FROM MCDONALDIZATION OF THE SOCIETY TO MCDONALDIZATION OF NEWS: MC-JOURNALISM[1]

Gülsemin MISIRLI[*]
Zuhal ERGÜN[**]
Burcu GÜNERI[***]

ABSTRACT

This study emphasizes the negative consequences of the digital age on journalism within the framework of the McDonaldization concept introduced by George Ritzer. The McDonaldization thesis is used today to express the situations that lead to the uniformization and standardization of societies and covers all areas where production-consumption processes are involved. Ritzer, who likens the developing societies to a giant McDonald's restaurant, claims that the society is organized according to similar production methods, just like the functioning of McDonald's. According to this idea, criteria such as efficiency, effectiveness, rationality, and profitability are also society's criteria in general. This means the sameness of lifestyles, clothing, social and cultural relations, entertainment, politics, production, and consumption. Thus, McDonaldization covers all areas of society, not just the food industry. This situation also shows itself in the field of journalism. As a matter of fact, in the modern communication age, the news has become a commodity that is rapidly produced and consumed. Therefore, the idea that employees in the McDonaldization thesis should do their job efficiently and quickly is reflected in the news production process in the same way in journalism.

For this reason, quantity comes to the fore in the news; the number of news begins to increase rapidly, while quality news decreases remarkably. Just as fast-cooked and fast-consumed food harms human health, fast-produced and consumed news might cause the structure of society to deteriorate. Thus, today's news production processes are similar to the principles of the McDonaldization process. In this context, today's news production processes will be discussed in the focus of efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control principles, which Ritzer discussed within the framework of McDonaldization theory. When the relevant literature is investigated, it is noteworthy that few studies are examining the relationship between journalism and the concept of McDonaldization. In this context, the study is vital in dealing with the concept of McDonaldization and the relationship between journalism in detail.

Keywords: McDonaldization, Mc-Journalism, Digitalization

TOPLUMUN MCDONALDLAŞTIRILMASINDAN HABERİN MCDONALDLAŞTIRILMASINA: MC-GAZETECİLİK

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, dijital çağın gazetecilik/habercilik üzerindeki olumsuz sonuçlarını George Ritzer'in ortaya koyduğu McDonaldlaştırma kavramı çerçevesinde açıklamaktadır. McDonaldlaştırma tezi günümüzde toplumların tek tipleşmesine ve standartlaşmasına sebep olan durumları ifade etmek için kullanılmakta ve üretim-tüketim süreçlerinin olduğu her alanı kapsamaktadır. Toplumu büyük bir McDonald's restoranına benzeten Ritzer, McDonalds'ın işleyişi gibi toplumun da benzer üretim şekillerine göre düzenlendiğini iddia etmektedir. Bu düşünceye göre, verimlilik, etkinlik, akılcılık, kârlılık gibi kriterler toplumun genelinin de kıstaslarıdır. Bu, yaşam biçimleri, giyim-kuşam, sosyal ve kültürel ilişkiler, eğlence, politika, üretim, tüketim gibi her türlü faaliyetin aynılaşması anlamına gelmektedir. Dolayısıyla, McDonaldlaştırma sadece yemek endüstrisini değil, toplumun bütün alanlarını kapsamaktadır. Bu durum gazetecilik/habercilik alanında da kendini göstermektedir. Nitekim modern iletişim çağında haber hızla üretilen ve tüketilen bir meta haline gelmektedir. McDonaldlaştırma tezinde çalışanların görevlerini kolay ve hızlı yapmaları gerektiği düşüncesi, gazetecilikte de haber üretim sürecine aynı şekilde yansımaktadır.

Bu yüzden haberde nicelik ön plana çıkmakta, haber sayısı hızlı bir şekilde artmaya başlamakta buna karşın nitelikli haberler dikkat çekici bir şekilde azalmaktadır. Tıpkı hızlı pişen ve hızlı tüketilen yemeğin insan sağlığına zarar vermesi gibi hızlı üretilen ve tüketilen haber de toplumun yapısının bozulmasına neden olmaktadır. Böylece günümüzde haber üretim süreçleri McDonaldlaştırma sürecinin prensipleri ile benzerlik göstermektedir. Bu bağlamda çalışmada günümüz haber üretim süreçleri Ritzer'in McDonaldlaştırma teorisi çerçevesinde ele aldığı verimlilik, öngörülebilirlik, hesaplanabilirlik ve denetim prensipleri odağında tartışılacaktır. İlgili literatür tarandığında gazetecilik ile McDonaldlaştırma kavramı arasında ilişkiyi inceleyen çalışmaların az olması dikkat çekmektedir. Bu çerçevede çalışma McDonaldlaştırma kavramı ile gazetecilik ilişkisini detaylı bir şekilde ele alması bakımından önem taşımaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: McDonaldlaştırma, Mc-Gazetecilik, Dijitalleşme

INTRODUCTION

Today, technological developments affect all areas of life, and daily practices constantly change in this environment. The revolution carried out by the printing press in the 15th century has opened the doors of a new era today through digitalization. While mass consumption has become possible with the printing press, production possibilities have developed, and mass consumption with digitalization. These developments have affected the field of journalism as well as all other fields. All kinds of information circulation have begun to be provided through digital technologies, and in this process, the practices of receiving and imparting information have also transformed.

Innovations brought by digital technologies to journalism improve journalism technically but create some problems in terms of professional values. Chief among these is the rapid production/distribution of news. Today the news is shared without being put into context and verified from different sources so that the news cannot leave its trace either today or tomorrow. Mainly in internet journalism, since the primary purpose is to bring the news to the site as soon as possible and produce a number of news, quality news is no longer an important priority. News becomes a rapidly consumed commodity by moving away from its functions, such as informing society and creating public opinion. This situation is similar to

From Mcdonaldization of the Society to Mcdonaldization of News: Mc-Journalism / Gülsemin MISIRLI, Zuhal ERGÜN, Burcu GÜNERİ

Ata İlet Derg, 2021; Özel Sayı: 61-68

the operating logic of fast-food restaurants today. Just as access to food is provided in these restaurants quickly and easily, but this food might cause an unhealthy body, the news produced and consumed in this way creates an unwholesome public opinion today. Although fast-food meals fill the stomach quickly and easily, people are deprived of the pleasure of labor in the food preparation process. In journalism, the news produced quickly and becomes copies of each other without in-depth research causes the journalist's point of view and experience not to be reflected in the news and alienated from his news. This situation also deprives the reader of the journalist's experience. As Boje puts it (2017), McDonald's has become an "empire where the sun never sets." In this context, McDonald's has spread to all sectors globally and has affected many occupational groups with its unique production logic. The journalism profession has also been affected by this situation, leading to the emergence and discussion of a concept called McJournalism.

1. MCDONALDIZATION CONCEPT

Although the McDonaldization thesis is perceived as the increase in the number of fast-food chains called McDonald's and people constantly consuming something there, Ritzer uses McDonald's to express a broader process (Cited by Dever and Ateşoğlu, 2021: 32). McDonald's has reached a strong position in the restaurant industry and an significant position in American popular culture and global popular culture. Even the opening of a small McDonald's today can be an important occasion in society. The statement of a high school student at the opening of McDonald's in Maryland, "There has never been such an exciting event in Dale City" (Ritzer, 2019: 28), proves how much the developments in the ready-made food sector have resonated in the society. McDonald's has become a sacred institution for many people around the world. At the opening of McDonald's in Moscow, a worker spoke of him "as if the Cathedral in Chartres was a place to experience 'spiritual joy.'" Kowiniski also defines indoor shopping malls, where fast-food restaurants are concentrated, as places where people practice their "consumption religion." According to him, these spaces are "cathedrals of consumption" for modern people. Likewise, traveling to Walt Disney World, one of the other important venues of the McDonaldized society, pilgrimage has been described as a compulsory journey to the sun-scorched holy city. (Ritzer, 2019: 32).

The concept of McDonaldization did not emerge suddenly. According to Ritzer; In the West, Max Weber's 'Rationality and 'Iron Cage' theory, Frederick W. Taylor's 'Scientific Management' understanding, the 'Assembly Line' system, also expressed as Fordism, developed under the leadership of Henry Ford, Mass-built suburban homes and shopping malls laid the groundwork for the McDonaldization process. According to Weber, who tries to distinguish rationality according to Western societies' progressive and scientific understanding, rationality is the most convenient way to reach the goal and institutionalize all these stages through certain norms and regulations and transfer them to time and space. Rationality creates a bureaucratically organized social order, which Weber refers to as the 'iron cage.' Extending Weber's theory, Ritzer argued that the McDonaldization process represents a more contemporary form of rationalization beyond the formalization of production (Ahuvia and Bilgin, 2011: 361). In this respect, there is a close connection between McDonaldization and rationalization.

McDonaldization refers to the reconceptualization of rationalization or the transition from tradition to rational thought and science. Ritzer states that although he bases the McDonaldization thesis on Weber's concept of rationalization, he adopts a different model.

According to him, while Weber is based on bureaucracy, he concentrates on fast-food restaurants. In addition, according to Ritzer, the McDonaldization thesis brings Weber's rationalization thought to the present day and stated that this thought has spread to much more areas than Weber imagined (Ritzer, 2012: 451). Rationalization is the social actors' use of information more frequently in order to dominate the world more. At the same time, rationalization traps the individual in the "iron cage" of rationalized institutions rather than greater autonomy and freedom (Marshall, 2005: 11). Thus, one of the negative aspects of rationalization for Weber is that it narrows the individual's space and traps him in a cage that surrounds him with rules. Ritzer also argues that just as in Weber's thought, rationality will cause a series of irrationality.

McDonald's is a sociological phenomenon that explains modernization, rationalization, efficiency, and cultural homogeneity. McDonald's has become a concept that symbolizes a fast-food restaurant and the spread of capitalism. McDonaldization, rationalization, and predictability, in which employees and customers attain a standardized form; It is taken as an example by many institutions and communities. The McDonald's system is based on repetitive and automatic execution of what works, when and how, even by unqualified employees. Thus, McDonald's creates a highly routinized, patterned, and repetitive bureaucratic organizational form (Boje, 2017).

In summary, Ritzer's concept of McDonaldization is not a concept that has emerged today, but its origin goes back to the concept of the iron cage, which Weber explained with rationalization. In this context, it is not possible to limit the McDonaldization thesis to only food. McDonaldization refers to a much broader process. Today, it is possible to see traces of this in many areas. The concept of McDonaldization is discussed in many occupational groups that Ritzer describes as McProfessions. One of these fields is undoubtedly the field of journalism. Elements such as fast work and rationality have become one of indispensable elements of journalism today.

2. DIMENSIONS OF MCDONALDIZATION AND ITS REFLECTION IN THE NEWS OR MCDONALDIZATION OF THE NEWS

Ritzer lists the basic premises of the process, which he describes as McDonaldization, as efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. Jobs characterized by these four dimensions of McDonaldization eventually led to the creation of McProfessions. In McProfessions, work is made highly routine, thinking is reduced to a minimum, and high-level skills such as creativity and criticism are disabled. This situation also makes itself felt in journalism. At this point, it is essential to examine the dimensions of McDonaldization within the framework of journalism practices.

Efficiency: According to Ritzer, one of the most critical features of McDonaldization is the principle of efficiency. So, it is the most convenient way to get from one point to another. The fast-food eating style offers, or at least appears to offer, an effective means of meeting many other needs. Other institutions propose a similar efficiency as in the McDonald's model. Like customers, workers in McDonaldized systems function efficiently by following the steps of a previously planned process (Ritzer, 2019: 43-44). Efficiency is perhaps the aspect of McDonaldization most often associated with the apparent increase in the pace of modern life. Increasing productivity is everywhere. This can range from just-in-time production to faster service, from streamlined operations to solid plans, workplaces, Disney

From Mcdonaldization of the Society to Mcdonaldization of News: Mc-Journalism / Gülsemin MISIRLI, Zuhal ERGÜN, Burcu GÜNERİ

Ata İlet Derg, 2021; Özel Sayı: 61-68

World, and homes (Ritzer, 2019: 113). Efficiency is also a significant factor in journalism. Journalists have to do their job quickly and easily.

Efficiency can often be considered a good thing. Undoubtedly, it is exceptionally advantageous for customers to reach the things they need quickly and effortlessly. Likewise, productive workers can accomplish their tasks more quickly and easily. As a result, managers and property owners earn more. Because more business is done, more customers are served, and big profits are made. However, increasing pressure on efficiency creates irrationality such as inefficiencies and dehumanization of customers and workers (Ritzer, 2019: 113-114). Especially today, the development of digitalization and the fact that journalists are exposed to more pressure than necessary in terms of productivity have caused journalists to understand journalism faster than they should be in the news production process. However, this situation has led the journalists to bring the news to the site rather than create satisfying content. In such a system, the fastest becomes the most efficient. Short articles are prepared using plenty of photographs in the news so that journalists' news production is fast and easy. This situation causes the news receiver to consume the news quickly.

On the other hand, the journalist is not expected to present the news differently in this system. On the contrary, in line with the institution's policies, what the journalist will do until the morning when he comes to work is determined in advance. Therefore, the journalist does only what is asked of him, almost following his trail. Today, with the advancement of technology in journalism, the transfer of news writing from journalists to robots is an essential reflection of the McDonaldization process because robot journalism is aimed to write standard news with certain words.

Computability: The McDonaldization process also includes computability. In the McDonaldization of working life, calculability primarily reduces production and service to numbers (Ritzer, 2019: 194). Because McDonald's always emphasizes size. Symbols of the long-time emphasis that he and other fast-food chains have a "big are good mentality" are significant signs, often under substantial golden arches, touting the millions and billions of hamburgers McDonald's sells. This is a rather harsh and heavy way of announcing McDonald's great success. As its achievements have been widely accepted in recent years, there has been less need for McDonald's to be this prominent, thus reducing the size of these signboards and golden arches. It played a role in the protests against the size of the golden arches. The high number of hamburgers sold shows potential customers how successful the chain is and popularizes the idea that hamburgers are of very high quality under these sales throughout the nation. So, it seems that quantity equals quality (Ritzer, 2019: 141-142). In this system, quantity tends to replace quality. Numerical standards are used for both processes and outputs. When looking at processes, the emphasis is on speed (usually high), while in terms of outputs, the number of measures (usually large) of products produced or served. The situation in Mcjournalism is not different from this. The news media are highly obsessed with circulation, and for years, circulation has been seen as an indicator of success. One of the most important examples is the coupon and promotion frenzy that newspapers used to increase circulation. Today, circulation has become more critical with internet journalism, and in internet journalism, circulation is measured by the number of clicks. The more news, the more click-through rate is considered, and journalists serve the news that they collect from right to left. Therefore, all kinds of click tricks are used to click on the news more and keep the reader on the site longer.

Computability has many positive consequences, the most important of which is producing or getting much something quickly. Customers in fast food restaurants get a lot of food in a short time; managers and property owners derive excellent efficiency from their employees; things are dealt with quickly. However, the emphasis on quantity tends to harm the quality of both the process and the outcome. For customers, accountability means eating in a hurry (not a fine dining experience) and eating mediocre meals almost all the time. Accountability often means that their work makes no sense to employees; therefore, business, products, and services deteriorate. In McDonaldization, the statement that Ritzer spoke of, "food to fill the stomach is much more efficient than the pleasure of fine dining," is also valid in journalism today. The reader now enters the site and looks at the news, rather than learning the news from all aspects and having background information. In fact, on the one hand, it seems to be saturated with news with a mass of information, but this saturation corresponds to "filling the tank" in Ritzer's words. As a result, in the McDonaldized system, the journalism profession has moved away from the function of forming a healthy public opinion and has turned into a machine that produces only a large amount of news.

Predictability: One of the issues that Ritzer emphasizes in McDonaldization trends is predictability. According to Ritzer, in a rationalized society, consumers often want to know what to expect. Consumers want the Big Mac they eat today to be the same hamburger they ate yesterday and will eat tomorrow. There is no room for surprises, disruptions, and changes in this system. For today's people, standardization is the end of predictability and unpleasant surprises. For a rationalized society to be predictable, it must be disciplined, regular, systematic, formal, routine, and consistent (Ritzer, 2019: 150; Şakı-Aydin, 2019: 1171).

McJournalism does not guarantee quality journalism but predictable journalism (Franklin, 2018). In this journalism, it is aimed not to leave an element of surprise to the consumers in any way. As Adorno and Horkheimer emphasize in their thesis on Culture Industry, "The culture industry finds everything untested risky. This is the reason why people talk about ideas, innovations, and surprises, that is, about things that are known and never existed" (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2014: 180) are valid in journalism today. Journalists confront readers in the same way and with predictable news. Although it is thought that competition creates diversity, a standard, and uniform journalism understanding is developing in the media. Because newspapers have become more dependent on news agencies than ever before, this situation has caused the diversity of information and opinions to a single source. Newspapers give the same news and the same image while reporting the events. Therefore, readers can almost predict what news was in the newspaper that day, what the headline was. In this case, McJournalism offers only a few surprises to the reader, as Franklin (2018) stated.

Control: Ritzer states that humans are the most significant source of uncertainty, unpredictability, and inefficiency in any rationalization system. Efforts to increase control often target people. Therefore, customers and employees in McDonaldization should be controlled (Ritzer, 2011a: 153). Control has two primary dimensions. The first of these is the inspection of the product and process. The product and process control is maximized with unmanned technologies (Göker, 2015: 399). For example, thanks to the opportunities offered by drones, it has become easier for journalists to obtain information, documents, resources, photographs, and videos from regions where natural disasters pose a danger to human safety. In addition, journalists had the opportunity to quickly reach and access events such as plane crashes and avalanches that occurred far from their region. The possibility of obtaining faster and higher quality images in social events such as rallies and

From Mcdonaldization of the Society to Mcdonaldization of News: Mc-Journalism / Gülsemin MISIRLI, Zuhal ERGÜN, Burcu GÜNERİ

Ata İlet Derg, 2021; Özel Sayı: 61-68

demonstrations, concerts, and sports activities can also be achieved through drones. However, there is a more critical necessity in journalism than displaying or measuring the objects correctly, which is to put the elements in the news in the proper context.

> For example, drones are very effective in obtaining wholesome information about the density of the crowd protesting on the street against a bill discussed in the parliament. However, the protesting group's degree of opposition or advocacy, the issues raised in the protest, the audience's characteristics. Therefore, they will be insufficient to accurately determine vital points such as Journalism based only on information and documents obtained through drones may lead to incomplete or misinformed public opinion, as it may cause the news to be placed in a wrong or incomplete context (Culver, 2014: 59).

It is seen that the reality of a specific event or phenomenon is reconstructed during the practice of writing news, and writing news is also a production of meaning (Dursun, 2004: 45). Thus, it will become more apparent how vital the correct setting of the context in the news is in terms of informing the public correctly.

The second dimension of auditing is the auditing of customers. When we look at customers' inspection in general, fast-food restaurants have created such a system that the customers do not need or want to linger after the meal; foods that are consumed quickly and eaten by hand turn into serial meals. Some fast-food restaurants use chairs that disturb customers after an average of twenty minutes (Ritzer, 2019: 169). Although the chairs are designed to attract customers to McDonald's, what is expected from customers is to get up without delay after finishing their meal. This situation is reminiscent of internet journalism today.

On the one hand, readers must click on the news and be drawn to the site. However, on the other hand, news content that is not attractive enough to distract the readers from the advertising content of the newspapers is created. Today, many traps are set in internet journalism to lure readers into the site. However, when the reader clicks on the news or enters the site, it is not expected to focus entirely on it.

CONCLUSION

The development of new communication technologies has led to some changes and transformations in the journalism profession. While these changes in journalism practices made positive contributions to the profession, they also brought some problems. Speed came to the fore in the news, and this situation paved the way for factors that would negatively affect the journalism profession, such as the decrease in quality news, loss of accuracy, and violation of privacy. All of this has led to the birth of a new style of journalism that can be called McJournalism. Dimensions such as efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control, which Ritzer put forward in his McDonaldization thesis and discussed over the fast-food sector, have also begun to impact the journalism profession.

The news prepared by spending the least time in McJournalism is the most efficient. The emphasis on the quantity of the news comes to the fore; The quality of the article is ignored. McJournalism is more concerned with fast, standard, and predictable content than quality content. McJournalism is the journalistic equivalent of the Big Macs. Just as the Big Mac offers more food but an unhealthy diet, McJournalism offers an unhealthy news diet. Thus,

McJournalism is less interested in quality that is, quality news, emphasizing the abundance of news. As a result, the news is increasingly similar. It is frequently encountered in news, headlines, images, and headlines that are copies of each other mainly obtained from agencies.

As a result, McJournalism surrounds the reader with an increasing number of but similar reports, exposing them to too much information and monotony. Thus, the reader cannot see any other news or point of view. All these factors prevent the individual from being informed, the society's awareness, and the formation of a rational public opinion.

REFERENCES

AHUVIA, Aaron ve IZBERK-BİLGİN, Elif (2011). "Limits of the McDonaldization Thesis: eBayization and Ascendant Trends in Post-Industrial Consumer Culture", *Consumption Markets &Culture*, 14 (4), 361-384.

ADORNO, Theodor W. ve HORKHEIMER, Max (2014). *Aydınlanmanın Diyalektiği*. (Çev. Nihat Ülner-Elif Öztarhan Karadoğan). İstanbul: Kabalcı Yayınları.

BOJE, David M. (2017). *Theatres of Capitalism,* https://www.cairn.info/revue-management-2018-1-page-667.htm (Erişim Tarihi: 10. 09. 2021).

CULVER, Kathleen Bartzen (2014). "From Battlefield to Newsroom: Ethical Implications of Drone Technology in Journalism", *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 29, 52-64.

DEVER, Ayhan ve ATEŞOĞLU, Sinem (2021). "McDonaldlaştırma ve Simülasyon Teorileri Bağlamında Postmodernizm ve Spor", *Mavi Atlas*, 9 (1), 28-41.

DURSUN, Çiler (2004). "Haberde Gerçekliğin İnşası Ne Demektir?", *Haber Hakikat ve İktidar İlişkis*i içinde. (Ed. Çiler Dursun). Ankara: Elips Yayınları. 37-65.

FRANKLIN, Bob (2018). "*McJournalism": The McDonaldization Thesis and Junk Journalism* file:///C:/Users/PC/Downloads/nanopdf.com_mcjournalism-the-mcdonaldization-thesis-and-junk-journalism.pdf (Erişim Tarihi: 11.09.2021).

GÖKER, Göksel (2015). "İletişim McDonaldlaşması: Sosyal Medya Üzerine Bir İnceleme". *Turkish Studies-İnternational Periodical for the Languges and History of Turkish or Turkic*, 10 (2), 389-410.

MARSHALL, Gordon (2005*). Sosyoloji Sözlüğü*. (Çev.Osman Akınhay ve Derya Kömürcü). Ankara: Bilim ve Sanat Yayınları.

RITZER, George (2019). *Toplumun McDonaldlaştırılması*. (Çev.Akın Emre Pilgir). İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları.

ŞAKI-AYDIN, Oya (2019). "Yeni İzleme Biçimleri ve Netflix İçerikleri: Ritzer'in Mcdonaldlaşma Tezi Ekseninde Bir Değerlendirme", *Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 12 (63), 1167-1172.