BOOK REVIEW

FOR THE CULTURE: THE POWER BEHIND THE WORLD'S MOST SUCCESSFUL BRANDS, FROM APPLE TO BEYONCÉ

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OVERVIEW

Culture is the most powerful tool to influence consumer behavior, so if a brand or company wants to be successful, it is essential to understand the culture and the elements contained in culture- this is what Marcus Collins firmly believes in. In his new book, "For The Culture: The Power Behind the World's Most Successful Brands, from Apple to Beyoncé", Marcus Collins shares his valuable insights and experience, highlighting how the most successful brands such as Apple, Reddit, and McDonald's use the power of culture to achieve business success. What's more interesting is that he also provides us with more than 10 cases of the successes and failures of differing brands such as Supreme, Patagonia, Beats, IBM, Meta, Coca-Cola, De Beers, Pepsi, and Koda to help readers better understand that a correct understanding of culture and cultural differences allows brands and companies innovate and adjust their strategies according to the needs of their target markets and target groups, ultimately winning the market.

Dr. Marcus Collins is globally recognized for his strategic, creative, and academic contributions (American Advertising Federation's Advertising Hall of Achievement inductee, Thinkers50 Radar Distinguished Achievement Award, Cannes Lion Creative Strategy juror, Ad Age's 40 Under 40 recipient, and Crain's Business 40 Under 40 recipient) having launched several successful campaigns such as "***Cliff Paul***" for State Farm, the Made In America Music Festival, and Google's "***Real Tone***" technology—among others. He also led iTunes + Nike sports music initiatives at Apple before running a digital strategy for Beyoncé. Besides this, he is the author of the best-selling book ***For The Culture***, which reveals the connection between culture and human behavior (http://marctothec.com/info).

The book is well-structured into seven chapters as follows:
Chapter One: Unpacking Culture
Chapter Two: Finding a Congregation
Chapter Three: Preaching the Gospel
Chapter Four: Making Meaning
Chapter Five: Missing the Codes
Chapter Six: The Speed of Culture
Chapter Seven: Implication of Cultural Production

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REVIEW

In the first chapter, based on the definition of culture given by Raymond Williams, who defined culture as a "realized signifying system" (p.21), Marcus Collins explores the system of culture further from three perspectives. The first system regards how we see the world, meaning that understanding who we are is a fundamental human drive. The second system relates to a shared way of life, indicating that people behave and live in a manner consistent with their shared beliefs and ideologies. The third system relates to cultural production, including art, literature, film, materials, tools and brands, implying the creation of a shared expression. Marcus Collins uses "rap music- a cultural product of hip-hop culture" (p.42) as an example to describe how a cultural product affects people's attitude, language and engagement in the community, thereby becoming a trend.

The second chapter relates to finding a congregation, a social tool through which people find community, fulfil their civic obligations, and establish collective and individual identities. Put simply, a congregation can be thought of as a community or a group. Marcus Collins explains how Patagonia applied this concept to their business practices. Patagonia decided not to deal with any company that doesn't care about the environment. Surprisingly, the more Patagonia make decisions like this that appear to hurt its business, the better its business performance becomes as consumers who share Patagonia's beliefs continue to buy its products. This case also reflects identity, which "influences what we buy, where we go, how we show up in the world and with whom we choose to congregate" (p. 65). Fundamentally, consumers tend to adopt brands that align with their beliefs and ideologies. Apart from the congregation, Marcus Collins also discusses the predominance of social networks in the contemporary business context.

In the third chapter, Marcus Collins expounds on preaching the gospel: "starting with the soul and ending with the sales" (p.101) via the cases of Nike, Apple, Coca-Cola, and others, explaining how a brand tells its story more effectively to target a community, promoting final sales and consolidating the brand effect. The core of preaching the gospel is to activate network effects among people who share the same belief system, incentivizing them to evangelize others on the company's behalf. But how? Marcus Collins explains that brands could start with establishing an emotional connection with customers. Once the customers find out the brand's beliefs align with theirs, the customers are inclined to choose the brand. The choice of the brand reflects how customers self-identify themselves- "who we are and how we want to be seen in the social world" (p.111). In this case, it becomes essential for the companies to state what they believe and their worldview clearly.

In the fourth chapter, Marcus Collins indicates that for a brand or company, it is not enough just to create a congregation and establish an emotional connection with the members to achieve a publicity effect; on the contrary, the brand or company must understand how the congregation interprets the meaning of the product or brand. He believes that meaning is rooted in culture, and the values, norms and symbols in different cultural systems affect people's interpretation of meaning. At the same time, he deems that meaning is embedded into products through four unique fashion systems, including advertising, news and magazines, highly esteemed individuals (e.g., opinion leaders), and fringe societies (e.g., LGBTQ+ Community). In addition, if a brand's meaning is consistent with the self-identity of its target customer group, then the brand and branded products will spread quickly. However, this requires coordination among its members through evaluation (e.g., people decide whether it is good or bad) and legitimation (e.g., people choose whether something is accepted in the community). In the end, Marcus Collins highlights four mechanisms of evaluation and legitimation, including responding (e.g., the use of language), recontextualizing (e.g., the use of memes and their cultural replication through the imitation of ideas, fashions and beliefs), reconciling (e.g.,

seeking cognitive coordination when their behavior is out of sync with the cultural norms of the community), and reinforcing (e.g., How people visibly present themselves with or talk about a particular brand).

The fifth chapter focuses on how to avoid message inconsistencies. This occurs when one person's reality is inconsistent with another person's reality. Sometimes, marketers believe their marketing communications methods help consumers understand or accept their messages. Nonetheless, the target customer group may not respond positively to or accurately acquire the information presented by marketers. That's message inconsistency: What is intended in marketing communication may not be what people receive. Therefore, marketers should know what they want to say and must also confirm what the message they want to convey means to others. When these two things are inconsistent, it creates a state of inconsistency in meaning. If marketers want to synchronize their intentions with their target audience's understanding, they should stay in close touch with them.

In the sixth chapter, Marcus Collins indicates that the rapid development of technology, such as the emergence of the Internet and social media, has affected the spread of culture. It also changes cultural ideologies and cultural practices in cultural production (e.g. music, film, fashion, and branding). It is worth noting that community members do not always interpret the intentions of cultural producers in the way that is expected. Therefore, if marketers want to understand the cultural phenomena within the group, they must penetrate into specific interest groups. In this case, they will learn about the community by conducting netnographic research, through which they will collect data to study the complex cultural practices of community members in action. Additionally, marketers should try to get closer to their congregations through empathy. If a brand deeply understands the community's worldview and corresponding cultural characteristics, it is more likely to win the favor of community members. Against this backdrop, brands must proactively take action, focusing on communities and their propensity to connect.

In the final chapter, Marcus Collins discusses the implications of cultural production. First he discusses storytelling, arguing, "without understanding the ideologies and shared beliefs evangelized in the storytelling of people's culture, we see only the cultural practices and product without understanding why these people do what they do" (p.235). In general, the more stories we hear, the more we accept it, the more we prefer it , and the more it will influence people. But how is a story being told? Marcus Collins raises two important cultural implications in this milieu: cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation. Cultural appreciation refers to a person's attempt to understand a culture different from their own in order to broaden their horizons and make cross-cultural connections. On the other hand, cultural appropriation refers to a person's inappropriate adoption of another culture's customs, practices, and ideas, usually from a more dominant social culture. Learning to appreciate, understand, and respect cultures that are different from your own is crucial. Often, there are opportunities for marketers to create culturally relevant content and capitalize on growing social trends. Marketers risk crossing the line into cultural appropriation when they tap into cultural elements whose brands haven't yet earned credibility with their respective group. Therefore, it is paramount for marketers and brands to seek information to understand cultures and communities beyond their own better. At the same time, brands must be clear about what aligns with their values and shared beliefs. When they stay true to their values, they can gain insight into the brands' space and the audience they cater to.

In summary, understanding culture will help bridge the gap in marketing a product or service. In contemporary marketing campaigns, if brands and marketers do not understand the values and shared beliefs of a culture, they cannot correctly understand the consumer behavior and attitudes influenced by various cultural behaviors. When a brand's culture or beliefs are consistent with the common beliefs of the target group, the brand can effectively establish an

emotional connection with the target group and ultimately achieve long-term sales. Moreover, culture has a profound impact on marketing communications. Only by having a deep understanding of the cultural characteristics of a community can an enterprise effectively and accurately deliver information to the right people. For marketers, the question is not whether to communicate but what to say, to whom, and how to say it.

This book is worth reading for everyone, especially marketers and academics. Marketers will learn how culture works in marketing practices, and scholars will learn more from the various cases presented.

The main contents are extracted from *For The Culture: The Power Behind the World's Most Successful Brands, from Apple to Beyoncé*, **by Marcus Collins (Macmillan, 2023).**

REFERENCES

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