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# *From Golden Arches to Arcos Dorados: an analysis of McDonald's localization strategies and cultural adaptation in Latin America*

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*Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful individuals with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.*

— Ray Kroc



# ABSTRACT

For more than 60 years, McDonald's has been a leader in the fast-food market, thanks to its deep understanding of both local and global contexts, leading to what is commonly known as the McDonaldization of society. McDonald's has revolutionized the fast-food industry with its innovative methods but has also faced various challenges. To address these, McDonald's has developed its own strategies for adapting to various markets.

This study examines key concepts such as culture and communication to provide a broader understanding of these dynamics. It analyses McDonald's operations in Latin America, examining reports, local marketing campaigns and experts' opinions to assess the company's cultural adaptation strategies. It delves into the origins of McDonald's and explores how the company has adapted its approach to target the Latin American market, focussing on pivotal cultural and value-based elements. This study also highlights specific examples of McDonald's adaptation to the local culture, demonstrating that the company's success in Latin America hinges on its ability to respect local values of its target market while maintaining global brand identity.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that the figure of the intercultural communicator plays a vital role for facilitating effective communication across cultures, and without it, companies risk miscommunication and potential failure in foreign markets.



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# INTRODUCTION

This thesis delves into McDonald's journey of global expansion, with a focus on its strategic adaptation to diverse cultural landscapes, particularly in Latin America. From its humble beginnings as a fast-food venture in California, McDonald's has grown into a global entity synonymous with the spread of American cultural values yet has distinguished itself through a nuanced approach to localization. This dissertation navigates through the relationship of globalization and localization, with McDonald's as a case study embodying the concept of "glocalization" – balancing a globally recognized brand identity while accommodating local tastes and values.

In Chapter One, the importance of cultural context in shaping marketing strategies is examined, underscoring how globalization and localization serve as opposite yet complementary approaches. This chapter contextualizes cultural adaptation as a key component in transcending linguistic and societal boundaries, ultimately fostering intercultural understanding. The focus then shifts to McDonald's adoption of these strategies, marked by its conscious alignment with local consumer values and cultural nuances. Key concepts such as *familismo* or the prioritization of family in Latin American societies serve as thematic pillars in understanding McDonald's targeted advertising.

Chapter Two traces McDonald's historical path, from its American roots to its Latin American market penetration, analyzing pivotal moments in its international expansion. This chapter highlights the company's evolution, detailing how it has navigated challenges such as health critiques and environmental concerns by recalibrating its practices and product offerings. Insights into McDonald's regional adaptations reveal a pattern of responsiveness, where its branding strategy evolves to reflect the socio-cultural dynamics of Latin American communities.

The third and final chapter, "The Taste of Change" delves deeper into McDonald's specific strategies for cultural resonance within Latin America. Through case studies of tailored advertisements and localized menu items, McDonald's ability to honour local traditions while preserving its global identity is brought into focus. By analysing campaigns such as "Todos hablamos McDonald's" the chapter demonstrates

how McDonald's leverages shared cultural values, such as community pride and familial bonds, to bridge generational and linguistic divides.

Additionally, the discussion extends to McDonald's adaptations, the role of cultural pride, and the impact of regional flavours on product offerings, underscoring the depth of the brand's commitment to inclusivity. At the core of McDonald's approach lies the emerging role of the intercultural communicator. This professional figure bridges cultural divides, ensuring that marketing messages resonate authentically with diverse audiences. By interpreting and adapting cultural values, the intercultural communicator strengthens brand authenticity and fosters meaningful connections across varied communities.

In essence, this thesis seeks to illustrate the complexities of adaptation within a culturally pluralistic society, using McDonald's as a prism through which explore the broader implications of globalization and cultural adaptation in modern business practices.

# Chapter 1

## The importance of cultural background within globalization and localization

### 1.1 The concept of Culture

One of the key concepts to better understand people is the concept of Culture; and it is therefore important to understand what its proper definition is before delving into the matter. The word “culture” comes from the Latin, *cultura*, which means to grow or to cultivate something; this definition is far away from what we nowadays refer to when talking about culture, but we can find another word that can be linked with our definition of culture. The closest meaning that the Romans might have attached to our understanding of group interaction would be *humanitas*, which was associated with human events and therefore culture. *Humanitas* is the engagement of one human being with another (Tuleja, 2016). We first come across this term with Cicero’s works, it is here that *humanitas* takes on his full meaning of mutual respect between one another, and the respect for the individual as such.

Therefore, we can introduce another key concept which is tolerance or better, political tolerance that can be defined as the capacity of recognizing and respecting the beliefs or practices of others; a crucial example of political tolerance is given to us by the Persian Empire which adopted this type of policy. The Persians left the conquered cities intact and did not impose any religion on them, so that their values, customs, and religions could flourish and not be eliminated. They decided to do this because of what their religion, Zoroastrianism, had taught them, for among its basic principles was the condemnation of the oppression of people. Thus, knowing something about these roots can help us understand another person’s world view and the most basic assumptions they hold about others who might be different (The Free Dictionary, no date, henceforth n.d.).

Nowadays, there is a disturbing lack of agreement on the definition of culture among cultural anthropologists. Some view culture as learned behaviour, while others see it as an abstraction from behaviour, while for some culture exists only in the mind, whereas others believe it consists of observable things and events. There are also debates about whether culture is in the minds of the people studied or the minds of ethnologists. Various definitions range from culture as a psychic defence mechanism to a Rorschach test of society, leading to confusion.

Historically, there was greater agreement on the definition of culture, in fact in the late 19th and early 20th centuries most cultural anthropologists held to E.B. Tylor's 1871 definition: *culture is a complex whole including knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and other capabilities acquired by humans as members of society*. Tylor's definition implied that culture is unique to humans and encompasses beliefs, customs, objects, and techniques; its conception dominated anthropology for decades (White, 1959). However, conceptions and definitions of culture have multiplied and varied to a great degree.

Many thinkers have tried to define culture from many points of view. We may recall some of these definitions, for instance famous anthropologist Edward T. Hall states that culture is all about communication and that it is governed by hidden rules which are reflected in both language and behaviour (Hall, 1959). According to social psychologist Geert Hofstede culture can be described as “the programming of the human mind by which one group of people distinguishes itself from another group; culture, he says, implies a kind of collective software of the mind, learned over a lifetime of programming the way we do things” (Hofstede, 1997). Another important definition is given to us by Jolene Koester, she defines culture as a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, norms, and social practices which affect the behaviours of a large group of people (Koester, 2009). Therefore, it is important to understand that culture is learned, we are not born with it but instead we learn it from the people (parents, friends, and society in general) around us with whom we interact with when socializing.

In whatever way we choose to explain it, culture involves understanding that other people may have different values, beliefs, ideas, and ways of doing things compared to ours. Culture itself is complex, like a puzzle. We slowly build our understanding of it by learning about these various perspectives, understanding the differences between our own values and behaviour and those of others, while still respecting what is different from us; in fact, one must not make the mistake of thinking that different is dangerous and thus enter xenophobia.

It is fair to cite Ethnocentrism, a belief about one's superiority to that of another (Tuleja, 2016; Lustig & Koester, 2010). Of course, all people in cultures around the world believe that they are the best, that they are the centre of the universe. The word "ethnocentric" is the combination of the Greek word *ethnos* with the word 'centre' and its literal translation is that a particular *ethnos* (a specific ethnic group) is in the centre. We have the tendency to view the world only through our lenses and we do think our way of life is the best way of life among other ways of life. That is why when we go abroad we cannot understand why others do not understand us, it is because we think we are superior and that others should adapt to us, not the other way around.

Ethnocentrism can, in the worst of consequences, lead and indeed has led to acts of intolerance towards other peoples and cultures. This occurs when there is an excessive rejection of others to the point of escalating into outright intolerance or complex direct or indirect mental forms that are harmful to those who are not part of us. When ethnocentrism is translated into its most exasperated form, it becomes racism, tending not only to reject but to destroy the other. As a category of thought, dilated self-concept belongs to numerous cultural contexts (Hooghe, 2008).

This is the case - and these are just examples, which could be multiplied to involve practically every human culture - of the Arab, Persian, or Native American worlds, in which the 'other-than-self' is systematically debased and despised, when not actually denied as belonging to humanity. Edward Said pointed out how the West has constructed and belittled Eastern cultures, portraying them as inherently different and inferior, thus justifying Western domination. Similarly, Ward Churchill has shown how Native Americans have been dehumanised and labelled as 'savages', thus justifying

their forced conquest and assimilation by American colonizers. Both of these dynamics reflect a process of dehumanization and marginalisation that allowed dominant cultures to impose their power and control over those perceived as inferior (Said, 2003; Ward Churchill, 2001).

As already mentioned, culture can be seen as a puzzle that, to be completed, needs its pieces, called blocks (Tuleja, 2015):

- *Values*: are taught to us at an early age, at a time when we do not ask questions and accept them as they are taught. Around them revolve our decisions, our choices, and our behaviour throughout our lives. They can be defined as the tenets of our lives.
- *Beliefs*: are the convictions people hold about the world that are considered true because they are based on our values. They shape how people understand the world around them.
- *Attitudes*: reflect how we feel about something. They are shaped by our values and beliefs, but also by subjective experiences. Attitudes can be positive, negative, or neutral towards objects, ideas, or people. For example, if a core value tells us that drinking is not good for us, then a belief may be that drinking is not a clever idea and therefore the attitude that arise from values and beliefs tell us not to drink. Values and beliefs influence our attitudes towards things we encounter.
- *Behaviours*: are the observable actions people take. Behaviours are influenced by the values, beliefs, and attitudes within a culture. They are the outward expression of what is considered appropriate or acceptable. Behaviours are the most visible portion of these blocks of culture.

Culture is almost invisible to us, we do not realise why we do things a certain way, we simply assume it is the correct way to do it because we have been taught that way.



its roots, branches, and leaves. Lastly, the *thought* or *reference* is the concept, idea or thought that the symbol brings to the mind of the communicators. It is the mental image that each person has in their mind when they come in touch with the symbol. When someone says “tree” the thought or reference is the mental image or idea of a tree that comes to mind.

To close the triangle, what remains are only the speakers which are also called interpreters and are the crucial part of this process; it is central to understand the direct and indirect relations between the symbol, the referent and the thought or reference. Between a thought and a symbol exist a causal relation because when we speak, the symbolism we adopt is the result of the reference we are making. Among the thought and the referent there is also a relationship, direct or indirect, depending on the cases; however, we can establish that among the symbol and the referent does not exist any direct relationship (Ogden, 1923).

Within this triangle it is important to understand that the referent, the actual thing, can be different in the minds of the speakers because if we assume that the interpreters have the same symbol, for instance the word ‘tree’, and the same thought, that of a tree with all its branches and roots, the referent might be different because one speaker could think of an oak while the other speaker may think of a willow. Therefore, it is possible for them to have the same thought, and use the same symbol, but end up with two different views and being aware of this indirect relationship between symbol and referent, we can try to compensate for it by getting clarification.

As already mentioned, at the core of this triangle lies the concept of meaning, which is shaped by both cultural and communicative processes. Culture provides the foundation for the way individuals and groups make sense of and interpret the world around them, including the communication behaviours and norms that are considered appropriate (Hunsinger, 2006). In turn, communication is the primary vehicle through which culture is expressed, negotiated, and shared between individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Gerritsen, 1998). The cultural context within which communication occurs plays a critical role in how messages are encoded, transmitted, and decoded (Liddicoat, 2009). Certain communication styles and practices may be considered appropriate or effective in one cultural context, but confusing or even offensive in another. (Gerritsen, 1998; Hunsinger, 2006).

## 1.2 Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication is where culture meets communication and can be described as an important phenomenon which occurs when two or more people from different cultures meet and communicate with each other. This kind of communication is linked to the different context within each culture, this means that each participant in this dialogue has a different background, different symbols, different values, and different beliefs. It is essential to notice how these cultural differences change and modify the interactions between the people involved; in fact, intercultural communication is a fundamental aspect in our everyday life and it is required to function effectively in private and public life; we need to learn how to communicate with people whose cultural heritage makes them very different from us.

If we want to communicate in the proper way, be effective and have the certainty that what we say penetrates in the minds of others we must learn how to communicate internationally. To communicate with different people from diverse cultures we have to understand what is within culture; in fact, culture is not confined to language, food and customs but also includes other facets of our everyday life, our personal way of being between others that influence our personal and social sphere.

Another fundamental element of culture is the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’. The most obvious boundaries are those defined by nation-states (such as the United States of America, Japan, or China), but also by ethnic groups formed by people with a specific tribal, national, or regional heritage (such as Jews, the Russians, or the Europeans).

Intercultural communication is useful both in our personal and private lives, when getting to know new people from other cultures, and in our working lives where we must deal with various foreign companies. To be able to communicate effectively we must learn certain communication skills, known as cross-cultural, because they help us build bridges between distinct cultures, crossing different boundaries, and help us understand the differences between us and them. When we are in this kind of communication, we must consider a set of factors that can, and do, differ depending on who is the speaker, some of them are:

- *Language and linguistic boundaries*: in communication between cultures, the first and most evident obstacle is certainly the language barrier, the foreign language in fact creates problems for many. It includes not only different languages but also, within a country, different dialects and jargons, where misunderstandings can occur frequently perhaps due to fear of making mistakes, lack of adequate schooling or lack of active vocabulary. The first step in respecting another culture is knowing how to communicate through their language. We must view language as a tool, an especially important one.
- *Norms and cultural values*: are the shared expectations and rules that guide behaviours in a culture. They can include beliefs, rituals, and customs that are considered normal within one culture but may be unfamiliar or even offensive in another. Differences may arise, among other things, in social hierarchies, in fact the appropriate way to address someone or show respect differs across cultures. For example, in some cultures, gifts are expected and appreciated, while in others, they may be perceived as bribery or simply as offensive. Additionally, taboos also differ, there are indeed certain topics or actions that may be considered offensive in one culture but are perfectly acceptable in another (Hofstede, 2001).
- *Personal Space*: another important aspect, when communicating, is the personal space, also called personal bubble which regulates how closely we interact with others. According to Hall (1966), our perception of time is patterned by culture and there are different personal space zones (intimate, personal, social and public); therefore, we have cultures where the personal space contracts such as Spain, Greece and France, and distance is perceived as intimate; and others where the personal bubble expands such as Americans who have a larger ‘personal space’ (Bennett, 1998). Generally speaking, we could say that the higher the density of the country population the more used we are to smaller bubbles; for example, people from India and China accept quite small personal bubbles (Hall, 1966).

- *Non-Verbal Communication*: which includes among other things, gestures, postures, facial expressions, and body language, can change from culture to culture. Even though there are some universal gestures, such as the shoulder shrug, there are many gestures that differ from country to country and what may be considered offensive in one culture may instead be friendly in another. For instance, in North America touching the head of a little baby is seen as a friendly gesture while for the Hmong people (East Asia) is seen as something rude because they believe that the soul resides on the head: making eye contact could be seen as something normal for Americans but again for the Hmong people could be viewed as rude (Fadiman, 1997).
- *Perception of Time*: the conception of time differs widely from country to country; we differentiate between cultures that adopt either Monochronic or Polychronic time. In some cultures, where time is perceived as linear, punctuality is essential and being late is seen as disrespectful (monochronic time vision), while in others, time is perceived as a cycle, and there is a more relaxed attitude about punctuality, schedules, and deadlines (polychronic time vision). Instead of thinking about monochronic cultures as diligent and serious and about polychronic cultures as lazy, we should view monochronic cultures as rigid and polychronic cultures as more relaxed (Tuleja, 2016).

Summarising, language is the foundation of communication, much like music is to dance, and it is not just about spoken words, but their meanings and contexts. Miscommunication is common when people from different linguistic backgrounds interact, so understanding a language's nuances is crucial, akin to learning dance steps for sync; beyond language, cultural norms and values are the unwritten rules guiding interactions, setting the rhythm and pace, indicating when to act or pause. Personal space reflects cultural boundaries, requiring awareness and respect, much like maintaining the right distance in a dance. Non-verbal communication includes subtle cues like smiles and gestures, which can have different meanings across cultures. Timing is also critical, as cultures vary in their approach to time, from strict punctuality

to relaxed flexibility. Mastering intercultural communication requires learning, adaptability, patience, and respect for diversity; misreading these cues can cause misunderstandings and therefore the right communication exchange cannot occur.

### 1.3 The importance of Culture in Marketing

Nowadays, if a business wants to sell its products to people from various parts of the world, it is vital to understand how people's customs and ways of life affect what they buy and like. What works for selling something in one country might not work in another, or it could even upset people. So, when a company wants to win over customers from all over the globe, they really need to get how important culture is in shaping what people want and do. As stated earlier, culture plays a crucial role in marketing, influencing everything from product development to advertising strategies, and what can make the difference between a successful campaign and one that fails or even backfires is the understanding of these cultural differences. Culture shapes the way consumers think, feel, and act; it influences their values, attitudes, and behaviours, which in turn affect their purchasing decisions. Marketers must understand cultural norms and preferences to effectively reach and resonate with their target audience; for instance, a marketing campaign that is successful in one country might not work in another due to differing cultural values and expectations.

According to Marieke De Mooij (2010), a renowned expert in the field of cross-cultural communications and marketing, culture affects marketing in many ways; in fact, cultural differences influence consumer behaviour, preferences, and perceptions, which are crucial for developing effective marketing strategies. Among others, De Mooij's work underscores the importance of understanding cultural values and norms when creating advertising campaigns, as these elements can significantly impact how messages are received and interpreted by different audiences.

The six Cultural dimensions defined by Hofstede (1980) such as Individualism and Collectivism, Power Distance (PDI), and Uncertainty Avoidance play a critical role in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviours; for instance, in individualistic cultures marketing messages that emphasize personal success and individual achievements tend to resonate well, while in collectivist cultures, such as Hispanic and Latino cultures, appeals to family, community, and social harmony are more effective. It is important to

briefly cite an important phenomenon that will be discussed later: *Familismo* which is a fundamental cultural value among individuals of Hispanic or Latino origin. It emphasises support, attachment, loyalty, honour, and obligation to family.

First, familismo reflects a strong identification with family, which goes beyond the family unit to include extended family and close friends; this value implies family duties, constant interaction, and shared responsibilities. For instance, the relationship between *compadres* (godparents) represents an example of a collectivist approach: compadres undertake to share the role of parents towards the baptised child, creating lasting bonds and there is a strong respect for elders and is considered a core value. In Hispanic or Latin families, traditional roles are still present, indeed the father is considered the respected authority, while sons often acquire independence before daughters (although this norm is gradually changing). It should be noted that familismo influences both family dynamics and individual adaptation and it has positive effects on education, family relationships and mental health (Zeiders et al., 2013).

Moving on, in high power distance cultures, brands that highlight prestige and status may be more successful, whereas in low power distance cultures, messages that promote equality and accessibility might be preferred (Hofstede, 2001). Cultural contexts also affect the interpretation of symbols, colours, and narratives in advertising (Nisbett, Smith et al., 1997). Here one can see that humour does not travel well across cultures, because humour relies heavily on cultural conventions, and what is considered funny in one culture may not be understood or can be even offensive in another (Mooij, 2013). This underlines the necessity for marketers to be deeply aware of the cultural context when designing advertisements that use humour; and this process involves not just translating language but also adapting idioms, expressions, and even colour schemes to suit cultural preferences because when talking about effective communication there must be a deep understanding of these cultural nuances. Especially, when dealing with different countries and different cultures, cultural sensitivity is required because without understanding and adapting to local communication preferences, marketing efforts can fail to resonate with the target audience; cultural sensitivity is essential for maintaining relationships with the world

around us and therefore helps brand to build trust and establish a deeper connection with the consumers (Mooij, 2019).

## 1.4 Different approaches in Marketing

There is an ongoing debate between standardizing marketing strategies globally versus adapting them to local cultures, so the debate is about the different approaches in marketing, where one could argue that globalization is better than localization and vice versa; first of all is it important to define what each of these strategies involve. On one hand, Globalization embodies a view of the world as a single entity and as such proposes and develops marketing strategies because the world is seen as a unified market; companies that adopt this approach sell standardised products in a consistent manner globally.

### 1.4.1 Globalization and Localization

Globalization is indeed defined in the broadest sense by Robertson as “the concrete structuration of the world as a whole” (Robertson, 1990) and the term *globalization* is often used to cover the global flow of technology, media and changes in human behaviour that are a result of globalization. We have various examples of globalized approaches such as Apple, Coca-Cola, Starbuck’s and McDonald’s, these companies use to a certain extent a globalized approach; in fact, no matter where you are in the world right now, you know for a fact that you can find nearby you an Apple Store and a McDonald’s, this is what globalization means: the ability to deliver consistent products, services, and brand experiences across different cultures and regions, creating a sense of familiarity and reliability that transcends borders. This global presence is achieved through standardized business models, marketing strategies, and operational practices that cater to a diverse international audience while maintaining the core of the brand. Companies who believe in a globalized approach tend to use uniform products, promotional campaigns, pricing, and distribution channels across all markets and, among the marketing mix variables, the easiest things to standardize are the brand name, product features, packaging, and labelling.

The Internet is the ultimate example of global communication, and it is believed to cross cultural barriers (Cheon& Sutherland, 2007). However, in a short span of time, it has become very local as people in different countries use it in diverse ways and in different languages. The technology needed for computers to communicate with each other was invented by the American defence research agency. The Internet as we know it today was invented by a British computer scientist and developed in the English-speaking world, but in fact by 2008 most blogs were not in English but in Japanese (Sifry, 2006). Already in 2005, a prominent level of localization of websites for global brands of U.S. origin was reported (Okazaki, 2005). Globalization, then, has not produced globally uniform consumers and although there is a worldwide convergence of technology, media, and financial systems, the desires and behaviours of consumers do not seem to be converging.

Looking back at the origin of globalization we came to realize that, despite the fact that we can find millions of articles and books with the term “globalization” in its title (Lazarus 1998/99:91) declaring it as something extremely new and revolutionary, globalization is only the natural response to the evolution of technologies and means of transport, as the world became interconnected so did the markets and the money. Nonetheless, many began to be scared and to go against globalization because of the process of homogenization found within the concept of globalization. During such process certain ideas and cultural practices would spread, especially from the Western centres to the more remote regions of the world and lead consequentially to the loss of local identities and culture; in fact, the whole globalization discourse in marketing is dominated by Anglo-Saxon authors and as a result, many view globalization as some sort of Americanization (Mooij, 1998). In addition, there is the fear of a global culture, where distinctions and individual’s identities disappear, and although we need to maintain the ideal of a world culture, we are at the same time forced to admit that it is something we cannot imagine. Indeed, the imposition of one culture on another would only become much worse if we tried to create and impose a global culture, since cultures do not all follow the same processes of growth and therefore develop differently. Then, we must agree with T.S. Eliot (1948) when he stated in his book ‘Notes towards the Definition of Culture’ that “a world culture which was simply a uniform culture would be no culture at all. We should have a humanity de-humanised. It

would be a nightmare”. Throughout this ongoing debate, others envisioned the melting of all cultures together, such as Theodore Levitt in *The Globalization of Markets* (1983). In his article he in fact forecasts a world in which, thanks to technology, cultures will converge into one single global culture; he then goes on to say that “different cultural preferences...are vestiges of the past” (Levitt, 1983). He believes that cultural preferences are outdated, something obsolete and he thinks that all people are increasingly alike in their desires and needs. Apart from Levitt, another key advocate of standardization can be seen in the figure of Erik Elinder; Elinder argued that converging standards of living and technological advancements justified uniform advertising messages across European countries, predicting the emergence of a common European consumer (Elinder, 1965). Similarly, Levitt (1983) emphasized technology and modernity as forces driving global convergence, suggesting that standardization allowed companies to offer the best combinations of price, quality, reliability, and delivery for globally identical products.

While it might appear that much of Levitt's predictions have come true, human cultures are diverging and becoming more distinct. This is supported by empirical data from surveys conducted by the Dutch academic Hofstede (Hofstede 1984, 1991), whose extensive research at IBM produced various cultural indexes. If humanity were indeed moving towards a single global culture as Levitt suggested in his article, these indexes would show convergence; however, the data indicate the opposite trend, with values among countries of similar cultural backgrounds growing further apart. For instance, two hundred and fifty years ago, Americans, British, Canadians, Australians, and New Zealanders shared the same culture due to their common British heritage; they shared many things such as the language they spoke: English, followed similar legal and educational systems, and adhered to British customs, traditions, and social norms. This shared background created a largely homogeneous cultural landscape across these nations. Today, however, each of these countries has developed its own distinct culture, which is becoming increasingly well-defined. The United States has forged a unique identity characterized by its emphasis on individualism, the United Kingdom maintains a rich historical and cultural heritage, Canada is known for its cultural mosaic, embracing diversity. These distinct cultural identities reflect the diverse paths these

nations have taken since their shared beginnings, demonstrating a divergence that counters the idea of a converging global culture (Griffiths et al., 1989).

Additional evidence against Levitt's globalization theory is the rise in ethnic awareness worldwide. In the U.S., this is reflected in the growing popularity of ethnic studies, such as Native American and Black studies, and cultural achievement scholarships in many colleges. In Japan, it is seen in the public's dedicated support for their Olympic athletes and a renewed interest in traditional Japanese arts like Sadō, which is a particular tea ceremony (Kurita 2004). Naisbitt (1991) refers to this as cultural nationalism, where identification with religion, language, and race is an expression of human individualism resisting a homogenized lifestyle. Despite the global presence of multinational corporations making the world appear more uniform, people are increasingly proud of their local culture and heritage (Tanahashi, 2008).

On the other hand, we find Localization which involves customizing marketing strategies for different regions/countries of the world according to (cultural, regional, national) differences. According to the Localization Industry Standards Association (LISA) we can describe localization as follows: "Localization involves the alteration of any aspect of a product or service that is needed for a product to be sold or used in another market" (Haron, 2016). When companies localize, we must consider that the marketer is subject to a new set of influences and different limitations such as language, climate, occupations, educations, and frequent conflicts arise from the varying laws, cultures, and societies that must be considered when developing a marketing strategy. It is clear that people in different countries speak different languages, and laws and regulations vary between states and while most countries drive on the right side of the road, some drive on the left. We must conclude that these differences significantly influence consumption preferences and patterns.

The question of whether a company should globalize or localize its marketing mix when it expands abroad remains open, and as we have already seen, today's world is not a homogenous blob of mankind therefore we have to consider the uniqueness of each local market so as to optimize the potential for success and we can infer that

products need to be localized to different markets instead of being offered in a globalized form; also there is ample evidence that to consumers, the *local* is more meaningful than the *global* (Mooij, 1998).

However, there are different opinions and statements about this debate that need to be cited; for instance, Ohmae (1989) states that “large companies must become more global if they hope to compete. They must transform themselves from companies that view their foreign operations as secondary to companies that view the entire world as one borderless market”. Levitt (1983) suggests that as markets become more similar and globalised, the key to success lies in the ability to globalize. Additionally, Czinkota and Ronnenken (1995) believe that multinational companies need to understand how to adapt their entire marketing strategy, including sales and distribution methods, to meet new market demands. They stated that ‘modifying and adapting the determinants of the marketing mix is essential and vital to meet local tastes, respond to specific needs and the non-identical demands of consumers’ (Czinkota and Ronnenken, 1995). There is, however, another protagonist in this debate, which is glocalization and the principle of *think global, act local.*; in fact, Taylor (1991) argues that companies should use both elements of localization and globalization to create a competitive advantage: ‘... it is important to follow the principle “think globally, act locally”. The company must ensure that its structure adapts to the international environment while having the internal flexibility to implement its strategic objective’ (Taylor, 1991).

## 1.5 Think Global, Act Local

It is therefore important to understand and to mention the quote *think global, act local*, which is a strategic marketing principle that suggests that companies should consider both global opportunities and local needs when developing their business strategies. This approach seeks to balance global consistency with local adaptation to optimise the competitiveness and relevance of the product or service in different markets. However, we must view this principle as a paradox because, according to De Mooij (1998), thinking and behaviour are influenced by culture and someone who thinks globally is still a product of his or her own culture. The paradox lies in balancing two contradictory goals: Global Consistency and Local Adaptation.

Companies strive for consistency across different markets to maintain a strong brand identity, economies of scale, and efficient operations. Simultaneously, they need to adapt to local preferences, cultural nuances, and regulatory requirements to remain relevant and competitive. Achieving both global consistency and local adaptation is challenging because what works well in one market may not translate directly to another. We must understand that when someone thinks globally, they still carry their cultural background and biases and even when aiming for a global perspective, individuals and organizations are shaped by their local context, values, and experiences. Among others, multinational corporations (MNCs) must face this paradox and to face it they must consider overarching strategies, global trends, and shared best practices while tailoring their offerings to meet specific local needs, preferences, and regulations.

However, these goals often clash: a global product might not resonate with local consumers due to cultural differences, and local adaptations can lead to inconsistencies across markets, diluting the global brand. For instance, fast food chains like McDonald's maintain a consistent menu globally, creating a sense of familiarity, but adapt it to local tastes, such as the McPollo in Peru or the Dulce de leche in Argentina, these are only few examples of localized menus, this is one of the ways McDonald's honours and respects local customs and dishes.



Figure 2. Localized item in McDonald's Peru ([urly.it/310qrs](http://urly.it/310qrs)).



Figure 3. Localized item in McDonald's Argentina ([urly.it/310qrm](http://urly.it/310qrm)).

The slogan “think globally, act locally” also applies to sustainability efforts, where individuals can have a more immediate impact by reducing their own energy consumption rather than waiting for global policy changes (Giddens, 2009). In summary, the paradox lies in harmonizing global aspirations with local realities and while the principle encourages holistic thinking, it acknowledges that cultural context remains a powerful force shaping our actions and decisions. People’s thinking and perception are influenced by the framework of their own culture, leading them to identify similarities based on their cultural perspective. Often, these perceived similarities are pseudo-similarities, reflecting what people want to see rather than the reality; for instance, viewing Japanese individuality as a sign of Westernization is a common misperception (Mooij, 1998). The global-local paradox highlights that as people learn more about other countries and cultures, they become more aware of their own cultural or national identity. During the unification of different European nations, increased knowledge about each other led to advertising symbols and appeals becoming more nationally oriented.

To set an example, despite globalization there is a growing preference for local music. At the start of the 21st century, 93% of music sold in the United States was by local artists; in Japan, it was 74%, and across Europe, more than 50%. By 2008, most young people favoured local singers, such as Jay Chou in China, Himesh Reshammiya in India, Fall Out Boy in Australia, and Jolin Tsai in Taiwan (Synovate, 2008). Although marketing knowledge has spread globally, it has facilitated the localization of products and services rather than their standardization. (Baker et al., 2003).

To conclude and summarize this ongoing debate between local and global we have to rely on various studies that have been done, during a long period of over 50 years, based on how companies behave in foreign markets so as to understand the factors influencing their choice between standardizing operations and adapting to local environments. Research has spanned from individual marketing elements (mostly product or advertising) to the entire marketing mix and business strategy, primarily focusing on U.S. companies' global strategies (Dow, 2005). The debate continues, with proponents of standardization arguing for the benefits of economies of scale in

marketing, production, and R&D, while advocates of adaptation emphasize the need to tailor practices and offerings to meet diverse consumer needs and wants. The challenge lies in determining the optimal level of adaptation for maximum economic payoff (Jain,1989).

Watson Dunn, an early U.S. advertising professor, encapsulated the dilemma faced by international marketing executives: whether to use the same advertising in foreign markets or adapt to local differences to avoid cultural taboos and other issues (1966). This debate reflects the broader question U.S. companies face when marketing abroad: whether to standardize for efficiency or adapt for effectiveness. Early studies often relied on conceptual assumptions without empirical evidence, focusing on manufacturers' opinions rather than consumer needs (Zinkhan, 1994). Proponents of standardization believed in the universality of fundamental human needs, asserting that a strong advertising concept could cross borders with only minor execution adjustments (Mooij, 1998). However, competition increased over time, leading companies like Levi's and Coca-Cola to adapt their strategies to local markets (Quelch, 2003). By the 1990s, the arguments for universality became more nuanced and standardization was recognized as suitable only for specific segments or marketing mix elements, such as packaging and advertising (Banerjee, 1994).

Researchers like Agrawal (1995) categorized international advertising strategies into standardization, adaptation, and contingency perspectives, with the latter suggesting that the most effective strategy varies by situation. Studies conducted over five decades (e.g., Merz, 2008; Okazaki, 2007; Harris, 2003), including fifty-six research papers, have revealed a shift from international to regional focus, with full standardization being rare in Europe. Different measurement approaches included manager surveys, advertising content analysis, and complex studies incorporating environmental variables, adaptation measures, and performance outcomes (Fastoso, 2010). Several strategic factors influence the decision to standardize or adapt, including product category and life cycle, company organization and culture, business environment, and consumer factors (Mooij, 1998). Some products, like whiskey and perfume, benefit from a standardized marketing approach due to their strong country-of-

origin associations (Nelson, 2007); in addition, also technology products tend to standardize effectively (Reader's Digest Trusted Brands, 2012).

However, as products mature, adaptation becomes necessary to provide to varying market needs and attitudes. A company's origin culture and management vision significantly influence its approach; for instance, U.S. companies often favour standardization, while European and Japanese firms emphasize local adaptation (Mooij, 1998; Alashban, 2001; Taylor, 2006). Export dependence also plays a role, with highly export-dependent firms more likely to adapt their products for better performance (Calantone, 2006). Differences in infrastructure, competition, laws, regulations, and media infrastructure necessitate varying degrees of adaptation. Despite the availability of international media, cross-border campaigns remain limited due to cultural programming differences (Dibb, 1994). Consumer similarity and differences, including spending power and cultural preferences, are critical (Samli, 2012). Recognizing and addressing these differences can lead to more effective marketing strategies; as Ohmae (1989) noted, managing in a global context requires understanding and catering to diverse tastes and preferences rather than seeking universal solutions.

Furthermore, studies among U.S. and Japanese multinationals and manufacturing firms in various countries have found positive correlations between product adaptation and export performance (Dow, 2006). Scholars emphasize that superior performance often results from marketing competence in handling product adaptation, planning, control, and effective execution of pricing, advertising, and distribution strategies (Knight et al., 2004). The renowned advertising research firm Millward Brown has concluded that few advertisements can transcend cultural boundaries, indicating that local engagement may balance the cost efficiencies of standardized campaigns. Thus, while the appeal of globalization persists, evidence increasingly supports the benefits of localization in achieving superior market performance (Hollis, 2009).

## 1.6 McDonaldization

After exploring the intricate balance between globalization and localization, it becomes evident that businesses must navigate the complex interplay of global consistency and local adaptation. We now must go deep on the main topic of this research, which is the phenomenon of McDonald's, a brand that has become synonymous with both global reach and local adaptation. This leads us to the concept of "McDonaldization" a term coined by sociologist George Ritzer in the 1990s (1993). We can infer that McDonaldization refers to the process by which the principles of the fast-food industry, epitomized by McDonald's, increasingly dominate various sectors of society and the world. George Ritzer was concerned with the risks that this cultural homogenization and loss of authenticity brought about by the diffusion of McDonald's all-around America and later the entire world; he called this phenomenon "McDonaldization of society."

The world of McDonald's provides a vivid illustration of how a global brand can standardize certain elements while adapting others to meet local tastes and cultural preferences. McDonald's global success hinges on its ability to offer a consistent experience worldwide, with recognizable branding, menu items, and operational efficiencies. However, its enduring appeal and competitive edge also derive from its willingness to tailor its offerings to local markets. This dual strategy of global standardization and local adaptation exemplifies the broader dynamics of globalization in the contemporary business landscape.

In his pivotal 1996 work, *The McDonaldization of Society*, Ritzer situates McDonaldization as a cornerstone of sociological discourse on globalization. He argues that when societal institutions and organizations embrace the same traits prevalent in fast-food chains, a profound transformation occurs. He viewed the McDonaldization of society as "the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more sectors of American society, as well as the rest of the world" (Ritzer, 1996). Furthermore, he considered McDonald's as the symbol of a new way of doing business, which would inevitably influence the market in the years to come.

Ritzer, explaining the McDonaldization theory, highlights four key dimensions—*efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control*—that are not only central to

McDonald's strategies, but also increasingly prevalent in various facets of modern life and many other companies such as Amazon, Coca Cola, Walmart. These dimensions reflect a drive towards efficient processes, quantitative metrics, uniform experiences, and regulated environments. By examining how McDonald's implements these principles on a global scale while simultaneously respecting local cultures, we can gain deeper insights into the broader implications of globalization and localization in today's interconnected world.

- *Efficiency* is about selecting the most effective methods to achieve a specific aim. McDonald's has consistently focused and spent most time on identifying the most efficient techniques for preparing hamburgers, frying chicken, and serving customers in the fastest way possible. They managed to get a hamburger into the customer's hand in just 30 seconds (as reported in 'The Founder', directed by John Lee Hancock, 2016, a biographical film on the history of McDonald's) thanks to a specific layout of the kitchen. Furthermore, efficiency does not only apply to customers, in the case of the drive-through formula where a customer can get the food in a very quick and practical way, but also to workers who must function well in such a small environment, and to do so they must follow a specific, well-orchestrated, process (Ritzer,1996).



Figure 4. A food preparation area display sits inside the McDonald's USA First Store Museum April 14, 2005, in Des Plaines, Illinois ([urly.it/310qrz](http://urly.it/310qrz)).

- *Calculability* in McDonaldized systems emphasizes quantity over quality, or at least sees them as equal terms, where quantitative aspects, such as portion size or price and the time it takes to get the product to the customer, are particularly important. Similarly, food and beverage companies like Domino and Pizza Hut are a clear example: Domino promises to deliver pizza in half an hour, or the pizza is free for the customers, while Pizza Hut does similarly by offering a pan pizza in five minutes or it will be free. As two observers of contemporary American culture put it, “As a culture, we tend to believe deeply that in general ‘bigger is better’ (Barber, 1992; Friedman, 1999).
- *Predictability* ensures uniform production or service delivery processes, granting consistent and identical products across the globe; customers take great comfort in knowing that McDonald’s, in this case, offers no surprises (Ritzer, 2018). Predictability can be seen in the same exact store with the same colours, logo, layout of furniture; the workers are also predictable, in fact what they do and say is often scripted and dictated by their manager. In this type of environment, people want to know exactly what to expect when entering a McDonald’s, where to go, where to pay, where to eat.
- *Control* is exerted towards the final customers who find themselves in a McDonald’s for example through the drive-through which suggests to customers to leave before they even eat (respecting the formula fast-food), de facto leading them to do what the management wants them to do. Control is extended even to those who work in McDonald’s through behavioural methods and rules about how to get tasks done in a specific way.

However, equating McDonaldization with the homogenization of social realities would be a significant oversight. McDonald's, as a global brand, exemplifies how adaptation and innovation are pivotal to its success across diverse markets; in fact, the company's strategy involves tailoring its services and products to meet the specific needs of various consumer demographics, local factors, and economic conditions. For example, in the 1960s, McDonald's catered to women entering the workforce and a

growing teenage population with fast and affordable menus. During the 1970s and 1980s, McDonald's embraced globalization, disseminating the American lifestyle globally while adapting to local contexts through franchising. The company's corporate image evolved with strategies emphasizing speed and convenience, incorporating healthier options like salads and fruit to align with contemporary food trends. Innovations continue with the introduction of high-quality beverages and products that compete directly with local cafes and chains like Starbucks.

McDonald's exemplifies a dual marketing strategy combining standardization and localization. Certain core products, such as the McFlurry, McNuggets, and Happy Meal, remain consistent globally, reinforcing the brand image and achieving economies of scale; simultaneously, the company adapts its offerings to local markets, enabling broader reach despite higher communication and production costs.

Ritzer argues that the rationalization of the society is an on-going and unstoppable phenomenon which eliminates any surprises and casual elements during the process in order to avoid inefficiencies (Ritzer, 1999); so, when entering a McDonald's or any other fast food, as stated earlier, we know for sure what to expect and at the same time we will not receive anything out of the ordinary. He stated that this process encourages people to consume in an endless cycle and infinite number of products and services.

However, despite Ritzer's assertion of the inevitability of McDonaldization, other scholars like Phil Lyon, Stephen Taylor, and Sheena Smith (1994) contend that the process is not ever-present or inevitable; they argue that competition among fast-food restaurants fosters diversity, in fact different consumption and production systems exist in various countries. Moreover, McDonald's adaptation to local tastes and changing fashions shows that it does not offer a completely standardized menu globally.

While Ritzer thinks that the result of globalization is homogenization of society, the theorist Robertson introduces the concept of *glocalization*, a blend of globalization and localization, that can be defined as "the co-presence of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies." This term is not to be interpreted as the opposite of globalization, rather we must consider global and local as two sides of the same coin where each side can be eligible on its own but if taken together it can create a different kind of approach, just like the case of McDonald's. Glocalization does not ignore the presence of globalizing factors around a specific matter, but it melts them with the local

factors that might succeed in a specific situation. Even though Ritzer was firmly convinced that McDonaldization was about to bring the homogenization of society, we must agree with other scholars who strongly and empirically proved, as we have stated earlier, that this kind of phenomenon does all but lead to homogenization.

Some scholars argue that McDonald's massive adaptation of local taste might lead to a loss of its own identity and to not be recognizable anymore, however this is the very strategy of McDonald's which tends to focus on the consumer behaviour and attitudes to understand which changes are to be undertaken in a specific case. What McDonald's understood was that the customer wants to try something different and at the same time wants to feel at home and, while there will be some products that recalls a specific region, there will always be standardized products like French fries or the Big Mac that are essentially the same in each store.

Apart from the products sold within the store, for the purposes of this dissertation it is important to understand the concept of *transcreation* which is the process of adapting content with a persuasive aim from one language to another while preserving its original intent, style, tone, and context, as if the target text was born in the target language and culture (Benetello, 2017). Unlike direct translation, which focuses on converting text word-for-word, without considering the essence of the culture for which the message is being translated, transcreation involves a more creative and culturally sensitive approach to ensure that the message resonates appropriately with the target audience.

This process often requires reimagining or recreating content to align with cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, and local preferences, thereby maintaining the effectiveness and emotional impact of the original message. For instance, one thing about companies that resonates globally is the *payoff*, which is a short phrase that accompanies a brand logo whose aim is to summarise the brand's promise; the payoff needs to be adapted depending on the country and it cannot be just translated word per word but needs to capture the essence of the payoff in each country; in fact since it is usually meant to be catchy, it is Important that the sentence is culturally relevant. In these cases, idioms tend to be unique to the culture in which they are spawned and, unfortunately, they are often literally "*lost in translatio*" because they do not translate to mean the same thing in another language; additionally, language barriers are very

important and should not be underestimated, proving that it is not enough to translate word-per-word to capture the essence of the message one wants to convey abroad.

To provide an example of the difficulties many have faced during the creation of a payoff we may cite the famous and successful “Got Milk” ad campaign created in the 90s, which was directed by Micheal Bay, who quickly made a name for himself as a commercially successful director in the years to come. This two simple but effective words helped to increase the milk sales, for this reason the company decided to set their sights on the Latino community but failed because “Got Milk” translates as “¿Tienes leche?” which means “Are you lactating?” in Spanish. Furthermore, the central concept of the campaign, which highlighted the inconvenience of running out of milk, had to be completely reconsidered; the depiction of a Latin mother running out of milk or other necessities was considered offensive rather than humorous. In addition, the "Got Milk?" campaign was originally aimed at a broad audience, focusing on anyone who might run out of milk, rather than specifically targeting mothers and grandmothers who are often considered the main providers of milk in Latino households.



Figure 5. ‘Got Milk?’ - The famous advertising payoff ([urly.it/310qs1](http://urly.it/310qs1)).

To achieve greater resonance with Hispanic audiences, the campaign shifted its focus from the 'Milk Deprivation Strategy' to the 'Milk Generations Strategy'. The new payoff, "¿Y Usted, Les dio suficiente leche hoy?" ("And you, have you given them enough milk today?"), emphasised the importance of feeding and providing for the family. The advertisements featured traditional family recipes, such as flan, bread pudding and tres leches cake, all using milk as a key ingredient. Over time, the tagline

evolved into 'Familia, Amor y Leche' ('Family, Love and Milk'), further reinforcing the campaign's focus on family values and cultural traditions (Raine, 2001).

One example of successful payoff can be seen in McDonald's famous *I'm Lovin' It* in 2003 which was able to use transcreation to convey this payoff in different countries such as Spain and Latin America "Me Encanta" or the German "Ich Gleich's" featuring the classic logo of the two golden arches forming the 'm' of McDonald's (Hogan,2016).



Figure 6. Transcreation of McDonald's 'I'm Lovin' It' payoff in different languages ([urly.it/310qs5](http://urly.it/310qs5)).

### 1.6.1 Cultural Adaptation

International marketing experts have long recognized that achieving success in global markets requires more than simply exporting products or services as they are from one country to another. As we have already seen, to effectively engage with diverse consumer bases, companies must carefully adapt their offerings to align with the unique cultural, social, and economic conditions of each market (Cateora e Graham, 2002). This often involves tailoring products and services to meet local tastes, preferences, and expectations, as well as navigating varying regulatory environments and consumer behaviours. The underlying goal is to cultivate a positive brand perception and establish a meaningful connection with local consumers. This process

may necessitate altering certain elements of the company's global identity, such as branding, messaging, or even product formulations—to resonate more effectively within specific cultural contexts. By doing so, companies can enhance their relevance and appeal, driving greater brand loyalty and market success on a global scale.

In today's globalized world, cultural diversity plays a significant role in shaping consumer behaviours and as companies strive to expand their reach and cater to diverse markets, it is crucial to embrace and understand the cultural factors that influence consumer preferences and purchasing decisions. By incorporating cultural diversity into consumer marketing strategies, businesses can effectively connect with their target audiences, build strong brand loyalty, and drive business growth.

Embracing cultural diversity in consumer marketing is no longer an option but a necessity for businesses to thrive in today's global market, in fact only by conducting thorough market research, adapting marketing messages and visuals, and collaborating with local influencers, companies can effectively connect with diverse audiences, build strong brand loyalty, and drive business growth. Embracing cultural diversity allows businesses to create a meaningful impact and foster positive relationships with consumers from diverse cultural backgrounds. In the following sections we will explore how McDonald's has successfully embraced various cultures through multiple strategies, specifically Latino cultures, displaying their culturally inclusive marketing approach across different geographical and cultural contexts.

## Chapter 2

# The genesis of McDonald's: expansion across Latin America

“Look after the customer and the business will take care of itself”

— Ray Kroc

### 2.1 The Origins: The McDonald Brothers and the Invention of Fast Food

Every great empire is founded on modest roots, and the history of McDonald's is no exception. What is now one of the most recognizable and influential brands in the world began with a small restaurant in a quiet American town. The early stages of this entrepreneurial venture were characterised by a mix of innovation, perseverance and, above all, simplicity. By exploring the origins of McDonald's, we can understand how a small business managed to grow into a global catering giant.



Figure 7. The McDonald brothers in front of their first restaurant in San Bernardino, California, 1940; they were announcing the future opening of the first Drive-In

Hamburger Bar with the Speedee system that was destined to revolutionise the fast-food industry in the United States ([urly.it/310pc\\_](http://urly.it/310pc_)).

Brothers Richard and Maurice McDonald (commonly known as Dick and Mac) opened the world's first McDonald's in San Bernardino, California in 1940 where originally a carhop drive-in system was used; the breakthrough came in 1948 where they invented the "Speedee Service System" featuring 15 cent hamburgers: they had created the world's first Self-Service, Drive-In Restaurant in which they were able to give people a fast-food menu with low prices. McDonald's brothers did not stop in San Bernardino but decided to go further and started a small franchise<sup>1</sup> operation with six McDonald's (McDonald's History, n.d.). We can see franchising as a:

*"System in which one large firm ... grants or sells the right to distribute its products or use its trade name and processes to a number of smaller firms...Franchise holders, although legally independent, must conform to detailed standards of operation designed and enforced by the parent company"* (Dicke, 1992).

### 2.1.1 Ray Kroc and the Creation of a Global Empire

In this timeframe an ambitious milkshake salesman named Ray Kroc came in contact in 1954 with the two brothers and was both surprised and thrilled to understand that a single restaurant needed eight of his milkshake's machines so he decided to see for himself what kind of fast food was (Kroc, 1990). He remained shocked seeing the swiftness within that restaurant, thanks to the speedee system, and decided to go into business with the McDonald's brothers; he managed to convince them of a dream he had: to open a McDonald's in every city in America. Ray Kroc had a much larger franchise in mind than the two brothers had, they were reluctant to risk it all with a national venture, but in the end Kroc, taking all responsibilities, managed to convince them. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that Ray Kroc did not invent anything at McDonald's, in fact he did not invent the principles within McDonald's nor the franchising operation (Ritzer, 2018); franchising for instance made its debut way before Kroc came in contact with the McDonald's brothers, just to cite some of them: A&W

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<sup>1</sup> Franchising is a form of continuous collaboration for the distribution of goods or services between an entrepreneur, known as franchisor, and one or more entrepreneurs, known as franchisee (Rizzuto, 2012).

Root Beer stands started franchising in 1924 or Howard Johnson began franchising ice cream in 1935, so we can clearly see how many others pre-dated McDonald's (Ritzer, 2018). Even so, McDonald's had something in its recipe that made it special, and Kroc had perfectly understood that. At first, Kroc and the McDonald brothers worked together, but throughout their partnership they had some problems with running the franchises: as stated by Ritzer (2019) the McDonald brothers were happy to keep McDonald's as a "local sensation" while Kroc wanted to build an empire under the name of McDonald's.

On April 15, 1955, Kroc opened what will be considered the first *McDonald's* in Des Plaines, Illinois (McDonald's History, n.d.) offering a simple menu centred around a 15-cent hamburger and as his ambition grew, he decided to buy them out in 1961 so that he could finally forge his personal empire (Ritzer, 2019). Kroc was particularly impressed by the efficiency of the McDonald brothers' operations and the immense potential such a system could generate if applied to a large number of restaurants. Here is how Kroc (Kroc, 1977) described his first impressions of the McDonald's system:

*"I was fascinated by the simplicity and effectiveness of the system ... Each step in producing the limited menu was stripped down to its essence and accomplished with a minimum of effort. They sold hamburgers and cheeseburgers only. The burgers were... all fried the same way, for fifteen cents"*



Figure 8. Depiction of the original McDonald's menu emphasising its simplicity and limited choice of items, taken from the film 'The Founder' directed by John Lee Hancock, 2016 ([urly.it/310pca](http://urly.it/310pca)).

It is important to note that, although Ray Kroc did not invent either the methods used by the McDonald brothers nor the franchise operation, he certainly managed to bring innovation within McDonald's methods and more importantly within the franchising. Speaking of methods, Ray Kroc had developed an obsession with efficiency and streamlining processes; in fact, before going into business with the McDonald's brothers, when he sold blenders to restaurants, Kroc was frustrated by the lack of efficiency he observed: "There was inefficiency, waste ... and food whose [*sic*] quality was never consistent. What was needed was a simple product that moved from start to completion in a *streamlined* path" (Boas, Chain, 1976). Before bumping into McDonald's hamburgers and choosing them as a model of efficiency, Kroc had considered focusing on hot dogs but rejected the idea because of their excessive variety: there were many types of hot dogs and just as many ways of cooking them (such as boiled, steamed, grilled or barbecued) while on the other hand hamburgers were a much simpler and more instant solution (Ibid.).

In order to gain efficiency Kroc and his partners experimented with every component of the hamburger to enhance the efficiency of its production and service. For instance, they initially used partially sliced buns that arrived in cardboard boxes but this solution was a partial waste of time since the griddle workers had to spend time opening the boxes, separating the buns, slicing them completely in half, and disposing of the leftover paper and cardboard. Eventually, they discovered that using buns that were fully sliced in half and shipped in reusable boxes was more efficient. The meat patties received similar attention, for example, the paper between the patties had to have just the right amount of wax so that the patties could easily slide off the paper and onto the grill (Kroc, 1977).

Kroc's aim with these innovations was to achieve greater efficiency throughout the process, as he explains in his book "Grinding It Out" (1977):

*"The purpose of all these refinements ...was to make [the] job easier [so as to be done] quickly and well. And the other considerations of cost cutting, inventory control ... were important to be sure, but they were secondary to ... what happened ...at the smoking griddle. This was the vital passage of our assembly-line, and the product had to flow through it smoothly or the whole plant would falter"*

Apart from his obsession on efficiency, Kroc's biggest and most important innovation was without any doubt his personal approach of turning McDonald's into a franchise. Unlike other franchisers, he did not allow regional franchises, in which a single franchisee controlled all outlets in a specific area; other companies had struggled with this model because regional franchisees often became too powerful and damaged the brand's core principles. Instead, Kroc maintained a strong central control and guaranteed consistency across the entire network by assigning franchises individually and rarely granting more than one to the same person; additionally, he established strict standards for every aspect of the restaurant's operations, from food preparation to cleanliness. Kroc understood that franchisees were the key to realizing his dream of taking McDonald's abroad and managed to standardize each aspect of restaurants, to maintain consistency across all locations, he launched a training program in 1968, known as Hamburger University, to introduce franchisees to all the standardized procedures and to give them rules to follow (Michman, 1988). In fact, the mantra of Ray Kroc was based on "Quality, Service, Cleanliness, and Value" (Smith, 2008).

Despite the fact that Kroc imposed strict controls and operational standards on franchises in order to protect the brand's quality, he stimulated and motivated his franchisees to develop new ideas that could improve their restaurants and benefit the whole system. While Kroc was not a great product innovator, some of McDonald's most successful products, such as the *Filet-O-Fish*, the *Egg McMuffin*, McDonald's breakfast options and even the *Big Mac*, were franchisee innovations. This approach allowed McDonald's to strike a balance between centralised control and franchisee independence (Ritzer, 2019). This aspect is therefore particularly important, in fact the freedom to be able to propose ideas and that these ideas can be accepted and introduced is vital in a reality like McDonald's; this aspect over time has made McDonald's much closer to the various realities in which it has found itself (Ibid.).

When talking about innovations within McDonald's products it is essential to cite the origins of one of the main products, especially for kids, which is the Happy Meal. Its origins are to be traced back to Latin America, where José María Cofiño and Yolanda Fernández de Cofiño opened the first McDonald's in Guatemala in 1974. After noticing that children could not finish meals offered by the restaurant, Yolanda produced the idea of offering smaller portions for kids and include a toy to make it fun. Fernández

de Cofiño explained that she had observed how mothers would come into the restaurant with their children, who often did not know what to order. As a result, they would choose a Big Mac, but the children were unable to finish it because the meal was too large. This led her to reflect on how to prevent people from wasting their money in that way. From this, she conceived the idea of a children's menu that would include a smaller burger, smaller fries, a small soda, and a small sundae and she called it “Ronald’s Menu” ([urly.it/311krs](http://urly.it/311krs)).

Fernández de Cofiño named the offering Ronald's menu after Ronald McDonald, the company's clown mascot; Cofiño also put toys in the *Cajita Feliz* (Happy Meal) that she bought at a local market. The interesting fact is that Cofiño did not ask for permission from McDonald's key managers to create the menu; however, the comments it received among them were incredibly positive, therefore, this motivated her to launch the menu during the 1977 World Franchisee Convention. McDonald's headquarters managers took over Cofiño's idea and began deploying the system worldwide in 1979, naming it the Happy Meal. Additionally, Fernández de Cofiño was also put in charge of birthday parties at the restaurant: she proposed having party areas for big groups of children all together, for which she was awarded her second Ronald award ([urly.it/311krt](http://urly.it/311krt)).

### 2.1.2 The International Expansion Strategy

As stated by Ritzer (2019) “Kroc’s genius was in bringing all these well-known ideas and techniques to bear on the fast-food business and adding his ambition to turn it, through franchising, into a national, then international, business phenomenon”. Since McDonald’s passed into the hands of Kroc, it has expanded internationally; as of 2023, the company operated and franchised approximately 41.8 thousand restaurants globally, serving more than sixty-nine million customers daily across the globe (Statista, 2023).

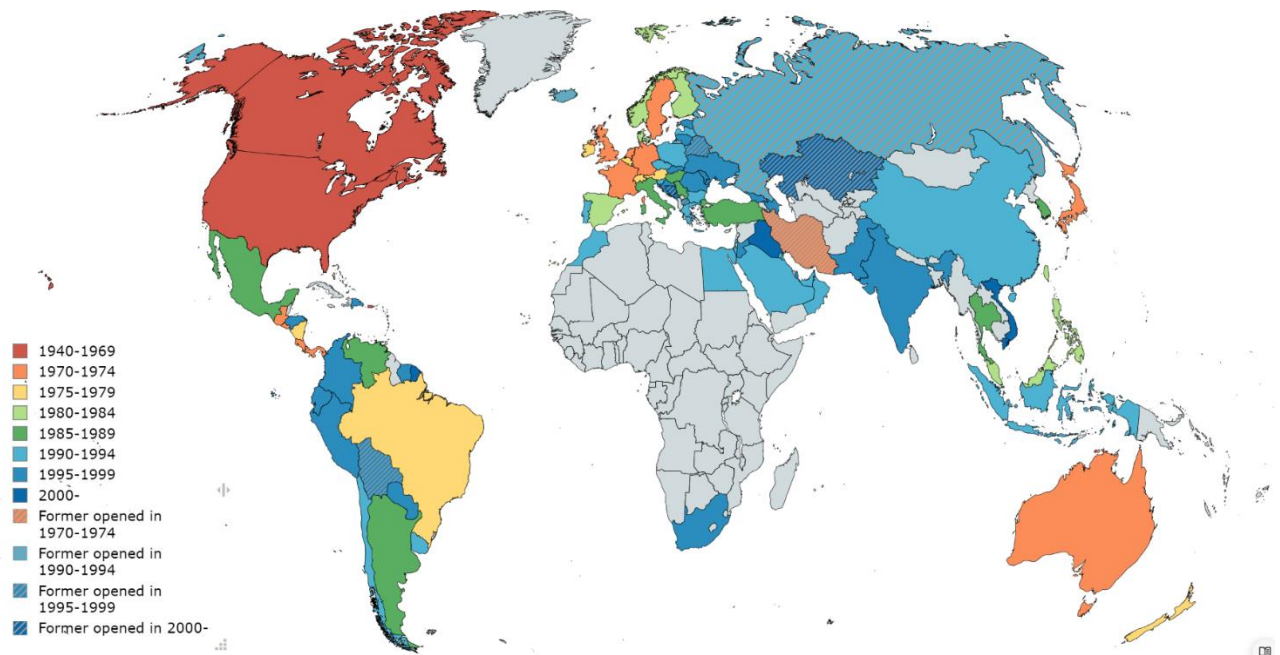


Figure 9. Updated map of countries with McDonald's restaurants, showing the first year in which the first restaurant was opened ([urly.it/310pn2](http://urly.it/310pn2)).

Ray Kroc initially envisioned having 1,000 McDonald's locations exclusively in the United States. However, McDonald's continued to expand beyond national borders, opening its first international restaurants in Canada and Puerto Rico in 1967. Today, the company operates more than 36,000 restaurants across over one hundred countries (McDonald's History, n.d.).

McDonald's *glocal* strategy consists in balancing the two opposing goals of global consistency and local adaptation; they are able to do it through their mantras which can be resumed in the power of repeatability and the power of adaptability ([urly.it/311kry](http://urly.it/311kry)). The repeatability within McDonald's can be found in the consistency of its standardized menu in which we can find basically the same items all over the world and we can rely on it knowing that it will essentially taste the same regardless of where you are in the world, so we can expect and we are, in fact, given the same taste, quality and experience. As Ritzer (2018) outlines "Customers take great comfort in knowing that McDonald's offers no surprises".

Although consistency is key, McDonald's also understands the importance of adapting to local tastes and cultural preferences. The company's ability to balance global

brand standards with regional flavours has contributed greatly to its success. For instance, in various parts of the world we can find different items like a Maharaja Mac in India (since cows are worshipped and considered sacred in India, the law prohibits the consumption of beef, hence, McDonald's had to change its burger's famous recipe for the Indian market creating the Maharaja Mac which is in fact made of chicken), or we can name others such as the McEgg in Uruguay, McSalmon in Norway, a Samurai Burger in Thailand (Huber, 2002).

More importantly, eating at McDonald's does not mean the same thing in different parts of the world, as several studies have shown (Alfino, Caputo and Wynward 1998; Watson 1997). For example, in the United States, McDonald's is often appreciated for its fast and cheap food. In Guatemala, on the other hand, dining at McDonald's is considered expensive: taking someone to McDonald's can be seen as a gesture to impress, indicating wealth and prestige. So, while the action may be the same - two people eating a hamburger - the cultural meaning behind this gesture is quite different. This distinction is crucial because meanings are the basis of culture. As we stated in the previous chapter culture is invisible to us, in fact we do not realize why we do things a certain way. To utterly understand culture, we must not only look at what people do, but also at why they do it, so as to understand the “*why*” behind the “*what*” (Tuleja, 2016).

Furthermore, another key factor that has contributed to the success of fast-food restaurants is their contrast with traditional, formal restaurants. McDonald's, among other fast-food, both then and now, is known for its informality, which distinguishes it from other restaurants, making it anything but a regular restaurant. Policies such as ‘No Tipping’ and the introduction of self-service have encouraged a more informal and open interaction between staff and customers. Instead of being served, customers participate in the process: they order, wait, collect their food and get rid of waste. This approach reduces operating costs through a concept known as ‘work transfer’ in which part of the work is shifted from the employees to the customers themselves (Royle, Towers, 2002).

## 2.2 McDonald's expansion in Latin America

McDonald's Corporation has had a significant presence in Latin America since it launched its first restaurant in Puerto Rico in 1967. Over the following decades, the company strategically expanded into new markets across the region, seizing opportunities as consumers demand grew. In 1979, McDonald's entered Brazil, marking the start of its South American operations. This was followed by further expansions into Mexico and Venezuela in 1985, and shortly after, into Argentina in 1986 and in 1990 they managed to open the first McDonald's in Chile ([urly.it/311ksk](http://urly.it/311ksk)). It is important to cite Arcos Dorados, which in Spanish means 'Golden Arches': a company formed in 2007, which was established following the acquisition of McDonald's Corporation's operations in Latin America by the region's management group, which then took control of the business in this important acquisition ([urly.it/311ksn](http://urly.it/311ksn)). However, not every country embraced well McDonald's, Bolivia is the one exception in which the McDonald's restaurants were not well received and where therefore rejected from the country. In 1985, Bolivia experienced a severe economic crisis, and in response, the government adopted policies allowing foreign investors to enter their market. Among them was McDonald's, which opened its first location in La Paz in 1997. By 1999, the fast-food chain had six stores in Bolivia and had adapted its menu to local tastes, offering items like Ilajua (a spicy sauce made from tomatoes and chili peppers) and McSalteñas (traditional Bolivian empanadas). Despite the initial interest, crowds at McDonald's began to disappear gradually. In 2002, the company expanded to Santa Cruz and Cochabamba in an effort to attract middle-class consumers, but this strategy failed, and that same year, McDonald's shut down all its stores in Bolivia ([urly.it/311ksp](http://urly.it/311ksp)).



Figure 10. Map of the Americas showcasing the presence/absence of McDonald's locations across the continent. Most countries are marked in red, indicating that McDonald's operates there; Bolivia is highlighted in white, emphasizing the absence of the fast-food in this country ([urly.it/310xcq](http://urly.it/310xcq)).

McDonald's failure in Bolivia was partly due to the deep cultural rejection by the Bolivian people and government. Although President Evo Morales was elected after McDonald's entry into Bolivia, he remarked in a 2013 speech to the U.N. that "the fast food of the West is doing a great deal of harm to humankind... the major multinational food companies seek to control the production of food and to dominate global markets by imposing their customs and food". In 2012, Morales even banned another iconic American product, Coca-Cola, in favour of a traditional Bolivian drink ([urly.it/311ksq](http://urly.it/311ksq)).

However, it was not just politics that stopped McDonald's growth in Bolivia—economic factors also played a key role. Bolivia is one of South America's poorest countries and when McDonald's entered in 1997, 63% of Bolivians were living in poverty, and 37% were in extreme poverty (International Monetary Fund, 2001). By the time McDonald's gradually exited the country in 2002, those numbers had risen to 65%

living in poverty and 40% in extreme poverty (The World Bank, 2005). This made McDonald's an expensive food option for many Bolivians; a meal at McDonald's costs around \$4-5, while a traditional meal with meat, rice, and potatoes could be had for half the price. Additionally, other local burger chains in Bolivia managed to keep their prices lower, retaining their customer base and staying in business.

There was indeed a market for burgers in Bolivia, but people preferred buying from street vendors known as "cholitas," or they opted for other local chains like "Crafted Burgers" or "Che Burgers." Bolivians take extraordinary pride in their food and the traditions surrounding it; for them, food is sacred, and unfortunately, McDonald's was unable to fully capture the essence of this sacred food culture ([urly.it/311kst](http://urly.it/311kst)).

### 2.2.1 The health issue: McDonald's criticisms and responses

The success of McDonald's continued in every country, slowly building its stores around the world, but at the same time it was flooded with increased criticism concerning its association with the global increase in obesity and moreover received criticism for their unhealthy sizes and menu ([urly.it/311ksv](http://urly.it/311ksv)). In the early 2000s, several lawsuits were filed in the U.S. against the company, claiming that its food caused health problems, although none of them prevailed. McDonald's also suffered major backlash in the popular documentary *Super Size Me* (2004), in which the director saw his health fail dramatically while on a diet of only McDonald's food.



Figure 11. Morgan Spurlock in front of a McDonald's while on a diet of purely McDonald's products (Spurlock, 2005).

The idea of the super-size menu started in 1987 when McDonald's realized that they could make more profit if they started to sell people slightly bigger portions of food and they introduced super-size menu (Liebig, 2012). In 2004, Morgan Spurlock, released *Super Size Me!*, an independent documentary in which he recorded his 25-pound (11 kg) weight gain from consuming a McDonald's diet for just 1 month. Spurlock was inspired by the 2002 legal case in which two obese teenagers (Jazlyn Bradley, 19; Ashley Pelman, 14) sued McDonald's, accusing the fast food of contributing to their health problems; although the case was dismissed by the judge for lack of proofs that showed the full responsibilities of McDonald's ([urly.it/311ksw](http://urly.it/311ksw)). Spurlock wanted to see for himself if eating at McDonald's three times a day for thirty days would affect his health conditions.



Figure 12. Super Summer Sizes - trayliner placemat, 1987 ([urly.it/311384](http://urly.it/311384)).

Perhaps in response, McDonald's announced plans to phase out its Supersize menu items (Burros, 2004) In fact, following the release of Super-size Me!, McDonald's eliminated the supersize and reduced the sizes of the large and medium menu, although they stated that this phasing out had nothing to do with the film, which grossed over 11 million in domestic box office and was nominated for an Oscar ([urly.it/311ksy](http://urly.it/311ksy)). The 2006 Large was indeed just slightly smaller, approx. 6.0 oz, than the 1998 Supersize, approx. 6.03 oz (Young, Nestle, 2007). Furthermore, McDonald's have expanded the menu to include many options, like a small cheeseburger or a three-layered burger for different appetites. They also offer gluten-free, sugar-free, dairy-free, vegan, and low-calorie choices to accommodate dietary restrictions ([urly.it/311ksv](http://urly.it/311ksv)). Lastly, they added entree salads and provided more fruit, vegetable and yogurt options with its Happy Meals ([urly.it/311ks-](http://urly.it/311ks-)).

## 2.2.2 McDonald's environmental impact and changes

Since 2009, McDonald's implemented a strategic rebranding initiative in Europe, changing its iconic logo to reflect a more environmentally conscious image. This change involved switching the background of the well-known golden arches from red to dark green, symbolising a greater commitment to sustainability. The change was not just aesthetic, but part of a broader effort to improve the company's environmental awareness and promote eco-friendly practices in all its activities. This visual change is in line with McDonald's aim to demonstrate its corporate responsibility and its ongoing initiatives to support environmental sustainability ([urly.it/311ksa](http://urly.it/311ksa)).

It is important to underline the shift of colours, the former golden arches on a red background were intended to fascinate, grab attention and make people hungry, while in contrast the new combination of dark green background aims to spread the idea of calmness, a relaxed place where one could eat in peace. According to Singh (2006), colours like green are associated with tranquillity and comfort, which can influence customers behaviour by encouraging them to stay longer and enjoy their meals at a slower pace. Additionally, the colour green often represents healthiness as stated by Mohebbi (2014). Other scholars like Dupont (2014) have argued that the colour green can evoke feelings of agreeableness and positivity due to its associations with nature and tranquillity. Dupont (2014) provides an illustrative example from the 1950s, where factory workers found black boxes too heavy but reported feeling much more comfortable handling them after they were painted green, despite no change in the actual weight.

This principle can potentially be applied to McDonald's rebranding, in fact while the "heavy load" in this case is not physical but related to the perception of unhealthy food, the introduction of the green colour scheme may subconsciously soften negative perceptions among customers. By aligning with the calming and agreeable connotations of green, McDonald's could influence how its food is viewed, making it seem less harmful and more acceptable while doing what is necessary to change gradually the environmental impact ([urly.it/311kt0](http://urly.it/311kt0)).



Figure 13. The green logo McDonald's has used in Europe since 2009 ([urly.it/3125t1](http://urly.it/3125t1)).

By 2025, McDonald's has pledged that 100% of its customer packaging will be made from renewable, recycled, or certified sources. It has also committed to recycling customer packaging in all of its restaurants globally by that same year, considering the different recycling infrastructures and consumer behaviours across various regions. As the world's largest restaurant chain, McDonald's is dedicated to using its scale to drive environmental progress, with packaging waste being one of the top concerns highlighted by its customers ([urly.it/311kt2](http://urly.it/311kt2)).

To achieve these goals, McDonald's will collaborate with industry experts, local governments, and environmental organizations to develop smarter packaging designs, improve recycling programs, and raise environmental awareness among both customers and employees. This builds on McDonald's previous commitments, including a 2020 promise to ensure that 100% of its fiber-based packaging would come from recycled or certified sources where no deforestation occurs.

Over the years, McDonald's has released several commercials to show where their waste goes, allowing consumers to not only hear but also see how they are reusing waste. A notable campaign from 2021, titled "Change a little, Change a lot," became famous. It highlights how McDonald's is cutting waste by converting cooking oil into biodiesel for trucks, turning McCafé cups into greeting cards, and transforming Happy

Meal toys into playgrounds for children. The ad ends with a voiceover stating the chain's commitment to reducing waste as much as possible and closes with the slogan "Change a little, Change a lot," emphasizing that while the changes may seem small, in the bigger picture, they make a significant impact. Additionally, Chris Kempczinski, McDonald's President and CEO, stated, "We have the privilege but also the responsibility to do our part and help drive change in the communities where we operate—and there is no more urgent challenge, both globally and locally, than protecting our planet for future generations" ([urly.it/311kt3](https://www.urly.it/311kt3)).



Figure 14. Ad campaign “Change a little, Change a lot” by Leo Burnett (2023).

McDonald's journey toward sustainable packaging began nearly 25 years ago with a landmark partnership with the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), which focused on reducing packaging waste and implementing more sustainable practices. This partnership resulted in significant achievements, such as avoiding over three hundred million pounds of packaging and reducing waste by 30% within the first decade. Today, approximately 50% of McDonald's customer packaging comes from renewable, recycled, or certified sources, and about 64% of its fiber-based packaging is made from certified or recycled materials. However, only 10% of its restaurants

currently recycle customer packaging. Despite these challenges, McDonald's remains committed to expanding its efforts globally.

Francesca DeBiase, McDonald's Chief Supply Chain and Sustainability Officer, stated: "We look forward to doing more and continuing to raise the bar on what it means to be a responsible company committed to both people and the planet." This commitment reflects McDonald's broader ambition to reduce waste, use less packaging, and promote sustainable practices inside and outside its restaurants ([urly.it/311kt5](http://urly.it/311kt5)).

## 2.3 Values promoted by McDonald's

McDonald's, as a large company of the fast-food industry, follows certain ideals and principles that are considered core values. These are the 'pillars' on which all the choices and decisions of the company itself are based and therefore must always remain consistent and strive to create a unique customer experience.

The five values are:

- *Person*: the company's customers and staff are put first.
- *Inclusion*: everyone is treated with respect and equality, without any distinction.
- *Integrity*: it is important to always be honest and responsible and to ensure that this is also perceived externally and by customers.
- *Local community*: means paying attention to recycling and the environment or making donations.
- *Family*: it is particularly important for McDonald's to create a family and close-knit environment both in the workplace with employees and with the customers themselves: They will feel part of a real family and will be able to have a real and concrete experience.

These pillars, therefore, guide and outline the culture of the company and create and shape McDonald's beliefs, priorities and actions. Essentially, these values influence the decisions that are made, the way customers and other employees are treated, but above all, they influence the way people are treated ([urly.it/311m6j](http://urly.it/311m6j)).

It is important to explain briefly what McDonald's does to assure diversity and equity inclusion among the staff and the customers. With the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) program McDonald's is committed to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion as a fundamental part of its corporate values. The company recognizes its unique position as a large global corporation to make a positive impact on the communities it serves. The company's DEI strategy is built on three pillars: representing diverse communities, fostering inclusive cultures, and breaking down economic barriers.

To bring this strategy to life, McDonald's has implemented a comprehensive approach that touches every aspect of its business. The company uses advanced technologies and industry best practices to mitigate bias in hiring and promotion processes, ensuring a fair opportunity for all candidates. Employee Business Networks play a crucial role in creating a sense of belonging and providing professional development opportunities for diverse groups within the organization. Leadership development is another key focus, with McDonald's offering inclusive leadership training to executives, emphasizing the importance of fostering an environment where all perspectives are valued. The company's commitment to equality extends to compensation, with regular pay equity analyses and prompt action to address any disparities.

The company has also taken steps to increase diversity among its franchisees, including a significant financial commitment to support undercapitalized candidates in joining the McDonald's system. McDonald's regularly monitors closely its progress, with specific targets for representation of women and underrepresented groups in leadership roles. The company has also tied part of executive compensation to achieving these DEI goals.

By viewing DEI as both an ethical imperative and a business advantage, McDonald's is working to create an environment where innovation thrives and better decisions are made. The company's approach to inclusion aims to ensure that everyone, from crew members to corporate leaders, franchisees to suppliers, and feels valued and respected. Through these efforts, McDonald's is striving to build a culture of belonging that reflects the diversity of the communities it serves, setting a standard for corporate

responsibility in the global marketplace where everyone feels valued and respected, regardless of their background, thus promoting a culture of belonging throughout the organization ([urly.it/311m7p](http://urly.it/311m7p)).

In order to show McD promotion of equity and respect among everyone, it is important to cite the advertisement “Cambiando un poco, Cambiamos mucho” (By changing a little, we change a lot) made by McDonald’s Uruguay in 2024 about people with any type of disability. In this advertisement, MCD states that 80% of people with disabilities in Latin America are unemployed (OCDE/OISS, 2024). While others reject them, the ad says that in McDonald’s they are very welcome, saying that they are a true value and a source of pride for the company.



Figure 15. A frame of the advertisement “Cambiando un poco, Cambiamos mucho” ([urly.it/311mbv](http://urly.it/311mbv)).

## 2.4 Culture and Values within Latin America

In the context of McDonald's expansion in Latin America, it is essential to understand the deeply rooted cultural values that influence social and consumer behaviour in the region. These include *familismo*, a core value which places the family at the centre of social and personal life where the family serves indeed as the core source of emotional and social support in a person’s life (Tuleja, 2016); linked to the notion of *familismo* are *machismo* and *marianismo* that shape gender roles in Latin America. Additionally, *religion* is vital for Latinos, particularly Catholicism, because it

permeates many aspects of daily life and creates a sense of community and shared spirituality. Although the diversity of Latin America's religious composition is recognised within religious cultures, it is important to place Christianity, for better or worse, as the gravitational node of moral and religious life in countries from Mexico to Brazil (Thornton, 2018).

Values such as *caballerismo* (chivalry), *charlar* (small talk), *destino* (destiny or what future has in store), *carino* (genuine caring), *modestia* (modesty), *compadrazgo* (sponsorship relationship made official during the baptism), *dichos or refranes* (sayings), *esperanza* (hope), *fatalismo* (fate or God's wish), *orgullo* (pride), too, can be present and wield important influence on Latino behaviours when contextualized within other values (Allison & Bencomo, 2015; Bordas, 2013; Gallardo, 2013; Irizarry, 2012; Juckett, 2013; Perera et al., 2016).

Moreover, pride in cultural heritage — *orgullo cultural* — plays a significant role in uniting people through music, dance, and celebrations, embracing a shared identity that honours both ethnic diversity and historical roots. For many Hispanic people, cultural heritage forms the foundation of a deep-rooted sense of identity and connection to their community, fostering belonging and pride in their shared history and traditions (Lozano, 2010). We have numerous examples of this pride within society such as famous celebrations like the *Día de los Muertos* or the Hispanic Heritage month, where the collective spirit and historical consciousness come alive. These values provide a crucial framework for understanding how McDonald's has adapted its business model to resonate with local audiences.

#### 2.4.1 *Familismo*

Culture and values in Latin America are deeply embedded in tradition, community, and family bonds. One of the most important values which we have hinted at is *familismo*, where the family serves as the core source of emotional and social support in a person's life. Familismo reflects the importance of a strong family loyalty, unity and mutual support (Cauce & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2000; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007).

Traditionally, the Hispanic family is a close-knit and is considered the most significant social unit; the term *familia* extends beyond the nuclear family, in fact the Hispanic 'family unit' includes not only parents and children but extended family members as well. In most of the Hispanic families the father is the head of the family, whereas the mother usually takes charge of the home while each individual in the family has a moral obligation to support other family members facing economic challenges, unemployment, adverse health conditions, and other life challenges (Clutter; Nieto, 2000). For most Hispanic families, reunions occur for holidays, birthdays, baptisms, first communions, graduations, and weddings. With familismo comes a deep sense of family responsibility, strict adherence to traditional gender roles and a respectful attitude towards elder adults; in fact, honour, good manners, and respect for authority and elders are instilled among children (Clutter; Nieto, 2000; Tuleja, 2016).

As we have seen within individualistic cultures the focus is on personal achievements and individual rights, the people in such cultures also tend to give priority to their own needs, wants, and the immediate well-being of their family members over those of the larger community. Furthermore, success is normally measured in terms of personal achievement, and there is an important level of encouragement for self-reliance (Hofstede, 1980).

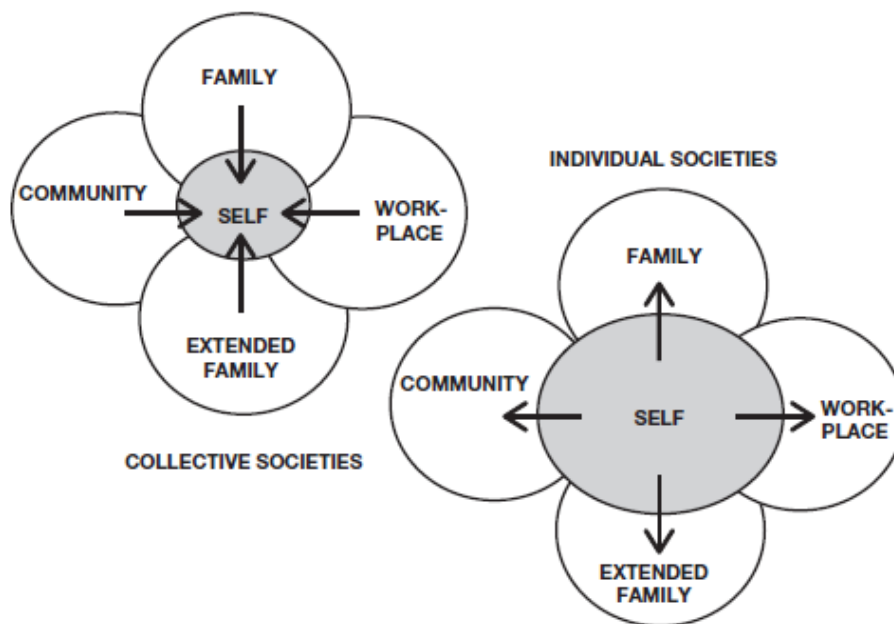


Figure 16. Individualism – collectivism (Tuleja, 2016).

In contrast to individualistic cultures where everything is centred on the self and the single individual, for Hispanic and Latino cultures family is everything and it is considered the basic unit of social life (Tuleja, 2016). For these people, living near one another is not about convenience but a deep expression of support and commitment towards one another. Family members are expected to take a degree of care for each other, both emotionally and practically, and this often expresses in regular interaction, if not daily. From shared meals down to conversations and times together, such close bonds between members of the family give that needed sense of sociability and stability (Ibid.). This so-called practice of *familismo* creates a life-long bond (Sanchez, 2015) which permeates every aspect of life; its origins are based on family and the main purpose is helping each other, offering support through each stage of life (Paredes, 2020).

Furthermore, research indicates that *familismo* serves as a protective factor for Latino families, as this cultural value has been associated with positive health outcomes; for instance, it has been linked to lower rates of substance and drug abuse (Gil, Wagner, & Vega, 2000; Unger et al., 2002), a higher likelihood of seeking mammogram exams (Suarez, 1994), and a reduced risk of child abuse (Coohey, 2001). It has been found that elevated levels of family supportiveness among Mexican American families function as a defensive element during crises and psychological distress (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2011) while poor mental health has been associated with low levels of familism (Ornelas and Perreira, 2011).

#### 2.4.2 *Machismo* and *Marianismo*

Along with *familismo* there is strong respect and commitment to traditional roles within the Hispanic Latino family where male and female are expected to act in a different way and to stick to a certain type of behaviour (Tuleja, 2016).

*Machismo* and *Marianismo* are the sociocultural scripts of male and female gender role socialization in Hispanic cultures. *Machismo* represents various beliefs and expectations within the role of men in society; it represents a set of values, attitudes, and beliefs about masculinity. This concept encompasses both the positive and negative

features of masculinity such as bravery, honour, dominance, aggression, sexism and emotional reserve (Mirandé, 2018; Niemann, 2004). *Machismo* also contains attitudinal beliefs that support the idea that women must remain in traditional roles, thereby promoting the belief in male dominance over women. It is worth noting that a small but growing body of research literature is moving away from the rigid depiction of machismo characterized by hypermasculinity, referred to as traditional *machismo*, and instead focuses on a positive view of male gender role attributes such as chivalry, bravery, and the role of family provider referred to as *caballerismo* (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008). Recently in fact men are shifting away from traditional, strict gender roles and are embracing a more adaptable view of masculinity, focusing on positive qualities such as politeness and courage (Nuñez et al., 2016).

The female parallel to *machismo* is *marianismo*, a constellation of attitudes and roles defined specifically for women. The term *marianismo* derives from the Catholic cult of Mary in her ambivalent role as mother and virgin, but it refers to the imposition of a specific socio-cultural model of womanhood based on the ideals of purity and submissive sacrifice and is sometimes expressed through mechanisms of imitation or opposition (Morales & Pérez, 2020). The cult of virginity is indeed an all-European product that has accompanied and appears to be part of the process of cultural colonization starting from modern Mexico through the region, taking on an autonomous set of characteristics in relation to other contexts—primarily that of the Old Continent, like the veneration of the Virgen of Guadalupe in Central America (French & Bliss, 2007).

Evelyn Stevens first proposed the term *marianismo* in 1973 to refer to a model of semi-divine femininity. It is an ideal of a woman who is spiritually strong and morally superior, predisposed to sacrifice, and encased in a domestic, chaste, and benevolent dimension—devoted and passive. This model forces women into complete self-sacrifice, allowing their definition to emerge solely through the functions they perform, all relegated to a private dimension. A strong taboo surrounding sex is realized through the utmost demand for premarital virginity, followed by conjugal frigidity. The obvious interest in care from women is innate, sharply separated from productive aspects (Stevens, 1973). *Marianismo* emphasizes a family and home-oriented woman, delineating characteristics such as passivity, self-sacrifice, and chastity (Gil &

Velazquez, 1996; Niemann, 2004). Women are described and seen only in nurturing roles and only from a patriarchal approach. As we have seen, the issue of *marianismo* has its roots in the Christian ideals imposed on Latin America upon colonization, defining the nature and the role of women to be nurturing and spiritual supporters of the family after the image and likeness of the Virgin Mary (Gil & Velazquez, 1996; Niemann, 2004).

In other words, *machismo* and *marianismo* denote two interdependent, simultaneous constructions that define socially accepted behaviours and attitudes that affirm both men and women in conventional gender roles underlining the patriarchal system of authority. *Machismo* ideology is carried forward not only by men because women are socialized into accepting male dominance, and they are expected to internalize and hence normalize patriarchal values. Similarly, *marianismo* relates to both sexes because men are also expected to be dominating as well as exercise protective paternalism, which strengthens the marianista belief that women must be obedient nourishing figures that need protection by men. Although *machismo* and *marianismo* gender roles have been well-chronicled in research, there is little literature about their associations with the emotional health indicators. It is important to relate gender roles with cognitive-emotional factors in view of the fact that experiences of gender roles also occur on a cognitive-emotional and behavioural level (O'Neil, 2008).

### 2.4.3 Religion

Inside the Hispanic world religion has always played an important role in everyday life; the church influences family life and community affairs, giving spiritual meaning to the Hispanic culture. Each local community celebrates genuinely its patron saint's day with greater importance and ceremony than individuals do for personal birthdays (Clutter & Nieto, 2000).

In 2020, a survey taken across 18 Latin American countries indicated that approximately 57% of the general public described themselves as Catholic, whereas 16.6% of the total participants claimed not to be practicing any form of religion. This provides an understanding of just how solidly entrenched a region is concerning this

religion. In Mexico, this proportion became even higher, with more than 74% of the respondents claiming to be Catholics; the same level of significance was found in such countries such as Honduras, Colombia, and Ecuador, where the lion's share of Christians underlined that religion plays a major role in their daily lives (Statista, 2020).

Latin America's religious landscape today is far more diverse than just being predominantly Catholic; labelling it solely Catholic oversimplifies the region's complex cultural history and overlooks the real experiences of its believers, as well as the significant changes in its religious sphere throughout both colonial and postcolonial eras. Indeed, terms like diversity, heterodoxy, and pluralism have long provided a more accurate portrayal of religion in Latin America than orthodoxy or uniformity, even though Catholic identity has been widely present (Thornton, 2018). Apart from Catholics, there is a smaller presence of protestant Christians, Judaism and Islam within countries in Latin America.

However, Catholicism remains important for the majority of people in Latin America with all of its symbols and elements which permeate most aspects of life. Catholicism was brought in Latin America by the *conquistadores* and it was integrated with Indigenous traditions in the form of syncretism, which is the combination of different forms of belief or practice (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), where religious beliefs have intertwined and changed over the past five hundred years.

In this context, various fundamental elements of the Catholic faith gained popularity in Latin American, leading to a significant increase in their popularity among the local populations. One notable example is the cult dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus, which resonated deeply with the Indigenous peoples. As these communities embraced Catholicism, they often wanted to incorporate aspects of their traditional beliefs into the new religious framework. This syncretism allowed them to maintain a sense of cultural identity while adapting to the new spiritual landscape introduced by European colonizers ([urly.it/311ktn](http://urly.it/311ktn)).

The figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe gives a clear example of the phenomenon of syncretism. The Virgen de Guadalupe emerged as a significant figure in the cultural landscape of Latin America, effectively replacing the Aztec goddess Tonantzin while sharing an important spiritual connection; both figures embody feminine strength,

nurturing qualities, and a profound connection to the land and its people. Like the Virgin Mary, Tonantzin represented a maternal figure within the Aztec pantheon, and her name translates to "Our Sacred Mother" in the Aztec language Nahuatl ([urly.it/311kth](http://urly.it/311kth)). This parallel enabled the Virgin of Guadalupe to be readily accepted by Indigenous communities, who could see her as a continuation of the Goddess of fertility and motherhood Tonantzin, their own spiritual heritage rather than a complete break from it. As a result, the transition from Indigenous belief systems to Spanish traditions became more seamless, allowing the Spanish to indoctrinate their cultural and religious ideologies into the native populations (Zepeda-Shepeck, 2023).

The Virgin of Guadalupe symbolizes not only the fusion of Catholic and indigenous traditions but also serves as a powerful emblem of cultural resilience. As indigenous peoples reinterpreted her significance, they forged a unique identity that blended their ancestral beliefs with Catholicism, although there are numerous myths regarding the Virgin of Guadalupe, she is officially recognized by the Catholic Church as a manifestation of the Virgin Mary. Ultimately, for many individuals both within and outside Mexico, the Virgin of Guadalupe and the ancient Tonantzin are viewed as one and the same entity ([urly.it/311kth](http://urly.it/311kth)). This transformation illustrates how faith can adapt and evolve, creating a rich tapestry of beliefs that reflects the complexities of cultural exchange and the enduring spirit of the people. Thus, religious complexity not only reflects historical influences but also continues to shape the cultural and social identity of Latin America.

#### 2.4.4 *Orgullo Cultural*

Lastly, *orgullo cultural*, Latino pride in cultural heritage, is deeply rooted in the traditions and customs that shape Latino identity and culture. These customs are described above: religion, family and heritage roles within family, but also celebrations. From the celebration of quinceañeras, symbolizing a young girl's transition into womanhood, to the deep ties of compadrazgo, and from the restful afternoon siestas to the colourful piñatas, these traditions shape culture. These are not just rituals, but are to be considered as expressions of community, joy, and belonging.

These traditions have often transcended their religious or local origins, evolving and expanding along the way in remarkable ways. Take, for example, the Day of the Candelaria, rooted in the biblical story of Mary and Joseph presenting the baby Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem. In places like Olvera Street in Los Angeles, this celebration involves the blessing of dressed figurines representing the infant Jesus, but it also becomes an opportunity to enjoy tamales, music, and time with loved ones ([urly.it/311ktd](http://urly.it/311ktd)).

The Hispanic Heritage Month is celebrated annually from September 15<sup>th</sup> to October 15<sup>th</sup> and serves as a vital platform to honour and recognize the rich history, culture, and contributions of Hispanic and Latino communities in the United States. This month-long observance provides a huge opportunity to reflect on the significant impact that Latinas and Latinos have had on the nation; it is a special moment in which diverse cultures blend together in unity ([urly.it/311ktc](http://urly.it/311ktc)). It is celebrated to recognize the achievements and contributions of Hispanic American champions who have inspired others to achieve success ([urly.it/311ktb](http://urly.it/311ktb)).

There are other celebrations, such as *Día de los Muertos*, Day of the Dead, which provides a shared cultural bond within different countries in Latin America and is celebrated at the beginning of November. During November first and second, Mexicans honour their deceased relatives by cleaning, decorating, and keeping vigil at their graves. Tombstones and burial sites are embellished with vibrant flowers, candles, and offerings of food, all thoughtfully arranged as tributes to the departed. It is a deeply meaningful tradition, with some believing that, during these days, the souls of the dead return to watch over their living relatives. This ritual reflects the strong cultural connection between life and death in Mexican tradition (Brandes, 1997).

Therefore, we can state that Hispanic traditions bring colour and life to every celebration, within each one of them there is a strong sense of connection. These events embody a spirit of sharing and closeness, where laughter and lively conversation are as important as the food and music. More than just rituals, these customs serve as vital connections to the past, preserving shared identities and engaging with heritage, family, and the world. They highlight a distinct worldview that endures despite modern technological, political, and social changes, emphasizing celebration as a core element

of daily life in the Hispanic experience. Tapping these cultural experiences helps us understand a deep connection that is based on a shared history (Monzó, 2015).

## 2.5 The intersection of Values and cultural adaptation

McDonald's has a lot in common with Latin America and its values and seeks to connect with it on many different occasions, so as to adapt to the local culture. A big occasion for McDonald's is the Hispanic Heritage Month which, as stated earlier, takes place from 15 September to 15 October. In 2024 MCD decided to pay homage to different key figures of art, music, movies, sports such as Zoe Saldana, Guillermo Del Toro, Tito Puente, Carolina Herrera and many others. McDonald's, as a global brand, recognizes the significance of cultural awareness and respect in its business practices. By celebrating Hispanic Heritage and honouring notable Hispanic figures across various fields such as acting, art, directing, painting, and sports, the company demonstrates its commitment to cultural diversity.



Figure 17. Leading figures of Latin cultural tapestry including, from top left, Tito Puente, Zoe Saldana, Carolina Herrera and Carlos Santana ([urly.it/311m9f](http://urly.it/311m9f)).

This approach is crucial in today's interconnected world, as it fosters inclusivity, builds stronger connections with diverse communities, and acknowledges the rich contributions of different cultures to society. Understanding and respecting cultural heritage not only enhances McDonald's brand image but also reflects a deeper appreciation for its diverse customer base and workforce. It shows that successful businesses must go beyond mere product offerings and actively engage with the cultural contexts in which they operate. This strategy can lead to improved customer loyalty, employee satisfaction, and a more positive impact on local communities, ultimately contributing to the company's long-term success and social responsibility efforts ([urly.it/311m9\\_](http://urly.it/311m9_)). These are not the first or the only adaptations created by McDonald's, there are in fact various examples of adaptations to the target culture of which we will examine and analyse in the next chapter.



## Chapter 3

# The Taste of Change: McDonald's Adaptation to Latin American flavours

### 3.1 The Balance of Local and Global: How McDonald's mastered Adaptation

In an increasingly interconnected world, multinational companies are tasked with the challenge of balancing a consistent global identity with the need to adapt to local realities. Achieving this balance requires navigating complex cultural landscapes, where success hinges on the ability to maintain brand coherence while responding to the unique preferences and expectations of diverse markets. As we have seen, this dynamic is reflected in the concepts of *globalization*, *localization* and, more recently, *glocalization*, a term that merges both approaches.

The debate on which strategy is best for companies - whether to globalize their products and strategies or customise them for local markets - has seen supporters on both sides (Levitt, 1983; Taylor, 1991). In this context, McDonald's represents an inspiring case study on how to balance global standardization with local adaptation.

While maintaining a recognizable worldwide experience, the chain has developed a remarkable ability to localize its products and advertising, managing to establish authentic ties with local consumers (Mooij, 1998). In today's landscape, international brands face the challenge of speaking to different cultures while maintaining their distinctive identity and McDonald's, as one of the world's most iconic fast-food chains, has achieved extraordinary success in several regions precisely because of its ability to adapt its marketing strategies to local cultural values. A particularly interesting example is Latin America, where traditions, family values, and cultural pride play a key role in shaping consumer preferences. Throughout this chapter, we will explore how these cultural elements are reflected in McDonald's approach to this region, highlighting the brand's ability to resonate with local audiences.

It is important to understand how McDonald's advertising works, as it involves a variety of strategies. On one hand, the company uses general advertisements that connect with shared values throughout the Latin American region, fostering a sense of unity and cultural ties. These ads resonate with broad cultural themes like family values and pride, which are prevalent across Latin America. On the other hand, McDonald's tailors its menu to suit specific regional or national tastes, showcasing its adaptability.

Moreover, targeted advertisements are crafted for individual countries, reflecting local customs, traditions, and preferences. A key element of this strategy is the use of colours as a communication tool, which significantly enhances the brand's visual appeal and makes it more relatable to the local audience. This multi-faceted approach enables McDonald's to maintain a balance between its global image and local relevance, ensuring that its brand remains both familiar and adaptable (Vignali, 2001).

Furthermore, it is important to familiarize with the concept of the *marketing mix* which was first introduced by McCarthy (1975), who formulated the 4Ps - Product, Place, Price and Promotion - as fundamental elements of any marketing strategy. These four elements have traditionally been used to structure marketing plans and guide companies to effectively reach their target markets. Subsequently, Fifield and Gilligan (1996) proposed the addition of three new variables - People, Process and Physical - to create a more comprehensive model, known as the 7Ps. This improved framework allows for a more in-depth analysis of marketing strategies, particularly in service industries, where customer experience and operational processes are crucial. The 7Ps will serve as the basis for analysing McDonald's marketing mix, exploring how the company not only offers products and sets prices, but also how it manages promotional efforts, engages its workforce, designs process and maintains its physical environments to provide consistent quality service.

The analysis will focus on how McDonald's integrates these variables to meet the needs of different markets, with particular attention to the 'promotion' element, which includes advertising, sales promotion and public relations strategies adapted to both global and local contexts. Promotion, or the marketing communications mix, as outlined by Kotler (1994), consists of five major tools: advertising, direct marketing, sales promotion, public relations and publicity, and personal selling. McDonald's employs these tools strategically by localizing its promotional efforts to fit the unique

cultural contexts of each country it enters. Given the vast range of cultural, moral, and religious differences across global markets, it is essential for the company to adapt its marketing communications to ensure resonance with local consumers. This includes analyzing consumer attitudes, usage patterns, and the specific ethical considerations of each environment.

While McDonald's promotes a consistent global brand image, its promotional strategy aligns with the motto "brand globally, advertise locally" (Sandler & Shani, 1991). This means that although McDonald's presents itself as a global brand, its advertising campaigns are tailored to meet the needs of local communities. In Latin America, for example, McDonald's utilizes advertising that appeals to shared regional values, such as family (*familismo*) and cultural pride (*orgullo cultural*), but also develops country-specific ads that reflect national traditions, preferences, and even colour schemes that resonate with the local audience. This dual approach ensures that McDonald's remains culturally relevant while maintaining its global brand consistency, in line with Kotler's (1994) emphasis on the importance of adapting the promotional mix to the local context.

### 3.2 Cultural Adaptation in McDonald's advertisements: examples highlighting *Familismo* and *Orgullo Cultural*

As previously discussed, *familismo* stands as one of the most, if not the most, significant core values in Latin American culture. Given its profound cultural importance, it is unsurprising that McDonald's has incorporated this concept into its advertising strategies, reflecting the value's influence in both its messaging and brand positioning across the region. At the same time, *orgullo cultural* (cultural pride) has a fundamental influence within Latino community and, inside McDonald's advertisements, it plays a vital role in bringing people together through music, dance, and celebrations, promoting a collective identity that both celebrates ethnic diversity and honours historical heritage.

### 3.2.1 Examples of *Familismo*

There are many commercials that depict the value of family, one example is the McDonald's ad titled "First Drive" created in 2019 by Alma Agency; the commercial offers a representation of *familismo* in Latin American culture, a central theme in our analysis. The commercial does not merely show the standard parent-child dynamic but presents an equal and mutual view of familism ([urly.it/311sa0](http://urly.it/311sa0)).



Figure 18. This scene of the commercial depicts the daughter carefully listening to her father's advice ([urly.it/311sa0](http://urly.it/311sa0)).

The opening scene focuses on the father's advice to his teenage daughter preparing for her first car ride alone. The worried father reminds her to fasten her seatbelt, use her indicators and not use her mobile phone while driving. This behaviour highlights the importance of the parental role in Latin American culture, where parents are heavily involved in their children's lives, always ready to offer guidance and support. After the advice, the two parents follow her in another car thinking of not getting caught; this choice underlines the concept of protection and control typical of familism, while granting the daughter a new autonomy. The parents in fact remain present and caring, demonstrating constant support at the same time giving her space to grow and explore on her own.



Figure 19. The daughter buys donut sticks for her parents, as a way to thanking them ([urly.it/311sa0](http://urly.it/311sa0)).



Figure 20. The father accepts the gift and leaves the McDrive ([urly.it/311sa0](http://urly.it/311sa0)).

The gesture of the daughter who, at the end of her first car ride, goes to the McDrive and orders something for her parents because she knew she was being followed, reverses the traditional dynamic of *familismo*, introducing an element of

reciprocity. The daughter, while enjoying her autonomy, recognizes and appreciates the support received, showing attention and gratitude towards her parents.

McDonald's, in this context, positions itself as a mediator of these family interactions. The choice to buy donut sticks at McDonald's suggests that the brand is part of a family sharing moment, offering a small pleasure to be enjoyed together. The 'First Drive' commercial manages to communicate a profound message about familism in a simple and emotional way. It does not merely portray parental protection and control, but highlights the reciprocity of family relationships, where each member feels a strong sense of protection and commitment and contributes to the common well-being of one another ([urly.it/311y2x](http://urly.it/311y2x)).

We can name another commercial who displays the value of *familismo*, perhaps in a different way, and it is the advertisement titled "Tío Roberto" (Uncle Roberto) created in 2018 by Alma Agency. This ad displays a simple but effective interaction between a Latino family, more specifically the young Beto and his uncle "Tío Roberto"; between them there appears to be a sort of language barrier due to the fact that Beto was born and raised in the U.S. and belongs to the younger generation, Gen Z, while Uncle Roberto has Latino origins and does not speak English, so they cannot understand each other ([urly.it/311tca](http://urly.it/311tca)).



Figure 21. At the beginning of the ad the family discusses the language barrier ([urly.it/311tfj](http://urly.it/311tfj)).

Throughout the commercial they struggle to understand each other even though they would like to; the first problem occurs when the uncle attempts to fix the sink and asks his nephew for a screwdriver, but the nephew misunderstands and hands him a hammer instead. In a subsequent scene, they are driving together but once again struggle with communication and it is important to note how the advertisement plays on the fact that the nephew indicates to go *derecho* (straight) instead of *derecha* (right), showing how he is not fluent in Spanish, in fact this is a typical mistake made by someone who is not fluent in the language, as *derecho* and *derecha* are very similar phonetically and morphologically and afterward he is in fact jokingly told by his uncle that *derecho* and *derecha* are two separate indications ([urly.it/311tf8](http://urly.it/311tf8)).

The tension displayed in the commercial exemplifies the frustrations often experienced among Latino families in the United States; in fact, parents believe that children ignore their heritage by rejecting their native language ([urly.it/311y2x](http://urly.it/311y2x)). However, everything becomes clear when they arrive at McDonald's and share a meal, symbolizing that, despite linguistic or cultural barriers, McDonald's and its golden arches serve as a universal space where connections are fostered through shared experiences.



Figure 22. The famous Golden Arches in a frame of the commercial “Tío Roberto” ([urly.it/311tfj](http://urly.it/311tfj)).

At the end of the commercial the phrase is displayed “Todos hablamos McDonald’s” (We all speak McDonald’s) with which there is a reference to the fact that McDonald's acts as a bridge between different languages and cultures and unites instead of creating barriers between people.



Figure 23. Todos hablamos McDonald’s – We all speak McDonald’s ([urly.it/311tfj](http://urly.it/311tfj)).

This McDonald's commercial perfectly fits the context of the challenges faced by Hispanic Gen Z, born and raised in the U.S., in connecting with their extended family in Latin America due to language and cultural barriers. In a situation where these young people often feel disconnected from their roots, McDonald's becomes a place that transcends these barriers, offering a universal language that everyone understands: the language of food and family. This is deeply connected to the concept of *familismo*, where the family is the core of social and emotional life, and the ad emphasizes the importance of family unity and shared experiences.

It is important to highlight the impact of cultural authenticity in advertising, a concept McDonald's fully leverages in this spot. Despite generational and cultural differences, McDonald's uses shared symbols and values, such as family meals, to create an emotional connection that transcends words and traditions. The commercial perfectly reflects this principle, showing how the brand becomes a bridge between

Hispanic Gen Z and their Latin American family, using the shared experience of food as common ground.

Moreover, McDonald's ability to craft authentic advertisements that respect cultural nuances aligns with the idea that these ads not only reflect a culture's reality but do so in a way that allows each viewer to find something meaningful and relevant. The ad avoids cultural stereotypes and instead makes universal values like family and sharing accessible to all, positioning McDonald's as a place of belonging for everyone.

In this way, the brand strengthens the concept of *familismo*, facilitating a reconnection that goes beyond language and cultural barriers, confirming the importance of family.

Furthermore, these impactful commercial highlights the significant role that food plays in people's lives, while also promoting a message of inclusion aligned with McDonald's core values of diversity and equality. McDonald's presents a relatable issue and positions itself as part of the solution, effectively connecting with its Latino consumer base through humorous and profound content. This is an effective approach which fosters strong relationships with customers, making them feel valued and understood, which in turn builds trust and encourages long-term loyalty ([urly.it/311y2x](http://urly.it/311y2x)).

### 3.2.2 Examples of *Orgullo Cultural*

When dealing with cultural pride, McDonald's takes a step forward and decides to deeply connect with the Latino culture in various ways. Within the Hispanic Heritage Month, McDonald's has actively supported the Latino community through various initiatives, including sponsoring the Latino Heritage Festival, coordinating the annual *Triunfadores* awards luncheon, and donating one million dollars to the National Museum of the American Latino. Additionally, through the *Ritmo y Color* festival (2022), McDonald's highlighted Hispanic visual artists in a collaborative celebration of music and art. This initiative featured performances from artists such as Camilo, Prince Royce, and Lunay, while Hispanic artists were commissioned to create murals on McDonald's locations in cities like Chicago, New York, Dallas, San Antonio, Miami, and San Jose where the Latino roots are firmly planted ([urly.it/311zkt](http://urly.it/311zkt)).



Figure 24. Vibrant elements of Latino culture adorn the exterior of this McDonald's in San José ([urly.it/311y5x](http://urly.it/311y5x)).



Figure 25. The interior of a McDonald's in San José ([urly.it/311y5x](http://urly.it/311y5x)).

These murals, inspired by indigenous roots, incorporate traditional Mexican patterns, cultural symbols, and bold colours – elements historically associated with

peace and activism. The use of colour, dating back to the Mayan civilization, originated from natural resources like plants, minerals, and stones, imbuing the designs with a profound cultural significance. These murals not only celebrate Aztec and Mayan heritage but also reflect the resilience of Latino artists, who have faced decades of rejection and discrimination from mainstream US institutions. Through these initiatives, McDonald's fosters a deeper connection with the community, celebrating ancestral and spiritual legacies while promoting love and unity ([urly.it/311y2x](http://urly.it/311y2x)).



Figure 26. Latino details highlighted on the exterior of a McDonald's in the Bronx, NY ([urly.it/311y5x](http://urly.it/311y5x)).

Apart from its design changes concerning the interior and exterior throughout the Hispanic Heritage Month, McDonald's has engaged in various commercial efforts to promote inclusiveness, pride, and vibrant celebrations, aligning its values with those of the Latino community. In its broader strategy to remain culturally relevant and attract a younger audience, McDonald's regularly collaborates with trending artists, leveraging these partnerships to connect with youth through pop culture. By creating custom meals with celebrities like BTS, Saweetie, and Travis Scott, McDonald's reconfigures its existing menu items with unique twists, such as special sauces and limited-edition merchandise, to create a sense of exclusivity and excitement (McDonald's, 2020).

One successful example is the Travis Scott Meal, which debuted during a challenging period in September and helped McDonald's U.S. same-store sales rebound significantly – from an 8.7% drop in the second quarter at the height of the pandemic lockdowns to a 4.6% increase in the third quarter. This meal showcased how a well-chosen celebrity partnership could boost sales and establish a stronger connection with trending social conversations (Forbes, 2020).

In a campaign tailored to the Latino community, McDonald's collaborated with the popular Latin artist J Balvin to create the J Balvin Meal, a simple yet symbolic offering consisting of a Big Mac, medium fries, an Oreo McFlurry, and ketchup. For the general public, McDonald's also commissioned a song from J Balvin, resulting in the production of *Dorado*, which means “Golden” and it is a reference to the famous Golden Arches, a short but powerful commercial that encapsulates Latino pride and resilience. The video showcases J Balvin as various characters (a grandpa, a basketball player, and a McDonald's worker) who collectively celebrate Latino identity and community spirit.



Figure 27. J Balvin acting during the commercial *Dorado* ([urly.it/311znpj](http://urly.it/311znpj)).

Through the lyrics, J Balvin expresses gratitude and cultural pride, singing lines like “*gracias mami por hacerme latino*” (“Thanks Mom for making me Latino”) which

highlight unity and a shared sense of belonging among Latinos. This campaign resonated deeply with Latino audiences, reinforcing McDonald's commitment to inclusivity and cultural appreciation (McDonald's, 2020). Through these high-profile collaborations, McDonald's has not only strengthened its brand among young and diverse audiences but has also inspired other brands, like Burger King, to adopt similar celebrity partnerships. By aligning with cultural icons that embody values that are important to distinct communities, McDonald's continually enhances its appeal, solidifying its image as a culturally adaptable and relevant brand for youth worldwide (urly.it/311zn8).

### 3.2.3 *Me gustas así* – McDonald's Connection to Chilean Culture

In the Chilean market, McDonald's has skilfully adapted its brand to honour local culture and resonate deeply with Chilean consumers. A clear example of this cultural respect and adaptability is the "*Me Gustas Así*" campaign, which celebrates the individuality and unique preferences of Chilean customers. This campaign represents a significant step for McDonald's in Chile, as it is the brand's first 100% locally developed advertising campaign, designed not only to refresh McDonald's presence but also to cultivate a deeper connection with Chilean customers by recognizing their unique preferences, habits, and cultural pride (urly.it/311-72). Through this campaign, McDonald's aims to position itself as a brand that celebrates individuality and local customs, aligning with the distinct tastes and values of Chilean consumers.

The inspiration for "*Me Gustas Así*" originated from an internal survey conducted by McDonald's Chile, which revealed that Chilean customers enjoy creating hundreds of unique product combinations, such as dipping fries in ice cream or pairing burgers with McNuggets. By embracing these consumer-driven preferences, McDonald's acknowledges the creativity of its Chilean customers, capturing the slogan "*Me Gustas Así*" ("I Like You the Way You Are").

Furthermore, the campaign adopts colloquial Chilean language including the informal abbreviation of the restaurant's name to "McDonal" a familiar pronunciation used in everyday conversation. At night, the restaurant sign is designed so that the full name "McDonald's" appears as "McDonal" with the "D's" disappearing. This choice

reflects McDonald's intention to blend seamlessly with Chilean culture and make the brand feel approachable and locally integrated ([urly.it/311-72](http://urly.it/311-72)).



Figure 28. McDonald's logo at night in Chile, with the “D’s “disappearing ([urly.it/311-92](http://urly.it/311-92)).

In fact, at this point it must be clear that McDonald's has become more than just a restaurant around the world; it is a cultural phenomenon that people refer to with distinctive nicknames reflecting their local language and culture. For example, in Mexico, it is known as *McDona's*, while for instance in the U.S. it is known as *Mickey D's* (Zhang et al, 2018). Whereas in Brazil it has taken on the playful nickname "*Méqui*" which is a local adaptation that became so popular that McDonald's embraced it by naming their 1,000th location "*Méqui 1000*". This branding move reflects McDonald's commitment to connecting with local cultures and acknowledging the unique ways communities make the brand their own.



Figure 29. The villa at 1811 Avenida Paulista, São Paulo, Brazil, is one of Latin America's most iconic addresses, it has undergone several aesthetic transformations before becoming home to McDonald's 1000th branch, popularly known as 'Méqui 1000' ([urly.it/311-9f](http://urly.it/311-9f)).

McDonald's also targets a broad audience in Chile, aiming to resonate with people of all ages, with particular emphasis on youth. Carlos González, CEO of McDonald's Chile, highlighted that McDonald's recognizes the importance of connecting with the new generation, especially considering that Arcos Dorados, the aforementioned company who manages McDonald's in Latin America, is one of the largest employers of young people in the region. This focus on youth aligns McDonald's with emerging cultural trends and strengthens its image as a brand that supports and values young people.

The advertisement "Me Gustas Así" is vibrant and dynamic, showcasing young adults enjoying McDonald's products in various creative and personal ways. The background music is cheerful and energetic, with a tone that emphasizes acceptance and individuality, consistent with the slogan "I Like You the Way You Are." These elements appeal to a youthful audience, capturing the lively, spontaneous spirit associated with Chilean culture. By showcasing Chilean customers enjoying McDonald's in their unique ways, the campaign reinforces McDonald's appreciation for cultural diversity and individual expression.



Figure 30. A frame of the commercial “Me Gustas Así” ([urly.it/311-9p](http://urly.it/311-9p)).

Through “Me Gustas Así” McDonald’s Chile aims to strengthen its bond with Chilean consumers by honouring their culture, traditions, and distinctive ways of enjoying McDonald's. This campaign is part of a broader localization strategy that McDonald’s has embraced throughout Latin America, adapting to meet local tastes and values. From creating culturally resonant menu items to crafting local campaigns, McDonald's strives to integrate itself into each Latin American community and this strategy serves the purpose of balancing global brand identity with genuine local connections ([urly.it/311a4w](http://urly.it/311a4w)).

### 3.3 Localization of McDonald’s Products

As we have mentioned, MCD in its glocal strategy constantly adapts its menu to the local tastes and cultural preferences of the countries in which it operates. This approach is essential to maintain the relevance of the brand and to cater to different culinary traditions. From Asia to Europe and throughout the Americas, McDonald's makes targeted changes to its core offering, incorporating regional flavours, ingredients and portions that resonate with local consumers. In Latin America where, as we have seen, cultural pride and traditional food play a key role, the fast-food giant customises its menu to reflect local favourites, while maintaining the brand's recognisable identity.

These adaptations help McDonald's merge international appeal with local authenticity, ensuring a connection with customers in the various Latin American markets ([urly.it/311\\_4f](http://urly.it/311_4f)).

In Latin America, these menu adaptations are not limited to changing ingredients or introducing local flavours; in fact, they also incorporate elements that resonate culturally with the local communities so as to pay homage to both the people and the place in which the McDonald's operates. Within the Latin American market there are various culinary adaptations in different regions such as Colombia and Venezuela, in which McDonald's offers *arepas*, a traditional cornmeal snack filled with cheese or eggs, which is regarded as a popular food item in both countries. The origin of this particular food is a subject of debate between Venezuela and Colombia, with both nations claiming this food as a core part of their cultural heritage. Venezuelan anthropologist Ocarina Castillo suggests that *arepas* have indigenous roots dating back to pre-Columbian times, involving native populations in areas that are now Venezuela and Colombia (Castillo, 2014).



Figure 31. Image of *arepas* on the McDonald's Venezuela website ([urly.it/311\\_qp](http://urly.it/311_qp)).

This adaptation is not simply an ordinary adjustment in food but represents an ancient cultural symbol from pre-Columbian times. *Arepas* play a significant role in the daily lives of Colombians and Venezuelans, symbolizing comfort and tradition.

McDonald's demonstrates respect for residents' culinary traditions by including arepas in its breakfast menu, thereby portraying itself as a company that values this popular food. Introducing *arepas* helps McDonald's go beyond being solely a foreign fast-food chain and instead become a recognizable and culturally important choice. Likewise, in Guatemala, McDonald's serves a *Desayuno Tradicional* (Traditional Breakfast) containing scrambled eggs, refried beans, tortillas, plantains, and cheese. This breakfast dish aligns with Guatemalan traditions, offering a hearty meal influenced by indigenous tastes that cater to customers' usual preferences. Referring to the meal as "traditional" shows that, in its food offer, MCD adapts to Guatemalan culture introducing a dish that strongly evokes a beloved local meal, underscoring the brand's commitment to connecting with Guatemalan, strengthening the authenticity and acknowledging the Guatemalans' deep bond with their culinary heritage. This plan adapts McDonald's menu to fit in with the eating habits of the local community and reinforces the message of valuing different cultures, solidifying the brand's image as a promoter of Guatemalan food traditions.



Figure 32. Image of *Desayuno Tradicional* on the McDonald's Guatemala website ([urly.it/311\\_r6](http://urly.it/311_r6)).

In Argentina McDonald's introduced a *Dulce de leche* flavour to desserts like sundaes and McFlurries, which are well-liked by locals. *Dulce de leche* is more than just a tasty dessert for Argentinians because it symbolizes Argentine culture and is

central to family traditions and memories from childhood. McDonald's aims to connect with Argentine tastes and emotions by introducing the *dulce de leche* dessert, which helps to cultivate a brand image that is culturally relevant. Deciding to incorporate this flavour shows a solid understanding of local preferences and a recognition of Argentina's culinary traditions.



Figure 33. Image of *Dulche de leche* on the McDonald's Argentina website ([urly.it/311\\_rv](http://urly.it/311_rv)).

In Mexico, McDonald's sells McPatatas, which are seasoned potato wedges that appeal to the Mexican preference for strong flavours. Adding spices showcases Mexican food preferences, making this side dish more interesting and attractive to local customers. In addition, the marketing for McPatatas features the catchphrase *Brillan como oro* (They shine like gold), which boosts its attractiveness by invoking Mexican patriotism and appreciation for delicious, top-notch cuisine. By blending spicy flavours and language that resonates with the culture, McDonald's is able to enhance its position in Mexico by associating the brand with Mexican pride and traditional culinary values.



Figure 34. Image of *McPatatas* ([urly.it/311\\_ra](http://urly.it/311_ra)).

In Peru, McDonald's has launched *Pollo Grill al Plato*, which is a grilled chicken meal served with rice, salad, and French fries. This meal meets the needs of Peruvian tastes for complete, wholesome dishes that go above and beyond the usual fast-food sandwich and fries. Rice is a common ingredient in Peruvian food, so when McDonald's added it to their menu with grilled chicken, they made a meal that meets the expectations of locals for a filling dish. Serving a dish like *Pollo Grill al Plato* demonstrates McDonald's ability to adapt to traditional eating habits in Peru, providing a satisfying and full meal option that aligns with the local preference and which is perhaps quite different from what McDonald's offers to its customers in other parts of the world.



Figure 35. Image of *Pollo Grill al Plato* ([urly.it/311\\_s0](http://urly.it/311_s0)).

In Honduras, the so-called *Te Alcanza* menu is a great illustration of McDonald's catering to the economic and cultural requirements of local customers. The name *Te Alcanza* means "It's enough for you" mirroring the menu's goal of providing budget-friendly and generous choices that cater to the community's love for value and large portions. The menu features simple choices such as the *Quesoburguesa* (cheeseburger) and *Hamburguesa Ranch*, which use McDonald's main ingredients but are priced lower. This method caters to the needs of the Honduran market for satisfying and budget-friendly meals, offering a variety of burgers with familiar ingredients such as beef and cheddar cheese. In addition to the culinary changes, the name *Te Alcanza* directly appeals to the Honduran consumer's preference for getting the most out of their money.

In an economic environment where many consumers are cautious with their finances, the message “Te Alcanza” indicates that McDonald's is a budget-friendly choice for all, while maintaining high standards. This adjustment to the culture helps McDonald's show more empathy and understanding towards the financial situation of the local community, enhancing its reputation as a brand that is affordable for people of all income levels (urly.it/311a4a).

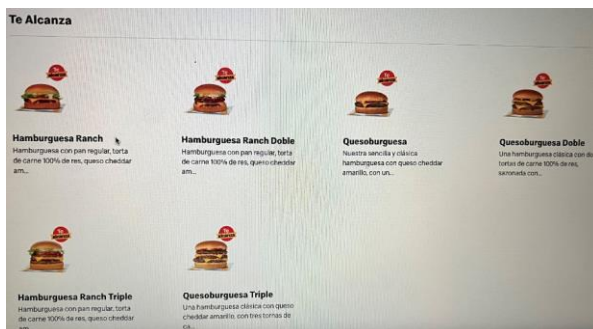


Figure 36 and 37. Images of the menu *Te Alcanza* (urly.it/311\_sc).

Location is a key factor when establishing restaurants in Latin America. In fact, in order to ensure business success McDonald's carefully considers its target audience, foot traffic, and local economic factors. This analysis becomes more complex in countries like Honduras, where many people have limited financial means. In San Pedro Sula, over 57.7% of the population lives in poverty, particularly in rural areas, with daily incomes as low as \$6.85, which is even below the minimum wage in Louisiana (World Bank, 2023). This income level is insufficient for many people to afford McDonald's regularly while covering household expenses, which leads them to reserve fast food for special occasions.

McDonald's, therefore, focuses primarily on suburban areas due to the fact that these kinds of restaurants are seen as “fancy” catering to the middle class and located in suburban neighbourhoods. Each of the suburban locations, which were all free-standing buildings, also had an Auto-Mac (drive-through), a detached McDonald's sign with arches, and a full-sized Ronald McDonald sitting at the exterior of the restaurant (Oldakowski, Ray, et al., 2010). However, with the change of interiors McDonald's seeks to attract higher-end customers by presenting its locations as modern and vibrant, conveying a sense of luxury. This positioning allows McDonald's to appeal to wealthier clients while remaining family-oriented, going beyond its image as a “children's restaurant”. Mark Moeller ([urly.it/311a6-](http://urly.it/311a6-)), chef and restaurant consultant states that:

*“The original thought with restaurants like McDonald's was to aim at a family audience, so you could get customers for life, which is what drove the playgrounds and the toys, all very kid-friendly stuff. Over the past few years, they have decided to become more adult, with clean lines and colours that will appeal to you while you are eating.”*

Expanding on the adaptation of menus, a particularly notable case can be observed in Venezuela where McDonald's has adjusted its menu by adding the McFlurry Toronto, which highlights Toronto, a well-liked Venezuelan chocolate filled with crunchy hazelnut. This dessert version is accompanied by a marketing strategy that cleverly includes Venezuelan slang, such as *achantado* (meaning a shy person) and *pana* (a term for friend).

Using the local language gives the campaign a personal feel, making it truly Venezuelan. The cultural adaptation goes beyond the simple taste, as it incorporates common expressions from daily life, fostering a feeling of familiarity and enhancing the brand's connection with Venezuelan customers. The use of local expressions like *achantado* and *pana*, among others colloquial terms used within the same advertising, in the *McFlurry Toronto* campaign goes beyond the simple translation of the advertisement; it represents a cultural marketing strategy that strengthens the bond between the brand and the Venezuelan consumers. By incorporating slang commonly used in everyday life and by making puns with this slang, McDonald's effectively conveys a sense of belonging and familiarity, making customers feel recognized and understood in their unique cultural identity.

This approach not only makes the campaign more engaging and relatable to the local audience but also creates an emotional connection, enhancing customer identification with the brand. Furthermore, the use of local slang differentiates McDonald's from competitors who may not invest in the same level of personalization, thus solidifying the former's position in the Venezuelan market and demonstrating an intercultural sensitivity that makes the brand more accessible and appreciated by local consumers.



Figure 38 and Figure 39. Images of the McFlurry Toronto ([urly.it/311\\_sk](http://urly.it/311_sk)).

With these examples we can see how McDonald's approach to tailoring its menu to local tastes in Latin America goes beyond simple adjustments; it reflects a

commitment to understanding and respecting regional culinary preferences. These adaptations foster a sense of familiarity and inclusivity, positioning McDonald's as a brand that values and celebrates local identity within a global framework. By thoughtfully aligning its offerings with cultural expectations, McDonald's achieves a unique blend of global presence and local relevance, which resonates strongly with its diverse Latin American audience.

### 3.4 Behind the scenes: the Intercultural Communicator

Throughout this analysis it has become clear that in today's global context, where interactions between people from different cultures are more frequent and necessary than ever, it is crucial to be able to rely on the figure of the intercultural communicator. This professional figure does not merely translate messages from one language to another, but also mediates between cultural values, norms and beliefs, creating an authentic dialogue that is free of misunderstandings (Gudykunst, 2003). Intercultural communication requires skills that go beyond mere translation, in fact the intercultural communicator must possess knowledge of anthropology, social psychology and communication theory, skills that help them understand the dynamics that influence the behaviour and perceptions of the people involved in an interaction (Hall, 1976).

The main competence of the intercultural communicator is intercultural competence, i.e. the ability to recognize, respect and adapt to cultural differences. This skill involves the ability to interpret the symbolic meanings behind words and gestures, and to adopt a cultural perspective other than one's own in order to fully understand the speaker's message (Byram, 1997). As Gudykunst (2003) states, intercultural competence is not limited to language knowledge, but also requires interpreting underlying meanings and symbols. Intercultural understanding is thus a balance of empathy and flexibility because the communicator must be able to mediate between divergent cultural expectations and find common ground that respects the identity of both parties (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

In the corporate world, the intercultural communicator plays a particularly important role, as they ensure that corporate messages are not only translated, but also culturally adapted. Kotler and Keller (2016) note how the success of a global company depends largely on its ability to 'speak the language' of the target market, both literally and figuratively. This implies that a global company must adapt its messages not only in words but also in tone, symbols, and references that align with the cultural expectations of its audience, just as McDonald's did with Venezuelan market advertising. For instance, the intercultural communicator plays a crucial role in ensuring that humour, idioms, and local expressions resonate appropriately with the target culture, enhancing the relatability and authenticity of the brand. This level of adaptation requires cultural empathy and insight, as well as the skill to foresee potential misinterpretations that might arise from cultural differences. By 'speaking the language' figuratively, global brands can foster a sense of connection and trust, demonstrating respect and attentiveness to the unique identity of each market they serve. This means that every message, every advertising campaign and every product must be adapted to the values and norms of the local audience.

However, many companies choose not to involve figures specialised in intercultural communication, limiting themselves to superficial adaptations or literal translations, with the risk of launching messages that are ineffective or even harmful to the corporate image (Dahl, 2004). This is particularly important in marketing and advertising contexts, where a lack of true understanding of cultural dynamics can lead to stereotypes or misunderstandings. Holliday, Hyde and Kullman (2010) state that many global campaigns tend to reduce cultures to stereotypes, relying on superficial perceptions rather than in-depth knowledge of local realities. Here, the intercultural communicator can play a crucial role, using their expertise to help the company avoid stereotypes and superficial representations, making the brand more authentic and respectful. In a world where consumers are increasingly sensitive to authenticity, the ability to translate not only the words but also the cultural meanings underlying the message becomes a valuable resource for building a credible corporate image (Piller, 2017).

Nowadays, with the rise of digital media and social networking, the role of the intercultural communicator has become even more complex; that is due to the fact that online communication not only shortens geographical distances, but also exposes people to continuous cultural exchange in real time. On these platforms, misinterpretation can quickly cause reputational damage, making the presence of intercultural experts crucial for monitoring and managing interactions with cultural sensitivity. Piller (2017) speaks of 'digital culture', i.e. the set of languages and symbolic codes that develop online and often differ from traditional cultural codes. To be effective, the cross-cultural communicator must know and respect these codes to facilitate authentic and positive interactions between the brand and the global audience. When a company decides to expand on a global scale, intercultural communication becomes crucial to its success and, in the absence of the key figure of the intercultural communicator who mediates cultural differences, corporate strategies risk being perceived as 'imperialistic' or 'foreign' by local audiences. Kotler and Keller (2016) highlight how a successful global brand knows how to speak to the local consumer 'as if they were part of their community'. This requires an adaptation that involves not only language, but every aspect of the brand's presence, from the products to the packaging design to the way it is promoted. In some cases, as in McDonald's campaigns, attempts have been made to adapt menus to local tastes, but often without fully understanding the cultural needs of the context (Kotler & Keller, 2016). The lack of a cross-cultural communicator limits the effectiveness of these efforts, turning adaptations into mere superficial changes.

In contrast, in more structured campaigns, such as Coca-Cola's in Latin America, the presence of cross-cultural experts has allowed companies to respect and celebrate local values, creating an emotional and authentic connection with the consumer (Piller, 2017). Besides marketing, intercultural communication is also essential for the internal management of multinationals. When a company operates in several countries, it has to deal with cultural differences that influence leadership styles, work expectations and social norms (Gudykunst, 2003). Lack of understanding of these dynamics can lead to internal conflicts, misunderstandings and, ultimately, reduced operational effectiveness.

The intercultural communicator, in this case, becomes a resource for making members of the organisation aware of cultural differences, promoting an inclusive and respectful work environment.

Furthermore, the figure of the intercultural communicator represents an indispensable element for companies that want to operate on a global scale. The ability to mediate between different cultural values and norms not only makes corporate messages more relevant and acceptable to local audiences, but also helps to create authentic and meaningful relationships. As Dahl (2004) notes, intercultural communication is not just a technical skill, but an essential quality for building bonds of trust and respect. In marketing, in particular, the intercultural communicator not only makes the corporate message more accessible, but also helps to create an authentic and respectful image, reducing the risk of misunderstandings and misinterpretations (Piller, 2017). Intercultural communication, therefore, is not just a matter of words, but a way to bring people together and promote mutual understanding in an increasingly interconnected world.

McDonald's, in its approach to global expansion, has chosen a strategy of cultural adaptation that includes elements of localization to better mix into regional markets (Kotler, 1994). However, this strategy may lack a structured input from intercultural communication experts, whose function is crucial to ensure a deep and authentic alignment with local cultural values (Dahl, 2004). The presence of these professionals can not only facilitate the integration of cultural values, but also reduce misunderstandings and stereotypes that sometimes emerge in global promotional messages (Piller, 2017). The absence of a specialist in intercultural communication suggests that McDonald's may rely on a reductive perception of local cultures, limiting the effectiveness of its strategy and its cultural impact (Holliday, Hyde & Kullman, 2010).

Ultimately, the figure of the intercultural communicator represents a strategic element that could also have a significant impact on global companies such as McDonald's. In its expansion into different cultures, McDonald's has implemented several adaptation strategies, modifying its products and advertising messages to make them closer to local preferences and sensibilities. However, the absence or limited role of experts in intercultural communication can still result in campaigns that lack cultural

depth and risk being perceived as superficial or stereotypical (Piller, 2017). An intercultural communicator, with their knowledge of local cultural nuances and values, could enable McDonald's to go beyond simple product changes, helping to build a more authentic and lasting connection with local consumers (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Integrating this figure into business processes would not only help improve the effectiveness of advertising campaigns, but also strengthen the brand image as truly respectful and inclusive of the different cultures with which it interacts.

## CONCLUSION

McDonald's ability to adapt to the cultural values and preferences of Latin America demonstrates its skill in maintaining local relevance while staying true to its global identity. Throughout this dissertation, it has become clear how McDonald's has managed to create a dynamic balance between maintaining its global brand image and forging an authentic bond with local consumers, effectively using localization as a key strategy. In Latin America, deeply rooted values such as *familismo* and *orgullo cultural* have been integrated into the brand's advertising and products, giving McDonald's a cultural significance that transcends simply selling fast food.

McDonald's has made *familismo*, a central value in Latin American communities, a pillar of its communication strategy, portraying scenes of family life and shared moments that speak directly to consumers' hearts. The "Todos hablamos McDonald's" campaign embodies this principle, transforming the brand into a place of gathering and reconciliation between generations, bridging language and cultural barriers. This approach not only brings McDonald's closer to its customers but also positions it as an integral part of their daily experiences, demonstrating how a brand can become a cultural mediator, capable of uniting people and promoting harmony within communities. With *familismo*, McDonald's is not just offering food but moments of unity and connection, a crucial aspect for attracting Latin American audiences and strengthening its position within a region where the concept of family is particularly strong and relevant.

In parallel, *orgullo cultural* has been emphasized through initiatives that celebrate the traditions and cultural diversity of the region. McDonald's has adopted an inclusive branding strategy, embracing expressions of cultural pride like festivals dedicated to the Latino community and collaborating with local artists to create authentic content. Localization is not limited to products and advertising but extends to the selection of collaborations and personalities associated with the brand. Partnerships with local artists and celebrities contribute to making McDonald's a culturally relevant brand, especially for the younger generation. Collaborations with figures like J Balvin represent an effective way to capture young people's attention, reinforcing McDonald's image as a brand in sync with emerging trends and contemporary audience preferences.

In this way, McDonald's not only adapts its products and messages but also shows a concrete willingness to engage with and connect to various population segments, seizing the opportunity to grow within a market as diverse as it is rich in traditions. Through these initiatives, McDonald's establishes itself as a brand that not only understands but celebrates the rich cultural landscape of Latin America, visibly showing its willingness to participate in the life of communities and contribute to their well-being.

Another crucial dimension of McDonald's localization strategy is the customization of its menu. The introduction of dishes like *arepas* in Venezuela and Colombia, *Desayuno Tradicional* in Guatemala, and *Dulce de Leche* in Argentina demonstrates how McDonald's goes beyond surface-level adaptation. These choices reflect a deep respect for local culinary traditions and for the cultural symbols that unite people, offering customers an experience that resonates emotionally and culturally.

Food here assumes a dimension beyond commerce, becoming a vehicle for integration and celebration of cultural differences. Through menu localization, McDonald's demonstrates how a global brand can become a familiar and comforting element, capable of bringing people together around shared flavours and traditions. This ability to adapt to local culinary specifics underlines the value of localization as a tool for building long-lasting customer relationships and strengthening brand loyalty.

McDonald's glocalization strategy also highlights the complexity of balancing the brand's global identity with local needs. McDonald's has demonstrated that glocalization is more than a compromise between globalization and localization; it is a dynamic approach that requires sensitivity and a deep understanding of the cultural contexts in which the brand operates. In Latin America, this balance has been achieved through constant adaptation, allowing McDonald's to evolve in line with cultural changes without losing sight of its global brand. The ability to be both local and global has enabled McDonald's to build a positive image and a lasting presence in a region where cultural identities are particularly strong. This case illustrates how glocalization can be an effective way to achieve a more authentic and lasting connection with consumers, laying the groundwork for sustainable growth.

Finally, within this framework of ongoing interaction between globalization and localization, the figure of the intercultural communicator emerges as a potentially

valuable element to support these cultural adaptation strategies. The intercultural communicator is a fundamental resource for facilitating the dialogue between a global brand and local cultures, offering a professional and helpful perspective that benefits build relationships based on mutual understanding and respect. The presence of an intercultural communicator allows McDonald's to further refine its strategies, ensuring that every adaptation respects not only consumer preferences but also the values and traditions of the communities in which it operates. The intercultural communicator represents an opportunity for global brands like McDonald's to build bridges between different cultures, solidifying their role as sensitive and respectful actors within local contexts.

In conclusion, McDonald's experience in Latin America suggests that the success of a global brand in culturally diverse markets depends not only on the quality of the products and services offered but also on the ability to respect and celebrate cultural differences. The McDonald's case demonstrates how cultural integration can be a winning strategy for building authentic relationships with consumers, strengthening brand loyalty, and creating a brand image that resonates with local communities.



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## SUMMARY

Questa tesi ha il compito di illustrare varie tematiche legate alla società, tra le quali figurano la cultura e la comunicazione e come questi due concetti si intreccino tra di loro nella interculturalità. All'inizio di questa dissertazione ci si è voluti concentrare sull'importanza del background culturale nelle strategie di globalizzazione e localizzazione, ponendo l'accento su come la cultura, intesa come insieme di valori, credenze e norme condivise, influenzi profondamente il marketing globale. In un mondo sempre più interconnesso, le aziende che desiderano espandersi devono sviluppare una sensibilità culturale per adattare i loro messaggi e prodotti ai valori dei consumatori di diverse regioni. Comprendere la cultura è infatti essenziale per costruire un dialogo autentico e significativo con il pubblico internazionale, poiché cultura e comunicazione sono intrinsecamente legate. La cultura non è solo un insieme di tradizioni, ma rappresenta un sistema complesso di significati che condiziona il modo in cui le persone percepiscono il mondo e rispondono a stimoli come i messaggi di marketing.

Il termine cultura, derivato dal latino "cultura" che significa coltivare, ha un significato moderno che si collega a quello dell'*humanitas* romano, descritto come rispetto reciproco e tolleranza. Questo concetto indica che la cultura è un mezzo attraverso cui le persone si relazionano agli altri, cercando di comprendere le differenze per evitare conflitti e favorire un rispetto reciproco. La cultura si costruisce su valori, credenze, atteggiamenti e comportamenti che regolano le interazioni quotidiane. Definire la cultura, tuttavia, è complesso, poiché essa può essere interpretata in modi diversi: per alcuni, essa rappresenta un sistema di comportamenti appresi, per altri esiste solo nella mente come insieme di simboli e significati. Tra i vari studiosi che hanno provato a definire la cultura, Edward T. Hall la descrive come un sistema di comunicazione governato da regole nascoste, mentre Geert Hofstede la interpreta come un "software collettivo della mente" che distingue un gruppo da un altro. Queste prospettive mostrano che la cultura non è innata, ma viene appresa e interiorizzata attraverso le interazioni sociali, divenendo parte del nostro modo di pensare e agire.

Questa visione della cultura come un "puzzle" complesso, composto da elementi distintivi come valori, credenze e comportamenti, implica che essa ci condiziona nel modo di percepire il diverso, influenzando anche il marketing. Un concetto

fondamentale per capire le implicazioni della cultura nel marketing è l'etnocentrismo, che consiste nella tendenza a ritenere la propria cultura superiore a tutte le altre. Questo fenomeno, se estremo, può portare a pregiudizi e rifiuto delle altre culture, rendendo difficile la comunicazione interculturale. Allo stesso tempo, per evitare malintesi, è necessario comprendere l'importanza della comunicazione come processo in cui i significati sono condivisi tra culture diverse. Attraverso il *triangle of meaning* di Ogden e Richards, che collega simbolo, pensiero e referente, si evidenzia come la comprensione dei messaggi possa variare tra i parlanti, in base ai diversi riferimenti culturali. I simboli, come le parole, rappresentano significati condivisi, ma questi possono assumere forme diverse in culture differenti.

È stato poi ampiamente analizzato il concetto di comunicazione interculturale, ossia il dialogo tra persone di culture diverse, e di come rappresenti un elemento centrale del marketing moderno e un aspetto essenziale della globalizzazione. Nella comunicazione tra culture, il primo ostacolo evidente è la barriera linguistica, ma questa è solo uno dei vari aspetti che possono generare incomprensioni. Ogni cultura ha infatti norme, valori, percezioni dello spazio personale e comunicazione non verbale propri. Inoltre, anche la percezione del tempo varia tra culture: alcune lo vedono come lineare e danno grande importanza alla puntualità, mentre altre hanno una visione più flessibile. Questi fattori, se non vengono considerati, possono portare a fraintendimenti o addirittura a fallimenti delle campagne pubblicitarie, poiché le norme culturali guidano le interazioni e regolano il comportamento, influenzando come le persone rispondono a messaggi e prodotti.

L'importanza della cultura risulta chiara quando si osserva come essa plasmi le scelte dei consumatori. Le differenze culturali influenzano il modo in cui le persone interpretano e rispondono ai messaggi pubblicitari; pertanto, conoscere i valori e le norme locali è fondamentale per sviluppare strategie efficaci. Marieke De Mooij, esperta di comunicazione interculturale, sottolinea come le variabili culturali incidano sulle preferenze dei consumatori, richiedendo campagne pubblicitarie che siano adeguate al contesto locale. Le sei dimensioni culturali di Hofstede – tra cui individualismo, collettivismo e *power distance* – indicano come il marketing debba essere adattato per soddisfare le diverse sensibilità: ad esempio, le campagne che

esaltano il successo personale hanno successo in culture individualiste, mentre in quelle collettiviste è più efficace un messaggio orientato alla comunità.

L'analisi poi prosegue sul dibattito tra approcci diversi al marketing quali la globalizzazione, che mira a strategie standardizzate, e la localizzazione, che invece adatta i messaggi alle specificità culturali. La globalizzazione interpreta il mondo come un mercato unico, dove le aziende utilizzano campagne e prodotti coerenti a livello globale per creare un senso di familiarità e affidabilità, un fenomeno esemplificato da aziende come Apple, Coca-Cola e McDonald's. Tuttavia, i consumatori continuano a preferire un approccio di tipo locale, poiché ad esso attribuiscono un significato più profondo. Alcuni studiosi, come Levitt, credevano che la tecnologia avrebbe portato a una convergenza culturale, con preferenze globali sempre più simili, ma i dati indicano invece una tendenza opposta: le culture si stanno infatti diversificando sempre di più. Anche l'aumento dell'orgoglio culturale e delle peculiarità culturali sfida la teoria della convergenza culturale di Levitt, mostrando come le persone continuino a identificarsi nelle loro radici e tradizioni locali.

Il concetto di *Think Global, Act Local* rappresenta un equilibrio tra globalizzazione e localizzazione, suggerendo che le aziende debbano sfruttare le opportunità globali, ma con un occhio attento alle esigenze locali. Questa strategia permette di mantenere una coerenza del brand globale, pur rispondendo alle specificità dei mercati. Un esempio efficace è McDonald's, che adatta il menu e le campagne pubblicitarie ai gusti locali mantenendo un'immagine globale coerente, come dimostra l'introduzione di prodotti come il *McPollo* in Perù o il *Dulce de Leche* in Argentina. Questa flessibilità mostra come un'azienda globale possa preservare la propria identità, rispettando le tradizioni locali.

Ai fini della dissertazione è stato importante introdurre il concetto della McDonaldizzazione della società, concetto formulato da George Ritzer, che descrive come diversi dei principi operativi di McDonald's – efficienza, calcolabilità, prevedibilità e controllo – si siano insediati e diffusi in molti ambiti della società. Tuttavia, McDonald's non si limita a esportare un modello omologato; infatti, il suo successo risiede anche nella capacità di adattarsi ai mercati locali. Ritzer vede nella McDonaldizzazione una forma di razionalizzazione che elimina le sorprese per garantire efficienza e omogeneità, ma altri studiosi come Robertson ritengono che questa

tendenza possa portare a una combinazione di fattori globali e locali, definita glocalizzazione. La glocalizzazione rappresenta la fusione delle influenze globali con le peculiarità locali, come dimostra McDonald's che offre alcuni prodotti standardizzati, come le patatine fritte, insieme a specialità locali che rispettano i gusti dei consumatori.

L'adattamento culturale risulta quindi essere essenziale per il successo nei mercati internazionali. In un mondo sempre più globalizzato, le aziende devono abbracciare la diversità culturale per costruire connessioni significative, reali e veritiere con i consumatori. L'uso di strategie come la transcreazione, che adatta i contenuti ai contesti culturali locali senza perdere il messaggio originario, è fondamentale per mantenere l'efficacia della comunicazione in diverse culture. Un esempio è il payoff di McDonald's *I'm Lovin' It* che è stato trasposto in varie lingue mantenendo il significato emozionale originario, diventando *Me Encanta* in spagnolo. Questo tipo di adattamento permette al messaggio di risuonare con i consumatori locali, creando un legame più forte e autentico con il brand.

In conclusione, il primo Capitolo mostra come la cultura influenzi profondamente le strategie di marketing e l'importanza dell'adattamento culturale nel contesto della globalizzazione. McDonald's rappresenta un caso emblematico di come un brand globale possa integrare elementi locali per rispettare le sensibilità dei consumatori, bilanciando standardizzazione e localizzazione per mantenere un'identità coerente a livello globale. Si evidenzia che, per raggiungere il successo, le aziende devono non solo conoscere, ma anche celebrare la diversità culturale, adattando i loro messaggi e prodotti per rispondere alle esigenze e ai valori dei mercati locali.

Successivamente, nel secondo capitolo, è stato ritenuto adatto analizzare l'espansione di McDonald's in America Latina, tracciando il percorso di crescita dell'azienda dalle sue origini in California fino a diventare un marchio globale e influente, noto per la sua capacità di adattamento alle culture locali. L'origine di McDonald's risale agli anni '40, quando i fratelli Richard e Maurice McDonald aprirono il primo ristorante in California. I due svilupparono il sistema *Speedee Service System* che introduceva un metodo di ristorazione basato sull'efficienza e la rapidità, caratteristiche rivoluzionarie per l'epoca, che permettevano di servire un menu semplice a prezzi contenuti. Il sistema si basava su una logica di semplificazione del processo, che consentiva ai dipendenti di preparare e servire il cibo in tempi molto rapidi,

riducendo al minimo gli sprechi e mantenendo costanti gli standard di qualità. Questo concetto di ristorazione rapida divenne il fulcro del successo di McDonald's e gettò le basi per l'espansione dell'azienda.

La svolta però avvenne nel 1954, quando Ray Kroc, venditore di frullatori, notò la straordinaria domanda di frullatori del ristorante dei fratelli McDonald e, incuriosito, andò a vedere di persona il funzionamento del locale. Kroc fu colpito dall'efficienza del sistema e intravide il potenziale per espandere l'attività a livello nazionale. Dopo aver convinto i fratelli a dargli il controllo del franchising, Kroc ottenne l'opportunità di espandere il marchio su vasta scala, acquistando infine l'intera azienda nel 1961 e ponendo così le basi per la creazione di un impero globale del fast food. L'approccio di Kroc combinava un forte controllo centrale e la standardizzazione dei processi, per garantire che ogni ristorante seguisse le stesse procedure e offrisse la stessa esperienza al cliente, indipendentemente dalla sua posizione geografica. Questo modello di franchising divenne la chiave del successo internazionale di McDonald's, poiché permetteva di replicare il sistema in modo uniforme, adattandosi alle esigenze locali senza compromettere l'identità del marchio.

McDonald's iniziò la sua espansione internazionale nel 1967 con l'apertura di ristoranti in Canada e Porto Rico. Tuttavia, fu solo a partire dal 1979 che l'azienda penetrò il mercato dell'America Latina, aprendo il suo primo ristorante in Brasile. Questo ingresso segnò l'inizio di un'espansione che si sarebbe estesa rapidamente in paesi come Messico, Venezuela, Argentina e Cile. Il successo di McDonald's nella regione è stato facilitato dalla capacità dell'azienda di adattare il proprio modello di business e il proprio menu alle culture locali, pur mantenendo intatti gli elementi chiave del marchio globale. Tuttavia, non in tutti i paesi l'accoglienza è stata positiva: in Bolivia, ad esempio, McDonald's ha incontrato una forte resistenza culturale e politica, che ha portato alla chiusura di tutti i suoi ristoranti nel 2002. Questo rifiuto è stato attribuito sia a fattori economici che a una percezione negativa della globalizzazione, vista come una minaccia alla cultura e ai valori tradizionali locali. In Bolivia, l'idea di fast food contrastava con il modo in cui il cibo veniva considerato, ovvero come un momento di socialità e connessione familiare, aspetti che un pasto rapido come quello di McDonald's non riusciva a rispettare.

Per poter avere successo in un contesto così culturalmente radicato, McDonald's ha dovuto adattare le proprie strategie di marketing e di prodotto, cercando di rispondere alle critiche mosse sia alla qualità dei cibi sia agli effetti sulla salute. L'azienda ha introdotto opzioni più salutari nel menu, come insalate e frutta, per soddisfare le richieste di una clientela sempre più attenta alla nutrizione. Inoltre, McDonald's ha collaborato con esperti e organizzazioni sanitarie locali per migliorare l'immagine dei suoi prodotti, dimostrando un impegno verso la promozione di stili di vita più sani e contrastando la percezione negativa legata ai potenziali effetti sulla salute. Questa strategia ha permesso a McDonald's di adattarsi alle sensibilità della popolazione latino-americana, consapevole dell'importanza che il cibo ricopre nella cultura locale e nelle abitudini quotidiane delle persone.

Un altro elemento chiave dell'espansione di McDonald's in America Latina è stata la capacità di adottare pratiche di responsabilità sociale e sostenibilità ambientale, rispondendo così alle critiche riguardanti l'impatto ambientale delle sue operazioni. L'azienda ha lanciato iniziative per ridurre gli sprechi e migliorare la gestione delle risorse, promuovendo, ad esempio, l'utilizzo di materiali riciclati nel packaging e l'adozione di tecnologie sostenibili. Una delle campagne più rilevanti, *Change a little, Change a lot*, ha messo in evidenza come McDonald's possa trasformare i rifiuti in risorse, utilizzando l'olio esausto per la produzione di biodiesel e riciclando i materiali per costruire aree gioco. Questa campagna ha rappresentato un tentativo di avvicinare il marchio ai consumatori più sensibili alle questioni ambientali e ha contribuito a rafforzare l'immagine di McDonald's come azienda responsabile.

In seguito, è stato analizzato l'aspetto forse più rilevante dell'adattamento di McDonald's al mercato latino-americano che risiede nella capacità di rispecchiare e celebrare i valori culturali locali attraverso le proprie campagne pubblicitarie e la strategia di marketing. In particolare, il concetto di *familismo*, che pone la famiglia al centro della vita sociale, è diventato un tema ricorrente nelle campagne di McDonald's nella regione. Riconoscendo l'importanza dei legami familiari per i consumatori latinoamericani, McDonald's ha promosso un'immagine di inclusività e di connessione familiare, sottolineando come i suoi ristoranti possano diventare luoghi di incontro e condivisione per le famiglie. Questo valore è stato integrato anche nelle promozioni

rivolte ai bambini, che rafforzano l'idea che McDonald's sia un ambiente sicuro e accogliente per le famiglie, contribuendo a creare un legame emotivo con i clienti.

Accanto al *familismo*, McDonald's ha saputo adattarsi anche alle dinamiche di genere presenti nella società latino-americana, tenendo conto dei concetti di *machismo* e *marianismo*. Il *machismo*, che sottolinea la virilità e l'autorità maschile, e il *marianismo*, che esalta la purezza e il sacrificio femminile, riflettono valori radicati nei ruoli di genere tradizionali. Sebbene queste idee stiano gradualmente evolvendo, continuano a influenzare il modo in cui i consumatori interpretano i messaggi pubblicitari e interagiscono con i marchi. Per evitare di alienare il proprio pubblico, McDonald's ha sviluppato campagne che rispettano questi ruoli, senza apparire troppo moderni o, al contrario, eccessivamente tradizionali, cercando di bilanciare modernità e rispetto per le convenzioni culturali.

Anche la religione gioca un ruolo centrale nella cultura latino-americana, con il cattolicesimo che permea vari aspetti della vita quotidiana e crea un forte senso di comunità. McDonald's ha rispettato questa sensibilità religiosa evitando di introdurre messaggi o immagini potenzialmente offensive e ha promosso valori di unità e rispetto, che risuonano positivamente con i consumatori credenti. Questa attenzione alla religione si è tradotta in una strategia che mira a costruire un'immagine di McDonald's come parte integrante della comunità, anziché come una presenza estranea. Inoltre, il concetto di *orgullo cultural*, o orgoglio culturale, è stato un altro tema significativo per le campagne di McDonald's in America Latina. L'azienda ha celebrato la cultura locale attraverso iniziative che includono riferimenti a festività e tradizioni, come il Día de los Muertos (il Giorno dei Morti), e campagne durante l'*Hispanic Heritage month* (il mese del patrimonio ispanico), dimostrando una comprensione e un rispetto profondo per l'identità culturale del suo pubblico. Questo approccio ha permesso a McDonald's di posizionarsi come un marchio che non solo rispetta, ma celebra le tradizioni e le identità dei suoi consumatori.

Il secondo Capitolo si conclude evidenziando come McDonald's sia riuscito a bilanciare la propria identità globale con l'adattamento alle culture locali in America Latina, dimostrando una flessibilità e una sensibilità che hanno contribuito al suo successo nella regione. L'azienda ha saputo rispondere alle critiche, adottando strategie di marketing che riflettono i valori e le tradizioni locali, promuovendo stili di vita sani e

implementando pratiche sostenibili. Questo approccio ha permesso a McDonald's di diventare più di un semplice fast food: un luogo in cui le famiglie possono ritrovarsi, un simbolo di valori condivisi e un esempio di come la cultura locale possa essere rispettata e celebrata in un contesto globalizzato.

Attraverso l'integrazione di valori locali e la promozione di iniziative di responsabilità sociale, McDonald's ha creato una forte connessione con i consumatori latinoamericani, dimostrando che l'adattamento culturale è un elemento essenziale per il successo in un mercato internazionale. Il caso di McDonald's in America Latina rappresenta un esempio significativo di come un marchio globale possa mantenere la propria identità, pur rispettando e valorizzando le specificità locali.

Il terzo e ultimo Capitolo della dissertazione è dedicato all'analisi approfondita delle strategie di adattamento culturale che McDonald's ha adottato in America Latina, che rappresenta un contesto particolarmente complesso per la presenza di molteplici valori profondamente radicati e di dinamiche culturali che richiedono una notevole sensibilità e flessibilità. Nel corso della sua espansione globale, McDonald's ha saputo sviluppare e implementare un approccio di glocalizzazione, un termine che indica la combinazione di pratiche globali con adattamenti locali. Questo processo di glocalizzazione è diventato centrale nella strategia del marchio per garantire non solo la penetrazione del mercato latino-americano, ma anche la costruzione di un rapporto autentico e sostenibile con il pubblico della regione.

Il primo punto affrontato nel capitolo riguarda il concetto di equilibrio tra globale e locale. McDonald's ha saputo bilanciare la sua identità globale, basata su standard di servizio e qualità comuni in tutto il mondo, con un adattamento specifico ai gusti, ai valori e alle tradizioni dei singoli paesi latinoamericani. Questo equilibrio ha permesso al marchio di restare fedele alla propria essenza, mantenendo il riconoscibile marchio e i simboli, pur inserendosi in contesti culturali diversi e rispettando le peculiarità locali. Un aspetto fondamentale di questa strategia è stato l'adattamento dei messaggi pubblicitari e delle campagne di marketing ai valori locali, in particolare a quelli fortemente radicati come il familismo e l'orgoglio cultural, che rappresentano elementi cardine della vita sociale e personale dei latinoamericani.

Un esempio significativo di questa attenzione ai valori locali è l'integrazione del *familismo* nelle pubblicità di McDonald's in America Latina. Il *familismo*, infatti, è un

valore centrale nella cultura latino-americana, dove la famiglia non solo rappresenta un supporto emotivo, ma è anche vista come il principale riferimento e fonte di stabilità per l'individuo. Le campagne pubblicitarie di McDonald's hanno saputo sfruttare questo valore per costruire un'immagine del marchio come luogo di incontro familiare, enfatizzando la sicurezza e l'affetto che caratterizzano le relazioni familiari. Un esempio emblematico di questa strategia è lo spot *First Drive* che racconta la storia di una giovane ragazza alle prese con la sua prima esperienza di guida, un rito di passaggio seguito dai genitori con apprensione e amore. Questo spot non solo evoca momenti familiari significativi, ma rafforza l'idea di McDonald's come ambiente sicuro e accogliente, in cui i momenti di condivisione familiare sono valorizzati. L'azienda ha saputo mostrare un profondo rispetto per la struttura e i valori della famiglia latino-americana, costruendo una connessione emotiva con il pubblico che va oltre il semplice consumo di un pasto.

Un altro spot che illustra come McDonald's sia riuscito a collegarsi ai valori familiari è *Tío Roberto* (Zio Roberto) una pubblicità incentrata sul rapporto tra un giovane e suo zio, che devono superare le barriere linguistiche per trovare un terreno comune. Questa campagna sottolinea come McDonald's possa fungere da ponte culturale, un luogo in cui le persone possono ritrovarsi nonostante le differenze linguistiche e culturali. Nello spot, la famiglia si riunisce in un ristorante McDonald's, superando le differenze attraverso una esperienza condivisa. Questa pubblicità si conclude con il messaggio *Todos hablamos McDonald's* (Tutti parliamo McDonald's) che enfatizza come il marchio rappresenti un linguaggio universale che unisce le persone al di là delle differenze. Questo tema del superamento delle barriere linguistiche e culturali attraverso la connessione familiare è particolarmente significativo in un contesto come quello latino-americano, dove le famiglie sono spesso costituite da membri che vivono in diversi paesi o parlano lingue differenti. In questo modo, McDonald's non solo si presenta come un marchio globale, ma anche come un'entità che rispetta e valorizza la ricchezza delle relazioni familiari in tutte le loro sfaccettature.

Oltre al *familismo*, McDonald's ha saputo integrare nelle sue campagne un altro valore molto importante per i latinoamericani, *l'orgullo cultural* o orgoglio culturale. Questo concetto riflette l'importanza dell'identità culturale e del patrimonio locale per molti latinoamericani, che vedono nella propria cultura una fonte di fierezza e

appartenenza. Per conquistare il favore del pubblico latino-americano, McDonald's ha saputo celebrare questa identità unica, adattando i suoi messaggi e le sue campagne a festività e simboli locali come il *Día de los Muertos* (il Giorno dei Morti) in Messico o il mese del patrimonio ispanico. In queste campagne, il marchio ha integrato elementi tradizionali, utilizzando simboli e colori che richiamano le festività locali, e dimostrando un autentico rispetto per la cultura dei paesi in cui opera. Queste iniziative non sono solo un esercizio di marketing, ma rappresentano un modo per McDonald's di dimostrare un impegno reale verso la celebrazione e il rispetto delle tradizioni culturali. Attraverso questo approccio, McDonald's è riuscito a posizionarsi non solo come un marchio globale, ma come un marchio che si impegna a sostenere e celebrare l'identità e il patrimonio culturale del pubblico che serve, rafforzando così la propria credibilità e il legame emotivo con i consumatori locali.

Un ulteriore aspetto cruciale dell'adattamento culturale di McDonald's è stato l'adattamento del menu per riflettere le preferenze gastronomiche locali. In vari paesi latinoamericani, McDonald's ha introdotto piatti e ingredienti che sono parte integrante delle tradizioni culinarie locali, dimostrando una forte attenzione all'autenticità culturale e ai gusti dei consumatori. Ad esempio, in Colombia e Venezuela, McDonald's ha introdotto le *arepas*, un alimento tradizionale a base di mais molto apprezzato nella cucina locale. Questo piatto non è solo un semplice adattamento, ma rappresenta una celebrazione della cultura alimentare della regione, rafforzando il messaggio che McDonald's non si limita a "portare" un'esperienza americana, ma è aperto a integrarsi e rispettare le tradizioni locali. In Guatemala, McDonald's ha incluso nel menu un *Desayuno Tradicional* (Colazione tradizionale) che incorpora elementi tipici della colazione locale, come i fagioli, le uova e le *tortillas*. Questo tipo di adattamento non solo rende il menu più vicino ai gusti dei consumatori, ma rafforza anche il messaggio che McDonald's è attento alle specificità culturali e si impegna a fornire un'esperienza che sia realmente significativa per il pubblico locale.

È stata poi dedicata una particolare attenzione al ruolo dei comunicatori interculturali, figure professionali che, sebbene non ancora diffuse a livello globale, giocano un ruolo chiave nell'assicurare che le campagne come quelle di McDonald's siano adeguatamente calibrate per rispettare le sensibilità culturali locali. I comunicatori interculturali sono esperti nella gestione delle dinamiche culturali e linguistico-

comunicative, che aiutano il marchio a evitare malintesi culturali e a costruire un messaggio che sia autentico e rispettoso delle tradizioni e dei valori locali. Questi professionisti non si limitano a tradurre il linguaggio, ma si occupano anche di “tradurre” i significati culturali, assicurando che il messaggio del marchio sia compreso e apprezzato nella giusta luce. Nel caso di McDonald's, i comunicatori interculturali agiscono come intermediari tra la strategia globale del marchio e le esigenze locali dei consumatori, facilitando l'integrazione del brand nei mercati culturali di America Latina e contribuendo a costruire una relazione autentica con il pubblico. La presenza di questi professionisti è particolarmente importante in un contesto come quello latino-americano, dove i consumatori sono spesso molto sensibili alle influenze straniere e cercano marchi che dimostrino rispetto e apprezzamento per la propria cultura.

Infine, il capitolo evidenzia come l'approccio di McDonald's all'adattamento culturale non solo abbia contribuito al successo del marchio in America Latina, ma rappresenti anche un modello per altre aziende globali che cercano di entrare in mercati culturalmente complessi. McDonald's ha dimostrato che l'adattamento culturale non è solo una strategia di marketing, ma è una parte essenziale della costruzione di relazioni a lungo termine con i consumatori. Attraverso l'integrazione di valori locali come il *familismo* e l'*orgullo cultural*, la localizzazione dei prodotti e il coinvolgimento di comunicatori interculturali, McDonald's è riuscito a creare una presenza che è al contempo globale e locale, unendo l'identità del brand con la celebrazione delle tradizioni uniche dei paesi in cui opera. Questo approccio ha permesso a McDonald's di costruire non solo un marchio globale, ma una comunità globale di consumatori che si riconoscono nei valori e nelle esperienze offerte dal brand. In questo modo, McDonald's ha dimostrato come un marchio globale possa rispettare e valorizzare le diversità culturali, costruendo un legame duraturo con i consumatori e guadagnando la loro fiducia e fedeltà.

In sintesi, l'ultimo Capitolo illustra come l'approccio di McDonald's all'adattamento culturale in America Latina sia un esempio di come un marchio globale possa integrarsi armoniosamente in contesti culturali diversi, attraverso una combinazione di strategie di marketing, adattamenti del menu e l'uso di figure professionali come i comunicatori interculturali. Grazie a questa strategia, McDonald's ha saputo rispondere alle esigenze dei consumatori, rispettare le loro tradizioni e celebrare le loro identità, dimostrando che

un marchio globale può diventare parte integrante della vita delle persone anche in un contesto culturalmente distante.

Questa tesi ha voluto esplorare l'approccio di McDonald's nell'adattare la propria identità globale al contesto culturale dell'America Latina, evidenziando come il marchio abbia utilizzato una strategia di glocalizzazione per creare un legame autentico e duraturo con i consumatori della regione. L'espansione di McDonald's in America Latina è un esempio di come un marchio internazionale possa bilanciare standard globali e adattamenti locali, dimostrando che un'identità aziendale solida non implica necessariamente rigidità, ma piuttosto flessibilità nel rispettare e celebrare le differenze culturali. In un contesto di globalizzazione crescente, la capacità di un marchio di fondere elementi universali con la sensibilità verso le culture locali rappresenta una chiave di successo, poiché consente di mantenere coerenza di brand pur rispondendo ai bisogni e alle aspettative specifiche dei consumatori.

McDonald's, per inserirsi con successo nei mercati dell'America Latina, ha sviluppato un approccio di marketing che pone al centro valori e tradizioni locali. L'azienda ha saputo integrare aspetti fondamentali come il *familismo*, che sottolinea l'importanza della famiglia e dei legami affettivi, e l'orgoglio culturale, che celebra l'identità e le tradizioni uniche della regione. In questo modo, McDonald's non è stato percepito come un marchio estraneo, ma come un luogo familiare e accogliente, che rispetta il patrimonio culturale del pubblico che serve. L'adattamento del menu con piatti tipici locali ha ulteriormente rafforzato questa connessione, dimostrando che McDonald's non è solo un ristorante di fast food, ma un marchio che valorizza e rispetta le preferenze culinarie e le abitudini alimentari dei suoi clienti.

Le campagne pubblicitarie di McDonald's in America Latina hanno saputo evocare temi che risuonano profondamente con la cultura locale, raccontando storie di vita quotidiana e di interazioni familiari che mettono in luce l'importanza dei legami umani. Con messaggi come *Todos hablamos McDonald's*, il brand si è posizionato come un linguaggio universale, capace di superare le barriere linguistiche e culturali. Questo approccio dimostra che l'adattamento culturale non è solo una strategia di marketing, ma una forma di rispetto verso il pubblico, che percepisce il marchio come autentico e vicino alle proprie realtà quotidiane.

Il successo di McDonald's in America Latina è quindi attribuibile alla sua capacità di utilizzare la cultura locale come punto di forza, piuttosto che come ostacolo. Adottando pratiche di sostenibilità e responsabilità sociale, l'azienda ha anche risposto a critiche e preoccupazioni, adattandosi a un contesto in cui il rispetto per la comunità e l'ambiente sono valori sempre più importanti. In un'epoca in cui i consumatori cercano brand che siano autentici e responsabili, McDonald's ha dimostrato che un'azienda globale può costruire una relazione profonda e positiva con il proprio pubblico attraverso un approccio di marketing consapevole e culturalmente sensibile.

In conclusione, la strategia di adattamento di McDonald's in America Latina rappresenta un modello efficace di glocalizzazione, che potrebbe ispirare altre aziende globali a considerare l'adattamento culturale come una risorsa strategica fondamentale. McDonald's ha dimostrato che un marchio globale può prosperare nei mercati locali non solo grazie alla standardizzazione dei processi, ma soprattutto grazie alla capacità di adattarsi e celebrare le unicità culturali delle comunità in cui opera. Questo *case study* evidenzia come la comprensione e il rispetto per le culture locali siano essenziali per costruire un legame emotivo con i consumatori, garantendo al marchio una presenza forte e duratura in mercati culturalmente diversificati.