

Chapter 5

Evolution of Brand Culture: A Post–Industrial Revolution Story

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is the result of a deep-seated question in the mind of the authors- What is the essence of a business firm? The search of answer led the authors from insight to insight and at one point it became clear that roots of business success are deep into the world history. Related to realization above and based on the wider knowledge about business was the second question: What single attribute of a business entity contained most of its essence? In other words, when a business is born, what factors impart its unique identity? These questions appeared significant and set the authors to explore title theme, that is, the story of journey through centuries of history. The focus was on two separate forces which become infinitely intriguing when brought together: brand and culture. This chapter is a brief story of the antecedents and consequences of (both qualitative and quantitative) differences in brand culture and its ability to shape the life cycle of specific organization.

INTRODUCTION

Businesses are entities of specific nature and must live by imperatives derived the same way the great names in science (for example, Newton, Galileo, Descartes, Faraday, Marconi, Einstein etc.) discovered truths about way nature functioned. In order to achieve the objective of showing the value of these assertions, the authors believe nothing could be more productive and rewarding than exploring the very fundamentals of business through ages, namely, the evolution of brand culture particularly in the post-industrial revolution era.

The authors' logic is sophisticated yet easy to comprehend. The soul of a business is captured in its business model derived from the business acumen possessed by its promoters, investors and top executives. In general manner of speaking, even though accounting principles grant each firm an on-going

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concern status, reality is different. In particular terms, three classes of business acumen to business model to business longevity in business firms can be found.

The authors accord the highest respect to the class of companies which have offered the most convincing proof of business success through solid business acumen: ability to live on and on, not a few years, not for a few decades, not for a limited number of business cycles/life stages, but many centuries and in certain cases, more than a millennium—during which every major characteristic of the business environment changed (Please see Appendix 1, Table 1)

The next class of companies has displayed mastery of the art of designing profitable business models of the order that they find place in the blue-chip list. They may not be the longest living i.e., the oldest businesses on planet earth, may not be centuries old, but they have competence to control in practice for real, the controllables-of-business-in-theory. It is an expertise the competitors envy because many a times this spells the roadmap of creating the famous Blue-ocean strategy. Many of this class of firms find a place on lists such as “Fortune 1000”, “Global 500”, and “World’s Top 10 Culturally Most Vibrant Brands”. Quite a few of them are not giant businesses either (Please see Appendix, tables 2, 3, and 4).

Finally, there are companies which acquired enough of business imperative insight and respect for business world realities to such an extent that they can meet known as well as unknown (i.e., future) competitors on terms that are non-threatening to each other’s existence. Most of them have become household names. Many more of them populate the business-to-business universe away from the glare of popular culture and media, far outside of common peoples’ attention or direct concern (Please see Appendix, tables 5 and 6).

At this point in our discussion, two mega-remarks are in order: first, the authors are fully convinced that most practitioners and academics get carried away by temptation for exaggeration when talking about “disruptive innovations”—like personal computing in 1970s (which IBM was very late in recognizing the potential of), etc.—and granting them title of ‘Giant slayers’. Fact of the matter is that both Apple and IBM are not only alive but growing by creating value continuously for their respective admiring customers. Secondly, one of the authors has been asked in Seminars and Corporate Development Workshops about a possible fourth class of businesses—those which are born; make valiant effort to survive; ultimately fail; and end up joining the list of dead businesses. The author’s response is an unequivocal “No” to grant these kinds of firms a separate, fourth class on the ground that they clearly lack the ESSENTIAL, defining grasp of business acumen thus failing to produce the life-giving business model. Many communication experts suggest that metaphors illuminate landscape, and if we agree, then we can take an apt one here: that of “The Beheaded Chicken” representing such businesses. These are ventures started by businessmen or businesswomen who have scant respect for proper grasp of essentials of business. Contrast this reality with a recent dramatic event that happened in the world of art in 2012:

Left high on a library wall for more than half a century, the portrait of a rheumy-eyed old man initially seemed no different from the misattributed old masters hanging beside it.

But after more than half a century of being overlooked, it has been authenticated as a genuine and outstanding work by Rembrandt.

And the identification – by the world’s leading expert on the 17th century Dutch master – will make a multimillion pound difference to its price tag.

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