

# Commercial Hospitality in Destination Experiences: McDonald's and Touristic Consumption of Space

## Abstract:

This paper examines the multiple roles that globalised, branded spaces of commercial hospitality can play in tourists' experiences in destinations. Drawing on empirical data of consumers' discussions of McDonald's, the paper examines five themes: 1) *controlled separation* and the way consumers use these venues as spaces of comfort and familiarity, while employing notions of home to assess their touristic consumption of the venues and destinations; 2) *strategic behaviour*, in particular how tourists utilise such venues in their broader touristic endeavours; 3) *identity work*, specifically as tourists (re)construct their identities as they explain and often excuse their decision to consume in these venues; 4) *engagement(s) with the destination*, including how such hospitality venues are used as reference points by tourists to mentally construct the destination and shape their consumption practices; and finally, 5) *authenticity*, as consumers critically assess their consumption in such venues alongside critiques of authenticity and globalisation. The paper concludes by discussing the implications for the marketing and management of this and similar branded commercial venues, the marketing and management of destinations, and it outlines avenues for further research.

**Keywords:** Destination; Experience; Hospitality; Space and place; McDonald's

## 1. Introduction

The central role commercial hospitality plays in tourism and more generally in destination experiences has been acknowledged by Academics (Page, 2011). References to commercial hospitality within conceptualisations of touristic experiences emphasise accommodation services and the provision of food and drinks, and more rarely acknowledge practices of hospitality among service staff and the “host” community (Smith, 1994). Within the commercial hospitality-tourism experience nexus, hospitality is frequently considered as a supporting service to broader experiences in destinations. However, researchers have recognised that some commercial hospitality, particularly extraordinary gastronomic experiences or food-servicescapes, may be an important touristic attraction and a key aspect of the destination experience (Hjalager & Richards, 2002; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Quan & Wang, 2004; Sparks, Bowen, & Klag, 2003). Nevertheless, the more general role of mundane hospitality and foodservice spaces within destination experiences has received relatively little attention. This study examines the multiple roles that McDonald’s plays in shaping tourists’ destination experiences. More specifically, the paper uses tourists’ reflections of McDonald’s to provide a wider set of insights into the ways in which this and other branded chain of restaurants may be entangled in their experiences, while also demonstrating how such reflections provide broader insights into tourists’ experiences within destinations.

This is significant for several reasons. Contemporary research has challenged simplistic, managerialist conceptions of hospitality, and has encouraged hospitality research to consider its broader spatial and symbolic dimensions (Lynch, Germann Molz, McIntosh, Lugosi, & Lashley, 2011). Authors have also sought to make connections between hospitality and broader social phenomena, including tourism

(Lynch et al., 2011). The current study helps to understand how consumption in branded hospitality and foodservice spaces is shaped by the tourist experience in destinations. Furthermore, it helps to understand such mundane forms of hospitality, not simply as supporting services, but as key parts of tourist destination experiences. Finally, examining touristic reflections on McDonald's offers important insights into tourists' experiences, in particular as they relate to notions of comfort and safety, home and away, identity and authenticity.

## **2. Literature review**

### ***2.1 Hospitality in destination experiences***

Touristic experiences in destinations are multidimensional, involving a wide variety of people, places, organisations, actions, technologies and objects (Quinlan Cutler & Carmichael, 2010; Ryan, 2002; Sharpley, & Stone, 2012). Within destinations, tourists engage in a series of consumer and consumption experiences, the former being defined in market terms, while the latter can involve non-market and non-commercial transactions (Lugosi & Walls, 2013). Experiences are multi-sensorial (Agapito, Mendes, & Valle, 2013); and they can have a series of extraordinary and mundane elements that may emerge in sequence or in parallel (Walls, Okumus, Wang, & Kwun, 2011). Furthermore, academics recognise that touristic experiences take place over time, and not just during the visit: beginning with pre-travel desire, anticipation and preparation, and extending to when people return home, as they reflect and share their experiences with others (Morgan, Lugosi, & Ritchie, 2010).

Hospitality in destination experiences can take a variety of forms, ranging from its mundane forms, involving people and organisations providing accommodation, food and drink related services and experiences as part of commercial transactions, to the creation of shared spaces of interaction involving emotionally intense encounters between individuals and groups (Lugosi, 2008). The provision of mundane hospitality may be thought of as a series of functional, supporting activities in tourism: the provision of shelter and sustenance enables travellers to engage in other touristic activities. However, hospitality can also be a peak experience in tourism and the fundamental reason to engage in travel, for example, visiting novel eating and drinking venues (Mykletun & Gyimóthy, 2010; Quan & Wang, 2004). Such mundane and extraordinary hospitality experiences may reaffirm existing cultural values and notions of identity; and venues may be sites where cultural practices usually performed in tourist's home settings are reproduced; however, they may also enable consumers to engage activities that subvert their cultural norms and to create new cultural expressions, including of identity (Harrison & Lugosi, 2013; Lugosi, 2014; Pritchard & Morgan, 2006).

In the context of the current discussion, it is important to conceive hospitality as a spatial phenomenon, where the social, material and symbolic coexist. Spaces of hospitality are not fixed, static entities; rather they should be thought of, in Lefebvre's (1991) terms, as being produced through the ongoing mobilisation of capital and power, representations of spaces and everyday embodied practices (cf. Lefebvre, 1991; see also Cuthill, 2007; Lugosi, 2009, 2014). Such spaces thus emerge at the interface of production and consumption, involving multiple stakeholders, including but not limited to organisations, frontline employees, consumers/tourists, policy makers, marketers, local residents. As tourists engage with the material and the

social environment in destinations, different touristic spaces are perceived or rendered inclusive/exclusive or hospitable/inhospitable.

The (in)hospitableness of touristic space(s) and the role of hospitality within destination experiences is determined by a number of factors. These include the key purpose of the visit to a destination, fellow travellers, the type of tourist, for example, their desire for sensation seeking and where they lay on the allocentric/psychocentric continuum (Lepp & Gibson, 2008), and, related to this, their openness towards different gastronomic experiences (Mitchell & Hall, 2003). Access to resources, including time, and economic and cultural capital, the availability of hospitality offerings and a range of other social and cultural factors (on the part of providers and consumers) are also likely to shape how, where and when tourists engage with different food and hospitality experiences (cf. Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2009; Mak, Lumbers, Eves, & Chang, 2012; Stephenson, 2014).

There is an extensive body of work that has considered the different dimensions of hospitality management and its commercial manifestations (cf. Wood & Brotherton, 2008). There is also growing body of work that examines the relationship between food and tourism, for example, the role of cuisine in promoting destinations (Okumus, Okumus, & McKercher, 2007), the links between foodservice and event tourism experiences (Robinson & Clifford, 2012), extraordinary gastronomic experiences in tourism (Mykletun & Gyimóthy, 2010), or the role of gastronomy in shaping tourists' return intentions (Kivela & Crofts, 2006). However, this body of work does not address the interaction of mundane forms of commercial hospitality with broader touristic experiences in the destination. This paper attempts to address this gap in knowledge. Furthermore, beyond narrowly considering food,

this paper is concerned with commercial spaces of hospitality, and importantly, some of the key products, services and experiences (including food) these spaces offer.

The study focuses on McDonald's specifically for several interrelated reasons. Firstly, McDonald's is a widely recognised brand, with presence in a wide range of destinations around the world. Therefore, it is a common cultural and organisational entity, encountered by a wide range of people both as tourists and as residents in their places of origin. Secondly, as we discuss below, McDonald's and its 'propositions of hospitality' (Lugosi, 2009) provoke a range of psychological and emotional reactions, from both active consumers who patronise their venues, and those who do not. McDonald's thus offers a prominent and provocative reference point with which to examine touristic experiences of destinations, as well as the role that McDonald's and other similar types of globally established hospitality/foodservice venues play in those experiences.

## ***2.2 McDonald's: A foodservice operation and global brand***

McDonald's is a globally established corporation and an iconic brand. It has penetrated international markets through the development of scientific management techniques alongside and the adaptation of its offerings to local contexts (Vignali, 2001). Although the standard menu offers many signifiers of American "home", such as the fried apple pie (Willink, 2006), the company's policy is to customise restaurants to local needs, for example, replacing pork with lamb in Muslim countries (cf. Kabbassi, 2008; Kamalipour, 2006; Vignali, 2001; Watson, 1997).

In terms of consumer experiences, the design and aesthetics of McDonald's restaurants vary according to the market context, but all operations reflect certain "Western" standards specified by the company, including air-conditioning, cleanliness, affordability, consistent product quality and scripted service (Vignali, 2001). Menus and in-store signage extend these themes of experiential and operational consistency, at the same time implicitly constructing and positioning the customer as a rational consumer whose time is precious (Manning, & Cullum-Swan, 1994). The outlets simulate happiness, togetherness and a family focus through their product lines (e.g. Happy-meals), co-branding (with popular family and children-oriented entertainment figures), upbeat, broad-reaching marketing campaigns and the design of servicescapes (Vignali, 2001).

McDonald's' ubiquity, its rational management systems and its power to shape food systems, foodways and landscapes has made it a symbol of globalisation and of western, rational capitalism (Kincheloe, 2002; Ritzer, 2004; Watson, 1997). Consequently, it has negative connotations, and it is often associated with discourses of standardisation, routinisation, globalisation, cultural hegemony and unhealthy lifestyles (Cummins, McKay, & MacIntyre, 2005; Kincheloe, 2002; Ritzer, 2004). However, the aim here is not to rehearse critiques of McDonald's at length; rather they are stressed here to highlight that McDonald's as a foodservice operation and global brand has multiple connotations, both positive and negative. As our data shows, consumers are aware of the multiple connotations of McDonald's, which influences their relationship with venues; and, as we argue, subsequently intercedes their experiences of touristic destinations.

### 3. Methods

The overall research project which this paper is drawn from was conducted in two stages, involving two different methods: interviews and the analysis of Internet forums. In the first stage, 25 exploratory semi-structured interviews were conducted with European nationalities in Denmark, Hong Kong and the United Kingdom where informants were asked to talk about their destination experiences, especially in terms of foods eaten abroad. These produced 18,299 words of relevant transcribed text, in which 24 of the interviewees specifically mentioned McDonald's. had been broached.

In order to triangulate with these data, a second stage of the research was conducted, in which unsolicited tourist discourse was collected from online forums (cf. Mkono, 2012), following Kozinets' (2010, 2002) procedural recommendations. Fourteen discussion threads were identified, which contained commentary on the use of McDonald's while travelling abroad. These postings were downloaded between 01 January 2010 and 01 January 2011, totalling 784 items and producing 85,654 words of text.

Postings were successively refined using the procedures suggested by Kozinets (2010, 2002) and Puri (2007), e.g. by noting any hints contributors gave of their demography or purpose, and by applying a process of continual comparison, to ensure that comments were faithful to the context and the individuals they were supposed to represent. Posted articles written in a journalistic style in order to initiate discussions (used at several sites) were discarded at this stage, since the objective was to obtain spontaneous testimony and these blogs represented what de Certeau (1984: 134) referred to as the "scriptural economy", rather than the spontaneous,

vernacular commentary that was desired. This process reduced the original raw data to 437 postings, containing 20,374 words of narrative. The range of posting dates is shown in Table 1

Table 1 about here, please

The data were subjected to qualitative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which involved a process of data familiarisation, coding and gradual data reduction as coded data were brought together under higher order themes. Table 2 shows these themes, together with their rates of occurrence. In this paper we draw on the data emerging from the Internet forums.

**Table 2 about here, please**

## **4. Results and discussion**

### ***4.1 McDonald's and controlled separation***

Academics have long recognised the potential for hospitality venues in destinations to function as spaces of controlled separation, where tourists are removed from the host culture (Dann, 2000; Edensor, 2007; Harrison & Lugosi, 2013). Many of the postings suggested that McDonald's fulfilled some of the requirements of a sanctuary for tourists. As one commentator noted: "*When you're half a world from anyplace a cheeseburger becomes a mental life preserver, something almost sacred.*" As well as being a refuge it was a "staged" repository of Western artefacts and rituals (cf. Edensor, 2001). Artefacts included the familiar food and drink, the paperware in which it was served, the signage and icons (such as Ronald McDonald), menu presentation and interior design. Rituals included offering ice and refills in drinks, the scripted, dramatised service and spoken English.

The experience of consuming in McDonald's was considered in relation to notions of home, which provided a reference point for considering experiences in the destination alongside articulating notions of identity. Notions of home refer to the conceptions of the venue, but also to tourists' actual homes and the values they entail, which were mobilised in their interpretations of McDonald's and the overall touristic experience in which the visit to the venue took place. For example:

*When I am on vacation overseas seeing [a McDonald's] is like a hopping in a Concord [to] bring me home for just a few minutes when the whole experience is overwhelming. I can get my quarter pounder and fries and a real coke, and feel at home again even in the most upbeat European city.*

McDonald's made it possible to be present in a foreign culture for part of the time, in a controlled separation of the familiar and the unfamiliar, particularly when the foreign culture was perceived as overwhelming, or unintelligible:

*Even my Chinese wife admits that sitting in McDonald's is a useful mind-clearing exercise after an overstimulating adventure on Chinese trains and subways.*

*It's definitely a comfort going into these establishments and order something without having to knock your brains out on what to order and how to order.*

McDonald's provided refuge and thus a sense of temporary ownership over space, which was not available in a foreign destination:

*You seek out the most westernized mall you can find, order a burger and fries, buy a ticket to the latest Hollywood blockbuster and completely zone out to all the things far more exotic around you.*

Tourists spoke of McDonald's as "space" with minimal sensory and cultural demands which allowed respite from the surrounding culture. However, the perceived lack of stimulation was to a large extent generated by the presence of Western facilities and the application of Western values. Thus it was not truly culturally "empty" (to local people it might well have been stimulating), but it offered tourists the setting, practices and "props" (Goffman, 1990) necessary for them to occupy the spaces of hospitality within the broader destination on their own terms. For some tourists, who had very specific dietary restrictions, notions of ownership and control over place were entangled even further with McDonald's' core values regarding standardisation and consistency. McDonald's provided a safer option for food than local restaurants, because it was familiar from home:

*When we travel in any place we look for McDonald's ... because we're familiar with it. We know it. ... Because we are Muslims there's not many things that we are allowed to eat. [we know they do not serve halal meat as they do at home] but they serve fish or other vegetarian sandwiches because you know it's not allowed for us to eat their chicken or meat.*

#### **4.2 McDonald's and strategic behaviour**

Closely linked to the notion of comfort and safety that McDonald's offered were the touristic practices and performances that its staging subsequently facilitated in a destination (See Edensor, 2000, 2001 for further discussion of the staging-performance interaction in destinations). As a commentator added: "*Traveling can be overwhelming, and McDonald's is a safe haven to decompress and regroup to face the stress....*" For many contributors, McDonald's permitted strategic behaviour similar to that at home. For instance, people said they were able to eat a particular style of breakfast or use certain menu items to relieve hangover symptoms. McDonald's was also seen as offering relief from the "work" of tourism, a "place" where tourists could dwell briefly and undertake strategic activities of recovering their energies and planning:

*We just wanted to sit down for 30 minutes in air conditioning at a place with free refills on sodas with ice in them. Once we cooled off and rehydrated, THEN we went looking for a nice place to eat and have some wine.*

*When traveling and tired, a quick Big Mac and straight to bed is often a better option than taking time to eat more enjoyable food. Speed and predictability have their place.*

Strategic recovery prepared them for what was evidently perceived as a tactical assault on the destination:

*While in principle I like other countries' norms that you should sit down and take your time with your food, sometimes that doesn't work when I want to catch a train/plane/one more museum. No time to sit? McFood*

*to the rescue! (This is especially true at breakfast, when the street food isn't out yet.)*

These reflections appear to reinforce McDonald's functional status in foodways (Manning, & Cullum-Swan, 1994), insofar as these practices emerge in response to the pressures of tourism mobility. More importantly, these reflections also highlight that such decisions to consume (in) McDonald's were driven by necessity and that they were presented as temporary suspensions of a more meaningful engagement with the gastronomic culture in a destination.

#### **4.3 McDonald's and identity work**

The points raised in the previous quotes, concerning necessity and the temporariness of McDonald's consumption, also highlight tourists' concerns with their performed and perceived identities. Touristic practices in destinations offer ways to reaffirm certain aspects of identity, which tourists bring from home (Andrews, 2005); indeed, tourism may be driven by a desire to grow and to construct lifestyle identities (Cohen, 2010); but tourism may also be transformative in generating new notions of self (Bond & Falk, 2013). Consumption of and in McDonald's also offered points of reference in tourist's reflections of their sense of selves and cultural routes, for example:

*Once you walk through the front door you know they speak English  
and you say to yourself, this is who I am, my country created this.*

However, in most commentaries, rather than expressing a sense of pride or self-assurance, consuming McDonald's was categorised as a tactical coping mechanism:

*“I needed some USA comfort food at the point when culture shock overwhelmed me. After a good night’s sleep I was back on my feet and ready to explore Chinese cuisine again.”*

Stressing the tactical nature of such consumption also served to highlight the tensions that also arose, particularly as the homelike qualities of McDonald’s frequently conflicted with tourists’ perceptions of identity: *“I let my kids eat McDonald’s in Sienna, Italy. I felt like a dirty American tourist.”* Such statements point to a reflexive concern for cultural distinction (Bourdieu, 1986) where consumption in McDonald’s challenged notions of good parenthood and enlightened allocentricity. Several of the commentators subsequently engaged in defensive commentaries, which attempted to explain or excuse such activities, while reasserting notions of cultural position.

*There’s a difference between ‘ugly Americans’ who go abroad and ONLY eat American fast food, and cultured [tourists] who have spent days eating locally and every once in a while just need a little reminder of home.*

*There’s nothing wrong with a Big Mac every once in a while... Thai food is quite obviously wonderful, but it’s unrealistic to think it can be eaten three times a day, every day (unless you’re Thai). After all, when I’m in the US I don’t eat one particular cuisine endlessly.*

Thus, although the tourist role brought a perceived obligation to “eat locally”, there was apparently a need or right sometimes to eat as if at home.

Others used alternative forms of explanation or justification for consuming in McDonald's. Graburn (1989: 22-23) notes that the ordeals of travel confirm values of pilgrimage and sacred quest. Some contributors considered their consumption of McDonald's in relation to the "necessity" of self-enforced poverty:

*[In cities] tourists might be able to pay for a local meal, but travelers typically cannot in these locations. I eat McDonald's because I challenge you to find me an 80p meal anywhere else in the city!*

Such poverty even allowed individuals to feel superior to other "tourists", another important goal of what Cohen (1973) calls the "drifter". Because it was cast as unfortunate necessity, eating at McDonald's went beyond monetary poverty to become a poverty of aesthetics or spirit, an ordinariness and "making do" that further increased the rigours of the travel ordeal.

#### **4.4 McDonald's and engagement with destination**

The previous sections considered how McDonald's represented a specific type of accessible and inclusive hospitable space, which offered temporary escape and control, enabling tourists to engage in the tactical exploration of the destination. Within this second section, we consider further the role that McDonald's played in experiencing the destination as a physical, social and symbolic entity. Contributors' perceptions of the destination presupposed a "normal" world where fast food was the rule. Therefore, local versions of fast food were regarded as acceptable while those from global chains were not:

*I have a rule that I, so far, have not (willingly) broken: when away from home, I forbid myself to eat at any restaurant that also exists at my home ... This leads me often to (usually upscale) chains that don't exist at home.*

*When I travel I like knowing I'm NOT in the U.S. McDonald's and the like, are such blatant reminders of what I want to get away from. I like the fantasy that some things remain "pure" or untouched by mass production.*

Both these statements stress the overt acknowledgement and rejection of westernised spaces of hospitality. However, even if the tourist's choice was to use McDonald's as a point of disengagement with Western culture, McDonald's venues continued to function as symbolic and physical reference points for navigating the destination and thus the touristic experience:

*He couldn't remember the name of the hotel we were staying at, but knew it was a block from McDonald's. He jumped in a cab, and over the cabbie's protest that it was closed, got a ride to McD's.*

There must have been many other ways of mentally structuring the city, but McDonald's was prioritised over other, unfamiliar landmarks, and was used to reduce the parameters, making comparison and hence negotiation easier.

While some tourists saw McDonald's in contrast to an authentic experience of place, several contributors spoke of interpreting the destination through McDonald's. One for instance described it as a "lens" through which new cultures could be experienced: *"Actually, eating McDonald's abroad has become a way of dipping my*

*French fries deeper in the foreigner's way of eating.*" Many contributors saw McDonald's as a fusion between here and there, at least at the level of food. They used the familiar context as an interpreting tool, because it reduced the experience to a simple comparison:

*I don't even eat at McDonald's at HOME. But ... I now make it a point to visit one American fast food joint in every country I visit. There's something about seeing something that is supposed to be one way, and seeing it interpreted by a different culture. The food tastes different, the menu looks different, but only slightly. Those slight differences are so not what you are expecting that you notice them more.*

Visiting McDonald's was habitual to the point of being a ritual for some tourists, but in the liminoid tourist state (Graburn, 1989; Turner, 1974), serious and playful elements resonated with one another, so that play and earnest became indistinguishable:

*It started out as a joke but I try and have a Big Mac in each country I visit. So far the count is 15 and I have pictures from 12 of them. My wife could not believe that I wasted a lunch on our trip to Italy at McDonalds but it made a very nice photo.*

#### **4.5 McDonald's and authenticity**

The previous set of commentaries, regarding encounters with a destination, highlighted tourists' concern with the authenticity of their experiences, which were

again mediated by and thus constructed through consumption of McDonald's. For some visitors, the materiality of McDonald's appeared to be overtly entangled in the experience of place:

*When I went to China for two weeks, I stopped at a McDonald's to get a bite. I kept clean napkins, tray liners, nugget containers, Coke cans - anything with the Golden Arches, in addition to the authentic Chinese knick-knacks I brought back with me.*

For this contributor, the souvenirs acquired at McDonald's managed to juxtapose "here" and "there" but were regarded as "unofficial", not accredited by an acceptable authority. The souvenir shops where the "authentic knick-knacks" were bought were seen as more authoritative and the items were therefore more authentic. However, as another contributor suggested, for some tourists, the glocalisation of McDonald's apparatus could reassert the authenticity of place and culture: *"If you are in the McDonalds in Abu Dhabi, that IS a local experience... Maybe you want to save the ketchup packages written with Arabic script."*

In a similar vein, contributors mentioned "exotic" culinary experiences that they had had at McDonald's, some of which could have been enjoyed in their own countries. Eating these foods in their expected country of origin seemed to make them more authentic, while eating them in McDonald's made the experience more accessible in an otherwise alien environment: *"Had beer and bratwurst in Cologne, Germany; Rome offered raw oysters and other fish in a glassed area separate from the regular food line."* In this case the authentically exotic nature of the local foods contrasted with the "regular food line", and they seemed to make McDonald's a true

part of the foreign travel experience, even though this was belied by customers eating hamburgers in an adjacent area.

However, reflections on a trip to McDonald's could also be used by tourists to engage in more critical reflections on the questionable nature of authenticity and its link to consumption in such venues:

*Are we about to criticize all those locals for choosing McDonald's, as if we have the right to tell them what is authentic and what is not? The truth is, a local experience is an experience in the country you are in.*

Other contributors commented that it was impossible to find destinations and locals unaffected by globalisation and that locals' presence in McDonald's constituted their reality, and hence should be seen by the tourist as authentic. The juxtaposition of "here" and "there" offered by McDonald's for some represented an existential authenticity (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006; Wang, 1999), but also reinforced for them the constructed and contested nature of authenticity (Cohen & Cohen, 2012) that they experienced abroad:

*To see the "real China" for example you should visit a Chinese McDonalds and see whole families enjoying a "night out" but of course that's not the "real China" a tourist is looking for. Get impression sometimes that "authentic" in the eyes of the tourists means "confirming the often old-fashioned perception of a country" rather than seeing the real country.*

Contributors discussing the consumption of McDonald's in a destination frequently expressed scorn for anti-globalist discourses as well as scepticism regarding the

discourses of “authenticity” and towards notions of the culturally sensitive independent traveller:

*And who’s to say that eating at a Tokyo noodle bar dive with a bunch of backpackers provides a more “authentic” experience than chatting with local teenagers over an Ebi Fillet at McDonald’s? What matters more than where we eat is how we connect with another culture.*

In such exchanges, where contributors attempted to negatively position individuals consuming McDonald’s as “tourists”, in contrast to “travellers” who ate local cuisine, others deliberately rejected such modernist categorisations. Instead, they adopted a more postmodern stance to culture and constructed identity (Edensor, 2001), in which McDonald’s was an accepted part of social reality for tourists and locals. Consuming McDonald’s was simultaneously a part of globalised culture, a necessary and sometimes useful part of touristic experiences, as well as being an object of reflection for the construction of identity. Notion of superiority expressed towards inferior tourists and consumer of McDonald’s was also rejected as another identity position associated with clichéd attempts at social distinction.

## **5. Conclusion and implications for management and research**

This paper has shown how McDonald’s mediates destination experiences by offering a simulacrum of home that tourists recognise as rich in personal, social and ideological meanings. Its signifiers are often unacceptable to tourists at home, but may become acceptable in a foreign country. The simulacrum of home confers a sense of ownership and belonging, but McDonald’s may also offer a simulacrum of

the touristic destination, through limited ranges of locally influenced foods, local customs and styles, and also through the presence of local people. Thus there is a juxtaposition of home and the foreign touristic space through the simultaneous presence of two sets of signifiers, and McDonald's is perceived as a means to interpret and experience the destination.

McDonald's allows tourists to escape the destination: it allows them to sample local foods in a familiar environment, and for those entering from the surrounding foreign culture it provides a refuge. The juxtaposition of home and the foreign tourist space thus gives tourists a feeling of control over the process of travelling abroad; they "go" but keep home in sight, or are "at home" but still surrounded by alien territory, both inside and outside the restaurant. Hence McDonald's provides elements of the "binary opposition" (Rojek, 1997; Urry, 1990) the juxtaposition and resonance that is essential to the tourist experience.

Being effectively both "home" and "away from home", McDonald's is at the same time the tourist's own territory (i.e. "place") and a colonisable territory ("space") of "others". It forms a retreat for strategic consolidation and for planning a tactical assault on local attractions, and it may also directly support tactical behaviour in the form of sampling local delicacies or meeting local people.

As well as refuge, McDonald's offers artefacts and rituals appropriate to a sanctuary. Tourists appreciate these as possessing similar qualities to home. The tourist quest for novel experiences emerges through an awareness of home, and the immediate hospitable space, with its associated paraphernalia and social practices, enables tourists to appreciate the co-existing qualities of home and the destination. Although many tourists regard McDonald's as a respite from the rigours of the tourist

quest, some see eating there as contributing to their ordeal by supporting their voluntary poverty and perceived inability to go to local restaurants. McDonald's may also be a focus for playful behaviour related to the liminal quality of the tourist experience.

The juxtaposition of "here" and "there" makes McDonald's at once "real" and "authentic". Though it may be the day-to-day reality of local people, it is perceived by some tourists as lacking authenticity. However, McDonald's can also offer the existential authenticity of seeing local people, customs and foods in a very real process of adaptation to globalisation.

Finally, the (online) discussion of the (in)authenticity of consuming McDonald's becomes a point of critical reflection. Considering McDonald's offers a way for people to reassert their cultural positions (Bourdieu, 1986); it can also be used to explain and justify choices, which may otherwise contradict their values. Moreover, discussing McDonald's also allows people to reflect more critically on the nature of authenticity, the legitimacy of engaging in cultural critiques of consumption and of adopting particular hierarchic positions.

The emerging findings from this study have a number of implications for management and research. Firstly, at the level of organisation, the findings point to the necessity for operators to understand what the experience of consumption in McDonald's and other such international branded venues entails. Consumption in and of a venue in a destination setting has social and psychological functions, offering recognisable, safe and accessible spaces from which to experience the broader destination setting, or indeed to escape it. These insights may inform any (re)engineering of the customer experience, in terms of the services, the product

lines as well as the design of the service environment to appeal to such market segments. Appreciating the safety and security functions can also inform an organisation's marketing strategy, particularly as it engages in communications and promotions which appeals to market segments that view venues as spaces of comfort, familiarity and escape. These promotional campaigns may also utilise more of the material aspects of their service offerings, e.g. paperware, condiments, toys and novelty items that effectively cross-utilise features of the global brand and the local features of their products.

Secondly, the findings have implications for destination marketing and management. Specifically, by having a clearer understanding of a) the different zoning of tourism (i.e. what sort of tourism takes places where), b) the different types of tourists that occupy certain spaces in a destination, and c) the services and facilities desired by the different segments, planners can be better informed regarding the appropriateness of licensing and locating such global, branded chains in a destination. Some tourists (and residents) will continue to see the presence of global chains as a sign of cultural homogenisation and hegemony, which will lead them to avoid the areas or attractions; and in these cases McDonald's will continue to have a negative impact upon visitor perceptions. However, as the study suggests, having such branded venues in a destination, albeit contained and located away from touristically significant centres that are still accessible to tourists, may allow visitors to positively experience the "authentic" spaces of the destination and the "contrived" spaces of globalised hospitality. The experience of the former may, after all, be enhanced by having strategic access to the latter.

Such commodified spaces may offer comfort, familiarity and opportunities for recovery for consumers laying at different points on the allocentric/psychocentric

continuum. Tourists' use of such landmarks for negotiating a foreign city demonstrates the importance of familiar signifiers when constructing a spatial narrative in a foreign environment, even if their experiences are shaped by actively rejecting such global brands. However, it is also important to recognise touristic agency in evaluating discourses of authenticity and globalisation. This is not to deny or dismiss the potentially negative impacts of homogenisation and globalisation; rather, it is an acknowledgement that tourists as well as academics have informed, critical, often postmodern, interpretations of authenticity within a culture. McDonald's may be seen to challenge and even destroy local culture(s) and social practices, but tourists' narratives suggest that they critically reflect upon such critiques of globalisation.

This leads on to the final set of implications regarding further research. The current paper is based on a relative small sample of qualitative material, drawn from naturally emerging data regarding McDonald's. This line of inquiry, regarding the multiple functions of this branded chain of commercial hospitality in destinations, could be extended to investigate other brands and comparison of brands. This may offer a better comparative picture of how similar venues such as branded coffee houses e.g Starbucks operate in particular destinations, especially how they influence people's perceptions of space, their experiences, satisfaction and post experience behaviour. It may also be useful to move beyond naturally generated data, by interviewing visitors and residents or engaging in quantitative surveys about their uses of, and attitudes towards, branded chains in destination experiences.

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Table 1 Numbers of postings by date

Posting date	No. of postings	%
2005	1	0.2%
2006	102	23.3%
2007	21	4.8%
2008	90	20.6%
2009	208	47.6%
2010	15	3.4%
Total	437	100.0%

Table 2 Themes and sub-themes, with numbers of comments

<b>Practical support</b>	Web (no)	Interview	<b>Personal needs/desires</b>	Web (no)	Interview
Price	77	✓	Escape	129	✓
Standardisation	73	✓	Familiarity	105	✓
Toilets	51	✓	American culture	70	✓
Convenient	49	✓	Behaviour change	32	✓
Food quality	37	✓	Breakfast	28	✓
Clean/hygiene	34	✓	Hyperspace	17	✓
Health/nutrition/diet	27	✓	Hangover remedy	10	
Language	26	✓	Friend/colleague	7	✓
Safe	23	✓	Fast food needs	6	✓
Children	20	✓	age	6	
Opening hours	20		Ex pats	2	✓
wifi	14	✓	Loneliness remedy (item 43)	1	
No smoking	5	✓	Total	413	
Bus timetable	1				
Litter	1		<b>Authenticity</b>		
Total	458		Authentic	89	✓
			Other local restaurants, chains, foods	79	✓
<b>Interpretative</b>			Food adventure	17	✓
Regional variations in menus	108	✓	Total	185	
Featured local foods	98	✓			
McDonald's tourism	86	✓	<b>Negative feelings</b>		
Better than USA	55		Shame/guilt	60	✓
Not as good as USA	11		Globalisation	42	✓
Local attraction	39	✓	Protest	15	✓
Beer/wine	26		Food police	5	
Souvenirs	10	✓	Total	122	
Design/image	8				
Photos	7		<b>Mention of specific restaurants</b>		
Curiosity	6	✓	Total	338	
Opposite sex	5				
Total	459		<b>Total items indexed</b>	<b>1975</b>	