

# OPINION

## Look to McDonald's for lessons on Brexit and retail

The burger chain's approach to internationalism and the enhancement of the customer experience should provide inspiration for retailers and politicians alike, claims **Michael Poynor**

**T**he latest canard from Brexit Secretary David Davis is that the fear of any of the other 27 countries following the UK's suit and leaving the EU is "without foundation". Britain, he explained, is a "very different country" from the rest.

His implicit assertion that the French are fundamentally less French (or the Germans less German) than the British are British is as far from the truth as a Trump tweet.

Davis wilfully ignores the rich diversity that enjoys the EU's embrace and offers poor grounds for Britain's diversion from it.

The UK more different? I beg to differ. So too, I suspect, would McDonald's.

This ubiquitous champion of fast food is a powerful exponent of variety within uniformity. It is present in all 28 EU countries, with approximately 1,270 of its 7,200-plus outlets in the UK.

Not surprising for an Anglo-Saxon format to succeed in Britain, but McDonald's has more outlets in France and Germany than it does in the UK, demonstrating an adaptability to local markets that is the hallmark of all successful pan-EU businesses.

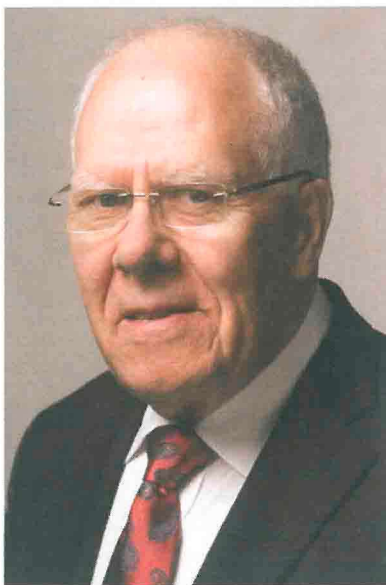
### Signature dish

Last month, 'McDo' launched a gourmet burger in its 1,400 French restaurants. Branded 'Signature' (cleverly bilingual), it is served in 'raffiné' black packaging with matching cutlery.

Writing this article in France on Bastille Day, I'm wondering if Président Macron, with Marie-Antoinette's cry to let him eat cake ringing in his ears, might invite The Donald to McDonald's in Paris to sample this new dish.

Two burgers ('d'origine française', of course) with Fourme d'Ambert cheese and French beech-smoked bacon might

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do wonders for diplomatic cordiality, and for future rounds of climate change talks or discussions about Nato budget contributions.

### Culture shift

'Vive la différence', Monsieur Davis, is a call for harmony, not secession.

What's happening at McDonald's can be assimilated in a politico-economic context, but it's also a metonym for the massive sea change that is disrupting the offline global retail sector at large.

'It's the experience, stupid!' one might say.

The 1990s brought a dramatic rise in

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retail sales as consumers accumulated a lot of stuff: homes, cars, furniture, clothes. But in the US, since 2000, clothes spending has dropped by 20% in its share of total consumer expenditure.

People are spending more money in hotels and on planes – domestic flights have seen an increase in passenger numbers every year since 2010.

And when it comes to eating out, revenues have grown twice as fast over the past 10 years as all other retail spending: in 2016, for the first time ever, Americans spent more money in restaurants and bars than in grocery stores.

Social media both reflects and drives many of these behavioural changes, of course.

We're much less likely to take a selfie and post it on Facebook when standing at a supermarket checkout than when seated in a restaurant – even a McDonald's (especially when eating a gourmet burger with a knife and fork and able to pick up one's iPhone with ketchup-free fingers).

### From McDonald's to M&S

Some commentators were surprised by the appointment of an ex-McDonald's luminary (Jill McDonald) at M&S. I wasn't.

It clearly shows the handwriting of new chairman Archie Norman who, in a similar role at Wesfarmers in Australia, oversaw the appointment of Guy Russo, nine years ago, as the new managing director of the moribund Kmart chain.

Guy was formerly head of McDonald's in Australia and China. He has done such a fantastic job at Kmart that Wesfarmers has now asked him to work his magic at Target too.

It will be fascinating to see Jill McDonald's impact on M&S clothing. What will her signature dish be? A sartorial canard à l'orange perhaps? **RW**