

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

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## Abstract:

This paper examines the multiple roles that globalised, branded spaces of hospitality can play in tourists' experiences in destinations. It is argued that previous studies have not considered adequately how such commercial hospitality services and spaces interact with and influence tourists' experiences of places. Drawing on a netnographic analysis of online discussions of McDonald's, this study explores how tourists perceive these hospitality venues, and how they use them to engage with foreign destinations and negotiate the 'work of tourism.' The data show how tourists (re)construct their identities through reflections on consuming McDonald's. The data also demonstrate that tourists critically evaluate discourses of authenticity and the (in)authenticity of consuming McDonald's. The paper concludes by discussing the implications for the marketing and management of McDonald's and similar branded commercial hospitality venues, the marketing and management of destinations, and it outlines avenues for further research.

**Keywords:** Destination; Experience; Hospitality; Space and place; McDonald's; Netnography; Fast-food

## **1. Introduction**

Commercial hospitality is central to tourism and more generally to destination experiences (Page, 2011). Discussions of commercial hospitality within conceptualisations of tourist 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 tourist 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 (Lugosi, 2008) (i.e. food and drink provided to meet basic human needs) and associated foodservice spaces within destination experiences has received relatively little attention. This paper addresses this gap in knowledge by examining 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 chains 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, management-oriented 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 ubiquitous branded hospitality and foodservice spaces shape tourists' experiences in destinations. Furthermore, it helps to understand such 'everyday,' globalised forms of hospitality, not simply as supporting services, but as key parts of tourist destination experiences. Finally, examining tourists' reflections on McDonald's offers important insights into their experiences of spaces and places, in particular as these experiences relate to notions of comfort and safety, home and away, identity and authenticity.

## **2. Literature review**

### ***2.1 Destination experiences***

This paper adopts a 'spatial-performative' theoretical perspective in considering tourists' experiences in destinations (cf. Andrews, 2005; 2009; Edensor, 2000, 2001, 2007; Lugosi, 2009, 2014). This approach is built upon a fluid conception of space, which 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 (See also Edensor, 2000, 2001, 2007). The importance of such an approach is that it does not seek to reduce phenomena to a series of preconceived measurable factors. Instead it embraces the complexity of human experience in examining its different dimensions

(Edensor, 2001, 2007; Ek, Larsen, Hornskov, & Mansfeldt, 2008; Lugosi & Walls, 2013). Tourist experiences in destinations are thus conceived as multidimensional, involving the entanglement of people, places, organisations, actions, technologies and objects (cf. Quinlan Cutler & Carmichael, 2010; Ryan, 2002; Sharpley, & Stone, 2012). Experiences are multi-sensorial (Agapito, Mendes, & Valle, 2013); and they can have a multiplicity of extraordinary and mundane elements that may emerge in sequence or in parallel (Walls, Okumus, Wang, & Kwun, 2011). Furthermore, there is acknowledgement that tourist experiences emerge over time, and not just during the visit, beginning with pre-travel anticipation and preparation, and extending to when people return home, as they reflect and share their experiences with others (Morgan, Lugosi, & Ritchie, 2010). Linked to this, tourists' representations of their experiences in destinations inform their pre-purchase decisions and post-trip evaluations, and those of subsequent tourists (cf. Moscardo, 2010; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

Tourists' visual representation of tourist spaces and reflections on their experiences, particularly through online forums, is becoming ubiquitous cultural practice. These online representations offer valuable consumer-generated insights into the people, practices and processes that shape how tourists encounter destinations and their inhabitants (cf. Hsu, Dehuang, & Woodside, 2009; Woodside, Cruickshank, & Dehuang, 2007). Moreover, rather than viewing online platforms as one-directional representations, virtual forums may be seen as performative spaces in which consumers (re)construct their values and identities through engagement with others (Watson, Morgan, & Hemmington, 2008). The current study seeks to examine tourists' online representations in order to appreciate the multiple (hospitality-related) elements that shape their experiences of spaces and places.

Experience-seeking within tourism is frequently conceptualised as an attempt to escape the everyday practices of home (Cohen, 2010; Graburn, 1989). Tourist destinations are thus often thought of as 'liminal' spaces (Turner, 1974) where the existing norms, behaviours and values of home are more open to subversion or abandonment (See e.g. Redmon, 2003; Shields, 1991; Urry, 2002). Academics have argued that tourists may view this experienced escape from normality as providing authentic experiences of other cultures or as opportunities for the reinvention of self (cf. Cohen, 2010; MacCannell, 1999; Meethan, 2001).

Encounters with new cultures in and through 'foreign' cultural spaces also introduce risks (Lepp & Gibson, 2003). These risks may be perceived to be part of the novelty of destination experiences, and the fundamental motive for tourist mobility. However, they may also produce anxiety, 'culture shock' or outright conflict between tourists and members of the 'host' community (cf. Furnham, 1984; Robinson, & Boniface, 1999). Therefore, rather than providing opportunities for the construction of new selves, tourist experiences may reaffirm notions of cultural identity (cf. Andrews, 2005; Lugosi, 2014). In response to stresses and risks encountered in foreign destinations, tourists may seek reassurance in the familiarity provided by practices from home. This desire for familiarity may be reflected in their choice of food, drink, accommodation, activities, attractions and (dis)engagement with locals and other tourists. Importantly, service providers in destinations recognise and respond to tourists' desire for familiarity by developing products, services and spaces that offer such reassurances (cf. Andrews, 2005; Lugosi, 2014).

Recent years have seen increasing interest in tourists' destination experiences (Lugosi & Walls, 2013). Researchers have considered the motivations for engaging in specific types of experiences in destinations, the risks and challenges encountered in destinations, and the factors that influence satisfaction and behavioural intentions (cf. Chen, Lehto, & Choi, 2009; Prayag, Hosany, & Odeh, 2013; Lepp & Gibson, 2003, 2008). However, these studies have typically adopted a positivist position, measuring relationships between presupposed variables rather than examining the complex sensations and meanings entangled in destination experiences. Moreover, these studies have largely concentrated on narrow sets of hospitality-related items such as the novelty or quality of food and/or accommodation. In contrast, the current study treats hospitality as a much more complex set of socio-spatial phenomena. We interrogate the nuances surrounding hospitality within tourists' experiences of space and place. Furthermore, we draw on tourist-generated conceptions of hospitality spaces and practices. In order to do this, the next section provides further discussion of the concept of hospitality, particularly in relation to tourists' experiences in destinations.

## ***2.2 Hospitality in destination experiences***

Hospitality in destination experiences can take a variety of forms, ranging from 'mundane' practices, involving the provision of accommodation, food and drink related services and experiences as part of a commercial transaction, to the creation of extraordinary moments and shared spaces of interaction involving emotionally intense encounters between individuals and groups (See Lugosi, 2008 for a more detailed distinction between mundane and extraordinary manifestations of hospitality). The provision of 'mundane' hospitality may be thought of as functional, supporting activities, which enable travellers to engage in other tourism activities. However, hospitality can also form an extraordinary tourism experience and a fundamental reason to engage in travel, for example, to visit novel eating and drinking venues (Mykletun & Gyimóthy, 2010; Quan & Wang, 2004). As with other forms of tourist practice, mundane and extraordinary hospitality experiences may reaffirm existing cultural values and notions of identity. Venues may reproduce cultural practices usually performed in tourists' home settings, or they may support activities that subvert cultural norms and permit new cultural expressions, including those of identity (Harrison & Lugosi, 2013; Lugosi, 2014; Pritchard & Morgan, 2006).

In the context of the current discussion, it is important also to conceive hospitality as a spatial phenomenon, involving the production and consumption of materials, embodied acts, representations of space and the mobilisation of capital (cf. Cuthill, 2007; Lugosi, 2009, 2014). As tourists engage with the material and social environment of destinations, different spaces are perceived as 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, including the key purpose of the visit and fellow travellers. Tourists' experiences of hospitality may also be influenced by their position on the allocentric/psychocentric continuum (Lepp & Gibson, 2008), and their openness towards different gastronomic experiences (Mitchell & Hall, 2003). Time and financial constraints, the availability of hospitality offerings, and multiple social and cultural factors (on the part of providers and consumers) also shape how tourists engage

with food and hospitality experiences (cf. Kim, Eves, & Scarles, 2009; Mak, Lumbers, Eves, & Chang, 2012; Stephenson, 2014).

An extensive body of work has considered the different dimensions of hospitality management and its commercial manifestations (See Wood and Brotherton, 2008 for an overview). There is also growing academic interest in the relationship between food and tourism. Researchers have examined 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) and the role of gastronomy in shaping tourists' return intentions (Kivela & Crofts, 2006). However, interactions between food and the mundane spaces of commercial hospitality within destination experiences have remained largely unexamined.

Germann Molz (2005) is one exception. She discussed the role of fast food establishments, including McDonald's, in the experiences of long term round-the-world travellers. Her chapter makes brief references to some of the themes explored here i.e. the novelties of 'localised' versions of McDonald's offerings, and the sense of necessity and guilty pleasure associated with travellers' visits to such westernised spaces. Germann Molz's (2005) work offers sociological insights into travellers' emotional states, particularly the feelings that are evoked by McDonald's. Her work suggests that travellers reflect upon their own identities through encountering McDonald's. However, the brief glimpses offered in her study principally serve to highlight avenues for further research, which are explored in greater detail in this study. Moreover, Germann Molz (2005) does not seek to examine the management dimensions or implications of travellers' observations. In general, therefore, it can be concluded that existing work on food, hospitality and tourism does not address adequately the interaction of mundane forms of commercial hospitality with broader tourism 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 these spaces offer.

The study focuses on McDonald's specifically, for several interrelated reasons. Firstly, it is a widely recognised brand, present in many 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 provoke a range of psychological and emotional reactions, from both those who patronise their venues, and those who do not. McDonald's thus offers a prominent and provocative reference point with which to examine tourists' 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.

### **2.3 McDonald's**

McDonald's is a globally established corporation and an iconic brand, which has penetrated international markets by adapting scientific service management techniques to local contexts (Vignali, 2001). Although the standard menu offers many signifiers of American culture, such as the fried apple pie and the burger

(Willink, 2006), the company also aims to customise its offerings to suit local markets (cf. Kamalipour, 2006; Khan & Khan, 2013; Vignali, 2001; Watson, 1997). This is achieved through three typical strategies. Firstly, ingredients of existing dishes are changed to conform to religious and cultural norms, for example, replacing pork with lamb in Saudi Arabia or beef with chicken in India. Secondly, variations of existing product lines are offered, using flavours and ingredients that are popular to a place or culture, for example using Teriyaki sauce in a sandwich in Japan. Thirdly, core product lines are extended, drawing upon local foodways, for example, serving rice dishes in China.

The design and aesthetics of McDonald's restaurants also vary according to market context. For instance, McDonald's temporarily rebranded several venues in Australia during 2013 as 'Macca's', a colloquial term for the chain and its products (Morrison, 2013). McDonald's has also experimented with different design concepts, for example using furnishings, materials and colours to reposition outlets to compete with coffee shops (which is also supported by changes in product lines and marketing) (Coomes, 2012; Kyte, 2009). Nevertheless, all its operations reflect certain 'Western' standards specified by the company, including the use of brands and corporate symbols, air-conditioning, cleanliness, affordability, consistent product quality and scripted service (Khan, 2008; Vignali, 2001). Menus and in-store signage reinforce 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). In many places 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 style 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, 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, but to highlight that McDonald's as a foodservice operation and global brand has multiple connotations, both positive and negative. As our data show, consumers are aware of the many cultural nuances of McDonald's, which influence their relationship with venues; and, as we argue, subsequently intercede in their experiences of tourism destinations.

### **3. Methods**

This study adopts a constructivist paradigmatic position and an inductive approach to data gathering and analysis (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). The analysis draws on 'naturally occurring', unsolicited tourist discourse gathered from online discussion forums (cf. Mkono, 2012). The sampling in this study, as in analogous online research, was purposive, focusing on carefully chosen message threads (cf. Lugosi, Janta, & Watson, 2012). Several different search engines were employed, including Google, Yahoo and LiveSearch, to ensure that one specific

search engine did not limit the variety of results. Relevant discussion threads were identified using permutations of key words, including *McDonald's*, *fast food*, *tourism*, *travel*, *visiting*, and *abroad*. Following Kozinets' (2002, 2010) procedural recommendations, the aim was to find threads that were relevant, active, interactive, substantial, heterogeneous and data-rich for the study. Fourteen relevant discussion threads were identified, dated between 2002 and 2010. From these threads 1000 postings (totalling 90,550 words of text) were downloaded between 01 January 2010 and 01 January 2011.

The data were subjected to qualitative thematic analysis, which involved a process of data familiarisation, coding and gradual data reduction as coded comments were brought together under higher order themes (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2006). The 'initial coding' (Saldaña, 2009) utilised 'sensitizing concepts' (Bowen, 2006) such as the standardised amenities and services offered by McDonald's to guide the analysis. These codings were augmented by others emerging from the data, for example relating to tourists' personal needs (in their consumption of McDonald's) and to how they compared the features of different McDonald's.

Codings were subjected to a process of continual comparison, and the data were refined through several stages using procedures outlined in the literature (cf. Kozinets, 2002, 2010; Puri, 2007; Saldaña, 2009). The original 1000 postings were initially examined for relevance and a number were dropped, reducing the number of posts to 784, from a total of ten sites, containing 85,654 words of text. Posted articles written in a journalistic style in order to initiate discussions (used at several sites) were discarded at this stage. The objective was to obtain spontaneous testimony and these blogs represented what de Certeau (1984, p. 134) referred to as the 'scriptural economy,' rather than the spontaneous, vernacular commentary that was desired. From these refined data 1634 coded comments were identified, which were reassembled into 44 sub-themes, and subsequently into five higher order themes. This process of analysis reduced the original raw data to 432 postings, containing 20,374 words of narrative. Table 1 shows the sites and descriptions of the threads, alongside numbers of usable posts at different stages of analysis and data reduction. Table 2 summarises the dates of postings and the numbers used in the final analysis. Table 3 provides an overview of the higher-order themes, subthemes, together with the frequencies of coded items.

Table 1. Sites used in the study, numbers of items per site and items used in analysis

Address of site	Title/description	No. items	Items used
<a href="http://blog.geckogo.com/2008/08/best-foreign-experiences-that-i-could-have-just-done-at-home/">http://blog.geckogo.com/2008/08/best-foreign-experiences-that-i-could-have-just-done-at-home/</a>	Discussion thread “Best foreign experiences that I could have just done at home...but why?” Comments dated 07 to 10 Aug 2008	7	5
<a href="http://travel.news.yahoo.com/b/rolf_potts/20060605/rolf_potts/rolf_potts5166">http://travel.news.yahoo.com/b/rolf_potts/20060605/rolf_potts/rolf_potts5166</a>	Slumming the Golden Arches, article by Rolf Potts, in e-magazine Travel News, 06 Jun 2006. Comments dated from 07 Jun 2006 to 05 Oct 2007.	214	133
<a href="http://www.thedvdforums.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-502574.html">http://www.thedvdforums.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-502574.html</a>	Sponsored comment site, topic “McDonald’s tastes different abroad”. Comments dated from 26 Feb to 01 Mar 2008.	40	38
<a href="http://action.publicbroadcasting.net/theworld/posts/list/451814.page;jsessionid=93CAF2A5E16805FD6B1383E51D94D133">http://action.publicbroadcasting.net/theworld/posts/list/451814.page;jsessionid=93CAF2A5E16805FD6B1383E51D94D133</a>	PRI’s The World; “When you travel abroad do you get the impression that everything looks more and more like home?” anonymous. Comments dated 10 Oct 07 to 27 Feb 2008	8	5
<a href="http://www.flyertalk.com/forum/diningbuzz/871506-admit-if-youve-eaten-american-fast-food-overseas-29.html">http://www.flyertalk.com/forum/diningbuzz/871506-admit-if-youve-eaten-american-fast-food-overseas-29.html</a>	Discussion thread on Flyer talk “Admit it if you’ve eaten American fast food overseas.” Comments dated 30 Sept 2008 to 10/09/2010	348	153
<a href="http://www.vagablogging.net/pico-iyer-on-mcdonalds.html">http://www.vagablogging.net/pico-iyer-on-mcdonalds.html</a>	Blog comment on “Slumming the Golden Arches” by Rolf Potts. Comments all dated 12 Jun 2006	4	4
<a href="http://www.vagablogging.net/mcdonalds-and-the-authentic-travel-argument.html">http://www.vagablogging.net/mcdonalds-and-the-authentic-travel-argument.html</a>	Authentic Travellers Don’t Eat McDonald’s, article blog by Katie Hammel. Comments dated 04 Nov 2009 to 11 Nov 2009	11	7
<a href="http://www.fodors.com/community/fodorite-lounge/mcdonalds-restaurant-at-the-louvre.cfm#last-comment">http://www.fodors.com/community/fodorite-lounge/mcdonalds-restaurant-at-the-louvre.cfm#last-comment</a>	Discussion thread “McDonald’s restaurant at the Louvre?” in Fodorite Lounge. Comments dated 05 Oct 09 to 10 Oct 2009	103	49
<a href="http://www.vagabondish.com/4-ways-to-be-a-traveler-not-a-tourist">http://www.vagabondish.com/4-ways-to-be-a-traveler-not-a-tourist</a>	4 Ways To Be A Traveler, Not A Tourist, article blog by Amanda Kendle. Comments dated 23 Nov 2007 to 05 Jan 2010	39	31
<a href="http://www.tripbase.com/blog/12-secrets-of-a-modern-day-nomad">http://www.tripbase.com/blog/12-secrets-of-a-modern-day-nomad</a>	12 Secrets of a Modern Day Nomad. Report of interview with Gary Arndt by Katie Erica. Comments dated 13 May 2009 to 21 Jul 2009	10	7
	Total	784	432

Table 2. Numbers of postings by date and numbers of posts used in final analysis

Posting date	Total postings	Postings used
2002	3	0
2003	1	0
2004	7	0
2005	1	0
2006	192	120
2007	36	19
2008	177	121
2009	343	161
2010	24	11
Total	784	432

Table 3. Themes and sub-themes, with numbers of comments

<b>Practical support</b>	Web codings	<b>Personal needs/desires</b>	Web codings
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	Loneliness remedy	1
wifi	14	<i>Total</i>	<i>411</i>
No smoking	5		
Litter	1		
<i>Total</i>	<i>457</i>		
<b>Comparisons</b>		<b>Authenticity</b>	
Regional variations in menus	108	Authentic	89
Featured local foods	98	Other local restaurants, chains, foods	79
McDonald's tourism	86	Food adventure	17
Better than USA	55	<i>Total</i>	<i>185</i>
Not as good as USA	11		
Local attraction	39	<b>Negative feelings</b>	
Beer/wine	26	Shame/guilt	60
Souvenirs	10	Globalisation	42
Design/image	8	Protest	15
Photos	7	Food police	5
Curiosity	6	<i>Total</i>	<i>122</i>
Opposite sex	5		
<i>Total</i>	<i>459</i>	<b>Total codings</b>	<b>1634</b>

A number of procedures were followed to optimise the 'credibility' and 'dependability' of the process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Coding was carried out independently by two researchers working parallel to provide 'researcher triangulation' (Denzin, 2009). The two codings were then brought together, compared and discussed to identify differences and similarities in analysis. As MacQueen, McLellan-Lemal, Bartholow, & Milstein (2008, p. 132) recommended, a single person was charged with the role of 'code-book editor' who managed the multiple codings.

It has been possible to generate numerical interpretations of our subthemes and codings (See Table 3). However, it is important to stress that this study draws on naturally occurring data and adopts a constructivist position. Consequently, it is highly problematic to adopt a positivist approach in manipulating and analysing such data, for example by trying to identify statistical relationships between types of commentary, posters and particular attitudinal positions. We have included numerical indicators in Table 3 to illustrate the substantialness of coded items under subthemes. However, in keeping faithful to the spatial-performative theoretical approach to conceptualising hospitality and destination experiences, and to our inductive, constructivist research approach, we focus on interrogating the meanings of consumers' narratives.

Finally, it is important to consider the limitations of the study and the data. The study uses naturally occurring data, which some writers suggest is a potential limitation because the researchers cannot direct responses, or prompt for elaboration, to ensure all the dimensions of social phenomena are explored in depth (See e.g. Kozinets, 2010). Furthermore, the data may be considered asymmetric or amorphous in comparison with survey data, where incomplete questionnaires can be eliminated to ensure consistency in measurable variables. However, as advocates of such online research recognise, the idiosyncratic, context-specific nature of the data can also be an advantage because it is naturalistic and thus more 'authentic' (cf. Kozinets, 2002, 2010; Lugosi et al., 2010). Moreover, as Law (2004) suggests, imposing a narrow positivist conceptualisation on social phenomena, based on order and measurability, is equally problematic since it represents another (equally) partial perspective on 'reality' that deliberately ignores the inherent 'messiness' of the social world.

A further limitation regarding this study concerns the ethics of conducting online research, which involves the reproduction of statements without explicit consent. Again, these are issues that have been debated at some length by researchers employing such techniques (cf. Beaven & Laws, 2007; Langer & Beckman, 2005). However, the size and diversity of the sample meant gaining consent from each poster would have been unfeasible. Moreover, these were open forums, and so it can be concluded that the contributors willingly shared their opinions for public consumption.

## 4. Findings 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). The hospitality offered by McDonald's was frequently considered by tourists instrumentally and a majority of comments reflected on the 'necessity' or 'usefulness' of the outlets, mentioning amenities such as toilets, alongside cleanliness and convenience. However, the globalised business model also means that features such as wi-fi and non-smoking facilities, which may not have been easily accessible elsewhere in a destination, were also expected of the venues. As the comment below exemplifies, visiting McDonald's is built upon the expectation of certain consistent hospitality offerings, which are consumed instrumentally to address specific needs.

*The main reason we go to McDonald's when travelling in Europe is because I have small children. It's one place to go in a hurry where you know they'll have high chairs and a changing table in the Ladies' room and you won't have to settle down to a 4-hour meal.*

In addition to these functional qualities of McDonald's, many of the postings suggested that McDonald's fulfilled some of the requirements of a mental 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 and for 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 tourism experience in which the visit to the outlet 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.*

Cultural encounters within destinations may introduce elements of 'culture shock' into tourists' experiences (Furnham, 1984). The sense of being overwhelmed by differences in language, symbols, customs, practices, becomes a source of stress. Cultural encounters may thus evoke emotional reactions of anxiety, and elicit a series of behavioural responses such as withdrawal or seeking familiarity as coping mechanisms. In these situations McDonald's provided refuge and thus a sense of temporary ownership over space, which was otherwise 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 a space with minimal sensory and cultural demands which allowed respite from the surrounding culture, but 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 exist within the broader destination on their own terms. For some tourists, with very specific dietary restrictions, notions of ownership and control over place were entangled even further with McDonald's' core values of standardisation and consistency. McDonald's was perceived to provide 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 gastronomic culture in the 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 short-term coping tactic: *'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 concern for cultural distinction (Bourdieu, 1986) where consumption in

McDonald's challenged notions of good parenthood and enlightened allocentricity. Several of the commentators 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 explanations or justifications for consuming in McDonald's. Graburn (1989, p. 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 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.*

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 tourism 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 considered its consumption as a way to experience new cultures, and noted: *'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 home and 'away,' 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 liminal 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 shaped 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 familiar aspects of home and the 'strangeness' of the 'other.' However, such souvenirs were regarded as 'unofficial,' because they were not accredited by an acceptable authority, in contrast with the souvenir shops where the 'authentic knick-knacks' were bought. However, as another contributor suggested, for some tourists, the glocalisation of McDonald's apparatuses reasserted 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 [McDonald's 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 'home' and 'local' cultures offered by McDonald's for some represented an existential authenticity (Wang, 1999), but also reinforced for them the constructed and contested nature of authenticity (cf. 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 tourist destinations 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, contributors adopted a rather 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 (in) McDonald's was simultaneously a part of globalised culture, a necessary and sometimes useful part of tourism experiences, and an object of reflection for the construction of identity. Notions of superiority expressed towards inferior tourists as consumers of McDonald's were 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 the complex ways in which globalised, branded commercial hospitality spaces, in this case McDonald's, are entangled with destination experiences. These spaces offer 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, albeit temporarily, in a foreign country. However, such hospitality settings may also offer simulacrum of the tourism 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' space through the simultaneous presence of two sets of signifiers, and the venue is perceived as a means to interpret and experience the destination.

The findings suggest that such hospitality spaces may give 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. Tourists can consequently experience the destination on their own terms: these venues may provide refuge from a foreign culture, but they also facilitate a particular type of controlled risk-taking, for example by enabling tourists to sample 'local' specialities in a familiar environment. Moreover, these venues become spaces for strategic consolidation and the points from which 'tactical assaults' on a destination may be launched.

The online data also suggest that such commercial hospitality spaces continue to shape tourists' experiences beyond the actual destination setting. Considering McDonald's offers a way for people to reassert their cultural positions (Bourdieu, 1986); reflections can also be used to explain and justify choices that 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 the rationality of adopting particular hierarchic positions.

The emerging findings from this study have a number of implications for management and research. 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 such as Burger King or Starbucks entails for the tourist. Consumption in such venues 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. It is highly likely that other branded spaces such as Starbucks fulfils the similar functions for tourists, but through slightly different propositions of hospitality. Such coffee chains may also offer clean, free amenities or wi-fi, but in serving tea or coffee and related sundries they help to perpetuate different cultural norms, for example reproducing notions of European cafe culture. These may be related to, but different from, the social and cultural functions offered by fast food chains. More specifically, upscale coffee chains may continue to function as cultural anchors because of their references to 'home.' However, such coffee shops may also help consumers articulate different cultural competencies or even class positions (Bourdieu, 1986), enabling them to differentiate themselves (symbolically and spatially) from other 'tourists' inhabiting fast food chains.

Appreciating such insights into consumer behaviours may inform the development and (re)engineering of the customer experience, in terms of service, product lines and the design of the service environment, to appeal to particular market segments. Appreciating safety and security aspects can also inform an organisation's marketing strategy, particularly as it engages in communications and promotions which appeal to market segments that view venues as spaces of comfort, familiarity, escape or even distinction. Such promotional campaigns may also emphasise the material aspects of service offerings, for example paperware, condiments, toys and novelty items that effectively cross-utilise features of the global brand and of local products.

The potential applicability of these findings to different branded chains presents numerous avenues for research. For example, this study could be extended to consider tourists' attitudes towards other chains to create a comparative understanding of brands. Research can also move beyond branded chains to considering themed venues such as Irish bars or ethnic restaurants, which may serve similar functions for tourists. Considering the function of other branded or themed venues within the context of a specific destination or types of destination may yield further important insights into attitudes towards venues and their uses. This line of enquiry could also be enhanced by a more detailed understanding of consumers' social, cultural and psychological profiles. For example, risk-averse tourists in a setting far removed from their home cultures, and in a destination with limited access to amenities may view McDonald's or other branded/themed venues very differently from tourists who have a greater risk appetite and for whom this was a more familiar cultural setting. Greater sensitivity towards the tourist and to the destination context may therefore provide a more nuanced understanding of how McDonald's and other branded/themed venues are entangled in the tourist experience.

This study's findings also 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 global, branded hospitality

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. In these cases a McDonald's, Starbucks or Burger King will continue to have a negative impact upon visitor perceptions. However, as the study suggests, having such branded venues in a destination, perhaps contained and located away from touristically significant centres, but 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 occupying different points on the allocentric/psychocentric continuum. Tourists' use of global chains as landmarks for negotiating a foreign city demonstrates the importance of familiar signifiers when constructing a spatial narrative in a foreign environment, even if the experiences are shaped by actively rejecting global brands. However, it is also important to recognise tourists' 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 or Starbucks may be seen to challenge and even destroy local culture(s) and social practices, but tourists' narratives suggest critical reflection upon such critiques of globalisation. Future research must at the very least remain open to tourists' multiple interpretations of branded or themed spaces, in which acceptance and disdain coexist. More importantly, research may be able to examine how tourists negotiate these tensions either in their behaviours or in their reflections upon their consumption choices, in these virtual forums and beyond.

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