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## **Bridging Globalization and Digital Society: George Ritzer's Insights on Prosumption and the Working Consumer**

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**Keywords:** McDonaldization; Prosumption; Digital Labor; Globalization.

### **Abstract**

This article explores George Ritzer's sociological contributions to understanding labor and consumption in the digital age. Central to his analysis are the concepts of McDonaldization and prosumption, which reveal how consumer roles have merged with productive labor across physical and digital realms. Ritzer illustrates how globalization and digital technologies—especially Web 2.0 and AI—externalize labor onto users, turning them into unpaid content creators and data producers. The rise of platform economies and "working consumers" blurs the boundaries between work and consumption, while corporate rationalization continues through models like Amazonization. Ritzer's theoretical tools, including the nothing/something continuum and instrumental rationality, help unpack these complex transformations. His work offers a critical lens to analyze how contemporary capitalism exploits user participation, commodifies data, and reshapes agency in an increasingly algorithm-driven society.

### **Article**

In an era of rapid technological advancement and societal transformation, George Ritzer stands out as a prominent sociologist who has profoundly analyzed the shifting dynamics of labor and consumption. By deconstructing classical categories such as the consumer and the producer, Ritzer reveals how globalization and digitalization are reshaping these roles on a global scale. His insights into metatheorization, McDonaldization, the nothing/something continuum, and prosumption serve as crucial tools for understanding the interconnectedness of modern economies and societies (Ritzer, 2014).

Ritzer's groundbreaking concept of McDonaldization (1993), exemplifies how the principles of the fast-food industry have infiltrated various sectors of society. McDonald's pioneered a system where consumers perform tasks traditionally done by employees, such as serving themselves and disposing of their own trash. This shift not only redefined the consumer

experience but also blurred the lines between production and consumption, giving rise to Ritzer's exploration of prosumption—the merging of production and consumption roles (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010).

Building on this foundation, Ritzer observed that McDonaldization extends beyond fast food, illustrating a broader societal shift where corporations externalize labor by shifting tasks to consumers. This practice, which Weber might have termed "instrumental rationality," aims to maximize efficiency and corporate profit by reducing labor costs. McDonald's is merely the tip of the iceberg; this model has now become common across multiple industries, from retail to online platforms, where consumers are increasingly involved in productive tasks without compensation (Ritzer, 1998).

With the rise of Web 2.0 in the early 2000s, Ritzer's theory of prosumption gained new relevance. Platforms like YouTube and Facebook transformed consumers into content creators—or "prosumers"—who generate content while their personal data is commodified. This digital form of McDonaldization enlists users to unknowingly contribute labor, while corporations profit from their content and data. This digital prosumption mirrors the earlier physical forms of consumer labor, but with new layers of complexity and exploitation, especially in terms of personal data extraction (Ritzer, Dean & Jurgenson, 2012; Ritzer & Degli Esposti, 2019).

This transformation in the digital realm is not isolated. Ritzer's analysis demonstrates how the processes of globalization and digitalization converge. On one hand, globalization facilitates the spread of McDonaldized practices, embedding corporate rationalization into diverse cultural contexts worldwide. On the other hand, digital technologies have transformed prosumption by creating new forms of consumer labor, where users produce valuable data and content that fuels corporate profits. In both contexts, Ritzer illustrates how McDonaldization and prosumption operate together, affecting both the physical and digital realms (Ritzer, 2015).

Further expanding on this, Ritzer's "nothing/something" continuum provides a conceptual framework to understand how traditional distinctions between production and consumption have dissolved. As prosumption becomes a defining characteristic of modern life, the roles of producer and consumer blend seamlessly into one another. Ritzer's continuum of prosumer capitalism highlights this transformation, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between production and consumption in contemporary society (Ritzer & Ryan, 2002; Ritzer, 2003).

The growing influence of datafication exemplifies this shift. As McDonaldization extends into digital practices, personal data becomes a key commodity, driving new economic circuits centered around user data collection. Platforms like Instagram monetize user preferences, consumption habits, and attention, further alienating users from the commodities they produce. This transformation has led to the unprecedented growth of Big Tech corporations, which now dominate the global economy (Degli Esposti, 2015; Ritzer & Miles, 2019).

Ritzer's exploration of these trends continues into the realm of artificial intelligence (AI), where he examines the rise of "prosuming machines"—AI-driven technologies that perform both mechanical and conceptual tasks. Much like McDonaldization's effects on labor, AI is increasingly replacing human roles in both production and consumption processes. This technological advancement raises new questions about the future of labor and how prosuming machines will further blur the lines between human and machine-driven production (Ritzer, 2014).

A key development in Ritzer's work is his notion of the "working consumer"—a concept that illustrates the increasing dependence of workers on platforms like Uber, Amazon Mechanical Turk, and freelancing websites. These platforms blur the boundaries between consumption and production, as workers must consume platform services to complete tasks, while their labor generates data that further fuels the platforms' profitability. Algorithms now dictate work tasks, monitor performance, and even determine compensation, deepening the dependency between consumption and production (Ritzer & Degli Esposti, 2019).

As Ritzer's analysis connects globalization and digitalization, he emphasizes how these dual forces shape labor, consumption, and economic structures. His concepts of McDonaldization, prosumption, and the working consumer provide critical insights into the nature of contemporary social and economic relationships. In his later works, Ritzer acknowledges that McDonald's is no longer the only model to represent these shifts, proposing "Walmartization" and "Amazonization" as more current examples of global corporate rationalization (Ritzer, 2020).

In conclusion, George Ritzer's contributions to contemporary sociology remain essential for understanding the profound changes in labor, consumption, and societal dynamics. His ability to recontextualize classical sociological theories, such as Weber's "instrumental rationality," to address modern phenomena like McDonaldization and prosumption is invaluable. As new

technological revolutions—particularly in AI and datafication—continue to reshape society, Ritzer’s work offers a critical lens through which to analyze these developments. His frameworks not only provide insights into the globalized world and digital society but also challenge us to reconsider how we define labor, consumption, and human agency in an increasingly interconnected and algorithm-driven world.

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