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McWant becomes McNeed

Citizens of the world are becoming increasingly affected by the forces of McDonaldization and McWorld, which relentlessly promote an array of seemingly harmless goods, services, and advancements. Although the corporate machine markets these products as needs that will improve people's lives, they are actually only human wants, designed as a quick fix to a variety of human problems. As an example of this phenomenon, we may look closely at the American soft drink industry. Here, the distinction between need and want is blurred as companies like Coca Cola and Pepsi market their beverages as symbols of attitude, markers of desirable behavior, and tokens of a certain lifestyle. Soft drinks and other popular non-alcoholic beverages really have little to do with quenching one's thirst.

The paradox is evident in the mere existence of soft drinks that have little necessity. These beverages are loaded with sugar, artificial coloring, and other attractive characteristics. However, the very purpose, which is to quench thirst, is not fulfilled in these soft drinks. In their very nature soft drinks are malnutritious and unnecessary. As a result, mass consumption of soft drinks rises not from actual needs, but from the effects of corporate images and marketing.

Benjamin R. Barber examines this paradox in great detail in his book, Jihad vs. McWorld. At one point he talks at length about the soft drink industry or more specifically Coca-Cola and Pepsi. One important quote that he outlines in his book is a statement made by Coca-Cola management in which they say, "as huge as our world of

Coca-Cola is today, it is just a tiny sliver of the world we can *create*” (Barber 68). Some might see Coca-Cola’s choice of the word create as interesting or ironic. However, that couldn’t be further from the truth. Coca-Cola and other multi-national corporations who systematically engage in activities that are designed to create consumer demand and brand loyalty are undoubtedly aware of the effects of their policies and marketing tactics. Products like Coke and Pepsi simply wouldn’t exist without actively manufactured and cleverly marketed consumer needs.

The process of manufacturing needs from wants is a delicate one that requires the ability to fabricate consumer spending by portraying a given product as something indispensable. This is accomplished by connecting a human trait such as a desired lifestyle or attitude with a respective product. In the case of the soft drink industry, an example would be the marketing/advertising campaign of Gatorade sports drinks. Gatorade, which is owned by Pepsi, currently occupies approximately 85% of the sports drink market. One of its recent advertising campaigns depicts a diverse array of athletes competing in various sports while sweating the colors of Gatorade beverages. The advertisement ends with the enthusiasm and dedication-invoking question, “Is it in you?” Pepsi’s obvious goal here isn’t to talk about nutritional value or to tell consumers about how good their product tastes. The objective of the advertisement and others like it is to connect the given product with emotions and in turn create needs. Pepsi, Coke, and other corporations that, for their very existence, depend on such methods know that brand loyalty and strength are actively created and not naturally existent or self manifested within people.

Two additional aspects that are significant to the behavior and lifestyle driven consumer model used by corporations are the degree of pervasiveness of a given product and the ease with which dependency can be created. In other words, a company has succeeded when they can develop an atmosphere that creates reliance on and little or no apparent alternatives to their product. These two aspects are extensively examined and discussed in George Ritzer's book, The McDonaldization of Society. At one point in the work, Ritzer examines the incidence of McDonald's food services in high schools. Ritzer quotes the director of nutrition for the American School Food Service Association as saying, 'Kids today live in a world where fast food has become a way of life. For us to get kids to eat, period, we have to provide some familiar items' (Ritzer 9). The McDonaldization effect on kids' fast food dependency is the same as kids who develop a kind of addiction to soft drinks. Many kids are exposed to the sweet, sugar laden nature of soft drinks like Coke at a very young age and as a result are often opposed to healthy alternatives. In turn, this creates a life long dependency, which is systematically reinforced by commercial images.

In addition, the second important aspect of pervasiveness is seen in examples of McDonaldization. Ritzer also brings up the important example of college cafeterias that "often look like shopping-mall food courts" (8). In keeping with the beverage industry example, the same type of pervasiveness observed by Ritzer can be seen in the advent of what are commonly known as "Coke Campuses". "Coke Campuses", such as Indiana University, are college campuses that have developed contracts with Coca-Cola that require them to almost exclusively make only Coke products available. In every dining hall and vending machine at Indiana University the product choice is overwhelmingly

Coke related. This phenomenon is one that Ritzer encompasses in his notion of formal rationality. With formal rationality being the idea that individuals are often allowed an optimal choice or, to put it another way, little choice of means to ends. The existence of few or no possible choice of alternatives is one of the main goals of corporations like Coca-Cola. If a consumer is exposed to a selection of products from only one company, however varied, the person will inevitably not only have to but also want to choose a product made by that company. Therefore when corporations limit personal choice, they do it not merely to profit from a single situation, but to actively promote and create lifelong customers by connecting desires and tastes to lifestyle and image.

An additional example of the success of corporate marketing that is aimed toward predetermined lifestyles, beliefs, and attitudes is the emergence of bottled water. Water being a necessity for life is not exempt from the power of corporate marketing. In this case, companies like Coke and Pepsi, who now carry water products like Dasani and Aquafina, have created another need among consumers. Products like Dasani and Aquafina are portrayed as somehow more pure than tap water or other alternatives. Images of streaming waterfalls and glacial reservoirs are ingrained into the minds of consumers so that people begin to believe that water in a bottle is somehow superior. Consequently, Coke and Pepsi have conquered a market that even many longtime supporters were skeptical about, they have succeeded in selling a product to consumers that is free from the water tap of any household around the world. They simply created a consumer need as they have repeatedly done and will continue to do.

It is clear, upon examination, that it is not so much the quality or physical value of a given product that causes consumption, but more the beliefs, lifestyles, and

attitudes of consumers that are utilized and developed by corporations to create habitual needs. These needs are manifested and reinforced through the globally omnipresent forces of McDonaldization and McWorld. As a result, a climate emerges that blurs the lines between what is practical or necessary and what is coveted or desirable.