



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Module: Strategic Management

(LCMB7003)

**Strategic Position and Competitive Advantage of
Starbucks**
in the United Kingdom Branded Coffee-Shop Market
A Strategic Consultancy Report to the Board of Directors

Student Name:	Kinjal Rama Bokhariya
Student ID Number:	2529401
Programme:	Master of Business Administration
Module:	Strategic Management
Module Code:	LCMB7003
Lecturer:	Amare Desta / Zulf Khan
Assignment Title:	Assessment component – Individual report
Word Count:	5000
Submission Date:	12th August 2026

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1 Executive Summary

The aim of this consultancy report is to analyse the strategic position of Starbucks in the United Kingdom (UK) branded coffee-shop market and to suggest actions to recover and improve Starbucks competitive advantage. Despite being one of the UK's most recognisable and largest coffee chains, Starbucks saw a 4% decrease in revenues to £525.6m and an operating loss of £27.5m in FY24, as a result of a combination of cost-of-living pressures, tough competition, and reputational headwinds (Starbucks, 2025; World Coffee Portal, 2025).

Using PESTEL, VRIO, Porter's 5 Forces, SWOT or Ansoff's Matrix, the analysis reveals the strengths of Starbucks lie in the fact that it is a brand name that is global, its size and digital presence, and the experiential "third place" model which are resources that are valuable, rare and partially imitable in a crowded market. The report suggests that the differentiation strategy with premium experience and with digital convenience is the most appropriate business-level strategy that Starbucks can implement, and its approach is market penetration (Back to Starbucks experience reset) and product development. Differential recommendations include speeding up service-speed and store-refurbishment efforts, increase drive-thrus and suburban outlets, and further personalisation via the app. Implementing risks such as margin pressure, execution capacity and reputational volatility are mitigated by a phased rollout and Balanced Scorecard governance. The report ends with a reflective section in the form of an account that is organised using Gibbs' (1988) cycle.

2 Introduction and Organisational Context

This report takes the perspective of a strategic management consultant and gives an analysis of Starbucks' strategic position in the UK branded coffee shop market and identifies actions that will improve Starbucks' competitive advantage. For this analysis the criteria outlined in the assessment brief have been adhered to with a single organisation within a single geographical market: Starbucks' UK retail business is selected as the organisation in order to give sufficient depth of company and industry data (Starbucks, 2025). To bridge the gap between theory and practice, the report relies on a variety of reliable sources, including seminal strategy literature (Barney, 1991; Porter, 1985; Kaplan and Norton, 1992), recent peer-reviewed research on Starbucks and the frameworks used (Benzaghta et al., 2021; Dimitrakaki, 2022; Li, 2022; Ren et al., 2023), and current industry and company data.

2.1 Company Overview, History and Business Model

Since its founding in 1971 in Seattle, Starbucks Corporation has grown into the world's largest Coffeehouse chain with over 40,000 stores existing worldwide (Starbucks Corporation, 2026). It was first introduced into the UK in 1998 when it acquired the Seattle Coffee Company, and has been trading for more than 25 years and comfortably passed the five-year trading timeframe as recommended in the brief. In total, the UK estate reached 1,240 stores at the end of FY24, having added 100 stores, including the acquisition of its biggest UK franchisee 23.5 Degrees (Verdict Food Service, 2025).

The mission is “To inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighbourhood at a time” and the long-lasting strategic notion of Starbucks is the “third place” – a cozy environment in between home and work (Starbucks Corporation, 2025). The business model is a premium and experience based differentiation model: Starbucks has a premium pricing strategy and claims that the product price reflects the quality of the products, the consistency of the brand, and the ambience of the stores, as well as the fact that its digital world, underpinned by its Starbucks Rewards loyalty programme and mobile ordering, is a market leader (Johnson et al., 2020). Revenue comes from company-operated stores as well as stores that are licensed, with more recently the drive-through format and convenience via apps.

2.2 Industry, Competitors and Market Position

The Starbucks brand is part of a UK coffee-shop industry with a value of around £5.3 billion, and more than 10,000 outlets, which have grown by 3.6% in outlets over the past year (World Coffee Portal, 2025). The market is dominated by Costa Coffee with approximately 38% of the number of brand outlets, followed by Starbucks with approximately 18.7% and in constant growth, Caffè Nero with around 9.1% and Pret A Manger with 7.0% (Lumina Intelligence

2026). The price war is spreading to both ends, as value-focused brands like Greggs and McDonald's McCafé drive a competitive price front, while premium brands like Gail's and Blank Street Coffee challenge the different end (The Week, 2025).

Starbucks' advantage, therefore, is that it is a powerful brand with a large UK presence - but one whose FY24 operating loss of £27.5m illustrated the fragility of a premium brand amid a cost-of-living squeeze, and which was hindered by "widely discussed misperceptions" in the Middle East that adversely affected footfall (Starbucks, 2025). In fact, the combination of brand, experience and quality are key to Starbucks' position of being different from its competitors and not the price, but it is an ongoing challenge to its strategy that is driven by imitative movements and value focus (Dimitrakaki, 2022). This report solves the strategic issue of getting this saturated market back on track for profitable growth.

3 External and Internal Environmental Analysis

This section critically examines Starbucks' macro-environment (PESTEL) and micro-level resource base (VRIO) before synthesising the findings in a SWOT analysis. The frameworks are complementary: PESTEL and Porter's outside-in view identify opportunities and threats, whereas the resource-based view offers an inside-out perspective on strengths and weaknesses (Barney, 1991; Johnson et al., 2020).

3.1 External Analysis: PESTEL

In this section, the macro-environment (PESTEL) and micro-level resource base (VRIO) of Starbucks are analyzed in a critical manner, and the results are combined to complete a SWOT analysis. The framework of PESTEL can be complemented by that of Porter's outside-in approach because opportunities and threats are analyzed, while the resource-based view is an inside-out approach to strengths and weaknesses (Barney, 1991; Johnson et al., 2020). 2.1 External Analysis: PESTEL PESTEL analysis is used to categorise the analysis of political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal forces that influence an organisation's macro-environment (Johnson et al., 2020). The most material factors for Starbucks UK are summarised in table 1 below.

Table 1: PESTEL analysis of Starbucks' UK operating environment

Factor	Key considerations and evidence	Net effect
Political	Geopolitical sensitivity (Middle East boycotts) affected UK footfall; scrutiny of multinational tax practices raises reputational and policy risk (Starbucks, 2025).	Threat

Factor	Key considerations and evidence	Net effect
Economic	Cost-of-living pressure, high interest rates and weak footfall depressed demand; input-cost and wage inflation compressed margins into a UK loss (Starbucks, 2025).	Threat
Social	Enduring UK coffee-shop culture and demand for experiential “third places”, alongside viral menu trends (matcha, cold, protein) that reshape preferences (World Coffee Portal, 2025).	Opportunity
Technological	Growth of mobile ordering, loyalty apps, AI and voice-ordering tools reshapes convenience and personalisation (Business Chief, 2026).	Opportunity
Environmental	Rising expectations on ethical sourcing, cup waste and net-zero commitments create both compliance cost and differentiation potential (Starbucks Corporation, 2025).	Opportunity / Threat
Legal	Employment, food-safety, consumer-protection and UK data-protection (UK GDPR) obligations increase compliance requirements.	Threat

Two forces dominate. The economic environment was the main, near-term risk; a cost-of-living squeeze and weak consumer confidence reduced footfall, and margins were squeezed by input-cost and wage inflation, leading to an operating loss in the UK for FY24 (Starbucks, 2025). Second, the social and technological trends present the biggest opportunity: UK coffee-shop culture is a long-standing reality that last year saw viral menu changes and the rapid uptake of app ordering, offering a way for Starbucks to reconnect with customers using experience and digital convenience (World Coffee Portal, 2025; Business Chief, 2026). This political aspect is especially relevant, there is an unmistakable correlation between the perception of geopolitical events and the numbers of users: the political perception directly translates to revenue (Starbucks, 2025).

Importantly, these forces should not just be listed, but each must be considered and the strategic relevance of a factor will depend on how likely it is to occur and the impact that it will have on the specific organisation (Johnson et al., 2020). Starbucks has been feeling the economic slowdown, but that's a temporary phenomenon: the social trend towards experiences rather than products is very real; the technological trend – digital convenience – is very real. The short-term recovery is a painful blow, but a board must respond wisely and invest in the long-term drivers – principles of the turnaround plan outlined in Section 4. The environmental side is a two-way street: the higher the expectation for sustainability, the higher the price, but for sure,

there's a good reason behind why the premium brand should justify that price. The environmental side is a double-edged sword: the more that people want to be sustainable, the more expensive it will be, but for sure, there's a good reason for the premium brand to justify that price.

3.2 Internal Analysis: VRIO

According to the resource-based view, SCA is achieved by resources that are Valuable, Rare, costly to Imitate and supported by Organisation to exploit (Barney, 1991). Barney's (1991) groundbreaking work moved beyond industry structure to focus on the resource heterogeneity of the firm, and the VRIO test is still widely used to assess the sustainability of competitive advantage (Johnson et al., 2020). The VRIO framework is applied to the key resources of Starbucks in Table 2.

Table 2: VRIO analysis of Starbucks' key resources and capabilities

Resource / capability	V	R	I	O	Competitive implication
Globally iconic premium brand	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sustained competitive advantage
Digital ecosystem (Rewards & mobile app)	Yes	Partial	Partial	Yes	Temporary advantage
“Third place” experiential store model	Yes	No	No	Yes	Competitive parity
Scale & global sourcing / supply chain	Yes	Yes	Partial	Yes	Temporary advantage
Human capital (barista skill & culture)	Yes	Partial	Partial	Partial	Temporary advantage
Prime real-estate & drive-thru network	Yes	Partial	Partial	Yes	Temporary advantage

The analysis is based on the fact that one resource is easily visible to satisfy all four VRIO criteria and has the potential to provide continued competitive advantage: The globally iconic premium brand, valuable, rare, costly to imitate, well organised to exploit (Barney, 1991). Empirical evidence supports this diagnosis: In a structural-equation study of the Starbucks brand, Ren, Choe and Song (2023) show that service quality and customer experience is what leads to brand equity, which then leads to brand personality and brand reputation, thereby confirming that Starbucks' advantage is one built on experience, not material assets alone. The

digital ecosystem and scale provides temporary benefits, but potentially significant, as other competitors like Costa and Pret are also accelerating their digital investments to build similar apps and loyalty offerings, which will slowly become less unique over time. Notably, what was Starbucks' mantra of “the third place” format is now a parity: the experience café, which is a specialty of Starbucks and its owners, is widely simulated on the market. The diagnosis is strategic in nature because it must seek to explain why Starbucks cannot go by the ambience alone as their advantage, but rather renew it by providing good service, personalisation via digital tools and brand relevance, which is the focus of the recommended strategy (Ren et al., 2023).

3.3 SWOT Analysis

The external and internal analysis is combined and presented as a SWOT matrix in figure 1. Although SWOT is still one of the most common strategic-planning tools, the literature warns that, when applied superficially, listing, SWOT can be ineffective, and a systematic review conducted by Benzaghta et al. (2021) found that SWOT was best used in combination with other analytical frameworks and to support rather than supplant strategic judgment. The matrix below is designed to reveal strategic fit – alignment of internal strengths to external opportunities and to neutralise interaction of internal weaknesses and external threats (Benzaghta et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2020).

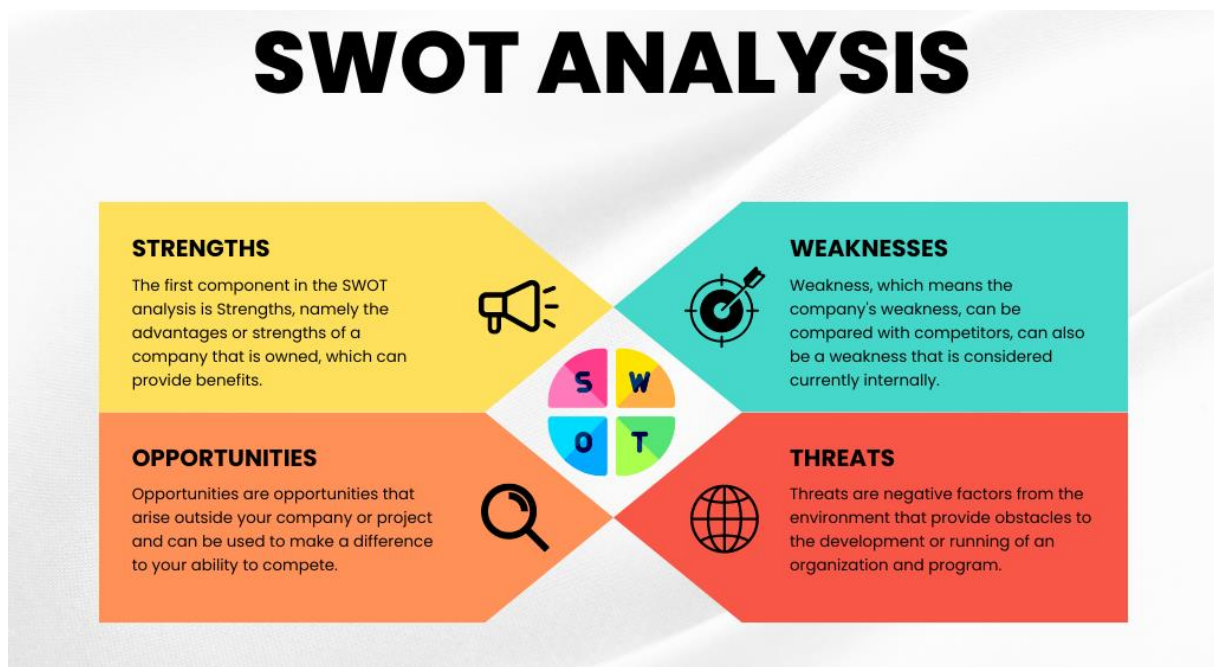


Figure 1 **SWOT analysis – Starbucks (UK market), 2024/25 (Starbucks, 2025; World Coffee Portal, 2025; The Week, 2025)**

The key strategic takeaway is a direct fit of the brand and digital ecosystem to opportunities for experience-led differentiation, Menu innovation and App personalisation. Starbucks'

preposterous pricing and strong price competition from Greggs and McCafé in a cost-of-living crisis, coupled with a bit of brand confusion. A closer look reveals that there are some things that are two-sided: the premium brand is a strength, but when consumers drop down, it's a drawback; the experiential store model adds to that expense, and the speed and convenience it offers is becoming a stronger consideration to customers. It is important to grasp this duality, which is the reason why the recommended approach is not to defend experience digitally and quickly, but to improve the premium differentiation. The judgement or level 7 diagnosis (Johnson et al, 2020) is contingent and depends on the situation as opposed to a static inventory.

3.4 Competitive Positioning

The Figures 2 follow the Starbucks UK revenue and operating result and competitive positioning by outlet share, respectively.

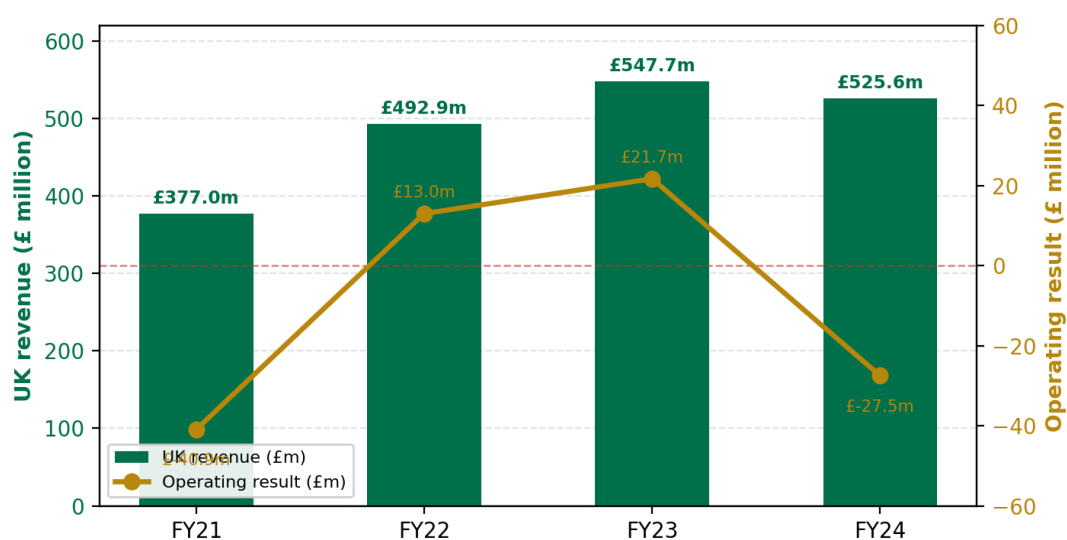


Figure 2 Starbucks UK revenue and operating result, FY21–FY24 (FY23–FY24 figures from Starbucks, 2025; earlier years indicative)

The trend shows robust recovery from the pandemic and a FY24 turnaround, with revenue down 4% and the operation experiencing a loss of £27.5 million (Starbucks, 2025) compared with a profit of £21.7 million in FY23. However, as can be seen in figure 3, Starbucks has maintained its market share at 18.7% despite this, holding the second position behind Costa (World Coffee Portal, 2025; Lumina Intelligence, 2026). The positioning picture is thus one of rapid expansion but squeezed profitability — growth in stores has yet to pay off in the UK and underlines the need for the strategy outlined below.

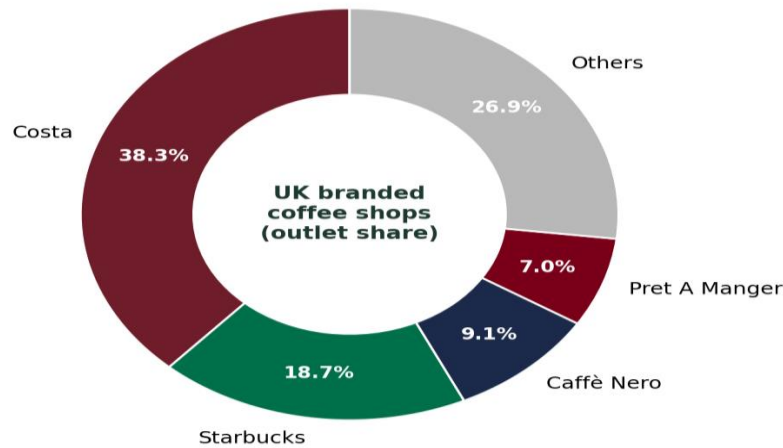


Figure 3 UK branded coffee shop market – outlet share, 2025 (Lumina Intelligence, 2026; World Coffee Portal, 2025)

4 A Holistic View: CSR and the Balanced Scorecard

4.1 Corporate Social Responsibility and Strategic Alignment

Starbucks' corporate social responsibility (CSR) approach focuses on ethical coffee sourcing, environmental stewardship and community investment, which are expressed in its “Coffee and Farmer Equity (C.A.F.E.) Practices”, its “Carbon, Water and Waste” reduction initiatives and its stated goal to become a “resource-positive” company (Starbucks Corporation, 2025). From a shared-value perspective of Porter and Kramer (2011), this agenda is fairly connected with business goals: ethical sourcing is essential for maintaining quality and continuity in the supply chain that the premium proposition relies on, whilst sustainability credentials lend a stronger competitive edge to values-driven consumers. Additionally, Starbucks has CSR embedded in its brand positioning and uses it as a strategic tool to create a positive corporate image, which is evident from the discourse analysis of Starbucks' CSR reporting performed by Li (2022).

However, the alignment is incomplete and is real risk. First, Starbucks' CSR credibility has been undermined by the persistent tax-perception issues that have dogged it and by labour relations conflicts regarding unionisation, which have the potential to damage a company's ethical image that CSR is intended to convey (PowerCommerce, 2025). Second, perceived values and geopolitics can have as big an impact on revenue as price or product for a global brand, as evidenced by the FY24 boycotts (Starbucks, 2025). A consultant's job is thus to flag that CSR is not a simple reputational accessory for Starbucks, but indeed a risk-management role: the credibility gap between what it says and what the public believes is a competitive risk. The strategy is to translate CSR into an auditable, measurable and clear communication: Make sustainability a reality of differentiation, instead of a subject for criticism. This requirement is

a natural progression to the Balanced Scorecard which incorporates such non-financial goals into the heart of performance measurement.

4.2 The Balanced Scorecard

The Balanced Scorecard (Kaplan and Norton, 1992) is a structured collection of financial and non-financial measures for four perspectives, that offset the financial-only-approach to control. Figure 4 shows the relationship between the four perspectives and the vision and strategy of Starbucks UK, while Table 3 provides an overview of the objectives, key performance indicators (KPIs), targets and initiatives related to the "Back to Starbucks" turnaround.



Figure 4 Balanced Scorecard – Starbucks UK, Kaplan and Norton (1992)

Table 3: Balanced Scorecard – objectives, KPIs, targets and initiatives for Starbucks UK

Perspective	Objective	Key performance indicators	Target	Initiatives
Financial	Restore profitable UK growth	Revenue growth; operating margin; store profitability	Return UK operation to operating profit by FY26	Cost control; refurbishment ROI discipline
Customer	Deliver a superior coffeehouse experience	Net Promoter Score; brand-perception scores; loyalty membership	Improve service speed & perception; grow app members	'Back to Starbucks' reset; Green Apron service

Internal Processes	Faster, simpler, consistent operations	Order accuracy & wait time; menu SKUs; refurb completion	Cut wait times; simplify menu; refurbish estate	Staffing investment; menu simplification; store redesign
Learning & Growth	Skilled, engaged partners & digital capability	Partner engagement & retention; training hours; digital-skills index	Improve retention; upskill in service & data	Barista training; wellbeing; AI/voice-order tools

The scorecard illustrates the strategic causality of investing in the learning-and-growth perspective (barista training, digital skills and Green Apron service programme) leads to improved internal processes (faster and more consistent service), which strengthens the customer experience (better perception and loyalty), and, ultimately, to financial recovery (profitable growth). This sequence of cause and effect is exactly what Kaplan and Norton (1992) envisioned and it more or less reflects the operational approach to the "Back to Starbucks" strategy that focuses on service and experience as the path to return to sales growth (Food Business News, 2025). The scorecard also contains the governance structure in which the recommendations in Section 4 can be tracked; it helps to ensure that the CSR and experience targets are not aspirational performance drivers.

5 Strategic choices and implementation

5.1 Business-Level Strategic Options

The basic business-level options of cost leadership, differentiation and focus are presented in Porter's (1985) generic strategies. Starbucks is clearly a differentiator – it plays the brand, experience and quality game, not price (Johnson et al., 2020). A strategy of cost leadership gets rapidly scratched off — it would put Starbucks in a price war with Greggs and McCafé as the lower-cost players, and the premium brand value that is the most defensible asset it has (Barney, 1991) would be lost. Also, a narrow focus strategy doesn't fit with Starbucks' scale and prevalence. The strategic question in reality is not about differentiation but how to redo it, rendering it defensible against value and premium challengers.

The recommended strategy is a "premium experience and digital convenience" differentiation, which is an in-store "third place" experience reshaped by the rapidism, customisation and loyalty aspects of digital. This directly takes advantage of the VRIO verified brand advantage

and helps overcome the parity issue highlighted in Section 2 by bringing together the experience and convenience which is difficult to match by a pure value chain and small premium competitor. It is supported by empirical evidence, as the quality of interaction and customer experience is the main contributor to Starbucks' brand equity, and the physical environment is much less statistically significant, indicating that investments in service and experiential interaction have the highest strategic return, compared to investments in the physical environment alone (Ren et al., 2023).

5.2 Validation through Porter's Five Forces

The Five Forces model of Porter (1985) is used to look at the attractiveness of the industry and the sustainability of the chosen strategy. The forces facing the UK branded coffee-shop industry are summarised in Figure 5.



Figure 5 Porter's Five Forces – UK branded coffee shop industry (Porter, 1985; World Coffee Portal, 2025)

In an overcrowded market of value chains, brands and premium players, competitive rivalry is extremely high (The Week, 2025). The buyers have a high power since there are negligible switching costs and complete price transparency. There is a risk of competition — there's always another option, such as home coffee machines, supermarket coffee and cheaper coffee chains, particularly when a family is facing a cost-of-living crisis. New entrants are moderate, with low capital needs and numerous independent and challenger cafés, but it is much more difficult to reach Starbucks level of scale and brand. Starbucks' scale sourcing reduces the power of suppliers, which is low to moderate. The Five Forces validate the fact that the brand is the primary protection Starbucks has: An experience and digital differentiation strategy that

decreases buyer price-sensitivity and increases switching costs (through loyalty lock-in) is the strongest answer in an industry as competitive as this.

5.3 Growth Direction: Ansoff's Matrix

Ansoff's (1957) matrix plots growth opportunities against the two categories of products and markets. Figure 6 lays out the possible realistic scenarios for Starbucks UK.



Figure 6 Ansoff's Matrix – Starbucks UK growth options (Ansoff, 1957)

The suggested emphasis is market penetration (primary) and product development (secondary). Market penetration — capturing back customers and visits in the existing UK market via the "Back to Starbucks" experience reset, faster service and loyalty engagement — directly leverages Starbucks' brand strength at lowest risk (Food Business News, 2025). Product development — including the creation of cold, matcha and protein-based menu items, as well as app functionality like voice and personalised ordering — further enhances the value proposition and reflects current trends (Business Chief, 2026). Drive-thru and suburban outlets can be an effective way of reaching new markets at a lower cost, as high street traffic declines. Diversification (e.g. at home coffee ranges) is mentioned but not considered as a priority and is associated with higher risk. Each successive quadrant of Ansoff's "eleven quadrants" will be more risky, and Starbucks should focus its strategy on the low-risk quadrant of penetration to ensure cash generation does not be lost, and should consider product/market development as a carefully managed, staged bet.

5.4 Proposed Plan and Anticipated Results

The suggested positioning of the premium-experience-plus-digital differentiation is to be achieved through market penetration and product development and to be managed based on the Balanced Scorecard. It directly addresses the strategic problem in Section 1, which was high buyer power and high rivalry (Five Forces), new sustainable brand advantages (VRIO) and restores the market differentiated aspect to parity. Starbucks' turnaround evidence, the "Back to Starbucks" strategy, was validated in the real world: the initiative achieved the group's first positive quarterly comparable-sales growth in seven, and included a strategy of investing in service and experience that resulted in better consumer-perception scores (Food Business News, 2025; Starbucks Corporation, 2026). The growth in expected performance is the return of UK operating profit, driven by service, experience and digital growth to increase visit numbers and hold the price premium.

Porter (1985) warns that the value the differentiator gets for his price premium has to be greater than the cost of differentiating. The value of the refurbishment investment and the extra staff needed to accommodate customers is only realized if it can be proven to lead to increased visits and spend, which is why Starbucks' turnaround needs to be disciplined: it will take about \$100,000 for every store, and the extra staff spend only if they are directly responsible for making it happen (CNBC, 2026). That is why Balanced Scorecard governance is part of the recommendation: Every initiative should be evaluated by both financial and non-financial KPIs before getting wider commitment, so that differentiation is not only costly but also profitable.

5.5 Implementation Challenges and Mitigation

The focus is on strategy implementation, and the brief does ask for challenges and solutions (which are also rightly focused on the brief), where advantage is realised or lost. The main risks and mitigations are outlined in Table 4.

Table 4: Implementation challenges and mitigation measures

Challenge	Severity	Mitigation
Margin pressure from premium position amid value competition	High	Justify price through experience, service and quality; protect margin via menu simplification and operational efficiency.
Execution capacity of estate-wide refurbishment & service reset	Medium-High	Phased, ROI-gated rollout; pilot-and-scale; clear Balanced Scorecard KPIs.
Reputational / geopolitical volatility	Medium-High	Transparent CSR communication; local community engagement; scenario planning.

Cannibalisation & over-expansion risk	Medium	Data-led site selection; balance drive-thru, suburban and high-street formats.
Input-cost & wage inflation	Medium	Scale sourcing, hedging and productivity gains; disciplined pricing.

A phased approach of service-experience reset over three years enables Starbucks to test, learn and replan resources, which aligns with its practice of taking action in the face of incomplete data at Level 7. Balanced Scorecard KPIs offer the monitoring system, allowing each initiative to be assessed in terms of both financial and non-financial measures prior to broader commitment, and allowing reputational and margin risks to be actively managed and not assumed away.

6 Conclusion

Starbucks is still a strong brand and the market-leading brand for UK coffee outlets but its FY24 operating loss demonstrated that a premium business model is not viable in a crowded and value conscious market. VRIO analysis proves that its brand is a sustainable advantage, but its previously-unique experiential model is now even. A premium-experience-plus-digital differentiation strategy – based on market penetration and product development; linked to a credible and measurable CSR; underpinned by a balanced scorecard – provides a consistent evidence-based path to profitability and to the defence of competitive advantage. Both risks of the execution and of the reputation are controllable with implementing the solution in phases and with KPI gating.

7 Reflective Account

This reflective account looks at the research, analysis and preparation that went into this report through Gibbs reflective cycle (Figure 7): Description, Feelings, Evaluation, Analysis, Conclusion and Action Plan. It was decided that the cycle would be used because it follows a six stage sequence of experience to learning, which is appropriate for a large analytical task (Gibbs, 1988).

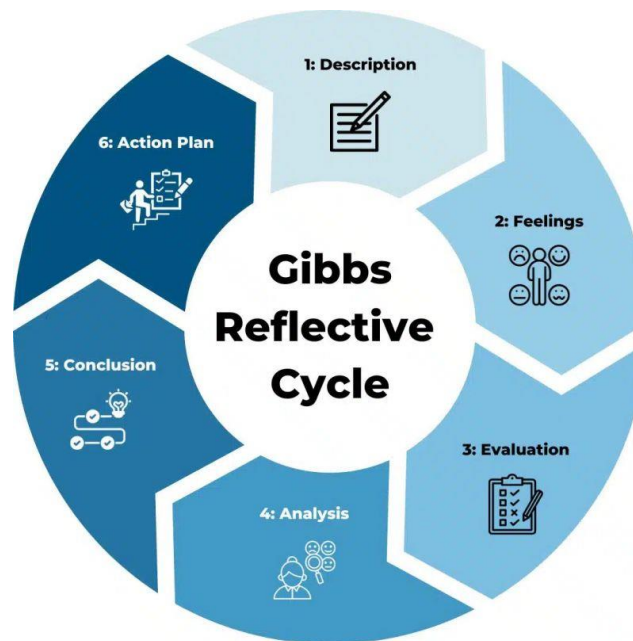


Figure 7 Gibbs' Reflective Cycle applied to the report process (Gibbs, 1988)

7.1 Description

The challenge was to set myself up as a strategic management consultant, to choose an organisation that has been in operation for at least five years in one market and to deliver a report to the board that shows and explains how the organisation is performing strategically through the use of the module frameworks. I chose to work on Starbucks' UK market, collected existing company and industry data, used PESTEL, VRIO, SWOT, Porter's 5 Forces analysis and the Balanced Scorecard and Ansoff's Matrix to make recommendations that were suitable for the company's live turnaround strategy.

7.2 Feelings

I was sure of the frameworks and felt uneasy combining them into a unified and unified thinking in one argument instead of a collection of unconnected models. Finding up to date, reliable UK specific data, such as recent financial data and market-share statistics, at first seemed like a daunting task and I had to be aware of the need to use only real and verifiable sources. As the analysis started to reinforce each other around a shared strategic problem, my fears were replaced by a feeling of intellectual momentum, and the feeling of owning the argument.

7.3 Evaluation

The process went well in two respects. First, combining evidence from company reports, industry analysis and academic sources provided a solid and up-to-date picture, and the turnaround in the FY24 losses and the "Back to Starbucks" proved to be a real, live focus. Second, the Balanced Scorecard was used as an integrating device, which facilitated the linking between CSR, strategy and performance measurement. The latter was less successful in my early work, where I would state a framework without critically applying it, e.g. in the early

drafts of the VRIO and PESTEL sections, I would state a factor without considering its strategic value.

7.4 Analysis

I think about why this is, and I think I see a common pitfall in strategic analysis, which Johnson et al. (2020) call “frames are tools to help generate insight, not the goal.” The breakthrough ended when I specifically questioned the frameworks with the "so what" question: (for example) while listing the resources of Starbucks, I asked, "but has the experiential store model become parity or been used up to become a differentiator? This one single thought reshaped the entire recommendation. This move from description to critical judgement was exactly the type of thinking that was expected of the student at level 7 and was the exact rationale for the quality of the recommendations, which then flowed out of the diagnosis.

7.5 Conclusion

I believe that strategic analysis is not so much about using models, but about synthesis and critical judgment. I developed the ability to combine outside-in and inside-out information (PESTEL, Five Forces), to take opposing information into consideration (Starbucks' expansion in stores, but decreasing profits), and to provide informed recommendations in the face of uncertainty. I also improved my academic writing by checking all my sources and used Cite Them Right Harvard referencing thoroughly.

7.6 Action Plan

For future analytical research I will: (1) have a clear strategic problem to begin with when using frameworks, so that they serve a purpose; (2) use a deliberate “so what?” test when applying analytical tools to ensure critical evaluation rather than description; (3) construct an evidence log at the beginning of the research process to manage evidence and referencing processes efficiently. The actions will help to make my consultancy-style analysis more integrated, critical and professionally persuasive – skills that are directly pertinent to postgraduate-level employment.

Stage	Concise Reflection
Description	I was a strategic management consultant and conducted a PESTEL analysis, VRIO analysis and SWOT analysis, Porter's 5 forces and a Balanced Scorecard and Ansoff's Matrix analysis of Starbucks' UK operations. Research using company, industry and academic sources to create recommendations related to Starbucks turnaround strategy.
Feelings	I found myself at ease with the individual frameworks, and at first not feeling very confident in linking them together in a coherent argument. It was also

	difficult to locate good and up-to-date data specific to the UK. The more I learned in the research process, the more confident I felt in the analysis and recommendations.
Evaluation	The report was well evidence based using industry evidence and academic resources as well as company reports. The Balanced Scorecard also enabled to align strategy, performance and CSR. My first projects, though, dealt more with "how" than with "why".
Analysis	I got the message that "frameworks" are only valuable when they result in some sort of insight. The question "so what?" helped to take me beyond description. I wondered about things like, "Well, is the Starbucks experiential store model still a competitive advantage or has it become ubiquitous in the market?" This helped my recommendations to be better.
Conclusion	I learned to do good strategic analysis, not just apply multiple models. I also enhanced my skills in comparing various types of evidence, making decisions in uncertainty and using academic referencing regularly.
Action Plan	Going forward: I will define the problem and identify the main strategic problem before deciding what frameworks to use, will apply the "so what?" test as I proceed with the analysis and will maintain an evidence log from the outset. This should enable my future work to be more focused, critical and convincing.

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