

**MSTU5555**  
**Technology, Globalisation & Transformation of Education**

**Assignment**

**Analytic Paper on *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*  
by Eric Schlosser (2001)**

**Introduction & Central Thesis**

The policies and practices of the influential and ever-growing American fast food industry are greatly responsible for most of the social, economic and environmental problems confronting the world today and are also contributing significantly to the creation of a homogenized global culture.

Over the past few decades, the personal efforts of some individuals coupled with support from government, has led to the rapid growth of the American fast food industry from a few small-scale individual enterprises into a huge industrial complex which now controls most of the nation's agricultural practices. In their desire to make extra profits whilst keeping prices low, the few companies that are the decision making bodies of this complex, have introduced mass agricultural production methods, industrialized the restaurant kitchen, introduced the concept of franchising, adopted exploitative labor policies and carry out advertisements targeted at children across cultures. These activities are greatly responsible for most of the current global problems which include; the collapse of independent small businesses, malling of the landscape, environmental pollution, consumption of uniform products worldwide, spread of obesity and other food-borne diseases, and the creation of a large poor working class with its attendant problems such as drug abuse, crime, labor disputes etc.

**Aspects of Globalization implicit in this thesis**

1. Global Franchising
2. Unfair global market
3. Application of science and technology
4. Unfavorable labor practices of employers
5. Advertising targeted at children across cultures
6. Anti-globalization agitations and protests

### Global Franchising.

The concept of franchising, one of the factors which is greatly responsible for the successful growth of the fast food industry, has been adopted by several other companies worldwide, leading to the creation of large scale business empires.

#### *Implications:*

- These businesses spread identical malls and retail outlets across the landscapes throughout the world, thereby creating similar architecture across the globe. Thus a main street in a city like Bangkok for example, becomes an exact replica of a main street in Los Angeles.
- The drive for uniformity by these franchises and chain stores has led to the provision of the same products and services worldwide thereby creating a homogenized global culture i.e. most people the world over engage in similar socio-cultural activities and in similar settings.

### Unfair global market.

Worldwide mergers of small businesses and acquisition of others by bigger ones has led to the creation of a few giant multinational companies which now dominate the global market. These companies engage in mass production and/or supply of goods and services to the rest of the world. Their vast purchasing power and their demand for standards and uniformity, has created a market which smaller companies find very difficult to penetrate. The further creation of powerful trading blocks such as the WTO, EU, NAFTA etc. has completely marginalized most other businesses particularly those in the third world, who have no option but to implement all policies that these powers recommend, sometimes to their own detriment.

#### *Implications:*

- Small-scale independent companies throughout the world are either forced into mergers, acquired by other companies, or simply pushed out of business.
- Small-scale entrepreneurs of otherwise profitable firms are becoming hired hands for the big companies, thereby joining the poor working class. This is further widening the gap between the rich few and the very huge poor population.
- Mass layoffs of workers following mergers and liquidation of companies are also contributing to the rise in unemployment figures worldwide.

### The Application of Science and Technology

The desire to produce uniform products in large quantities in order to meet the needs of the customers on a global scale has led to the application of science and technology to almost every aspect of human life including even the kitchen.

#### *Implications:*

- The same types of goods and services are made available in different locations of the world at the same time, obliterating cultural differences.
- In Agriculture, natural farming and ranching practices have been abandoned in favor of industrialized production which relies heavily of machinery and chemicals. This contributes to environmental degradation, pollution and the destruction of most biological species.
- The mass production and centralized processing of food items sometimes leads to the distribution of food-borne pathogens worldwide.
- Sophisticated packaging techniques create lots of garbage which is also polluting the environment.
- Introduction of labor saving machinery has led to the loss of jobs among the workforce of many countries resulting in the migration of people across national and international boundaries in search of jobs.

### Unfavorable labor policies of employers

Led by the fast food industry, most companies worldwide in a bid to keep production costs low tend to adopt exploitative policies towards the working class. The employment of vulnerable groups such as children and non-unionized workers, low wages, little or no benefits, lack of training and health-care, poor and dangerous working conditions etc. are all very common occurrences worldwide.

#### *Implications:*

- Labor disputes, strikes etc.

- Relocation of businesses to low cost and less turbulent areas.
- Poor and frustrated youth who live substandard lives and also resort to social vices such as crime, drugs etc.

### Advertising Targeted at Children

Most corporate bodies worldwide are now targeting their sales and advertisements at children and teenagers, thanks to the innovative policies of the fast food industry. This is due to the mentality that children, during their developmental stages, have the same attitudes and values everywhere. Thus kids across the globe are made to develop tastes for the same kind of products during their formative years and as such when they grow up, tend to stick to the consumption of these products.

#### *Implications:*

- Breakdown of cultural barriers as children all over the world grow up patronizing the same kinds of goods and services.
- The spread of obesity and other nutrient-deficiency syndromes as children tend to eat a lot of unhealthy food that has been artificially made to appear and taste good.
- Children's minds get corrupted towards other innovative products which might be better, but are not vigorously advertised.

### Agitations and Protests

The concentration of economic power in a few hands is now reaching dangerous levels and this is creating a lot of frustration and uneasiness worldwide, especially among the marginalized majority. People who are determined to curtail this excessive corporate power are therefore constituting themselves into various pressure groups. These groups adopt all possible means including demonstrations, lawsuits, boycotts of products, disruption of corporate meetings etc. all in an effort to draw attention to their plight and possibly reverse the trend. Some have even resorted to terrorism.

#### *Implications:*

- Worldwide economic recession

- Destruction of lives and properties
- Wars
- Political instability in most poor countries

### **Proposed Action**

I wish to propose the following line of action to be adopted by students in a public high school to address the issue of advertisements targeted at children, particularly those carried out in schools.

A select group of concerned students should get together, raise funds from their own sources and form a movement, call it “Action to Protect the Children.” The aim of this group will be to sensitize the rest of the school community to collectively address the issue of corporate advertisements in their school and possibly in all other public schools nationwide.

This group should:

- Gather as much data as possible on the harm being done to children when they are repeatedly bombarded with messages (some of which is inaccurate) at such an early age.
- Make this data available to all students and other members of the school community as well as parents.
- Create a website and post all this information together with their intended course of action in order to sensitize the general public.
- Hold forums and distribute fliers and posters so as to convince other students as well as some teachers to join in the campaign.
- Invite recognized child-rights activists over to the school to make speeches to students.
- Send memoranda to all other recognized bodies as well as congress explaining all the issues and asking for their support.

These activities when coordinated properly should be able to win the support of majority of the students as well as some teachers and parents. The group can then go further to:

- Meet with the school board and encourage them to revoke all corporate sponsorship agreements (if any) that involve placing advertisements in the hallways and school buses.
- Insist that advertisements included in educational radio and television programs should not be aired in the school.
- Ask companies whose advertisements are placed in the classrooms, hallways, playgrounds etc. to remove them.
- Organize mass boycotts of products of companies who insist on advertising in schools.
- Solicit support from the media to help them get their message across to the wider society.
- Encourage students in other schools to join in the campaign.