

# **The Emerging conditions of Meta-modernism: an observation based interpretivist perspective on the curious case of Royal Enfield.**

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## **Introduction**

The paper aims to propose the emerging conditions Meta-modernism through an observation based, interpretivist perspective on Royal Enfield, an erstwhile iconic British motorcycle manufacturer from Redditch, England. The company went out of business in the UK, however, what remained of the company was a single functioning manufacturing plant in India, which was established in 1955. The company was saved from disappearing all together in 1994 by Eicher Group (a diverse automotive firm, better known as the manufacturer for Eicher Mitsubishi trucks in India).

Fast-forward to 2015, at a time when the entire motorcycle industry in India is struggling (overall motorcycle sales in India were down 4.06 per cent during April to September 2015), Royal Enfield defied the trend by posting over 50 per cent sales growth during the April-September 2015 period (Doval, 2015; [economictimes.indiatimes.com](http://economictimes.indiatimes.com), 2015). This paper explores the authors' perspective over some of the Marketing methods that attempts to propose possible reasons behind Royal Enfield, today, boasting a 'niche' bike manufacturer image not just in its home market of India but again: globally. Market segmentation is to understate the cult following the company has in terms of fans and enthusiasts of the brand and the product. Hence the paper unashamedly and in line with the metamodernist view, revisits the concepts of post-modernism and tribe and seeks to gain insight into phenomena through this lens, attempting to explain and justify the use of culture, heritage, tribes and a disruptive marketing 'campaign' by a company which was on the brink of collapse, but has recently raced past Harley Davidson in terms of global sales.

## **Marketing evolution: shedding skin**

*"It has been acknowledged that there is a academic – practitioner divide which needs to be bridged and the impetus is more likely to come from the academic end of the divide as against the time constrained practitioner"*

(Hill et al., 2007)

Referring to the above quote, Hill et al., (2007) make the point that the academic community, and in particular the academic marketing community have a duty to better reflect the reality of the marketing practice of marketing practitioners within a global, new-post modern or metamodernist business landscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The metamodernist era, its consumers and practitioners, therefore, demand that academia look for fresh marketing insights be driven into the otherwise unidirectional, saturating knowledge of marketing which is constantly being re-cycled, re-packaged and re-delivered to Marketing students and practitioners to a point where the value of marketing knowledge as espoused by the academic community has become, at best, questioned and at worse fully eroded.

Whilst the debate circulating the nature of 'Marketing's mid-life crisis' (see for example Brady and Davis, 1993) is not new, neither is the need for a better way to gain (and

report) insight in a metamarketing era. As Piercy (2009) states; with the emergence of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Kotlerian 'Segmentation' pattern fails to explain why different consumers at different places do not always show loyalty. Such a perspective, begins to highlight metamarketing consumer issues, issues that consider the uncertainty /disorder / chaos that are evident in today's markets, the increasingly difficult in analysing consumer behavioural patterns and purchase decisions despite advancement in Big data and the rise of Individualism in societies previously acknowledged as collectivist (Hofstede, 1981).

### **Postmodernism: what lies beyond?**

Shaw and Tamlia (2001) assert that although the fundamental motives of finding stable sources of profitable sales remained constant (Shaw and Tamlia 2001), Hill et al., (2007) believes Marketing should be moving from 'marketing-as-content' towards 'marketing-as-questioning' as when "Questioning stops and the door to thinking closes". Firat (1992) also asserts Hill's view by prescribing the new model of Marketing thought development.

*Existing Knowledge ---- → Curiosity ---- → Questioning ----- → Thinking ---- → Evolution of Marketing.*

Adopted from: Firat (1992).

What is evident within the extant literature is that Marketing as a subject of scholarly endeavour has undergone several evolutionary changes and as such these resemble abrupt shifts rather than smooth transitions. The growing challenge for Marketeers to be pro-active regarding everything, from Consumer behavior to technological changes and economic shifts has resulted in a chaotic 'use and throw' approach towards adopting a Market strategy, without careful thought given to ones own 'context'.

In the case of Post-modernism however, the Western School of marketing thought has not only been pro-active, but rather assertive in their engagement of theories – even if, and paradoxically when the concepts of Administrative Marketing still persist. This paper intends to support the assertion by identifying examples of the theories being talked about in the West and yet implemented possibly 'accidentally' in the Eastern emerging markets. The paper encourages questioning some of the 'happenings' in these eastern emerging markets and posits that such questioning can possibly result in a healthy evolution of marketing concepts being driven by the practitioner and the consumer ends.

Firat et al (1995) and later Firat and Shultz (1997) explain that Postmodernism and its allied theories like Tribal Marketing, pre-dominantly revolve around certain 'conditions' of Post-modernism that include Openess/Tolerance, Hyperreality, Perpetual present, Paradoxical Juxtapositions, Fragmentation, Loss of Commitment, Decentering of subject, Reversal of consumption and production, Emphasis on form and style and Acceptance of disorder and chaos. According to Piercy (2009), there is a visible paradigm shift from mass consumption to mass customization and personalisation in certain sectors (Piercy, 2009). So while we still question and assert conditions of Post-modernism, the individual sheds skin and adopts a new identity which the meta-modernist view tries to explain. Postmodern conditions according to Firat (1992), have resulted in the consumer fragmenting oneself into different images (by shedding skin) in different situations at different times. Firat explains:

*"the same image-same clothing, same manner of speaking and acting, same personality-will not make the person likeable or presentable (marketable) in all situations since the cultural expectations from the different roles one plays (parent, friend, employee, shopper etc.) are*

*quite different. To make oneself presentable (marketable) in each situation, one needs to cultivate a different image”.*

Firat (1992) explains the relation between product and image in the modern era meant that the image represented the product and the value was a property of the product but in the post-modern era, the value is attached to the image and the product is a representation of the image wherein the image itself is the product. What interests us is how this relationship has further changed in the metamodernist era.

The question emerges whether such consumers ‘relate or devote’ themselves to the ‘image’ that the product they consume actually stands for, the challenge for the Marketers then is to ensure Authenticity, i.e. how to construct the image (which can constantly change itself and adopt to the changing consumer behaviour), how to articulate the Market communications that spell Authenticity and how to ensure a metaphysical ‘aura’ around the value proposition?

### **Tribal Marketing: completing the surrender?**

Cova (2002) defines a Tribe as “a network of heterogeneous persons- in terms of age, sex and income etc. – who are linked together by a shared passion or emotion”. Cova further highlights that a tribe is capable of collective action and its members are not simple consumers, but also advocates. To explain, the behaviour of these tribes cannot be predicted, and hence they probably may not be a subject of ‘segmentation’.

Godbout and Caille (1992) state that postmodern individuals, seek products and services :‘less for their use value, than their linking value’ in order to satisfy their need for communities. Cova (1997), explains that a post modern tribalist individual may also look less on consumptions from the perspective of giving meaning to life and more as an instrument to form links with others in the context of a community (single or multiple) which will give meaning to the individuals life. Tribal members hence are linked together by their shared passion generated from the ‘linking value’ (the contribution of the product or service to establish or reinforce the bonds between tribe members) they derive from consumption of certain goods or services.

Deacon and Harris (2011) make a clear metamodernist observation when they observe that “marketing should be ‘in context’ of the tribe of the owner/manager and end user”. Integration of a particular tribe into the business model of a firm can provide a firm with an edge with which the company may ‘craft a value proposition’. These integrations may be ‘inherent’ (which as per Deacon and Harris is when the owner belongs to the same or associate tribe) or by providing the tribe with or facilitating the tribe with ‘anchoring places’ (informal gatherings or places where tribal members meet physically or virtually) to perform their ‘rituals’ (sharing of experiences) thereby allowing co-creation of market value.

### **Research methodology**

Cova (2002) suggests that, Tribal Marketing should involve looking at the market at a micro social level rather than the macro social level. Maffesoli (2000) cited in Cova (2002) explains that “tribal members are never alone”, as they virtually belong to a vast and informal community, hence the recognition of tribe requires special effort. This may require setting aside traditional, disciplinary or systematic approaches and favouring practices based on detecting signs or hints by undertaking semi-structured interviews, non-structured interviews, participant observation on specific places where the tribe gathers, or exploring net forums

(Maffesoli 1999) cited in Cova (2002). Cova (2002) hence highlights that such changes require the willingness to depart from mechanical marketing thinking and adopting a fuzzy logic which is able to take into account the shared experiences of consumers in their tribal groupings.

The author hence participates as an observer at the research setting and gains access to the ‘happening’ without disturbing the naturalness of the setting by informing everyone involved in the phenomena under study (Carson et al., 2005). The author also employs an interpretivist method wherein the author is the research instrument (Fetterman, 1989; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983), such a method also helps focus the research on generating theories that help in understanding what is happening in this particular context (Carson et al., 2005). The authors prior knowledge of the research area informs the approach and is essential to fully understand the marketing context (Gummesson, 1991; Carson et al., 2005). The paper observes participants at the Royal Enfield ‘Rider Mania’ i.e. interpreted as an anchoring place and also explores the marketing context and communication of Royal Enfield (along with its place and positioning) in order to interpret meaningful insights out of the market approach.

The paper a) explores the Royal Enfield online media marketing content and communication and attempts to identify the elements of the ‘tribal and post-modern conditions’ construct, b) the paper establishes (as per evidence), the nature of the Royal Enfield tribe and the instruments (anchoring places, rituals etc.) used by Royal Enfield in their market approach and communications and c) the paper concludes with the emerging conditions of meta-modernism in a developing economy by identifying ‘trends’ of the contemporary generation.

### **Case evidence**

<b>Year/Strategy</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Description</b>
1994 – re-building or emphasising heritage.	New owners rechristen Enfield India Ltd to Royal Enfield.	
1997 – cultivating the image of ‘experiencing adventure in real than hypereal medium’.	Marks the beginning of tribal brand exercise – <i>the Himalayan Odyssey</i> .	40 Royal Enfield bikes travel on the Khardungla pass – the worlds highest motorable road
2000 – integrated communications strategy, authentic story telling, integrating consumer into the brand communications.	Royalenfield.com is set up, opportunity for company to encode marketing communications by enabling real customers to share real experiences.	Company then starts to mass propagate the same consistently as ‘stories’ through their channels.
2003 – initiation of anchoring place, source of gathering tribal insights to drive emergent strategy.	Royal Enfield rider mania is launched as an anchoring place for the tribe.	1000 riders ride from the original Royal Enfield birth town of Redditch to mark the 25 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary.
2008 – global push.	Royal Enfield senses global interest and pushes for selective global presence.	Company launches sales and observation ‘studios’ in Madrid and Paris experiencing rapid growth in sales.

Table 1: A new beginning? – social media, anchoring places, and tribal linking values.

Source: [www.royalenfield.com](http://www.royalenfield.com)

Trend or activity	Communication message
Activating the dormant tribe – emphasising ‘cause’ or ‘image’ over the product.	<i>“There is a world outside the comfort of the protected nest that mommy and daddy built. And when the world comes calling, young people all over the world go running to see it first-hand. But a few young people in India actually get out there and experience that feeling of being on their own. Our job as manufacturers of leisure motorcycles and as people with a healthy sense of adventure is to encourage this young bunch to go out there and get a taste for the unknown”.</i>
Activating the dormant tribe – leveraging local status quo cultural institutions.	<i>“68% of Indian girls will end up living with their in-laws. 92% of them will wish they didn’t”.</i> <i>“3% of Women have boyfriends who will live with their folks. 88% of Women have boyfriends who live alone”.</i>
Enabling ‘real time – authentic’ story telling – the ‘trip’ campaign.	<i>“ Kr V.P. Singh. Gentleman farmer. Bought his first Bullet in 1965. Sold the ancestral fort in 1966. Tripping ever since”.</i> <i>“Paul Smith. International traveller and custom bike builder. Crossed the Sahara desert in an 8 tonne, ex-German army truck with his wife and two daughters in 1987. Kept driving until he discovered Goa in 1991. Shifted from England to Anjuna (Goa) in 2000. Rebuilt three Bullets (one for Himself, one for each of his daughters) in 2001. Tripping Ever since”.</i>
Encouraging ‘inclusivity’ rather than ‘exclusivity’ character.	<i>“Meghna Khanna (AP28 D2350). Owner of three fashion boutiques. Daughter of a fighter pilot. Father taught her to ride a scooter when she was 12. Taught her to ride a 100cc when she was 13. First rode a Bullet at an airbase in Jodhpur when she was 15. Permanently borrowed her best friends 350cc when she was 21. Rode up to Kardung-La – the highest motorable road. Tripping ever since.”</i>
Carving the ‘alternate’ image – enabling representation platform for consumers.	<i>“Royal Enfield is about style, panache and distinctiveness. We at Royal Enfield believe that each individuals relationship with his or her bike is unique. Their perception of themselves with their bike is equally distinct. We launched the brand campaign ‘Trip’ to pay tribute to Royal Enfields authentic character as well as their owners. The campaign draws instances from real lives and bikes. People who have explorede their adventuorous traits on their Royal Enfield. Others who have pushed the limits to find their place in the sun. Yet some more who have simply given into their passion for riding and of course, their Royal Enfield. This campaign aspires to honor these timeless passions and the spirit of motorcycling in a world that is increasingly dependant on virtual reality. Go Ahead, enjoy the trip”.</i>

Table 2: characterising the brand. Source: [www.royalenfield.com](http://www.royalenfield.com)

## Analysis

### *Authenticity and Heritage – the art of stories worth telling?*

The case study supports the Deacon and Harris (2011) Metamodernist argument that Heritage and Authenticity remain the crucial elements of a Metamodern marketing approach. Through the case evidence, it is evident that maintaining the Heritage (if available) maybe an essential platform to base Authenticity upon. For example, in this case, after the acquisition of the British brand 'Enfield India', the Indian owner re-christened the company as Royal Enfield.

However, Heritage by itself may be simple history if left untouched, unexplored or unexploited. To activate or trigger the use of this Heritage, Authenticity can be used as a medium of delivering the message to the audience. Such non-traditional approach also requires a non-traditional method of communicating the Brand message- the art of story telling. The timeline on the Royal Enfield website is an example of the effort put in by the company to preserve its heritage and also an example of the importance given to the same. Stories are worth telling, however, one needs stories that are 'worth telling', the Royal Enfield website feature the use of 'real time' consumer experience based stories a.k.a the 'trip' to instil authenticity within the brand. This transmedia story telling approach is unique in the sence these stories do not contain promotional content. The method is totally dilineated from the company end and is rather attached to the story of the consumer. Royal Enfields approach of integrating the consumer as an advocate of the brand is unique, the metaphysical message links the local societal/cultural values with the product.

Metomodernist studies rate authenticity as a crucial element of Marketing communication. Royal Enfield ensured their bit of authenticity by acknowledging their tribe and unabashedly using the tribal consumers as a medium to propagate their message further. Stories have come to be an effective way of coupling the values of the firm with its consumers in order to derive an almost intangible dimension of company-consumer relationships.

### *Inclusivity?*

Postmodernism does not encompass the upcoming trends of the Millenials in entirety, who are living through a society i.e. inclusive rather than fragmented (Alexander and Sysko, 2012; Tobenkin, 2008). The literature suggests that they do not accept chaos as a norm, but rather challenge the message of chaos, this generation is proud of heritage and history, yet forward looking, more politically active and participative in social and cultural institutional pride. Hence products which allow them to represent themselves as readers of the past, but actors of the present reserve a special place. The factor if inclusivity is not only evident through the popularity of the product in a nation as culturally diverse as India, but across various cultures of different continents who relate to the product image which brings people together through a common linking value as evident from the impact the strategy had on the dormant UK Royal Enfield enthusiasts.

The market approach seems to have identified that there is a wave of the new generation which respects traditions, but want to live their life independently. The marketing content celebrates the individual who choose live independently, craft their own life and stand out among the crowd (not necessarily render their traditional and cultural beliefs obsolete). Royal Enfield probably had to recognise the changing 'trends', acknowledge the intangible demands of the new generation and facilitate a platform which will allow the latter to build their image upon.

Another interesting example of the Market approach is the 'inclusivity' of Women into the cult. Bikes were traditionally considered as a symbol for manhood, however Royal Enfield not only developed a bike specifically for women in the pre-modern era, but carry on the legacy till today by including and celebrating stories of women who dared to do things differently. This inclusivity feature enables the company to activate dormant tribal sympathisers across any walk of life which would be possibly ignored conventionally.

The marketing message leverages local cultural and societal institutions such as marriage, independent living (nuclear families) etc., issues of contemporary significance in a society as collectivist as India with low degree of individualism (Hofstede, 1980). The company identifies these trigger points such as arranged marriage etc. and acknowledged the voice which existed but never heard, that of evolution of marriage as an institution which celebrates freedom rather than binding. Here, the image of the brand gains significance as it allows its consumers and sympathisers alike to be represented by the brand and its communication. The Royal Enfield Marketing message triggered emotions by igniting these touch points of social and cultural significance, which allowed it to further cement the proximity with the consumer, they in a way spoke on the behalf of the consumer.

### ***Consistency across marketing platforms***

Meta-modernist marketers view Marketing as a two way dialogue between the consumer and the company, Royal Enfield used the story telling medium to innovate a virtual anchoring place by optimising the use of their website. The website forum acted as a two-way symmetrical platform for consumers to learn about the company by understanding the company heritage story and also enabled the consumers to post their 'experiences' onto the website, thereby delivering rich consumer insights to the company which further drove the companies corporate and marketing communication with the company acting as a decoder of the messages encoded by the real time consumers. On the other hand, the company also communicated authentic messages for example, the story of the paratrooper bike which was dropped with the soldiers from an aircraft to the ground is a legend in its own right, a story that has been viral for years among the enthusiasts, helping 'trigger' interests among brand sympathisers and laymen alike.

These consumer insights according to Tribal Marketing literature is essential for directing a company towards the tribe and the stories then act as platforms of further lateral Tribal expansion. Reality based transmedia story telling requires a feeder entity, hence the virtual anchoring place is used to source real-time anchoring places like the Rider mania. The conversations on the website led to the the company launching 'Rider Mania', an event which invites Royal Enfield owners from all over the world to gather and share their 'experiences' and passion towards Royal Enfield. Reality based anchoring places like Rider Mania and the virtual based anchoring places like the Royal Enfield website provide a medium for the cult enthusiasts to carry out rituals which range from customising bikes, drag racing and general propagation of lived experiences etc.

Such platforms also served as precursors to the rituals like Himalayan Odyssey and numerous other rides which were offsprings of the two way dialouge between the tribe and the company. Such rides are opportunitis for the company to listen to the tribe, identify the factors that impact the tribe the most and act on the same. Such events as a consequence have now in nature turned self-evolutionary, annual phenomenon wherein the company simply facilitates a space for action and consumers voluntarily do the rest. Instead of a traditional uni-directional marketing strategy of 'telling the people how good you really are', the company focussed their efforts on allowing the consumers to share their experiences.

The great philosopher Vivekananda quotes in his endeavors, “*Trust is blind, experience is the truth*”. The Royal Enfield ‘trip’ campaign seems to have encouraged a generation obsessed with virtual or hyper reality to go out and experience life. The ritual of ‘Trip’ was institutionalised as a way of getting out in the real world and experiencing it first hand and only trusting ones experience than corporate mass messages, thereby living an alter ego by fragmenting oneself from the daily chores and responsibilities.

To summarise, the above arguments highlight the importance the role the company has played as a representative of the consumers. The product per se represents an ideology with the company coupling a disruptive marketing campaign with an aggressive expansionist strategy, it presents itself as a radical Marketing wonder.

### **Conclusion**

The paper intends to highlight the completion of the circle of Marketing evolution, from a time when demand exceeded supply to a time of intense competition to sell by bombarding messages to consumers to now, a time to co-create, with the customer in the lead. The below table intends to propose the emerging conditions of metamodernism which does not render the conditions of post-modernism obsolete, but rather leverage them and other theories of Postmodern Marketing to assert the questions ‘Where are we?’.

<b>Emerging Conditions of Metamodernism</b>	<b>Description</b>
Preservation of History or Heritage	The contemporary generation takes pride in respective history and tradition – both positive or negative and endures to preserve it through dialogue and action in a world i.e. getting increasingly intermixed.
Authenticity in character	Authenticity as an essential platform to build trust and experience towards shared emotions or passions.
Consistency	Consistency, perseverance and enduring efforts in ensuring Authenticity, not driven by material motives – the cause is bigger than the product. Consistency in Marketing communication across all platforms.
Inclusivity	Dissolution of lines between societies and cultures, choices and needs, from acceptance of chaos to cure of chaos, mutual respect instead of tolerance.
Reality through experience than hyperreality	Only experience can be believed to be true, trust can be blind. Create experiences than hyperreality.

*Table 3: the emerging conditions of Meta-Modernism.*

The above table shows the proposed Emerging conditions of Metamodernism emerging from the values of contemporary generation, a generation that is open towards interpretation of their culture by an entity who can signify the changes and represent the change through a product and offer a platform for expression and lived experience.

Companies now possibly need to focus on providing ‘experience’ through acceptance of reality which remains to be explored in a world fantasising the unreal through hyperreality.

Authenticity now needs to be an integral part of the 'marketing culture' and not a mere Marketing tool. The message of Authenticity needs to be consistently delivered through all platforms by leveraging Heritage or local Culture as a mean, attempting to drive the tribe from the online hyperreality to the real time experience, the impetus needs to come from the marketer. The company message needs to be inclusive in its market approach rather than simply segment led, attempting to connect tribes rather than just gathering tribal members. Companies need to demonstrate acknowledgement of trigger points of social, political or cultural significance (considering every market locally), not to exploit the triggers, but to explore and understand the same and help the local come in contact with the global by identifying shared opinions on the triggers with each market provided with a special place and role.

The attempt now for Marketers will be to test the proposed emerging conditions of metamodernism and look for elements of significance among the contemporary generation and gain understanding of their ideals. The circle or surrender is now potentially complete, as the ultimate power needs to be handed to the consumer. Marketing needs to seek an image overhaul, wherein it is looked as an agent of change that explores conditions of global significance than exploit the same.

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