

*McDonaldization Advertising in the Context of Electronic Colonialism Theory*

Magdalena Lestari Ginting, Pelita Harapan University, Indonesia  
Selvi Siregar, Pelita Harapan University, Indonesia

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2017  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

Food is an important element in defining culture and can be seen to be the oldest global carrier of culture. According to William Gould's book *McDonalds: Business in Action*, "before the introduction of McDonald's overseas, fast food was almost unknown. McDonald's was the first company to try to export America's love of fast food and changes in eating habits of other nations." When taking a look at food from a cultural perspective, it should be understood how drastic changes on beliefs and consumptions of food could actually diminish some of the traditional beliefs of an entire culture. In fact, the replacement of non-traditional food over traditional food has the most detrimental effects on third-world culture traditions.

This study shows how globalized western advertising - in this case McDonald advertising - has affected the Indonesian social life and values. This study also present the benefits and also the threat of value changes to the society. An important discovery of this work is the willingness of the audience to accept the changes in their social life and values.

Keywords: mcdonalds, advertising, globalization, communication

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## **Introduction**

McDonalds has become a symbol of American cultural power and imperialism to the world outside the United States. The message of globalized McDonalds is clear: "If you eat like us, you are going to be like us." When in fact by eating like Americans people around the world are only being prone to look more like American's in regards to obesity. But yet, McDonald's, like many American corporations, have convinced themselves that despite its flaws, American culture is superior and therefore its influence is only beneficial to other, "lesser" cultures.

Food is an important element in defining culture and can be seen to be the oldest global carrier of culture. According to William Gould's book *McDonalds: Business in Action*, "before the introduction of McDonald's overseas, fast food was almost unknown. McDonald's was the first company to try to export America's love of fast food and changes in eating habits of other nations." When taking a look at food from a cultural perspective, it should be understood how drastic changes on beliefs and consumptions of food could actually diminish some of the traditional beliefs of an entire culture. In fact, the replacement of non-traditional food over traditional food has the most detrimental effects on third-world culture traditions.

The purpose of this study is to show the impact of McDonalds "Sate Burger" advertising on changing the family life styles and values of Indonesian consumers. This study also examines the influence of advertising – the benefits and the threat – to the society. Thus, this research is align with UPH's strategic planning "fish bone" in creative industry, specifically in audience studies.

## **Methodology**

This study focus particularly on McDonald advertising "Sate Burger". To watch how McDonalds tries to replace "nasi" (which is typical Indonesian) with "burger" (which is typical western) to eat sate with.

Methodology that will be used is qualitative. Qualitative content analysis will be used to analyze the advertising content. Meanwhile, to provide analysis of the impact of McDonald advertising on changing the cultural values of Indonesian consumers, focus group discussions will be used. The respondent for the FGD would be at least 12 participants to ensure the richness of the data.

Finally, to investigate the influence of advertising to the society, in depth interview will be conducted with McDonald Management, Advertising practitionairs and experts, and also Government body (Dirjen Menkominfo) officials.

## **Focus Discussion Group**

A method for collecting qualitative data through a group interview on a topic chosen by the researcher. A focus group typically consists of a tape-recorded discussion among six to eight participants who are interviewed by a moderator. As a method for collecting qualitative data, focus groups emphasize learning about the thoughts and experiences of others. When the participants in a group interview share an interest in the discussion topic, their interaction can provide information about how they relate to

the topic and to each other. The group dynamics in these participant-centred conversations allow researchers to hear how people explore the discussion topic. Hence, the most effective focus groups consist of participants who are just as interested in the topic as the researchers are, which helps to produce a free-flowing exchange. When the participants are mutually interested in the discussion, their conversation often takes the form of sharing and comparing thoughts about the topic. That is, they share their experiences and thoughts, while also comparing their own contributions to what others have said. This process of sharing and comparing is especially useful for hearing and understanding a range of responses on a research topic. The best focus groups thus not only provide data on *what* the participants think but also explicit insights into *why* they think the way they do.

One particularly powerful strategy in focus group research is to bring together participants with a common background with regard to the discussion topic. This homogeneous group composition makes it easier for the participants to engage in sharing and comparing. It is important to note, however, that this strength depends on careful recruitment procedures to ensure a group composition where the participants share a common set of experiences or beliefs with regard to the discussion topic. Another advantage of creating groups where the participants share similar interests or experiences is an increased ability to carry on their own conversation, with less active guidance from the moderator. Such groups are frequently termed 'less structured' since the participants are free to pursue their own interests in their own ways. This style of focus group is especially useful for exploratory research where the goal is to learn the participants' perspectives. It is less useful, however, when the research team has a strong set of predetermined objectives.

In that case, a 'more structured' approach would emphasize the role of the moderator as a discussion leader, who would use a fixed set of research questions to guide the group's conversation. Taken together, these two dimensions of 'group composition' and 'interview structure' generate a variety of research design options for focus groups. This flexibility makes it possible to use focus groups for a wide range of purposes throughout the social sciences. Compared to other qualitative methods, it is the interaction around a predetermined topic that makes focus groups unique. Although individual qualitative interviews also concentrate on well-defined topics, they do not provide the group interaction that is the source of data in focus groups. In particular, the process of sharing and comparing in focus groups often leads the participants themselves to explore the topic in ways that the researcher did not anticipate. Compared to participant observation as a means of collecting qualitative data, focus groups have the advantage of providing concentrated observations on the topics that are of most interest to the researcher. In particular, a focus group with questions that generate lively exchanges can provide information about a range of experiences and opinions that might be difficult to observe outside such a discussion.

Focus groups also have a set of corresponding weaknesses, which lead to situations where other methods of collecting data would be preferable. Individual rather than group interviews would be preferable when there is a need for greater depth and detail about personal experiences or beliefs, because one-on-one conversations allow more time to generate richer narratives. Collecting qualitative data through participant observation would be preferred over focus groups when there is a need to understand behaviour in context. In addition, focus groups and other types of interviews provide

only verbal and self-report data, so they are no substitute for observing how people actually behave in realistic settings.

Finally, focus groups typically follow other qualitative methods in relying on small, purposefully chosen samples that generate theoretical insights, which makes survey research preferable for studies that require generalizability. In just two decades, focus groups have moved from being almost unknown in the social sciences to become a popular method for collecting qualitative data. This widespread use clearly demonstrates their value. At the same time, however, this relative newness also means that focus groups have substantial, unexplored potential. This suggests a future for focus groups that builds on well established procedures at the same time as it uncovers new uses for this method. (Jupp, 2006: 121-122)

### **Cultural Imperialism**

Cultural Imperialism is the extension of influence or dominance of one nation's culture over others, through the exportation of cultural commodities (OED, 2008). Culture is defined as "The distinctive ideas, customs, social behavior, or way of life of a particular nation, society, people or period." Essentially, culture is something that is shared, learned or acquired, and constantly evolving and non-static. (OED, 2008). Imperialism is the extending of a country's power and influence through colonisation, use of military force or other means (OED, 2014).

Cultural Imperialism is closely related to global communication, which can be defined as the communication practice occurring across national borders, social, political and cultural divides (Thussu, 2010). The need for global communication has increased due to the expanse of globalisation. Schiller defined Cultural Imperialism as "The sum of the process by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system (Schiller, 1976). He argued that media is instrumental in this penetrative process, and referred to the idea of the USA exerting cultural influence over the rest of the world, particularly over developing countries (Schiller, 1976).

This type of Cultural Imperialism could be seen in US brand name products, like McDonalds, and media, like Hollywood and Disney. Ogan describes this as the process whereby the West produces the majority of media products, makes the most profit from them, and then markets these products to developing countries at lower cost than those countries would have been able to produce domestically (Ogan, 1988). Thereby creating a dependence and imbalance. Language is an essential aspect of Cultural Imperialism; in the past, Latin was the lingua franca and today English is the lingua franca of global communication (Goldhill, 2006). In global communication today, Cultural Imperialism manifest itself mainly through media, especially mainstream and mass media. As mentioned earlier, this is one-sided, meaning that the affected culture's media is not exported to the influencing culture (McPhail, 2014). Cultural Imperialism has taken both 'traditional' and modern forms. In past centuries, the church, educational system, and public authorities played a major role in inculcating native peoples with ideas of submission and loyalty in the name of divine or absolutist principle. While these 'traditional' mechanism of cultural imperialism

still operate, new modern instrumentalities rooted in contemporary institutions have become increasingly central to imperial domination (Petras, 1994).

The mass media, publicity, advertisement and secular entertainers and intellectuals play a major role today. In the contemporary world, Hollywood, CNN and Disneyland are more influential than the Vatican, the Bible or the public relations rhetoric of political figures (Petras, 1994). The U.S. flavor of globalization stems from the culture of possessive individualism and consumerism that has its most radical embodiment in American Society. The current world of consumer goods has an American face, even when goods and services are produced outside the United States. To that extent, the globalizing of the profit-driven culture of consumerism is identical to Americanization (Elteren, 2003). The principle target of cultural imperialism is the political and economic exploitation of youth. Imperial entertainment and advertisement target young people who are most vulnerable to US commercial propaganda. The message is simple and direct: 'MODERNITY' is associated with consuming US media products. Youth represents a major market for US cultural export and they are most susceptible to the consumerist-individualist propaganda. The mass media manipulates adolescent rebelliousness by appropriating the language and channelling discontent into consumer extravagances. Cultural Imperialism focuses on youth not only as market but also for political reasons: to undercut a political threat in which personal rebellion could become political revolt against economic as well as cultural form of control (Petras, 1994).

However, there are many critics of this, especially those that argue that Cultural Imperialism underestimates the free will, choice, and agency of the target audience (Tomlinson, 2001). It doesn't acknowledge a person's ability to process information and interpret that information differently based on their individual background and personal frame of reference (Ogan, 1998).

### **Electronic Colonialism Theory**

McPhail relates Cultural Imperialism to the theory of Electronic Colonialism – the dependency relationship established by the importation of communication hardware, foreign produced software, and engineers, establishing a set of foreign norms and values, which may alter the domestic culture (McPhail, 2014). Culture is basically an attitude, it is also learned. Now with ECT a new culture has emerged that is global phenomenon driven primarily by large multimedia conglomerates. They control, reproduce, and spread the global flow of words, images and sounds. They seek to impact the audiences' minds without regard to geography (McPhail, 2014).

Electronic colonialism Theory (ECT) focuses on how global media systems influence how people look, think and act. The aim of ECT is to account for how the mass media influences the mind. It is aimed at influencing attitudes, desires, beliefs, lifestyle and consumer behaviors. As the citizen of developed and developing nations are increasingly viewed through the prism of consumerism, influencing and controlling their values, habits and purchasing patterns becomes increasingly important to multinational firms. US life, culture, education and community (McPhail, 2014). However, one must note that although Cultural Imperialism is mostly used in pejorative sense, there are positive effects of it – like the exportation of women's rights values and other values like racial equality (Said, 1994).

## **Result and Analysis**

Expected results from this research are a description of eat culture in Indonesia and description of the McDonalds' impact "Sate Burger" advertising on changing the family life styles and values of Indonesian consumers. This study also examines the influence of advertising – the benefits and the threat – to the society.

## References

Barbour, R. S. and Kitzinger, J. 1999. *Developing Focus Group Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gould, William. 2004. *McDonalds: Bussiness in Action*. Evan Brother Ltd.

Jupp, Victor. 2006. *The Sage Dictionary of Social Research Method*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Keegan, Warren. Mark C. Green. 2015. *Global Marketing*. London: Pearson

Krueger, R. A. and Casey, M. A. 2000. *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, 3rd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Morgan, D. L. 1997 *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*, 2nd edn. Volume 16 in the Sage Publications series on Qualitative Research Methods, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Morgan, D. L. and Krueger, R. A. 1998 *The Focus Group Kit* (6 vols). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ritzer, George. 2010. *McDonalidization: The Reader*. New Delhi: SAGE Publication