

Consumer culture (1)

CONSUMERISM

Consumerism is the opposite (antithesis) and enemy of culture. Whereas culture is embodied in history, tradition and continuity, goods are manufactured for the profit they

make. Consumerism represents the triumph of economic value over social worth. Everything can be bought and sold. Everything has its price.

“Every time you spend money, you’re casting a vote for the kind of world you want.”

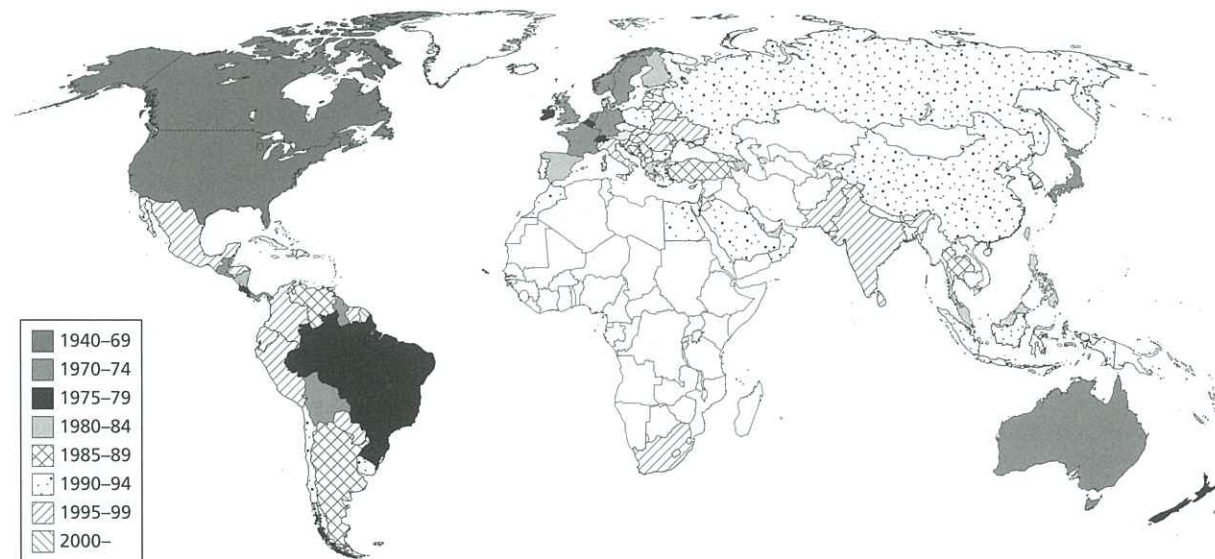
Source: Anna Lappe, O Magazine, June 2003

MCDONALD'S RESTAURANTS

On an average day, over 30 million customers are served at one of more than 31,000 McDonald's restaurants in more than 100 countries. The world map shows that the first restaurants were located in the USA and Canada and then spread to Europe, Australia and Japan during the early 1970s. By the end of the 1970s, McDonald's were consolidating their position in Europe and New Zealand, and had opened restaurants in South America, namely in Brazil. The 1980s saw further expansion and consolidation in South America, Mexico, parts of Europe and South-East Asia. China, Russia and parts of the Arab world were reached only in the 1990s.

Over half these restaurants are in the USA, but the UK has over 600 outlets, Brazil over 250, China nearly 200, Thailand nearly 50. A promotional corporate statistic is that a new McDonald's restaurant opens somewhere in the world every three hours. Not only this, of course, but McDonald's are famed for their uniformity; the same decor, the same basic menu (with very small variations, including the McSpagetti in the Philippines!) and the same service style the world over. And yet McDonald's may not be just the force for cultural homogenization that this suggests. McDonald's has been localized, indigenized and

incorporated into traditional cultural forms and practices. Exactly how this has happened varies across east Asia, for example. In Beijing, McDonald's has lost its American role as a place of fast and cheap food. Instead, it has become a middle-class consumption place, somewhere for a special family outing, somewhere where “customers linger for hours, relaxing, chatting, reading, enjoying the music”. McDonald's here is seen as American, but Americana means something stylish, exotic and foreign, and as such actually results in the meanings and experiences of McDonald's in Beijing being very un-American! In contrast, in Japan, while there is a similar leisurely use of McDonald's, it is not a place of exotic social prestige, but a youth hangout, a place where someone in a business suit would be out of place. In Hong Kong, McDonald's was likewise marketed to the youth market. Today, McDonald's restaurants in Hong Kong are filled with people of all ages, few of whom are seeking an American cultural experience. The chain has become a local institution in the sense that it has blended into the urban landscape. McDonald's is not perceived as an exotic or alien institution. Hence the meanings and practices of McDonald's – an archetype of global homogenization – vary from place to place.



McDonald's restaurants

Consumer culture (2)

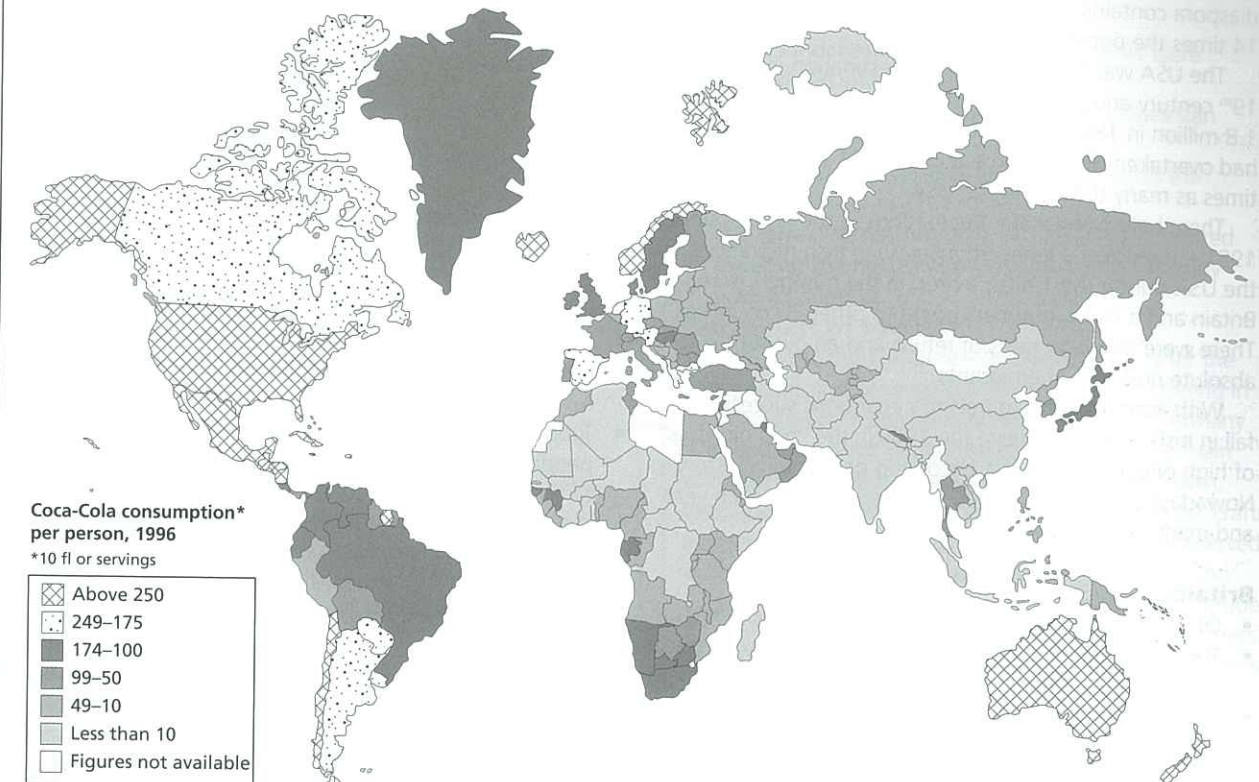
COCA-COLA

Founded in 1886 by pharmacist John Styth Pemberton in Atlanta, Georgia, The Coca-Cola Company is the world's leading beverage manufacturer, marketer and distributor of non-alcoholic beverage concentrates and syrups, used to produce nearly 400 brands. The Coca-Cola Company continues to be based in Atlanta and employs 49,000 people worldwide, with operations in over 200 countries.

The biggest-selling soft drink in history, and one of the best-known products in the world, Coca-Cola was first offered as a soda fountain beverage in Atlanta.

Coca-Cola arrived in Britain in 1900. First sold regularly through soda fountain outlets including Selfridges and the London Coliseum in the early 1920s, Coca-Cola is now the most recognized trademark in the world. The word “Coca-Cola” itself is even thought to be the second most widely understood word in the world after “OK”!

Nowadays, the company is located in more than 200 countries, where its drinks are produced by *local* people with *local* resources. Coca-Cola produces brands that embrace distinct tastes and local preferences.



Coca-Cola workforce worldwide

EXTENSION

Visit

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:KFC_world_map1.png for a world map showing the worldwide distribution of KFC fast food restaurants.

EXTENSION

The nearest neighbour index

The nearest neighbour index provides a statistical value for the degree of clustering, regularity or randomness in a distribution pattern. The formula is $NNI = 2\bar{D} \sqrt{n/a}$ where \bar{D} is the average distance between each point and its nearest neighbour ($\sum d/n$), n is the number of points being looked at, and a is the size of the area. The result varies between 0 (perfect clustering) and 2.15 (perfect regularity).

There are some considerations to bear in mind:

- there may be sub-patterns within the overall pattern although the answer may suggest a random pattern
- there may be controlling factors e.g. flood risk or soil type which influence the pattern.