

McDonaldization: An Effect of Capitalism in the United States

Globalization influences society and culture in the United States immensely, ultimately leading to the creation of processes like McDonaldization. McDonaldization involves standardizing and organization through efficiency and predictability. This affects how people view American values, like individualism, stressing standardization over quality in economic activity which extends to personal fulfillment in a capitalistic society like the United States of America.

The fast-food industry stamped its impact in American society. The convenience of fast-food restaurants like Wendy's and Taco Bell gives Americans more individualism in their choices, along with more time in their days. When eating at the McDonald's location in Stephenville, Texas, I noticed consumers desired the minimal distance between the parking lot and entrance, along with the accessibility of the lobby and the drive-thru windows. Efficiency appears in other sociological studies. George Ritzer (2012) referenced the efficiency of drive-thru windows, credit card transactions, and finger foods like *Chicken McNuggets* and how it contributed to American time management. We can even see McDonaldization in American law enforcement. Robert Bohm (2006) argued that plea bargaining, a tit-for-tat strategy where the defendant pleads guilty in exchange for a lighter sentence, is a process influenced by advocacy for efficient processes in the criminal justice system.

McDonaldization also places emphasis on individualism at the expense of minimum wage employees. When visiting the McDonald's location, the employees worked under extensive pressure as they followed systematic processes of ordering, cooking, and delivering food to customers. This also shows up in the addition of ordering kiosks for visitors, decreasing the need for human operations, dismissing self-expression and autonomy. As Ritzer (1998)

asserts, independence and creativity decrease as you go down the staffing line, prohibiting these foundational skills from lower-level employees.

As industries began integrating McDonaldization, quality went on the backburner. This can be seen by modernizing ordering via technology, low value and “super-sized” meals, and even as far as inventory and supply-chain management of ingredients. George Ritzer (2012) argues that Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) originally focused on the quality of cooking and seasoning, but after Harland “Colonel” Sanders sold KFC in 1964, the owners favored efficiency over the excellence of their products. However, after Sanders sold his business in 1964, the latest owners rather allocated towards haste over excellence as they realized how inefficient it was to produce foodstuffs from the recipes Sanders developed.

Let’s think about this in the context of education. Developing a high-quality course, with resourceful materials and engaging projects can be a challenging feat but can ultimately make or break your students’ experiences. Ritzer (2012) references higher education in relation to McDonaldization, arguing how some instructors can see students through one value: their grade point average (GPA). Noel Carroll (2013) asserts that e-learning specifically can fall into the trap of McDonaldization; with how components are written and calculated, students fail to question the contexts for themselves, in favor of simply completing the assignment for a letter grade. It is imperative that professors facilitate a space for learning, questioning, and critical thinking through their curriculum and materials, avoiding the predictability coming with “busy work.” This also causes problems for the student, creating the thought process that grades are the only aspect of their college career that matters. This couldn’t be farther from the truth, as a multi-faceted experience in college, with research opportunities and hands-on internships,

extracurricular involvement, and relationship building/conflict resolution guarantees students security for their future.

In summary, the developments of globalization curated the McDonaldization process. Time management, efficiency, a lack of autonomy, and a decrease in quality all exemplify both what American culture and McDonaldization values. McDonaldization permeates not only in the fast-food industry, but in law enforcement, nonprofit organizations, and even in K-12 and higher education, all within late-stage capitalism and degrading the self-expression of workers and students of all ages.

References

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