Mcdonaldization Of Society 2 Essay, Research Paper

The McDonaldization of:

If you have ever had a meal in a restaurant (fast-food/formal dining), used an ATM in a bank, spent your vacation at an amusement park or simply browsed through a mall, you have been exposed to McDonaldization. McDonaldization is the process by which the principles of the fast food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of America society as well as the rest of the world (Ritzer, 1996, 1). Nearly ever aspect of today s society has been affected by McDonaldization including the restaurant business, education, work, healthcare, travel, leisure, dieting, politics and the family (Ritzer, 1996, 1). I observed three East Side Mario s Restaurant s establishments while the dinner menu was being served on Saturday evenings between 6pm and 8pm to evaluate the ways in which McDonaldization has affected their company. On January 29th I visited East Side Mario s in London, Ontario, on February 19th I visited East Side Mario s in Plano, Texas (I used to hold a job as a server at this location) and on February 26th I visited East Side Mario s in Orange, California. With the diversity of locations I was able to observe, I compared and contrasted many angles of the East Side Mario s concept. East Side Mario s Restaurants Inc. is one of the millions of business that has implemented the four principles of McDonaldization, which are: efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control.

With the assistance of Bernard Platt, Vice President of Marie Callender s Pie Shops, Inc., former Vice President of East Side Mario s Restaurant, Inc., I will offer a condensed presentation of East Side Mario s history to get you familiar with the business. East Side Mario s Restaurants, Inc., is a wholly owned division of Marie Callender s Pie Shops, Inc. In 1987 a partnership of restauranteurs developed the ESM (for the remainder of this case study I will us the initial ESM to refer to East Side Mario s Restaurants, Inc.) concept in North Miami, Florida featuring the excitement and energy of a New York City street festival, a blend of outstanding American and Italian food, a place where families felt welcome and comfortable offering exceptional value. Today operating as a separate division of Marie Callender s Pie Shops, Inc., there are a total of 38 American restaurants 11 corporate and 27 franchise and there are over 80 ESM restaurants in The United States and Canada.

Efficiency is the first dimension of McDonaldization and the optimum method for getting from one point to another (Ritzer, 1996, 9). The parking lot allows ample amount of parking space for customers, including handicapped spaces directly in front of the building for efficient accessibility. The restaurant offers delivery to those who would like to spend their dinner in the comfort and convenience of their own homes. There is a small server to customer ratio to provide the best service expected throughout a customer s meal. A kid s bambino menu is offered for children to enjoy less expensive meals that suit their size, along with a separate lunch menu that offers smaller portions for a lighter meal. Happy Hour items are offered at certain hours for a quick snack fix, providing just enough time to satisfy your thirst with a favorite drink. Customers can pay with cash or credit card, whichever is more convenient for them.

To streamline the process of the kitchen work ESM simplified pasta dishes (their biggest items) to take only minutes to cook very large quantities. All employees have specialized jobs to divide the work load/streamline, including: host s/hostess , bartender s, server s, cook s, dishwasher s, salad bar attendant s, cleaning staff, cocktailer s and management.

To simplify the product the menu is limited and specializes in American/Italian food. They offer easy, quickly made finger food appetizers and unlimited soup/salad and bread which is prepared in just seconds.

ESM puts you, the customer, to work the minute you walk into the restaurant. Their may or may not be a host/hostess at the front. In the place of service staff you will definitely find a horn on a taxi stand so that a customer may call for service to the front immediately when they would like to be seated. Take-out boxes are available for the customer to take any leftovers home with them. However there is a catch, the box is merely dropped by the table and the customer is expected to put away their own leftovers. The employees and customers of ESM function efficiently together to produce a profit for the business and satisfy the customer.

The second dimension of McDonaldization, calculability, is an emphasis on the quantitative aspects of products sold (portion size, cost) and service offered (the time it takes to get the product) (Ritzer, 1996, 9). Servers are paid $6.85/hr in Canada and $2.15/hr in The United States. The rest of their money comes from tips so if they expect to take home cash they will have to work to their greatest ability and place their wages in the hands of the customers. Management usually recruits minorities to work the back of the house because they will work hard for little pay.

Emphasizing quantity over quality is an important aspect of calculability. With any entr e unlimited homeloaf and soup or salad is offered. For the bar flies free peanuts are always out in buckets for all to enjoy. Specials and promotions occur seasonally, like 15-cent wings on Tuesdays.

Bigger is seen as better and ESM has conformed to this idea, establishing this illusion with many of its menu items. Large plates are used to serve most meals and give the idea of large portions, with options of three different sides on dinner items.

Customers expect quick and accurate service, which ESM has provided by reducing the processes of production to numbers. To promise quick service, the server will initially take a drink/appetizer order to ensure that you as a customer receive prompt service immediately. The bread is brought out before the meal to snack on and give just enough time for transition to the main course. Customers do not like to sit in a restaurant without something in front of them. Each item on the menu has a preparation time, which is followed by the staff so customers can expect their food to be promptly served. ESM has successfully involved an emphasis on quantification.

As the third dimension of McDonaldization, predictability, gives the assurance that their [a company s] products and services will be the same over time and in all locales (Ritzer, 1996, 10). ESM has establishments across Canada and The United States and no matter where you go you can expect the same service and quality in each and every store. The logo is a familiar sign that represents a promise…. the same meal and experience you had at any other ESM.

Every store that is built is a replicate of the previous one. The layout of each restaurant is similar, limiting the dining area to all non-smoking and only the bar area has smoking. The same colors are dominant in each store: red, green and white. The immediate feeling you will get when walking inside is that of a New York street with replica s of the Brooklyn Bridge, Statue of Liberty, Scallero Bros. and Costello s Markets (trademarks of ESM).

Interaction between the employees and customers is scripted and predictable at each visit to the restaurant. The customer is seated, informed of specials, drink/appetizer orders are taken, bread, soup and salad are brought before the meal, entrees are served with the offering of cheese or pepper, a desert menu is presented, dishes are cleared from the table and the check is presented and paid for. ESM provides each of its employees with a handbook that outlines server etiquette. The employees are expected to have the mindset of the customer is always right which should convince the customer with the notion I ll be back .

Employee behavior is predictably the same. The staff wears the same casual uniform at each restaurant with a rountinized order of operations. You can always expect to have your server offer you fresh ground pepper or parmesan cheese. With respect to birthdays a desert of choice is presented with the East Side Mario s famous birthday song.

The menu remains the same, introducing new items on promotion once in a while, producing the same predictable products. People expect to have the garlic homeloaf with unlimited soup and salad. The routine, uniformity and systematization of operations in ESM prove that predictability has been achieved.

The fourth dimension of McDonaldization is increased control and the replacement of human with nonhuman technology (Ritzer, 1996, 101). ESM has integrated all forms of technology to better their establishment. From the fountain pop dispenser to timed broilers and appliances, every process is controlled by some sort of automation.

Under control is both the product and process of the business. The menu continually remains the same, limiting the items for customers to choose from. The Micros system is used to input orders which will be sent to the back of the house, organize each table s order and have the food out and arranged according to the server s timing. Server s and bartender s are expected to id all customers who look as though they are under the age of 30 for alcoholic beverages.

In regards to controlling customers, the guest is expected to honk the horn to get the attention of employees to serve them. If there is a wait a pager is given out to customers to be buzzed at the soonest opportunity a table opens up. When the customer is through with a meal, the check is brought promptly to encourage them to leave and allow the next table to be sat. A tip percentage is required for parties of 8 or more to ensure that the time spent on larger parties will be well rewarded in wages. Nonhuman technologies that have been implemented into ESM operations control the nature of the business.

The irrationality of rationality is recognized as the fifth dimension of McDonaldization. This is the downside of McDonaldization emphasizing the basic idea that rational systems inevitably spawn irrational consequences , serve to deny human reason and are often unreasonable (Ritzer, 1996, 13). In regards to efficiency people will go to ESM in search of a relaxing meal to find they have an hour-long wait, congested waiting space and loud noise. The efficiency of spending a family meal in a comfortable atmosphere now becomes inefficient. People are unable to sit right away, asked to wait with their families in a smoke filled bar and expected to just be patient while they anticipating the buzzing of their pager number. Employees who are expected to deal with the impatient customers get irritable which reflects on their work and the restaurant as a whole. When ESM business is slow and employees are unable to make tips there is no longer an incentive to put out quality work. The efficiency of paying minimum wage is lost when workers quit because they do not make enough for tips. The cost of a nice dinner for an average size family of 4 at ESM could cost well over $60. In the long run this could be the cost of 3 home cooked meals.

The profit a restaurant business makes on pop and such is huge compared to the production price. A family could just as well spend dinner at home, talking/interacting with one another in a much more comfortable, quit, atmosphere.

ESM offers the illusion of fun to attract customers and have them coming back. The setting gives the feeling of a New York City street with all of the downtown memorabilia. A taste of little Italy is used to let the prospective guest know that traditional Italian food will be served with popular Italian/American music filling the dining room. The National Television Network, NTN, offers an interactive trivia game to be played in the bar area. Entertainment is brought in on special occasions and the server s call out loud to the kitchen to fill the atmosphere with a feeling of excitement.

The unreality, or illusion of reality, which often goes unheard of in the restaurant business, still exists. The reality is that you aren t going to see the service staff singing and dancing with customer as they do in the commercial, in fact you ll be lucky if you can flag them down as they run by your table at top speed. The streets of New York City are not resembled accurately by the miniature landmarks located throughout the restaurant and it s unlikely a true Italian (person with Italian heritage) will serve your meal. All of this is not reality.

Dehumanization recognizes a system that is destructive to human beings. This dehumanization recognized in society is evident through health and environmental hazards, the dehumanization of customers and employers, a negative effect on human relationships and homogenization. The increased concern for the human diet is strongly affected by eating out and Italian food is extremely fattening. A dish known as fettuccine alfredo has been given the nickname heart attack on a plate . To adapt to these concerns ESM has began to offer low fat dressings and deserts. The vegetables have to be used in good time, as does much of the inventory so that contaminated/old food is not distributed. Dishes must be cleaned thoroughly so that germs do not transfer to other customers. ESM provides a fairly environmentally friendly establishment with reusable dishes. The biggest concern is over styrofoam take-out boxes.

Customers follow through with the same routine every time they enter a restaurant. ESM encourages the employees to follow script but at the same time get comfortable and act interested in the customer. But that s just it an act. Servers really are not interested in the lives of every stranger who steps foot in the building. Scripting brings employees and customers down to a primitive dehumanizing level of interaction. Turnover rates at ESM are not as high as those in the fast food industry however it is unlikely that the same person will ever serve you.

There is little, impersonal contact between people. ESM offers benefits for staying with the company, employee incentives, and employee events to encourage longer lasting relationships with the company and fellow workers, thus increasing the likelihood of establishing a relationship with customers.

ESM is a chain with franchises and individually owned stores. With its diversity of location it gives people the opportunity to recognize a familiar place and limiting the appeal to ever try anything new. Because ESM is the same no matter where you go you could virtually enter one restaurant and not know whether you were in Burlington, Ontario, Canada, or Phoenix, Arizona, USA. This is limiting the diversity of our world and proves that McDonaldization is homogenizing every aspect of society into one. All of these dehumanizing effects of McDonaldization apply to ESM and add to the irrationality that actually exists.

As McDonaldization comes to dominate ever more sectors of society, it will become ever less possible to escape from it (Ritzer, 1996, 143). In other words McDonaldization imprisons people into an iron cage. Max Weber referred to it as the iron cage of McDonaldization implying that the systems of society will become so inhuman that the systems will eventually have control of everything.

To make it in a McDonaldized society higher profits and lower costs will continue to be the goals of all businesses. The best ways to reach this goal is to conform to McDonaldization and strive for efficiency, calculability, predictability and control. ESM increases profit by taking each of these steps so that it can keep up with the competition. People have come to value the individual dimensions of McDonaldization and insist on relating to them even if they are not rewarded with economic gains. ESM has fallen into the trap and chosen locations on busy street corners surrounded by its competitors where a huge concentration of McDonaldization resides. The process of McDonaldization is so desirable that it is pursued as an end to itself (Ritzer, 1996, 145).

Fordism is the ideals Henry Ford projected into society. Mass production of a single product, using a simple assembly line process, standardized routines, deskilling, and more demanding and expanding markets have arisen as the result of Fordism. ESM came out of the woodwork with the idea of bringing New York City s Little Italy to any city. They became part of the restaurant market and had to adopt Fordism principles in order to reach high profitability with low costs.

Post-Fordism arose later on and is characterized by more customized/specialized products, smaller systems for specialization, technologies that will produce a range of products, requiring more workers, which in turn leads to diversity once again. ESM has also incorporated post-Fordism characteristics. They use one computer system to run the security systems, kitchen appliances, run credit charges and place orders. They cater to each individual customer, giving them what they ask for.

Finally, postmodernism, the idea that we are entering a more irrational and flexible era. The spread of different cultures throughout all of society is a product of postmodernism. ESM brought Little Italy to all kinds of cities. In fact, this American/Italian restaurant does not even exist in Italy. This society is superficial; people pass through McDonaldized systems without even being phased by them. No one walks into ESM and thinks; wow this is a superficial McDonaldized system . Every product and service has been presented before. ESM doesn t have the original calamari al diavolo sitting in a glass case to display. We now live in an n impersonal world. Even though employees approach customers with interest and a smile, they do not have a personal relationship with them. There no longer exists much emotion or expression in the postmodern society. We have to work hard at impressing people these days, having to always find something new and exciting to keep a customer hooked. Events of the past and present blur together. It is hard to distinguish between each visit to a restaurant, eventually all the visits blur together. Reproductive technologies have taken over. Computers and TV s dominate industry and the lives of every individual. In the restaurant business if the computers were to crash…. there goes the payroll, power, cash registers; the entire operation is over in the blink of an eye. Just like nearly all institutions in our society ESM is trapped in an iron cage of McDonaldization .

I believe McDonaldization has invaded every sector of society and as someone who grew up with McDonaldization at every corner of my life I would have to say it s been productive. It has allowed society to evolve. Every aspect of life has consequences and downfalls; it s just a matter of dealing with them. I like moving at a fast pace. Why do people have to make friends with every person they encounter? It s nice to have companionship but not from your server in a restaurant. McDonaldization has served as a directing force, another stage in our history. We adapt to every turn the world makes and change is good. When all of the aspects of McDonaldization are intertwined society runs smoothly. East Side Mario s was an example of a company that followed all the rules, aimed for a goal and made it. I believe that s all that it should take in anything you do in life to make it, just follow the rules and reach for your goals. McDonaldization is a positive contribution to society.

Bibliography

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