

# The mcdonaldization of society book review

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## **Book Review: The McDonaldization of Society**

The golden arches of the McDonald's logo make up of the most recognizable logos in the world. However, it's not alone-- there are hundreds of internationally-recognizable logos, and the list continues to expand year after year. The rise of globalization and global corporations has had far-reaching consequences for people around the world. It's nearly impossible, for instance, to visit somewhere in the world where Coca-Cola is not carried; similarly, there are McDonald's in over 34, 000 locations around the world, including rural areas of Africa and Asia. With the growth of fast, reliable transportation, there is hardly a corner of the globe that can't be reached within forty-eight hours of any other location. This reality is changing the global marketplace and the very fabric of society.

There are a variety of reasons that McDonald's and its sister fast-food restaurants have become so popular in the United States. Essentially, the formula boils down to this, according to George Ritzer, author of *The McDonaldization of Society* (2013, p. 13-15): each of these successful brands has become accomplished in efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. Because things like menu and price hold true across from one end of a country to another, an individual can always know what he or she is getting when he or she goes into a McDonald's.

McDonald's has taken a brilliant marketing strategy-- hooking children first on the brand, then on the cheap, tasty food-- and extended it around the entire globe. While Ritzer (2013) discusses brand loyalty, it seems that he underestimates the romance and emotional attachment that Americans particularly seem to have with their food. There are very real, concrete

reasons why people like McDonald's and other global, brands, but one of the reasons these brands became internationally popular in the first place is because during the formative years of the world's globalization process, the world as a whole was craving American products, This opened up individual, local markets for American brands.

Ritzer (2013) goes on to make a very interesting claim about globalization and what he calls the "McDonaldization" of society: McDonaldization is the logical result of extrapolation of the increase of bureaucracy in American society (Ritzer, 2013, p. 30). The philosopher Weber suggested that bureaucracies are necessary and important for societies where tasks exist that have a large amount of paperwork. McDonald's does not deal in paperwork, but what they do deal in is repetitive, monotonous tasks-- the fast-food equivalent of paperwork. Ritzer goes on to explain that this bureaucratization of society can also carry some of the blame for atrocities committed in Nazi Germany. When the task is rote, it is easy to get people to carry out the same task over and over in the name of bureaucracy (Ritzer, 2013, p. 32, 33). This is an uncomfortable, if difficult-to-deny truth that puts a serious face on the issue of McDonaldization in the world today.

An issue that is not covered by Ritzer's (2013) work is the question of what happens when the individual customer on a global scale becomes tired of McDonaldization. In Part 5, he briefly touches on dehumanization, customer disenchantment, and false friendliness; however, he does not go on to make the comparison between McDonald's and McDonald's-like establishments to other establishments that are highly successful and competitive in the marketplace (Ritzer, 2013, p. 123-134). It is, however, becoming more

apparent that while customers do appreciate McDonald's and other chains for their reliability, they also seek out the competitors of these chains for a more individualized, humanized experience. While economic status can often be a deciding factor on where individuals shop or eat, individuals in the middle class-- particularly younger individuals in the middle class-- seem to be rebelling against the older generation's love affair with fast food. This does not mean that places like McDonald's have become or will become obsolete in the United States anytime soon; it does, however, mean that places like McDonald's may need to see a shift in the company policy of control and efficiency to remain competitive and relevant in some key markets.

More and more, individuals are unwilling to give up aspects of the "customer experience" in the name of efficiency or cost-effectiveness. This jaded, educated consumer is the one that McDonald's and the McDonald's-like chains will be facing in the future. With the advent of the Internet, it is more and more difficult for companies to hide behind their corporate image and rely upon brand loyalty to bring customers through their door (Ritzer, 2013, p. 148).

Instead, the wealth of information available to consumers is a way for the consumer to hold the brand accountable-- accountable for their community practices, business ethics, or even the caloric content of their food. For example, there is now a State law in California that requires that all fast-food locations-- including Starbucks, Carl's Jr, McDonald's, and Chipotle-- to have clearly-posted information regarding the caloric content of their foods. Upon request, a full nutritional breakdown is even available.

This consumer-- this world-weary, jaded, ever-connected consumer-- is the new face of the target market for the McDonaldized world. It is hard to reach a customer that is apparently consumed with apathy and disenchantment; it's not enough to provide a service anymore. The customer wants to be wooed. Ritzer (2013) suggests something similar in his work, but he does not foresee a resurgence of mom-and-pop storefronts: instead, he suggests that the next wave of corporate globalization will be "Starbuckization" (Ritzer, 2013, p. 171, 172). Starbucks offers all the things that McDonald's does-- fast service, an addictive product, and quick customer turn-around, while also offering something McDonald's cannot: a comfortable atmosphere and the illusion of an individualized customer experience. Starbucks gives individuals more choices in how they want their food and drink prepared, while still managing to keep costs low and control over the various aspects of production high. It is for this reason that Ritzer (2013) suggests that Starbuckization will be the trend of the future.

## **Works Cited**

Ritzer, G. (2013). *The McDonaldization of Society* (20th anniversary ed., 7th ed.). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE.