

Globalization Through the Context of Consumption

This assignment will examine globalization through the context of consumption. This context has been chosen as there is disagreement amongst sociologists as to whether consumption is a principle architect of globalization, or if it is a consequence of it (Bauman, 1998). There is widespread agreement however, that consumption is central to the structure of modern social lives which has had profound impact on the understanding of society (Bauman, 1998; Appadurai, 1996). Also evident is that worldwide consumption has resulted in the emergence of new political, individual, social and cultural identities (Bauman 2012), and in the adaptation of local consumption strategies to meet specific cultural needs (Appadurai, 1996; Miller, 2012).

For the purposes of this assignment, the spelling globalization is preferred over globalisation although both are used widely. Definitions of the term globalization are considered along with origins of the concept. The roots of mass consumption arising from the industrial revolution and imperialism are examined, along with its consequences for politics, individuals and societies. The development of concepts of globalization through ideas such as the Global Village and World System Theory is discussed. The impact on the growth and influence of transnational corporations, decline of notions of the nation state is examined, as is the impact of the internet and instant global communication for concepts of time and space (Giddens, 1990; Bauman, 2000). In addition, there is examination of the cultural impact of worldwide consumption of Americana such as Coca Cola, McDonald's and Disney, and what is considered by many its negative consequences for the possible evolution of a homogenic global cultural identity, examining such concepts as Coca-colonization, Americanization (Daghrir, 2013), McDonaldization (Ritzer, 1993) and Disneyization (Bryman, 1999). Also discussed is cultural resistance to this process of global homogenization, through for example, 'Glocalization' (Robertson, 1992; Dixon, 2009). There is a brief examination of the rise of global anti-capitalist and environmental social movements in response to the impact and consequence of globalization.

There is no universally accepted definition of globalization, and there is some debate amongst sociologists as to whether globalization exists as a defined sociological concept as theorized by Baylis and Smith (2005), or whether it is merely part of the complex processes of continuing human social development as suggested by Bauman (2000). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2019) defines Globalization as a term used "to describe an increasing internationalisation of markets for goods and services, the means of production, financial systems, competition. Corporations, technology and industries." Giddens and Sutton (2018, p.7) provide a working definition as "The various processes through which geographically dispersed human populations are brought into closer and more immediate contact with one another, creating a single community of fate or global society." Giddens (1990 p.21) defines globalization as "the intensification of worldwide social relationships which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are

shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.” These definitions demonstrate that globalization is a multi-faceted concept, having economic, political and cultural dimensions (Waters, 2001).

Global social and trading interactions are, of course, not novel phenomena. The Greek-Alexandrian and Roman empires of the classical period stretched across the, then, known world and involved not only conquest, but high degrees of trade, cultural exchange and assimilation which continue to have relevance today (Bernanke, 2006). Although the word ‘international’ was not coined until the mid 18th century by the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) trading corporations which operated across national boundaries existed for many centuries, operating trade routes such as the Silk Road in a pre-modern age known as “archaic-globalization” (Ghosh, 2017). There are also numerous examples of more recent colonization and imperialism, such as the human slaves trade, the Dutch and British East India Companies, and Hudson Bay Company which were, arguably, the instruments by which richer nations exploited the resources of poorer countries, and which, consequentially, established the principles for trans-continental trade which led to possibility, and then reality, of mass consumption of imported goods in those richer countries (Bernanke, 2006).

The concept of a global community is also not a new one. In ‘The Communist Manifesto’ (1848) Marx highlights the exploitative nature of capitalism, and forecast its spread worldwide, calling for workers of all nations to unite. In 1964 Marshall McLuhan coined the phrase ‘global village’ to describe the simultaneous phenomena of the world’s cultures contracting and expanding due to technological and communications advances which allows for the instantaneous and worldwide sharing of culture (Dixon, 2009).

The roots of modern globalization lie in the industrial revolution, and the period of modernity, growth and wealth that followed (Bauman, 2000: Wallerstein, 1974). Following the Industrial revolution new kinds of industry, and economic and social developments advanced across Europe, Asia and the New World seeding the core modern economic systems through what has been termed the ‘second industrial revolution’ (Wallerstein, 1974). Expanding on the theories of Marx and Engels, Wallerstein (1974) argues that the interconnection of global economic relationships sees wealthier, developed nations exploiting the labour and natural resources of lesser developed nations, thereby ensuring that more prosperous nations are the principle beneficiaries of global commodities, and therefore the products and riches of industrial capitalism. Wallerstein (1974) suggests that a modern world capitalist system emerged in the 16th century as European nations such as Great Britain, France, Portugal and Spain extend their reach to Asia and the Americas, transgressing borders in for the purpose of exploiting the natural resources and labour of these new dominions, resulting in an integrated world system (Wallerstein, 1974). Wallerstein’s ideas are considered an important contribution to theories of

economic and cultural globalization, whilst recognising that it would not have been possible for him to foresee the global impact of developments such as the internet and mass travel for leisure.

Whilst some social commentators argue that the world is experiencing globalization as a new era, others see it as merely a continuation of the processes of modernity. Bauman (1998; 2000), for example, is critical of the emphasis of late 20th Century sociology on globalization. Instead Bauman, supporting the view of Marx that society advances through stages which develops from the stage which precedes it, suggests that the period of modernity that began with the industrial revolution has developed to a new stage of late-modernity as technological advancement accelerates and has become ever more sophisticated. Bauman (2000; 2012) provides a theory for the periods of modernity following the industrial revolution; the first phase of modernity he calls 'solid modernity'. Bauman sees this period as marked by stability, rationality and order. Bauman (2000) argued that solid modernity brought a high degree of stability to social structures resulting in people living within relatively stable sets of institutions, norms and traditions. For example, most people enjoyed job security within class-based employment and lived within a geographic area in which they were raised and went to school and in which they expected their own children to be raised, work and live as adults. There was also respect and support for institutions such as the head of state, government legal system and the church. Bauman (2012) argues that this stability resulted in personal identities which were unified, rational and stable underpinned by several social buttresses such as occupation, religion, gender, nationality and ethnicity, lifestyle and leisure. However, at some stage this solid modernity was influenced by a perfect storm of political, social and economic changes in which sources of identity become eroded leading to fragmentation of identities. People travel around the world in great numbers and there is political, economic and social instability, more competition from cheap imports and the resulting loss of job security. Confidence in science, engineering, politics, the law, church, state and family has been eroded, and these once stable institutions are considered as much the cause of political, economic, social and environmental problems as they are their solution. Identity no longer retains any stable base and Bauman (2000) argues that consumption has become a keystone feature for how individual identity is constructed. Furthermore, as society becomes more liquid, the horizons of the authenticity of self and the representation of self through acquisition of goods is destabilized (Bauman, 2000). For Bauman (2000) therefore, we are little more than what we buy. However, the central question of worldwide consumption on the construction of global identity lies beyond the acquisition of consumer goods. However, Bauman (2000) argues that the destabilizing forces of globalization are not distributed evenly and there are winners and losers which Bauman distinguishes as "tourist" and "vagabond." Tourists are those people who benefit from globalization are socially privileged and therefore are free to travel extensively, have ease of access to internet-based technologies and services and find satisfaction in novelty and consumerism; the vagabond on the other hand has limited mobility options and is largely excluded from consumer culture (Bauman, 2000). One of the interesting concepts that Bauman (2000)

identifies, is the concept that globalization has changed concepts of time and space. The 'tourist', for example, is able to operate both virtually and in real time across the globe, seeking out economic conditions and goods which are most favourable to meet their needs.

Liquid modernity, therefore, relates to a globalized social system that is characterized by uncertainty and a lack of stability. However, Although Bauman's theories are influential, they are not without criticism. For example, the majority of people in the UK continue to see the family as important, and to associate themselves with a specific class, and many would still regard themselves as being Christian even if they do not attend church, though Britain is becoming more pluralistic (Office for National Statistics, 2015). Furthermore, Bauman could not have anticipated the widespread availability of cheap digital devices and the technological advances made in data compression which has enabled the vast expansion of online social interactions, advertising and consumer choice. Giddens (1990) also argues that globalization has resulted in 'time-space distancing' (p.77) whereby people are able to communicate remotely, and which has become increasingly important, resulting in greater interconnectivity and interdependence of social systems which has impacted on the nature of businesses as a consequence of increased international competition, and on the concept of the nation state which can no longer impose protectionist measures to shield their own businesses from international competition.

Also developing from globalization are concepts of the 'global citizen' and 'global city'. Ohmae (1994) suggested the notion of the 'global citizen' within a globally interlinked economy, arguing that through communication systems and increased travel, people can see and experience what people in other countries consume and how they live This influences their own expectations and desires, along with the ability to purchase, utilise and consume the things they want from other countries. Increased mobility affords the opportunity to observe other cultures first-hand through travel. These, in turn, influences the change demanded of their own societies (Ohmae, 1994). Sassen (2005) proposed the idea of the 'global city' whereby certain cities are transformed to undertake a central role in producing the cultural and economic streams that interconnect societies and drives globalization. Sassen (2005) suggests that as such cities are increasingly diverse, their cosmopolitan nature means that they can act as key locations for supporting and driving worldwide economic and cultural processes, seeding innovation and marketing for new products, ideas and technologies.

A further aspect of globalization which requires examination is the idea of the domination of Americana on worldwide social life, possibly leading to uniformity of global culture which has been labelled 'Americanization' (Daghrir, 2013, p1). As has been seen with Bauman (2012) and Giddens (1990), globalization of communication systems, particularly the rapid development and expansion of the internet and satellite television have altered the time/space relationships between individuals and nations, reducing the barriers which once limited the flow of cultures between societies (Daghrir, 2013).

It is recognized that the United States of America (USA) has, for decades, dominated worldwide traffic in concepts, information and entertainment, including such areas as digital technology, television, music and films, influencing the life, aspirations and tastes and fashions of almost every country (Daghrir, 2013). American trans-national corporations (TNC's) such as Coca-Cola, Disney, McDonald's, KFC, Levis, Nike, Pixar-Disney, Microsoft, Google, Apple and the Hollywood based films industry have a global reach and have been criticized as being emissaries of a new form of global imperialism, destroying the cultural distinctiveness of nation states (Daghrir, 2013). The role of trans-national companies in globalization and the process of cultural change is complex with some suggesting that TNC's are principle drivers of globalization (Letto-Gillies, 2011). Whilst some consider that they bring employment and technical progress to areas, others argue that the sheer economic power, involving vast sums of money, crowd out local domestic economic investment and influence the nature of the way local businesses are run to meet the cultural expectations of the consumer who wants an experience relative to the global expectations, image and values of the product (Krystsina 2015; Letto-Gillies, 2011).

The concept of Americanization has raised many questions about the influence of a dominant global culture and its impact on the way that almost every aspect of social life in different societies is regulated and organized, leading to increased homogenization. Ritzer (1993), examined the impact of the fast-food restaurant chain McDonald's, which has franchises in many countries, on this process of rationalization which Ritzer called 'McDonaldization'. McDonaldization has been described as "Americanization of the whole globe" (Daghrir, 2013, p1). As has been seen, when visiting a McDonald's restaurant consumers, in whatever country, anticipate an experience that is in line with the brand and promised and promoted by the company. To achieve this, McDonald's employs the same rationalizing techniques in all of its restaurants, ensuring a uniform experience and service. Ritzer (2004, P61) describes this process as "calculating and quantifying; quantity becoming a surrogate for quality". Utilizing this example of McDonald's strong emphasis on standardization of processes and products, Ritzer (1993) demonstrated how many other businesses, as well as leisure and educational establishments have become increasingly organized along these rational lines in order to promote and demonstrate efficiency, to remain competitive, and relevant to consumer expectations (Ritzer, 1993). Ritzer (1993) argues that the consequences of McDonaldization are the extent to which the principles of control which is exercised over employees and consumer, with for example standardized menus, seating arrangements, self and drive through services, have been applied to many other areas of life, including work education and leisure, shaping the plethora of collective and individual social interactions. A parallel example of the homogenizing consequences of McDonaldization is 'Disneyization' (Bryman 2004, p 167). Disneyization is a process whereby the principles for organizing Disney theme parks have increasingly been applied to other areas of social interaction and consumerism. Bryman (2004) suggests that this has become a model for contemporary American social

life which increasingly displays characteristics of Disney's created and themed environments; and importantly for globalization, which has also spread rapidly to much of the rest of the world (Bryman, 2004, p.1). Bryman (2004) however, contrasts the underlying principle of Disneyization with that of McDonaldization, arguing that the former relates to consumerism, maximising profit through the consumer experience, whilst the latter, is concerned with the maximization of profit through the process of increased efficiency or rationalization. Bryman (2004) identifies several key pillars of the process of Disneyization of the social sphere; theming, hybrid consumption, merchandizing and performative labour. Theming involves using popular cultural imagery within a social environment to create a themed product or venue, hybrid consumption involves combining forms of consumption, such as cinemas within shopping malls, or restaurants within airports, merchandizing involves the use of copyrighted images in the production of consumer goods and the promotion of consumer goods utilising these, such as those which accompany McDonald's' Happy Meals, and performative labour is the transformation of a job into a performance, frequently utilising a script. Bryman suggests that these processes are intended to provide the consumer with a particular experience transforming the 'mundane to the spectacular' (Bryman, 2004. P177). The ubiquity of the use of multiple forms of consumption, the conspicuous theming of restaurants and bars, and high degree of merchandizing on numerous aspects of consumer goods suggests that Disneyization has developed into a central aspect of contemporary social life (Bryman, 2004).

The concern of many sociologists with the concept of globalization and particularly Americanization in its various forms is the dilution of local cultural identities and the possible destruction of national distinctiveness (Daghrir, 2013). However, there are examples of resistance to the forces of globalization. For example, Daghrir (2013) argues that the USA is itself a consumer of foreign artistic, technical and intellectual influences which have shaped the services and goods which are USA is well known. Daghrir (2013. p21.) argues, for example, that Levi jeans, despite being viewed as a classic item of Americana, are in fact a product of forces resulting from cultural exchanges occurring from mass immigration into the USA in the 19th century. Miller (2012) describes how the ubiquity of jeans has transformed them from an American to a global symbol, although brands remain important for individual identity. Draghir (2013) also cites foreign influence on Hollywood as an example citing Harry Potter as an example amongst others. The extent as to the ability of Americanization to supplant other cultures is also questioned by Daghrir (2013). For example, Daghrir (2013) cites the existence of fish and chip shops predating McDonald's, and that there are six times as many Indian restaurants in the UK as there are McDonald's. Daghrir also posits that the act of consuming Americana does not influence the consumer to feel, or consider oneself American (2013, p23). However, Gupta (2011) found evidence that globalization is having an impact on consumer culture and behavioural traits in India.

There is also evidence that social forces result in local communities modifying global forms of products and services in a process called 'Glocalization' (Robertson, 1992). Robertson (1992) challenges the assumption that globalization is leading to the formation of a single, homogenized global culture. Robertson (1992) suggests that, on the contrary, globalization accentuates the interactions between diverse communities, as people adapt cultural patterns to match their specific socio-cultural background. Glocalization is also the term which explains the way in which Trans-National Corporations (not just American) adopt their products and services to local circumstances. For example, McDonald's would not find it possible to trade in India where the majority population does not consume beef without modifying its products; therefore in India the principle McDonald's product is not the Big Mac but the Chicken Maharaja Mac (Dixon, 2009). Appadurai (1996) also challenges the contention that globalization is leading to a homogenous world, arguing that globalization is not an all-encompassing process and that there are cultural aspects to the way that societies acquire the 'materials of modernity'. Miller (2012, p42) examined consumption of soft drinks in Tobago and found that two British products, Cydrax and Peardrax are favoured over Coca-Cola even though the latter is widely available and heavily promoted through advertising and cost advantage. Miller found that the preference for Cydrax and Peardrax over Coca-Cola can be explained as they have acquired a cultural significance amongst Trinidadians which can only be explained through a specific localized sociological context (Miller, 2012, p43). In addition, commentators point to the growth over recent years of Asian economies, challenging the orthodoxy of the might of America and suggesting the emergence of a new Silk Road (Bernanke, 2006).

Finally, a resistance to globalisation can be seen in the activity of global social movements which emerged in the late 1990's. Callinicos (2003) sees the emergence of these movements as a consequence of the rapid expansion of free market neoliberalism, the rise of trans-national corporations as American businesses relocated production abroad to utilise low-cost foreign labour and materials, the development of the production of brands to promote consumption, and the increase in trading blocs such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the European Economic Community (EEC), now the European Union. In recent years there has also been an increase in the number of global environmental movements following greater understanding about the impact of mass consumption on the environment, concerns about the commodification of nature which adversely impacts on poorer but naturally rich nations (Juniper 2013; Monbiot, 2013). These movements are therefore intrinsically anti-capitalist and therefore against globalization (Callinicos 2003; Monbiot, 2013)

In conclusion therefore, globalization is a complex multi-faceted concept involving many political, economic and cultural aspects. Globalization is an element of modernity and human social development, although others consider it a distinct sociological concept. Several sociologists recognise that globalization has changed the time and distance experience of individuals creating concepts of tourists and vagabonds and the possibility of instantaneous cultural flows. American cultural hegemony

has resulted in concerns over the possibility of cultural dilution and the development of a global homogenic cultural identity due to concepts such as McDonaldization and Disneyization. Globalization has led however, to the emergence of a number of localized social strategies aimed at maintaining local cultural identity, such as glocalization. In addition, fears over the impact of globalization on poorer nations and the environment, and concerns over the role and power of trans-national corporations has led to the rise of worldwide social movements with an anti-globalization focus.

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