

## **MCALOO TIKKI: WHERE THE GLOBAL MEETS THE HYPER-LOCAL**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Globalisation has increased the exchange of information and cultures, as well as the establishment of MNCs across the world. However, the downside of globalization can be best examined through the theory of McDonaldization as contemplated by the sociologist George Ritzer. This paper will examine the theoretical foundations of the theory of McDonaldization and examine the same through the lens of the establishment of McDonalds in India and introducing culturally adapted products such as the McAloo Tikki burger. This paper will examine other examples of such local adaptations and argue that these interactions between the global and the hyper-local or "glocalisation" is in fact an extended form of McDonaldization. This paper will pose recommendations for future research and study to better understand the effects of the influence of western corporations on local settings, and the drawbacks of seemingly progressive local variations. In doing so, this paper will draw upon Ritzer's updated theories, existing literature in the field, and practical examples of how corporations such as McDonalds have tailored their operations to suit local contexts.

**Keywords:** Globalisation, McAloo Tikki, McDonaldization, Glocalization, Ritzer

### **Introduction**

McDonaldization is a concept that was first introduced by the sociologist George Ritzer. The concept is described by Ritzer as a "re-conceptualization of rationalization, or moving from traditional to rational modes of thought, and scientific management" (Farhanavs, 2011). This has meant that with the advent of globalization and integration of supply chains in the hands of increasingly concentrated conglomerates, elements have been adapted based on the characteristics of a fast-food restaurant—efficiency, calculability, predictability and standardization, and control—and that this adaptation has ripple effects throughout all aspects of society (Crossman, 2020). Driven by western corporations, the process of McDonaldization has led to a global homogenization of consumer experience and culture.

Therefore, even attempts to assimilate to local cultures through branding and marketing efforts through for example the introduction of the McAloo Tikki burger in India, is a process of rationalisation that results in further concentration of power and a larger attempt at homogenization. With increased liberalisation in developing countries such as India, MNCs have taken the opportunity to assimilate within the hyper local market. Ritzer himself has recognised this extension of McDonaldization through the example of the McAloo Tikki, which has been made with a potato patty instead of beef, primarily to accommodate for the majority Hindu population in India who do not consume beef (Ritzer, 2017). Ritzer terms this as 'glocalization', or the "interpenetration of the global and the local", which results "in unique outcomes in different geographical areas".

This paper explores the concept of McDonaldization further, focusing on its impact in developing countries such as India where there are examples of homogenisation through the process of "glocalization". The paper will further examine methods of engagement by international corporations to demonstrate cultural engagement through the lens of sociological theory and critical approaches. The paper will conclude by exploring the possibilities for future research into the interaction between the global and the local, highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of these attempts at cultural assimilation.

## **Background**

The theory of McDonaldization as contemplated by Ritzer constitutes four major dimensions. The first is efficiency, that is the process of choosing the optimum means to a given end. Every business venture looks for efficiency even in a non McDonaldized society. But in a McDonaldized society, efficiency is thrust upon an individual (Dasgupta, 2015). This leads to homogenised and standardised processes which are to be followed mandatorily. The second is calculability, which is an emphasis on the quantity of the products sold & speed of the service offered as a measure of the quality of the goods or services (Dasgupta, 2015). The third dimension is predictability, which is the emphasis on things such as "discipline, order, systemization, formalization, routine, consistency, and methodical operation" (Dasgupta, 2015). Therefore, the experience of a customer in India, should be the same as the customer in the USA. The fourth dimension is control, emphasis on controlling the workers and the customers. This is done to maintain a greater control over the complete rationalizing process through increased mechanization (Dasgupta, 2015).

Through the spread of the fast food culture to different parts of the world, the example of McDonalds is a prime case study for the observation of the blurred lines between the definitions of the global, the glocal and the translocal. The interaction has come from either side. India as a

country became more liberalised, looking for cheaper and faster options, increase in education and standard of living, and the development of the IT sector which led to an expansion of the middle class (Pendyala, 2014). These social circumstances created a prime opportunity for McDonalds to cater to India's large population. After a few missteps, McDonalds found that the way to best assimilate and tap into the Indian market was through the formation of a joint venture with two well connected Indian entrepreneurs, Vikram Bakshi and Amit Jatia (Kannan, 2014). By conducting localised research, the joint venture found that out of 100 meals that Indians ate in a month, only three were eaten out in sharp contrast to the USA. Therefore, in addition to introducing an extremely cheap option like the McAloo Tikki, changing the menu and dropping beef, a targeted campaign promoting vegetarian family values and using well known Indian celebrities was also a large factor in its success (Kannan, 2014).

Economic and sociological theory regarding cultural assimilation in products and messages of brands and businesses following Ritzer have all primarily drawn from his theories. Subsequent sociologists have developed the ideas that McDonaldization affects our values, preferences, goals, and worldviews, our identities, and our social relationships (Crossman, 2020). Further, sociologists recognize that McDonaldization is a global phenomenon, driven by Western corporations, the economic power and cultural dominance of the West, and as such it leads to a global homogenization of economic and social life (Crossman, 2020). This simultaneous process of homogenisation through cultural assimilation has also been noticed by sociologists in other areas of life like education and media, too. The following sections of this paper will further delve into critical approaches on McDonaldization and methods of glocalisation by different corporations.

## **Discussion**

Although being the first to break through the Indian market, McDonalds is by no means the only MNC to invest heavily in adapting to the Indian context. MNCs such as KFC, Nike, Burger King, Dominos, etc, are adapting to the Indian context and attempting to both standardise operations worldwide, but ensure the retention of market share through marketing to local cultures. Especially in the fast food industry, 'Indianised' versions of food such as burgers, pizzas and french fries have emerged as the best selling options. This has happened through an extensive process of region-specific product and service development, as well as marketing (Kannan, 2014). This is also done through an established local presence and capitalising on methods of demonstrating such cultural engagement with targeted messaging and marketing strategies. For example, offering innovative offers for local festivals such as Diwali and Eid, and plotting various economic, legal, political and cultural factors such as popular sports and events (UKEssays, 2017).

The disadvantages of this cultural assimilation are tangible. Ironically, this may lead to a process of acculturation and the spread of a cultural imperialism which also adversely affects local employment. Studies conducted on fast food work in India showed that employees' experiences have been negative, and that workers from a rural background find it difficult to adapt to these practices (Bathini, 2017). Poor pay, hectic workload and limited potential growth have become acceptable due to the dispensable nature of employment in the rationalised framework of McDonaldization which places more focus on quantity and efficiency than qualitative parameters (Bathini, 2017). Workers in these conditions engage in repetitive, routinized, highly focused and compartmentalized tasks that are quickly and cheaply taught, and thus easy to replace. This kind of work devalues labor and takes away workers' bargaining power. Sociologists observe that this kind of work has reduced workers' rights and wages in the US and around the world (Crossman, 2020).

Another consequence of McDonaldization through a simultaneous process of interaction with the hyper local, has been the diminishing of local industries and culture. The pricing ability of a large corporation has allowed items such as the McAloo Tikki to be as cheap as street food or local markets. Therefore, what may have been once considered a luxury is now on par with local businesses when brought to scale, which has caused economic damage to local industries (Pandyala, 2014). Sociologists, economists and political thinkers have also seen these forms of branding to assimilate with local culture as a long arm of cultural hegemony. Considering the example of McDonalds, although the fast-food restaurant is somewhat different in every country, the same fundamental principles apply in a culturally specific way (Saylor, n.d). The branding of the company is the same wherever it is; the "I'm lovin' it" slogan is inescapable, and the Golden Arches are, according to Eric Schlosser in *Fast Food Nation*, "more widely recognized than the Christian cross" (Schlosser, 2001; Saylor, n.d). The menu options and resulting product remain consistent wherever one may travel.

This homogenisation is problematic regardless of cultural sensitivity, given that the end goal of any cultural sensitivity is for the co-opting of culture for profit motive. For example, fast food outlets would typically not advertise with female models in the UAE. The political factor of macroeconomic environment does not directly affect McDonald's operations but governments in different countries do have control on what products a business is allowed to sell in their markets (UKEssays, 2017). Therefore, cultural assimilation does not serve to liberalise the markets where MNCs may enter, but rather increase control in the pursuit of the four dimensions of McDonaldization as detailed above. Therefore, the opposite phenomenon occurs than was originally attributed to globalisation. Globalisation has typically been that it would cause a global interchange of various aspects of culture, new ways are introduced on a local level as an addition to existing ones. However, in reality due to the process of McDonaldization, cultures rather

compete with each other (Speitkamp, 2014). In fact, there are a couple of one-directional processes, which try to transform local cultures in certain ways. As noted by Ritzer, "American cultural artifacts are an increasingly central element of global culture" (Speitkamp, 2014).

## **Conclusion**

From the above, it can be noted that while globalisation has led to a promise of diversity and multi-cultural outcomes, McDonaldization, and the meeting of the global and the local have not so much led to an exchange of culture than it has, an increased control and homogenisation of broader functionality with slight cultural variations. As Ritzer states, offering different food options such as the McAloo Tikki burger, to satisfy the cultural and religious preferences of consumers in different countries is a "weak form of glocalization" because it does not necessarily challenge McDonaldization – "the McAloo Tikki burger in India is just as efficiently mass produced, calculable and predictable as the Big Mac in the United States is" (Ritzer, 2017). In addition, American ideals continue to crowd out local cultures. For example, one of the entrepreneurs who had been instrumental in establishing the Indian presence of McDonalds commented that they had to set up the lettuce supply chain from scratch as Indians had typically used cabbage in burgers (Kannan, 2014). While seemingly minor, the same is an indication of the predictability, calculability and control that are essential features of McDonaldization.

Corporations with a caring or culturally sensitive image are often cultivated with extensive investment and resources, and are subject to control by governments and technologies, and the other principles of McDonaldization. The increase in the number of drive throughs and automated kiosks in India is a clear signal that despite localised versions of corporations are still subject to the same calculability, and standardization which is often the reason for their ability to proliferate at scale.

Future research in the field must focus on these new dimensions of McDonaldization, and the negative consequences of spreading homogeneity through the interaction of the global and the local, as well the response of local culture and the avenues for a more holistic integration. Studies conducted on the influence of Westernization in India clearly show that the local cultures often must adapt to the foreign influence in order for their own products or services to be more palatable (Raisa, 2020). For cultural variation to have true meaning, it must not be in the pursuance of the same efficiencies and profit motives which drive corporations. To this end, it will be crucial to examine the irrationalities that arise as a result of rationalisation, such as the dehumanizing nature of jobs for employees and preference of a packaged cultural commodity like a McAloo Tikki burger to local delicacies. Dehumanization will be increasingly pervasive, and is propped up by advertising and influences on culture which is learned and shared, and

portraying foreign culture as a status symbol is also an avenue for further study (Farhanavs, 2011).

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