Christmas is perhaps the most celebrated religious holiday in the world, with over 1.8 billion Christmas cards sent in the UK alone every year. Christmas is a Christian holiday that takes place on the 25th December annually to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ but has now extended across the whole of December with celebrations lasting well over a month and finishing early January. In the Post-Fordist society we now live in, the importance of Christmas is increasingly moving away from its traditional religious meaning and becoming a holiday that uses the consumption of consumer goods as a way of celebrating. With many of the so called “traditional” Christmas symbols being created by advertisers, the holiday is progressively becoming more materialistic and gift orientated. Perhaps the most famous example of this today is the image of Father Christmas, which was moulded and shaped by The Coca-Cola company who stated that “many people are surprised to learn that prior to 1931, Santa was depicted as everything from a tall gaunt man to a spooky-looking elf” (The Coca-Cola Company 2012).

It was November of 1997, I was 4 years old and my favourite time of year was fast approaching. I had already written my Christmas list to Santa as I had known what I wanted for months – the new PlayStation console. After playing on Crash Bandicoot at my friend Thomas’ house, I had to get one for Christmas, especially considering all my friend”s were getting one and I would be so uncool and left out if I had to settle for my Nintendo 64. After seeing so many adverts for different PlayStation games, I was spoilt for choice, which would I choose to ask for? When discussing it with my dad he told me how lucky I was to have a choice because when he was younger the only game available to play was Space Invaders down at the arcade, never mind a choice of console for your home and then a further choice of games.

This depicts the transition from a Fordist to a Post-Fordist society. A Fordist society is one of mass production and consumption of identical products, where as Post-Fordist society has
been seen to be distinguished by flexible specialization, (Das and Panayiotopoulos 1996). Flexible specialization was introduced as “the inverse of mass production: the manufacture of specialized goods by means of general-purpose resources rather than vice versa” (Amin 2008: 139). This means that companies have multi purpose equipment as well as a multi tasking work force, which therefore allows them to adapt to changes in the market and ensure that the consumers needs are always met. Video games are one of the many examples that illustrate the transition from Fordist to Post-Fordist society, displaying how products are increasing greatly in variation, giving the consumer a greater choice to suit their own needs, such as age for instance - with a wide range of games for children as young as three years old, up to eighteen years and above. These video games are also widely available, not just nationally but on an international scale, with developers aiming to take their games global from the launch date. This allows consumers to be able to gain access to identical video games and consoles in various different countries, but altered slightly in order to create a localised version that runs in the national language of the country that the game was purchased. This is another example of how companies in a Post-Fordist society, adapt their products to suit the needs of the consumer, therefore resulting in greater profits. This leads on to another concept that is noticeable in contemporary societies all year round but particularly at Christmas time – globalisation.

It was November of 2001, I was 8 years old and Christmas was just around the corner once again. As usual I was already pestering my parents with a completed list to Santa that I wished for them to post, after all it was not too early because the Coca-Cola Christmas advert had already been aired on TV, which meant Christmas was coming! This was something else I would also badger my parents for around this time every year – a trip to see the Coca-Cola truck in Manchester. I would love to get wrapped up in my coat and hat and spend the afternoon in town with my family to visit the attraction, taking photos and smiling with delight at the illuminated lorry. I was surprised when my mum told me that children all over the world visited their local city centre to see the truck, I thought that Coca-Cola was British and only popular here in England! After visiting it, I would nag my parents for a “McDonald’s Happy Meal” on the way home, which I would wash down with a cup of my favourite drink – “Coca-Cola”.

For Giddens (1990: 64), globalization is “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa”. Coca-Cola is perhaps one of the most recognisable examples of globalisation, showing how advertisement can increase a products popularity dramatically. The company has also moved away from its original Fordist means of production, whereby only regular Coca-Cola was produced and consumed and entered the Post-Fordist era, therefore changing its marketing strategies. Saylor (2012) stated that a “key factor that has supported Coca Cola’s globalization vision is the company’s ability to customize the product to meet the needs and wants of individual markets”. This confirms the companies shift to a Post-Fordist means of production, selling products in a “niche” market, where consumers can choose whether they wish to drink Coca-
Cola, Diet Coke or Cherry Coca-Cola for example. Another extraordinary example of globalisation is the company McDonald’s, which is the world’s largest chain of fast food restaurant in the world and the extent of McDonald’s globalisation has even lead to a theory being coined from it – McDonaldization. The theory was first mentioned by George Ritzer (2009: 263) who first defined McDonaldization as, “the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world”. Toys R Us, Wal-Mart, Gap, Jiffy Lube, and Home Depot are all examples of companies that want to become the McDonald’s of their industry. McDonaldization is not simply about McDonald’s as a single company but how the principles of the fast food industry have come to dominate the rest of society. Ritzer’s theory came as an updated version of Max Weber’s analysis of modern society and the process of rationalization. In Max Weber’s theory, the model of bureaucracy is used in order to explain the changing path of society, whereas George Ritzer used the fast-food restaurant as having become a more representative contemporary paradigm.

After looking back at my own experiences in the past 20 years, I have come to realise that Christmas has most definitely become a consumer holiday. Advertisement and the mass media are both major influences in the increase of consumerism, that is allowing us to believe that it is the norm to spend hundreds of pounds on family and friends at this time of year. Companies such as Coca-Cola have even gained the power to transform the image of Father Christmas, in order to suit their advertisement needs as well as company logo and colour. They have even managed to warp the minds of TV viewers into believing that the holiday season has begun once the Coca-Cola Christmas advert has been aired for the first time that year. This depicts the outstanding level of consumerism today and also illustrates the shift from a Fordist to Post-Fordist society with the “niche” marketing and advertising we witness, in order to suit the consumers needs.

Globalisation is another term we can relate to Christmas, with the ingredients of a typical UK Christmas dinner travelling 130,000 km collectively, whereas in the past they would have all been locally sourced in the UK. Toys are another example of a product that is transported across the world from places such as China and Taiwan in cargo plane, lorries and container ships to the UK at Christmas time, (Oakes 2010). The globalisation of products such as these has occurred due to the increase in cheap travel, therefore allowing multinational corporations to seek cheap labour overseas to manufacture their product and then transport it back to the UK and America with cheap transport.

In sum, it would be fair to say that Christmas is one of the best examples that can be used to illustrate the extent of globalisation and consumerism in our society today, and it also helps us understand the shift from a Fordist to Post-Fordist society.
Bibliography:


Image 1:


Image 2:

http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_A gdTRdQXx0/TOQ3LSUvAI/AAAAAAAACCI/_p0J_8tj4TI/s1600/Coca_Cola_Christmas_Truck_1280x720.jpg