another.

#### **3.6.1 Beanbook Page Design Breakdown**

- Type 1: Coffee Origin Introduction Pages
- Type 2: Challenge pages
- Type 3: Tips and Tricks

The coffee ordering experience tends to be relatively quick. However, there are key moments of downtime that allow for opportunities for added interaction and education. These opportunities can shape consumers' new attitudes and behaviors in future visits.

#### **Coffee Origin Introduction Pages**

These pages serve as a quick and easy survey of information that takes note of the history and culture as well as flavors one might be able to expect from coffee produced in their respective countries.

**Challenge Pages**

These pages act as a call to action, encouraging users to take part in the activities such as conversation and exploration.

**Tips and Tricks**

The Tips and Tricks page educates consumers on easy ways that they can take into their own hands to engage with coffee. Brewing coffee in easier ways, how to differentiate between different qualities of coffee, and good places to learn more interesting information about coffee.



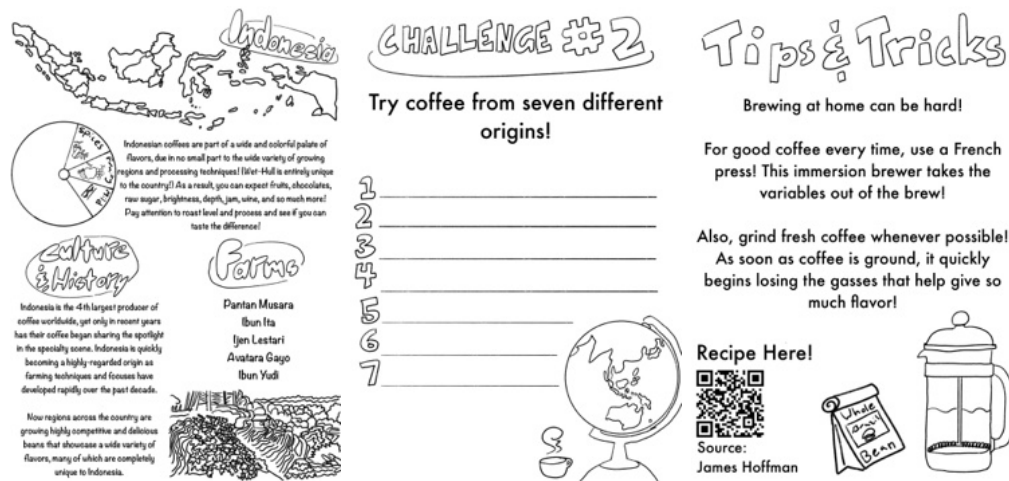


Figure 3.9 Origin Page, Challenge Page, Tips and Tricks Page

### 3.6.2 User Data and Iteration

The early survey results showed evidence of the behavior gap regarding coffee consumers' purchasing decisions. Most users surveyed felt that they could be ethical consumers, yet the stated coffee purchasing habits of those same consumers do not reflect practices that are necessary for sustainable, ethical coffee consumption.

#### Social Barriers

In the first round of testing, interesting social phenomena were found in users attempting to fulfill tasks outlined in the challenge pages. Specifically, it was difficult for users to commit to extended conversations with baristas (Challenge 2: Ask a Barista). This was an exciting finding as it also outlined the contradiction and complacency in the current ecosystem. How can cafes believe that they are the bridge to understanding farms for consumers without a push for consumers to overcome social barriers and talk with baristas to learn?

#### Not Matching Expectations

Results from the first wave of Beanbook users showed that there was genuine interest in the content that was being presented. However, the content could fall short when there was some information that was not matching what the user was

seeing in the coffee shop.

### **On Hand Materials**

Another obstacle was whether or not there was a writing utensil. Updated design ideas for the Beanbook would incorporate stamps and stickers attached to the book that would allow users to easily take prescribed notes on the coffees that they encounter.

### **3.6.3 Online Platform**

An online platform would function as a robust touch point for consumers to receive knowledge about specific coffee farms and cafes that can help direct their decision-making process in the future. Users would have profiles that would develop as they log details about their coffee. An interface that allows users to input the names of coffee farms for the Beanbook developers to generate information on. Finally, the platform would act as a host of resources for learning more about coffee.

## **3.7. Feedback and Iteration**

As iterations continued, it became clear that the most powerful factor in changing people's behavior was their social bonds. As such, the design began to shift away from an independent educational experience and towards a socially shared experience, using different types of social capital to entice people to engage with the educational material present and be excited to try something new and see it in a different light.

### **3.7.1 Artifact Design: First Postcard Design**

The first versions of the Blooming Post used a traditional single postcard design. The immediate strength of this design was the cost and ease of use. The postcard could be applied with postage and immediately mailed. The single piece of card stock paper was the cheapest option, allowing for easy and quick reproduction

without construction or fear of damage. However, initial feedback showed that the card needed to be more substantial as it did not convey the sense of value necessary to justify the potential cost structure.

### **3.7.2 Artifact Design: Post Pocket Design**

The next design was for a possible concept to include pre-ground or instant coffee packets. The coffee would come wrapped in a paper filter with information cards attached.

## **3.8. Final Prototype: Blooming Post**

### **3.8.1 Design Goal**

The goal of the final design prototype, the Blooming Post, was to encourage ethical consumption of coffee by growing the third-wave coffee industry from the inside out and developing a community of coffee connoisseurs by introducing casual coffee drinkers to exciting and new coffee experiences through a system that leverages bridging and bonding social capital that exists between the four primary actors outlined previously: Farmers, Coffee shops, baristas, and coffee consumers. This design is centered around experience sharing and third-space theory in order to create attractive motivations that coffee connoisseurs can share directly with any one of the social connections that they believe may enjoy a nice cup of coffee.

To this end, the blooming post consists of these primary features:

- The design is made through partnerships with coffee shops that have direct trade or otherwise close and relatively transparent connections with their coffee sources. These partnerships provide the faces, histories, and personal connection stories of the farmers and coffee shops involved.
- The design features personalized input from the “Sender” for the “Recipient,” acting as a unique invitation into the world of third-wave coffee that the coffee connoisseur enjoys.

- The design features unique remarks from both the farmer and the barista meant to express what they want their new customer to know about their coffee
- The design features region-specific history relevant to the origin of the coffee and the specific farm that the coffee comes from, as well as more detailed information about the processing of the coffee.
- Finally, the design features a ticket for a free cup of coffee from the featured coffee shop, included in the price of the Blooming Postcard.

In the following sections, we will describe the several theoretical foundations and how they directly relate to each design feature, as well as the different iterations of the blooming post that took place in order to best connect those design features with their theoretical foundations for maximum effect in the user experience.

### 3.8.2 Third Place and a Sense of Belonging

Oldenburg's third place theory has interesting implications on the design direction in the context of specialty coffee and attracting newcomers to this "third place."

Let's once again quickly review the core concepts of Third Place Theory.

- **Accessibility**
- **Regular clientele**
- **Conversation**
- **Neutral ground**
- **Low cost or no cost**

Independent, small-scale, or otherwise niche specialty coffee shops can run into unique obstacles with regard to the first two concepts. During our field observations, it was observed on a number of occasions that passersby would have their interest piqued, observe the inside of the cafe, and ultimately move on from the cafe. While the exact reasons for these potential customers to move on cannot be

determined, we can speculate based on the context of each occurrence. It is possible that newcomers who have no prior knowledge of the shop can be intimidated by the presence of an intimate or well-established environment. In one instance, a conversation was occurring between a small group of customers and the barista. This scene could present an obstacle for a newcomer who may potentially enter the shop as it could reduce accessibility relative to the regular clientele. This was one of the inspirations behind the keyword of “invitation.” The goal is that users of the blooming post will be welcome from the start, having a formal invitation as well as an informational primer on what to expect by the time they reach the coffee shop. This concept of invitation is also based on Putnam’s bridging and bonding theory, which will be discussed in the next section.

### **3.8.3 Bridging Capital and Social Influence**

The conceptual foundation of people and relationships in the context of the Blooming Post design is rooted in Robert Putnam’s theory of Bridging and Bonding Capital. Specifically, the theory of bridging social capital holds significant relevance for the Blooming Post’s objectives. Bridging social capital operates by fostering connections across diverse social barriers. In the case of the Blooming Post, it was crucial to identify and address potential social barriers within the realm of specialty coffee consumption.

By examining each persona involved, it became evident that the primary differences between connoisseurs and casual consumers lie in their level of access, which is influenced by their knowledge about coffee, coffee shops, and the local area. Additionally, a sense of belonging within these spaces plays a pivotal role. This sense of belonging may arise from being a regular customer at a particular coffee shop or having previous experiences in similar establishments.

To maximize the impact of the Blooming Post, it harnesses the existing level of access enjoyed by coffee connoisseurs and empowers them to extend that access to potential newcomers in the realm of third-wave coffee. By doing so, the Blooming Post facilitates the creation of bridging social capital. It encourages connoisseurs to share their knowledge, experiences, and access to specialty coffee spaces with individuals who may not yet be familiar with the third-wave coffee scene. This bridging social capital can break down those barriers, increase inclusivity, and

grow the community within the coffee industry.

### **3.8.4 Artifact Design**

The artifact design of the Blooming Post itself went through several iterations. The initial variant explored a design philosophy that was quite the opposite of the Beanbook in terms of design weight. Originally, the design stuck close to the concept of the postcard and used a traditional postcard size and material while fitting in as much relevant information as possible.

The aesthetic design of this postcard was reviewed well. However, due to space constraints, it lacked too much information that is critical to the identity of the design function as a tool to increase ethical consumption in the coffee industry.

#### **Design 2**

Another design attempted to find interesting ways in which to send coffee samples from the coffee shops to customers while also allowing them to brew the coffee using the packaging as a filter. While this design would ultimately not be used in any meaningful way, it did help to shed light on what the focus of the design going forward should be - the people, the places, and the information that is relevant to those actors.

#### **Design 3: Album Style Postcard**

Finally, the Blooming Post would reach a balance between the simplicity offered by the single postcard and the informational density offered by the Beanbook. This would come from implementing an album-style fold-able card wherein each side of the card would be dedicated to a different actor while also having a dedicated space for the Sender to leave a personalized message for their chosen Recipient.

#### **Design Layout**

The recipient is greeted with images of both Farmer and Barista, representing the core actors that create the coffee experience for consumers. The decision to spotlight these actors at the very start of the user journey is to reorder the user journey in a way that envelopes the experience in the social context that is lacking

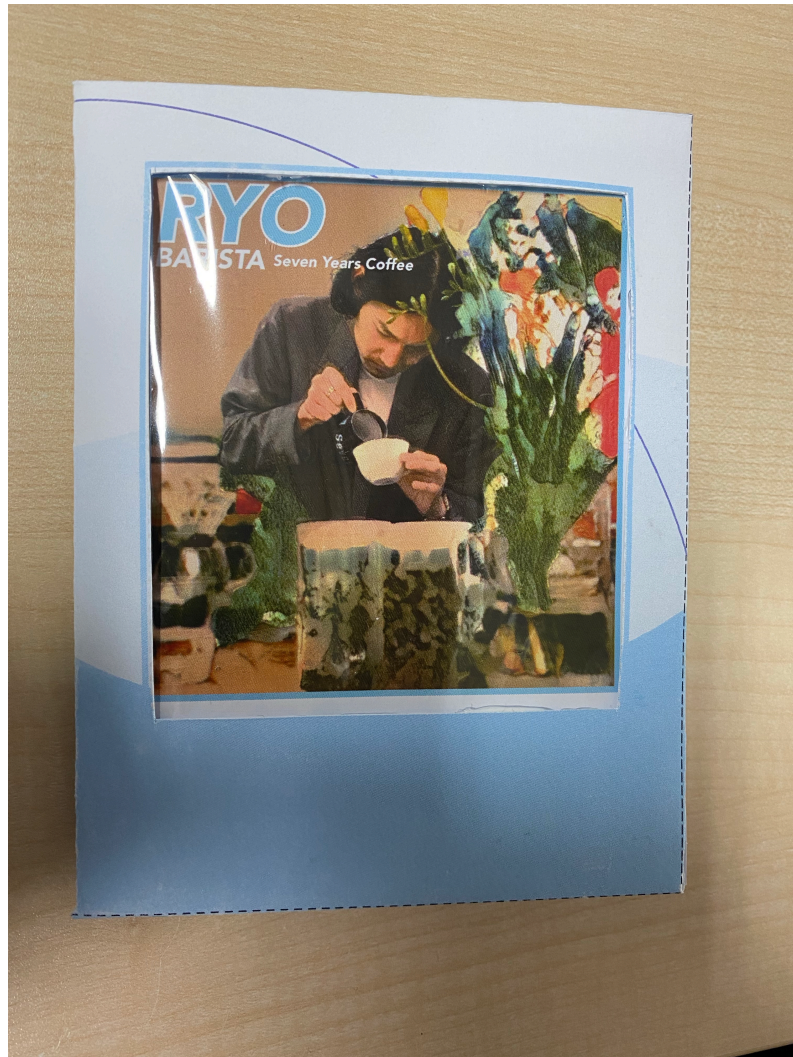


Figure 3.10 Blooming Post Cover, Barista Page



Figure 3.11 Blooming Post, With Postcards Removed



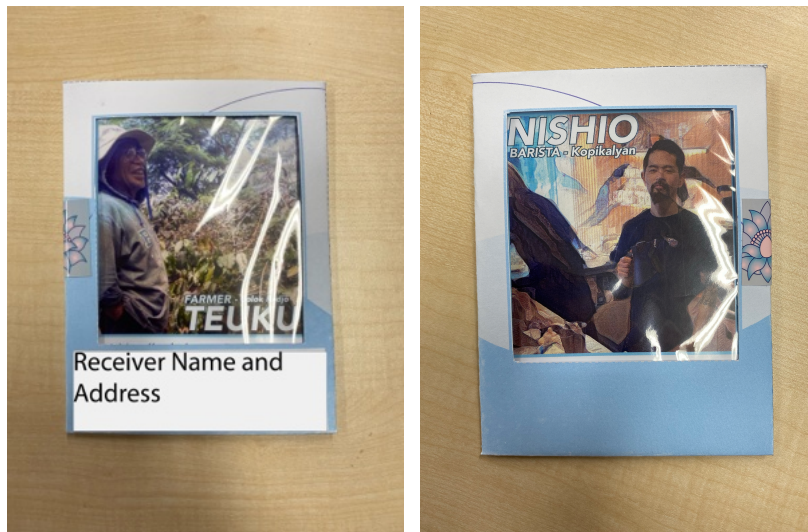


Figure 3.12 Blooming Post Cover, Farmer Page, and Barista Page, Kopikalyan Japan ver.

in the current cafe journey. The most important actors should be at the forefront of the experience.

There is a space directly on the front of the book for the recipient's address to be written, postage applied, and mailed directly without the need for an envelope.

Opening the blooming post first reveals the message written by the Sender. This message could be anything the Sender decides they would like to write. As the intended audience is someone the Sender knows, it is left to them to leave their own personalized message to the Recipient. This message can be adorned with other unique features, such as stickers or sketches.

Opposite the personal message is the story of how the Farmer and Cafe came to be connected. The purpose of the story is to reveal how much personal effort goes into creating good relationships business relationships between baristas, coffee shops, and farmers. This story, in contrast to the connection that is expressed between the Sender and Recipient, comes together to create a sense of connectivity and community between the four actors.

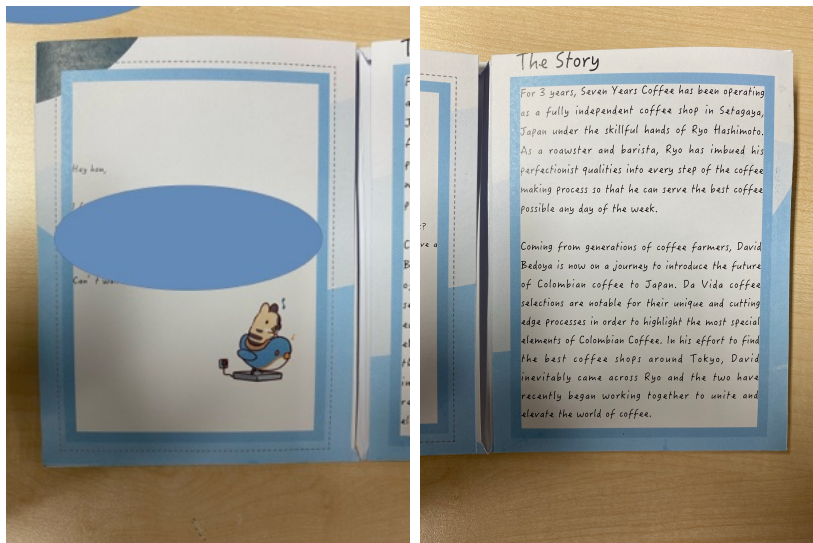


Figure 3.13 Blooming Post Message Page and Story Page

Opening the card reveals that the images of the barista and farmer, which are first seen on the outside of the card, are actually part of the respective postcard for each image. The user can remove these postcards from the blooming post album. On the front of the postcard is the image of the farmer or producer as well as a message written by the person imaged that remains hidden while the card is still in the album. On the back is information relevant to the role of that actor's postcard. For the Barista, it includes their coffee shop's name and information (including map and address), specialty drinks, and a ticket for a free drink at their coffee shop. For the farmer, it includes information about the farm and the country that the farm is based in, more detailed information about the coffee (varietal, process, etc.), and flavor notes for the coffee featured. Both postcards also include more images of the cafe or farm, respectively.

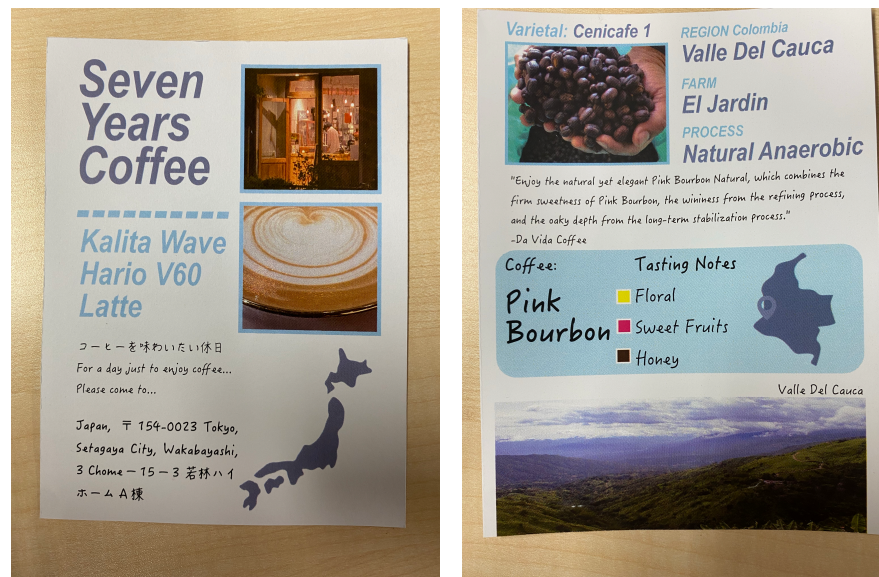


Figure 3.14 Coffee Shop Info Page, Coffee Origin Info Page

## Materials

The album uses a combination of photo paper and cardstock. These two materials were chosen as a result of early testing feedback. Cardstock was chosen for its durability and hand feel, whereas photo paper was chosen as it facilitates a more immersive, high-quality image print. The clear plastic vinyl film was used to create the “window” that reveals the actors’ image from the postcard. These materials were chosen in conjunction for the best hand-feel, durability, and for their lightweight.

# Chapter 4

## Validation

The primary goal of this study was to propose a service design that would strengthen and grow the third-wave coffee community by introducing newcomers to specialty coffee shops and roasters around Tokyo. We began with a significant mission statement, “Create a new and sustainable coffee community for all,” in order to guide us towards a compelling goal and used the concepts of third-space theory, bridging and bonding connections theory, and sustainable marketing theories, to create the foundations of “people” and “place” to create sufficient motivation to get the average consumer to try new coffee and become “coffee connoisseurs.”

In the following section, we will discuss the perceived value of the Blooming Post to actors and stakeholders within the Coffee ecosystem, with particular attention given to the four main actor types as outlined in Chapter 3. We will first evaluate the results of the series of user tests implementing the “Blooming Post” postcard prototype with different levels of coffee consumption. From there, we will evaluate the perceived value to coffee shops and coffee producers as was gathered through both developmental discussions and post-use interviews with employees and management of Kopikalyan Japan and Seven Years Coffee in order to determine market viability and value to the existing supply chain from potential distributors point of view.

### 4.1. Evaluation of provided value to Actors

The previous chapter detailed the initial research, observations, and assumptions that went into establishing the final prototype design concepts for the Blooming Post. At the end of this process, the proposed value of the Blooming Post was to be a tool to allow coffee lovers to invite newcomers into a new coffee world,

utilizing existing social connections to build a bridge between coffee producers, coffee roasters, and shops to their dedicated consumer base and from that dedicated coffee drinker to their friends, family, and anyone else they might want to introduce to the world of coffee. At the same time, the Blooming Post serves to re-contextualize the coffee journey by putting the coffee producers and vital information about these actors at the forefront of the journey. In this section, we will verify the proposed value of the Blooming Post as was experienced in real-time by consumer tests in the field and further discuss emergent phenomena resulting from the prototype that could constitute novel value in the coffee space: people, places, connections to create a meaningful and educational change. Let us briefly break down the proposed values of the Blooming Post postcard as it relates to each key actor in the service.

- **Farmers:** To create new channels and methods for farmers to communicate information directly to consumers at critical points in the typical coffee user journey. To facilitate opportunities for consumers to patronize coffee shops that supply quality coffee from quality farms. Finally, to provide financial support to various organizations and initiatives directly supporting coffee farms and research in different parts of the world.
- **Coffee Shops:** To allow new channels for marketing and opportunities to reach new customers in a personalized manner. To impart what the coffee shop feels are the most important values for their brand to consumers. To support and further strengthen the bonds between the shop and its coffee producer partners. To allow coffee shops to engage with their existing customers in a new and engaging way.
- **Baristas:** The Blooming Post proposes the opportunity for baristas to build on their brand image and be presented at a broader level to build deeper connections with their coffee shops and clientele. As well as to share their stories and values with consumers and create a base of regular customers.
- **Consumers:** Coffee connoisseurs can share their experience through the creation of a postcard in collaboration with baristas and farmers and further imbued with their personalized message, pictures, and stickers to send

an invitation to come to share in a meaningful part of their life to someone they care about, while also supporting the people that make having their cup of coffee possible. The coffee connoisseur becomes more than just an end consumer but another step in bringing coffee from its origin to as many people as possible. For the Recipient, the Blooming Post creates an opportunity for them to try something new, learn something new, and new opportunities to connect with their friends, family, or loved ones.

The above values are built on a foundation of “People, Place, and Connection.” They are critical in propagating a culture of responsible, sustainable, and informed consumption among the general public concerning coffee. Through the powerful concept of bridging and bonding connections to facilitate meaningful, personal, and memorable experiences, the idea of breaking people out of their coffee-consuming habits and introducing them to new outlets is hoped to be achieved. The following sections will evaluate the experiences of each of these actors throughout a series of user tests performed with the established Blooming Post prototype.

### 4.1.1 Experiment Design

#### Sender Side

For the final design experiment, users were instructed to send the Blooming Postcard to whomever they liked. We observed and noted the user’s feelings while selecting the friends and what they hoped to accomplish by sending the blooming post. We also noted the feelings towards the process of sending the blooming post.

#### Recipient Side

Receiving users were observed in the process of receiving the postcard. When possible, observations were noted regarding the reactions to opening the card and discovering its contents. Finally, we would shadow the user on their trip to the coffee shop if they decided to visit and make further observations of how they naturally engage with the coffee shop and the barista during their visit. Finally, a post-use interview would be had with every recipient to understand better how they felt about the entire experience.

### 4.1.2 Test Site

#### Seven Years Coffee

The Blooming Post was designed in collaboration with two coffee shops in Tokyo. The two coffee shops were chosen to highlight the different types of third-wave coffee shops in the Tokyo coffee ecosystem. We could design with versatility and adaptability by developing the design in tandem with these two very different, yet still third-wave, coffee shops. The first shop is Seven Years Coffee. This shop is an independently owned and operated coffee shop managed by one person. It is small-scale and well-represents local-level, freelance coffee brewers in Tokyo.

#### Kopikalyan Japan

Kopikalyan Japan is a branch of a larger Indonesian coffee franchise headquartered in Jakarta. Kopikalyan represents a large-scale specialty coffee shop with a much broader customer base and output in Omote-Sando, a high-end shopping district in Tokyo.

## 4.2. User Evaluation

### 4.2.1 Scenario A: A Coffee Connoisseur and a Casual Coffee Drinker

Scenario A featured two users. Sender A and recipient A. These two users were a couple. Recipient A describes herself as a coffee connoisseur. Sender A regularly drinks coffee but is not a connoisseur. Sender A chose the Blooming Post for Kopikalyan Japan as it was nearby to where his partner lived. Sender A knew that his partner had a distinct appreciation for coffee and decided to send a Blooming Post to recipient A on that premise.

The Blooming Post service allows users to collaborate with baristas and farmers to send a personal message and invitation to someone else, thereby creating an opportunity for a new coffee experience for the recipient of the Blooming Post.



Figure 4.1 Recipient A at Kopikalyan Japan

In order to determine the emergence of “new coffee experiences,” let us examine statements gathered during Scenario A with Recipient A. Recipient A was a self-described coffee connoisseur who keeps a running list of coffee shops handy whenever she has an opportunity to go out or is trying to get some work done. Recipient A cares about more detailed attributes of coffee, such as flavor notes, and is always happy to learn about new good coffee in the area or to learn more about where her coffee comes from. In Recipient A’s Scenario, Recipient A was a recipient and had received a Blooming Post from her partner as a surprise gift. However, during the Scenario, an interesting observation was made. If we refer to the post-use interview with Recipient A, she remarks:

**Recipient A:** “At first, when I saw that I got this strange mail, I was not quite sure what to think. I saw someone that was called a farmer, and I saw a barista and was a bit confused. But then I saw it was from [Recipient A’s Partner], and I was really surprised and curious.”

Recipient A then went on to open the Blooming Post and read the message left by her partner.



**Recipient A:** “I was so happy when I read the message. I didn’t expect a personal message, and that one was very sweet. We do not have many excuses to send each other these kinds of physical letters, so I was very, very happy. I had a smile on my face reading the whole card.

The first results we can determine from this interview are that the first foundational concept of “People” was what left the biggest impression. Recipient A shared that things like physical letters are uncommon and that receiving a personal message is a nice gesture. The most decisive moment of impression occurred when the user read the personal message. In this case, the message was from their partner. The user described a sense of excitement and curiosity from seeing that the postcard was a gift from her partner. She then was happy to read the message from her partner and felt that it made her excited to continue to read the story on the opposite page of the Blooming Postcard. In this case, the Blooming Post successfully used an existing social connection to encourage engagement with the educational material of the Blooming Post.

Let us further examine the impressions left by the personal messages as purported by three other Recipients in the three other scenarios.

### **The Apparent Value of Gift-giving:**

It becomes clear that having a personalized message and gift from someone the user is close to is essential. This importance alone is not particularly surprising. What is more interesting is how that feeling of care affected Recipient A’s experience with the remaining contents of the Blooming Post. Once again, referring to the research of Koleva et al., we can understand that physical gift-giving can create a more engaging experience for both givers and Recipients, with particular respect to the importance of effortful, visible, and pleasurable interactions [26].

### **4.2.2 Scenario B: Two Casual Coffee Drinkers**

**Scenario B** featured yet another couple. Both **Sender B** and **Recipient B** were “casual coffee drinkers.” The users in this Scenario both lived

**together, and Sender B felt that the Blooming Post could be an interesting experience for the pair.**

In scenario B, Sender B sent a Blooming Postcard to their partner as an invitation for a date. This was a new, emergent use case for the Blooming Post, highlighting the freedom that allowing the use of personalized messages to others provides for users to create their own contexts. This feature is reflected in the design philosophy of the Service-Dominant Logic framework. [6] In this Scenario, we captured the moment of Recipient B receiving, opening, and reading the Blooming post for the first time.

In Scenario B, Sender B left a personal message and requested to insert a sticker since that is a common and familiar way for her and her partner to communicate.

We captured a genuine change in the users' expression, from a neutral expression to a smile and joy as they read the words written primarily for them by their partners. This joyful expression persisted throughout the rest of their interaction with the Blooming Post, as they felt that their partner had gone through the trouble of sending them such a nice, physical gift, and they wanted to respect the gesture and appreciate the gift by examining the contents more closely.

For more insight into the potential validation of the values proposed by Blooming Post service, we will again refer to the post-use interview, this time with both Sender B and Recipient B.

**Recipient B:** "My first thought was that the mail looked different and maybe nicer than the usual mail I receive. You know, because it is not really very often that you get something that isn't spam. It looked interesting enough to set it apart from all the other random stuff in the mail. Then I noticed it was from [Sender B], and I realized that 'oh, this is for me.' I really liked that it was a physical letter. It just felt more thoughtful and like there was a lot of care put into it. So reading it, I got excited."

Once again, the personal message included with the Blooming Post generated a real sense of connection and excitement that the author feels is vital to creating genuine interest in new topics.

About the coffee-specific content, Recipient B continues...

**Recipient B:** “I appreciated the breakdown of the tasting notes and where the coffee comes from. I never really understood all the tasting and all that more advanced stuff because I normally just drink whatever coffee I can find. But it was cool to see the person responsible for producing the coffee and more about where it comes from. It adds to the feeling that the coffee and the [Blooming Post Card] are really cared for. I never really thought that people cared so much about this kind of stuff, and I would like to visit a coffee shop where it’s a bit more personal, and people put that care into what they are doing.

I also thought it was cool to get to know what is the barista’s philosophy behind choosing the coffee. Things like why they chose that specific coffee. It makes it feel very different than the bigger coffee chains, and again I really never put in the time to learn that much about coffee before. I’m excited to go try it out with [Sender B].”

This is an example of how the existing personal connection has built a bridge that has allowed Recipient B to develop a more profound interest in coffee. In particular, Recipient B cited the presence of the people involved and how much care they have put into the coffee as points of interest for him.

Now we will see the response from Sender B.

**Sender B:** “When I learned about the Blooming Post, I just thought that, ya, this would be a nice date idea. And I really like that it gives me a chance to go out with my SO in some special way that isn’t a birthday or something fancy. Also, because we live together, this is like a new way of communicating that was a nice surprise. Recently we don’t really plan out dates, so this is really nice. Also, when we were going to the coffee shop, it really felt like an adventure! Actually, I really liked that the coffee shop was further away than what we are used to.”

Once Sender B had experienced the coffee shop, she had this to say regarding potentially inviting others:

“This would also be so nice because I feel like me and my friends always go nice places and send each other pictures and say ‘hey, we should go here, we should go here!’ but then we forget about it and most of the time we don’t go. This makes it more formal and organized while also being really personal and casual. It’s a nice feeling.”

### **“We Should Go Here Some Time”**

Sender B alluded to a prevailing situation wherein friends will tell each other about fun and exciting restaurants, cafes, or bars that they have been to, commonly sending a picture, but then inevitably; the plans get lost in the plethora of daily life tasks that need to be attended to, leaving the potential plans to the side lost and forgotten. First, we will break down the foundational issues that lead to this common problem, and then we will acknowledge how the Blooming Post addresses each of those issues inherently in its design. In researching this issue further, we found that this issue arises out of two primary conditions.

- Lack of Commitment
- Abundance of Options

#### **Lack of Commitment**

In response to the fundamental issue of Lack of Commitment, the Blooming Post solves this in two ways. The first way is through a personalized message. The Sender imbues the postcard with their care, time, and effort. This adds a sense of commitment and effort that the recipient feels, as shown in the previously discussed Scenario. Recipients have commonly expressed interest in visiting the place because their friend specifically invited them in a slightly more formal manner. Said formality is an important feature distinguishing the Blooming Post invite from a standard text or verbal invite.

Blooming Post addresses the issue of Lack of Commitment by front-loading a purchase into the postcard. Since a cup of coffee is already paid for through the card, it increases the opportunity cost to the recipient of not visiting the coffee shop.

### **Abundance of Options**

In response to the issue of an Abundance of Options, the Blooming Post addresses this by elevating the option introduced by the Blooming Post above the other informal options through the packaging and gift-based design of the service. With the distinction provided through the design of the Blooming Post, people no longer need to decide between all of the different places they may have been recommended or have saved in their locations list. The blooming post offloads this effort onto the card and allows users to go and enjoy themselves.

### **Coffee Shop and Barista Interaction**

Once at Seven Years Coffee, Sender B and Recipient B met the barista featured on the Blooming Postcard in person. Because of the information provided by the Blooming Post, the pair had prior context for what to expect and knew precisely what they wanted to ask. This gave the pair a jumping-off point to begin an interaction and a conversation with the barista. This experience, at Seven Years Coffee, in Contrast with Scenario A's test site, Kopikalyan, showcased the Blooming Post's ability for the Coffee Shop and Barista to establish their brand identity to newcomers who have never been before. The setting of Seven Years Coffee is very compact and provides an intimate, cozy experience where customers are encouraged to interact with the barista. When compared to other customers who visited the shop without any prior context, the Blooming Post users were more easily able to

Sender B had this to say about their experience:

**Sender B** "I really liked that place. It was so unusual to be able to talk to the barista and actually have a conversation. I didn't know there were actually places in Tokyo where you could do that. I would love to go back there, and I also want to know if there are any coffee shops that are closer to where I live that have that same kind of atmosphere."

From Hashimoto-san's perspective, he was grateful that the pair had taken some time to learn about what he and David had done together to make that



Figure 4.2 Recipient B and Ryo Hashimoto of Seven Years Coffee

coffee available. Hashimoto-san is usually very busy, either working as a wholesale roaster, fulfilling roles at a more extensive coffee shop in Tokyo, or preparing for his own shop, Seven Years. This means he has little extra time to do things like marketing campaigns that go beyond Instagram announcements. So giving another type of “word of mouth” channel that allows his coffee shop to grow its customer base is a welcome addition.

### **4.3. Value to Producers: Creating New Opportunities to be Known**

The heightened awareness of producers provided by the Blooming Post has brought significant value to the producers. This recognition sets direct trade coffee apart from other coffee types and motivates producers and coffee shops to develop their direct partnerships further.

This awareness means that producers’ hard work and dedication to producing high-quality beans are acknowledged and appreciated. They are no longer anonymous suppliers in the coffee supply chain but are recognized as entities responsible for the distinctive beans used in direct trade coffee. This recognition



Figure 4.3 Ryo Hashimoto, Barista/Owner, Seven Years Coffee

can boost the market confidence in their product and reinforces their commitment to maintaining their beans' quality and unique characteristics.

Moreover, this increased awareness has broader implications for producers' ability to market their products in the future. Farmers can differentiate their beans in the specialty coffee market by establishing a brand and cultivating recognize-ability among consumers. This distinction enables them to establish a reputation for consistently delivering high-quality coffee to their partners, which can lead to increased demand and better pricing for their products.

For coffee shops, the awareness generated by the Blooming Post helps them in multiple ways. Firstly, it allows them to offer a unique selling point to their customers. By highlighting the origin and the specific farm or producer behind the beans, coffee shops can provide a story and a connection that adds value to the coffee-drinking experience. This storytelling aspect enhances the coffee shop's overall perception and helps build customer loyalty.

Secondly, the recognize-ability of the farms and distinct beans from consumers offers coffee shops a competitive advantage in the market. With consumers becoming more educated and discerning about coffee, increased recognition through the Blooming Post allows coffee shops to position themselves as purveyors of high-quality, ethically-sourced coffee. This positioning can attract a dedicated

customer base who appreciate the transparency and traceability of the coffee's origin.

## 4.4. Value to Coffee Shops: Growing the Coffee Community and the Market

During the design process of the Blooming Post, it was crucial to ensure that it would allow the coffee shop's ability to conduct its business. The minimum value for the coffee shops was thus clearly defined as the Blooming Post needed to be seamlessly integrated into their operations. The implementation of the Blooming Post needed to not impede the workflow, efficiency, and customer experience in the coffee shops.

While one of the initial objectives of the Blooming Post was to provide a nominal financial bonus for coffee shops and farmers, additional value beyond this was discovered throughout the process. Seven Years Coffee and Kopikalyan Japan experienced the benefits firsthand as they gained new repeat customers.

As customers were introduced to the coffee shops through the Blooming Post, they became attracted to the concept and the unique experience of third-wave coffee. This initial introduction acted as a gateway for these customers to explore the coffee shops further. As a result, Seven Years Coffee and Kopikalyan Japan saw an increase in their customer base, with Sender B and Recipient B from the Blooming Post becoming regular patrons. Furthermore, these new customers began attending independent events hosted by Barista Ryo, creating a larger community of coffee connoisseurs.

The Blooming Post, beyond its intended purpose, served as a marketing tool that generated interest and curiosity among potential customers. It effectively introduced individuals to the coffee shop's atmosphere, products, and the unique experience it provided. By delivering a compelling first impression, the Blooming Post attracted customers eager to explore more and become a part of the coffee shop's community.

By successfully leveraging bridging social capital between coffee connoisseurs and casual coffee drinkers, it helped introduce newcomers to the third place, fostering customer loyalty and a more extensive customer base and creating a sense



of community around the coffee shops. By introducing customers to the coffee shop's offerings and events, the Blooming Post catalyzed future business growth and customer engagement.

## 4.5. A New Coffee Ecosystem

The Blooming Post creates an ecosystem that sustainably provides new values to each member of the service. Consumers are able to strengthen their social bonds and gain important industry knowledge all while enjoying delicious coffee and vibrant atmospheres. Coffee shops are able to better market and develop their brands as sustainable coffee providers while also reaching a new clientele that may have never been inclined to try a specialty coffee had they not been explicitly invited. Likewise, coffee farmers and producers are able to market their coffee directly to consumers, increasing awareness and demand for high-quality coffee across the industry.

These values are all realized simultaneously throughout the use of the Blooming Post service, and are propagated in the event that recipients of the Blooming Post enjoy their experience and wish to pass it along to even more potential customers. In this way, the Blooming Post design serves to improve the current coffee consumption landscape by creating a harmonious way for each of the three primary actors within the industry to engage with and learn about each other. The social and intentional nature of the design enable new contexts and opportunities for consumers to enjoy coffee in a novel way that encourages appreciations and more sustainable consumption. Ideally, these new contexts can inspire long-term behavioural changes with regard to coffee awareness and sustainable consumption.

# Chapter 5

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to design a method to grow the third-wave coffee community, create new coffee connoisseurs and increase the level of knowledge surrounding coffee among consumers. This was meant to create more ethical coffee consumers and improve the coffee market for producers. The design focused on extending the act of buying coffee beyond the traditional isolated experience of simply going out and buying a coffee by using a service-design framework. Coffee consumers often have memorable experiences and become part of their coffee shop communities, befriending baristas or other regular customers. To this end, the author endeavored to construct a service design that utilizes these concepts of connoisseurship, third-place, and bridging social capital to extend these memorable experiences along to the coffee connoisseurs' social connections. The Blooming Post service design outlined in this study is a mail-based gift service that connects farmers to baristas to consumers and lets customers at participating coffee shops add their story alongside the coffee stories of the partnered farmer and barista to send a personal message along to whomever they wish. The postcard, encompassing these stories, is mailed to the recipient, beginning a new coffee journey through an invitation from the Sender, the Barista, and the Farmer. The blooming post transforms what would before be a singular transaction into a social bridge that invites newcomers into a new third place where they can cultivate community, learn more about coffee, create more memorable coffee experiences, and potentially invite more people into the fold. The final prototype for the Blooming Post was reached through iteration, interviews with industry professionals, as well as experimentation with and observation of coffee consumers.

Through the experimentation phase, the author found that the Blooming Post succeeded in encouraging newcomers to try ethically sourced direct trade coffee shops, creating new interest in both third-wave coffee shops as well as in informa-

tion about coffee farming regions and farmers. This is a good result as it suggests that over time, through the use of the blooming post, more and more casual coffee drinkers may be willing to alter their consumption behavior to include more ethically sourced coffee, as well as be willing to spend premiums on coffee. We also observed new repeat customers and a generally positive disposition to third-wave coffee that was not present in the casual coffee consumer prior to using the Blooming Post. There was also evidence that the Blooming Post addressed consumer side issues of choice. Issues of lack of commitment and abundance of options can be addressed when a suggestion is made through an effortful action such as gift-giving when compared to less effortful alternatives. These revelations could lead to more revenue for third-wave coffee shops and the coffee farms that supply them in the long term. As well it can encourage further development and maintenance of these direct trade relationships in the long term as more and more coffee consumers become more able to identify coffee through the specific people that prepare it, rather than very broad classifications such as country of origin.

## 5.1. Limitations and Future Work

Working with currently operating businesses presented certain limitations that impacted the full deployment of potential features of the Blooming Post in a live setting. These limitations had implications for exploring the pricing structure and measuring sustained behavioral change over time.

One major limitation was the inability to thoroughly explore the potential pricing structure of the Blooming Post. Since the project was conducted with existing coffee shops, it was challenging to determine the true price that would be representative of the product in a real-world scenario. To address this challenge, users were surveyed using a standardized price structure that may not accurately reflect the actual pricing determined by participating coffee shops. The variation in factors such as location, market dynamics, and individual business strategies would influence the final pricing structure. Therefore, the survey results might not capture the full range of pricing possibilities or the impact that different pricing strategies could have on consumer behavior.

Another limitation was the inability to measure sustained behavioral change

over time. Due to time restrictions, the observation of consumer behavior could not be conducted longitudinally to assess whether there were significant and lasting changes in coffee choices or cafe preferences. Understanding the long-term effects of the Blooming Post on consumer behavior and education would require a more extended period of observation and data collection. This limitation prevented a comprehensive evaluation of the durability and effectiveness of the Blooming Post design in shaping consumer behavior and preferences. Future research could do well in performing a long-term measurement of the growth of coffee communities, recording growth in the consumer base of participating coffee shops.

Future research would benefit from fully implementing the Blooming Post as a complete product in a live business setting for a significant duration. This would allow for a more accurate exploration of pricing structures tailored to individual coffee shops and provide an opportunity to track sustained changes in consumer behavior over time. By conducting a more extensive study, researchers would be able to assess the long-term impact of the Blooming Post on consumer choices, cafe preferences, and coffee education, providing a more comprehensive understanding of its effectiveness.

## 5.2. Possibilities Beyond Coffee

The social nature of the Blooming Post means that the core design can be repurposed for other consumer goods. For example, the chocolate industry shares many similarities, and in many cases even farms, with the coffee industry. Those wishing to grow awareness and community centered in specialty chocolate could find the Blooming Post to be an easily adaptable design. The tea industry is another clear possible extended application of the Blooming Post design.

Apart from consumable goods, the clothing industry could also value from increasing consumer awareness of and engagement in the sourcing for the materials of their clothes. Fostering clothing material connoisseurship among a broad consumer base could be an excellent way to combat irresponsible supply chain management that is rampant in the fashion industry.

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