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Entrepreneurial storytelling: using a consistent story to create and sustain a business: case studies of two migrant entrepreneurs

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Abstract: This qualitative research uses case studies of two migrant entrepreneurs – Karan Bilimoria and Levi Roots – to explore the use of storytelling as a tool for establishing and sustaining a business. It proposes a conceptual framework that shows how storytelling is used to gain legitimacy, credibility and support. It finds that the two men use consistent themes and patterns in their stories, which are similar to each other and to conventional metanarratives around entrepreneurship, and require narrative plausibility more than objective truth. It identifies themes that both individuals repeatedly use in their business storytelling to demonstrate attributes of entrepreneurship.

Keywords: storytelling; entrepreneurship; migrant; sense-making; meta-narrative.

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1 Introduction

This article proposes using storytelling as a new experimental method for research in entrepreneurship, bringing together a number of issues around the current discourse, including migrant entrepreneurship (Poblete and Mandakovic, 2021), entrepreneurial identity (Muhr et al., 2019), the need for research that challenges dominant ‘ideal’ stereotypes of entrepreneurs (Drakopoulou Dod et al., 2021), the use of storytelling for effective leadership (Denning, 2021); and sense-making by leaders (Galbin, 2021). In doing so, it contributes to the subject in four main ways.

Firstly, it overcomes the lack of consensus in the literature about what constitutes entrepreneurship – since our study shows how storytelling is used at various different phases of establishing and sustaining a business. Second, it addresses the predominance of quantitative research methods, by adopting a qualitative approach – case studies of two successful migrant entrepreneurs in the UK. Third, it challenges conventional ideas of who comprises an entrepreneur, by examining two non-white, migrant individuals. Fourth, it differs from much of the research in this field by focusing on the tools these entrepreneurs use – their stories – rather than on the individuals themselves or the organisations they have founded. The article examines how they relay these stories via their products, websites and merchandise, as well as the words they use. The objective is to examine how an Indian and a Jamaican entrepreneur have used storytelling to set up and develop their new entities in the UK. We study their patterns of storytelling, the themes repeatedly retold, the importance of truth, omission and narrative plausibility. We offer a new conceptual framework to understand how storytelling can be used to achieve business growth – by creating legitimacy, credibility and support for an entrepreneur’s vision. This framework is applied to consider three key research questions:

- 1 How do migrants in the UK use storytelling as a tool for business growth?
- 2 What are the key themes of these entrepreneurial narratives?
- 3 How visible are these entrepreneurs in their own stories?

We reach five observations on the case studies’ use of storytelling as an entrepreneurial tool. This article therefore provides an innovative contribution to the field of entrepreneurship studies, as well as identifying a leadership instrument for establishing and developing a business that has a proven practical application.

2 Current methods in entrepreneurship research

2.1 *What entrepreneurship is*

There is a lack of consensus about where entrepreneurship begins and ends. William Gartner considers it ‘business creation’ Gartner, (2010, p.8), and Drakopoulou Dodd and Anderson (2007, p.348) agree that it ‘is usually a one-off event’, while others view it as character or behaviour – who entrepreneurs are and what they do (e.g., Leitch et al., 2010), ‘something that either you have or do not, at a *given point in time*’ [Bagchi, (2006), p.22].

Much of the literature is aimed at readers thinking about starting up companies themselves, asking ‘how can we improve entrepreneurial practice?’ (Bygrave, 2007), or attempting to identify the traits that define successful entrepreneurs (Baum and Locke, 2004; Watson, 2009), along similar lines to populist how-to manuals (e.g., Murphy, 2010; Bagchi, 2006). However, there is a lot less comment around ‘Gaining support for a newly launched venture’ [Cornelissen and Clarke, (2010), p.237]; see also van Werven et al., (2019), even though it is particularly critical for a new business to attract support, investment and customers in order to succeed.

2.2 *Predominance of quantitative research methods in entrepreneurship studies*

Although academics such as Holmquist (2003) and Welter and Lasch (2008) observe that entrepreneurial studies include aspects from such diverse fields as leadership, economics, sociology, psychology, history and marketing, others (e.g., Kevill et al., 2015) note that the methods used have followed a traditional, positivist approach, with the main unit of analysis being the individual entrepreneur. McDonald et al. reviewed articles on entrepreneurial research and concluded that the ‘entrepreneurship research is dominated by the survey method’ [McDonald et al., (2015), p.302] and was heavily skewed towards quantitative analysis. Scholars such as Du Gay (2004) and Cook et al. (2010) have suggested that entrepreneurship needs to ‘develop its own distinct methods and theories which can accommodate the variable nature of entrepreneurial behaviour’ [Bygrave, (1989), p.8], by including qualitative or mixed methods (Fillis, 2015; Johansson, 2004), to take into account individuals’ contexts and developments over longer time periods (Patriotta and Siegel, 2019; Low and McMillan, 1988). Recently, Vershinina and Discua Cruz (2020, p.507) have posited the use of ‘collaborative (auto)ethnographies, while Hulsink and Rauch (2021, p.1) have proposed taking ‘a life course perspective on firms and their creators using alternative sources of information, specifically life history data included in autobiographies written by the founders of well-known firms’.

2.3 *Who entrepreneurs are*

Many commentators describe the archetypal entrepreneurial figure as being Western (Mölbjerg Jørgensen and Boje, 2010), white, and ‘resolutely male’ [Nicholson and Anderson, (2005), p.162]. Likewise, although many writers assert that storytelling is a ‘phenomenon that is fundamental to all nations, societies and cultures’ (Denning, 2005), they exclusively study European or American companies. This raises the question: how do non-white, non-Western and/or non-male entrepreneurs manage to convincingly depict themselves as entrepreneurs within the pervasive masternarrative? Some

researchers have studied entrepreneurs outside the dominant stereotype: Chyne (2020) and Smith (2005) reviewed female entrepreneurs, while Dawson and Hjorth (2012) and Dalpiaz et al. (2014) studied the ways that familial relationships and generational hierarchies impact on family businesses. Other observers focused on migrant entrepreneurs' social capital and economic contribution to their host countries, like Alexandre et al.'s (2019) investigation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon; Williams and Krasniqi's (2018) account of entrepreneurs forced to migrate to escape from conflict; Tolciu's (2011) examination of Turkish entrepreneurs in Germany; and a business report by Mwaura et al. (2019). However, there are few studies of how entrepreneurs use their position as cultural outsiders to develop their business (Pandey et al., 2021), so this is another area we will consider in this article. This constructivist perspective is in stark contrast to the earlier 'heroic discourse... [which] is long past its sell-by date' [Mead, (2014), p.33], and which advanced 'the Myth of the lonely only entrepreneur' [Schoonhoven and Romanelli, (2001), p.385] that viewed entrepreneurs as people with unchanging personality types that could be 'both born and made' (Bolton and Thompson, (2004), p.21; Kanagasabai, and Aggarwal 2021).

3 Storytelling as entrepreneurial method

3.1 Storytelling and narrative

One way that entrepreneurs can build and sustain a new enterprise is by telling a convincing story, and situating that within a credible and recognisable framework (Collison and Mackenzie, 1999). Storytelling is seen as a key leadership practice (Denning, 2021; Rasmussen, 2019; Hutchinson, 2017), and leadership is of course a cornerstone of entrepreneurship. 'Stories are a means of connecting events and deciding what is important' [Sax, (2006), p.166], and there is a 'primary relationship between storytelling and entrepreneurship' [Smith and Anderson, (2004), p.126].

Although there is some 'confusion about what is meant by 'story' or 'narrative' [Rippin, (2005), p.579], we follow Bruner's approach, which differentiates between stories, which recount things that have happened – and narratives, which pull the stories together to make sense of what has happened, sequencing them according to time, causality and meaning to produce a beginning, middle and end – a 'narrative diachronicity' [Bruner, (1991), p.6]. Like many leadership and strategy studies, much of the discussion around stories, narratives and sense-making focus on organisations, rather than individuals (e.g., Mølberg Jørgensen, 2020; Borghoff, 2017; Czarniawska, 1998; Heugens, 2002; Spear and Roper, 2013), revealing a gap in the knowledge about how entrepreneurs use storytelling to achieve business growth. This raises the question: how is storytelling used in entrepreneurship?

3.2 Storytelling in entrepreneurship

Much of the literature advocates using stories to provoke emotional responses – first, in order to achieve organisational change, because: 'Emotion slows down the process of analytic thinking... [and] The more specific and concrete, the sharper the image people retain' [Denning, (2007), p.150]. Second, stories can be used in coaching and leadership development. Barker and Gower (2010) have devised 'The storytelling model of

organisational communication (STMOC)', while Carr and Ann (2011, p.241) even suggest that coaches should make their clients feel 'shame, guilt or inadequacy', to be influenced to 'idealise' and follow their advice. Third, stories and narratives can be used to build legitimacy through both 'sensemaking and sensegiving' (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1995) and, therefore to explain, legitimise and enforce strategies (Weick, 1995). In sum, as Papadatos asserts: 'Storytelling is not just about describing events, but is about the "emotional management of an audience"' (Papadatos, 2008, p.28; Sreekumar et al., 2021). Devising and performing narratives is recognised in the wider leadership literature as a form of strategy as practice and there has been more discussion of entrepreneurs from this perspective. What is missing from this subject area, though, is an exploration of the *themes* that entrepreneurial narratives contain (see also Tripathi et al., 2015). This gap will be addressed in this article.

4 Research methodology

4.1 The case study approach

We decided to carry out a case study, which is suitable when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed... [about] a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context' [Yin, (2009), p.2]. This qualitative 'explorative' approach [Diefenbach, (2009), p.877] would enable us to closely scrutinise the stories produced in texts and artefacts by one or more entrepreneurs who fitted the research criteria above. The aim was to open up discussions into these under-researched areas and provide an innovative way to examine the purpose, impact and effectiveness of using storytelling to gain buy-in from investors, customers and other stakeholders in order to develop and sustain a business.

Because we view storytelling as a tool that is used for sense-giving and sense-making, and entrepreneurs as actors who are influenced and affected by their social, economic and cultural environments, our research is situated squarely inside the interpretivist perspective. Consequently, the data we collected was qualitative, because 'Qualitative inquiry deals with human lived experience. It is the *life-world* as it is lived, felt, undergone, made sense of, and accomplished by human beings' [Polkinghorne, (2005), p.138]. We were keen to explore the entrepreneurs' relational interactions, so a case study was a suitable method because it 'focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings' [Eisenhardt, (1989), p.534].

To mitigate the possibility that our choice might be anomalous, we decided to carry out two case studies with some contrasting features. We wanted to ascertain non-archetypal entrepreneurs who had already established a company within the UK, were seeking to grow their business, were actively using storytelling as a way to garner support for their future business strategy and were using their migrant or outsider status as an integral part of their narrative. We also wanted to investigate stories that contained some proven elements of omission or falsehood, to explore the importance of truth in this kind of storytelling. Our chosen subjects are Karan Bilimoria, Cobra Beer and Levi Roots, Reggae Reggae Sauce.

4.2 *Data collection*

We collected secondary data comprising company websites and documents; books and articles written by and about the two men and their companies; the products themselves; speeches, presentations and interviews which we accessed from the internet. These ranged from short online videos aimed at would-be entrepreneurs, like ‘Levi Roots – brand values’ (Roots, 2011) and Bilimoria’s ‘*How to create a product*’ (Bilimoria, 2014), to Roots’ appearance on Dragons’ Den and interviews with business school students and television presenters. The videos varied from 30 seconds to 15 minutes long, with most lasting around 3–5 minutes. Although these are mediated through filming and editing, the entrepreneurs are expressing their own thoughts and opinions – or at least those they want viewers to perceive as theirs. We undertook our data collection in a number of stages. First, we conducted searches in academic library collections, using keywords related to our subject area, e.g., ‘entrepreneur’, ‘storytelling’, ‘foundation myths’ and ‘migrants’. Next, we carried out keyword searches on the names ‘Karan Bilimoria’, ‘Cobra Beer’, ‘Levi Roots’ and ‘Reggae Reggae Sauce’. Then, we scoured specialist publications including *the grocer*, *food manufacture and brand strategy*. Finally, we carried out extensive online searches on the wider internet into all of these areas.

4.3 *Validity and reliability of the data*

As Yin (2009) notes, it is important that case studies can demonstrate an internal validity (identify causality between pieces of data), external validity (placing the study within its context) and reliability. To ensure the validity of our data, we listed, coded and cross-referenced all the key themes. This is how we unearthed the omission in Levi Roots’ narrative (the lie about his original recipe, discussed in Section 6.3). We also compared what the two entrepreneurs said with their actions.

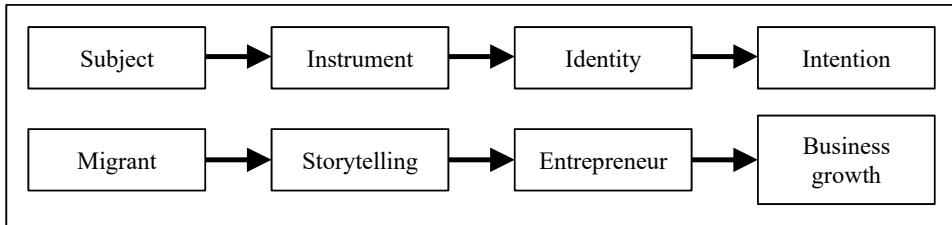
4.4 *Data analysis and interpretation*

We coded the data to identify key themes that appeared in the spoken, written and visual texts. Then we carried out content, discourse and visual analysis (Achtenhagen and Welter, 2007), ‘to generate issues, themes and patterns’ to show a ‘convergence of evidence’ [Yin, (2009), p.117]. The next stage of our research was interpretation (Denzin, 2005) – searching for ‘patterns, for consistency... which we call ‘correspondence’ [Stake, (1995), p.78], which revealed a core narrative, and mapping these onto our conceptual framework, to examine ‘the role that entrepreneurs play in their own stories’ [Larty and Hamilton, (2011), p.221]. The aim was to analyse the stories told by our research subjects in order to understand the meanings they intended to convey and the effects they hoped to achieve.

5 Conceptual framework of entrepreneurial storytelling

This study examines how migrants use storytelling as a leadership instrument to depict themselves as entrepreneurs and thereby obtain support to grow their business. We produced a framework to illustrate our initial concept Figure 1, developed this to show how we anticipated finding storytelling being used for business growth Figure 2, amended it to depict three attributes of entrepreneurial storytelling Figure 3, then added the ten themes we found in the two migrants’ stories Figure 8.

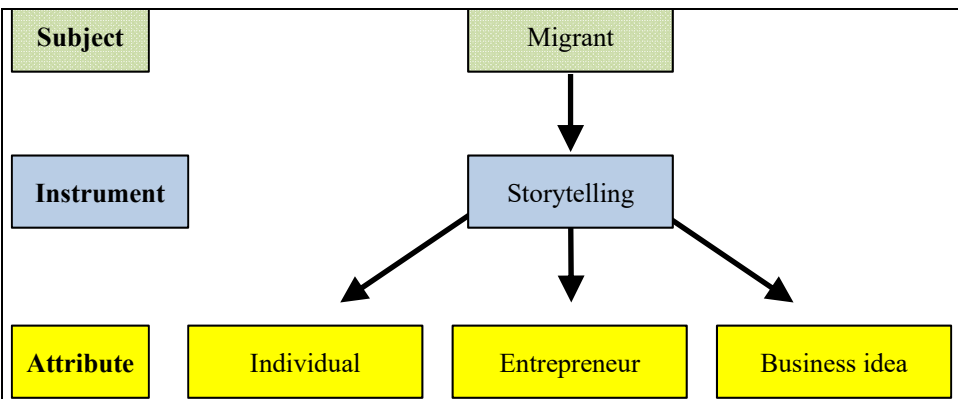
Figure 1 Storytelling as a leadership instrument for business growth



We argue that migrants use storytelling as a valid and effective tool to position themselves as entrepreneurs within the dominant masternarrative identified by Steyaert (2007), Watson (2009) and others. To do this, they must convince others that they have three key attributes: they are a trustworthy individual; they are a genuine entrepreneur; they have a compelling business idea.

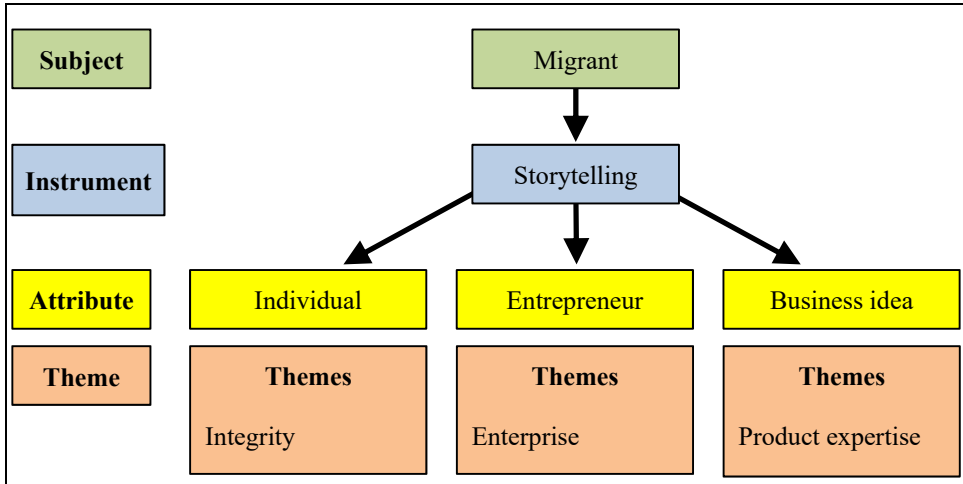
This enables them to obtain legitimacy as an individual, credibility as an entrepreneur, and support to develop their businesses idea by gaining access to finance, networks and customers. This is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Storytelling for legitimacy, credibility and support (see online version for colours)



Our research aimed to ascertain which themes were mentioned most frequently in the two case studies, and our initial assumption was that these would include things like integrity, enterprise and product expertise:

Figure 3 Probable themes comprising the three attributes of storytelling (see online version for colours)



6 Findings

6.1 Ten themes and three attributes

The data show that Bilimoria and Roots have used storytelling as a tool for business growth at every stage of their entrepreneurial journeys, to achieve legitimacy, credibility and support. They do this by adhering to ten consistent themes which demonstrate the three attributes shown in Figures 2 and 3 – individual, entrepreneur and business idea.

Attribute 1 Individual

Bilimoria and Roots tell stories to portray themselves as decent people, who should be listened to and taken seriously.

Theme 1 Authenticity and integrity

Both men state that it is important to be genuine in business, not putting on an act:

“The underlying foundation of all business is integrity.” (Bilimoria, 2016)

“Show your personality. Successful businesses are run by those who can lead, inspire, and influence others. People are investing in you as much as in the business.” [Roots, (2001), p.128; see also Mohapatra, and Gupta, 2021)

Roots recounts how this approach enabled him to win investment on the TV programme Dragons’ Den:

“Peter Jones thought that, you know, he wanted to invest in the man himself as opposed to investing in the sauce.” (BT Tradespace, 2009)

Theme 2 Family and religious values

Both men generally begin their business story with an adored older relative. Bilimoria explains how his father’s high-ranking position in the Indian army influenced his own career choice:

“I decided that the army for me would have been too constraining. And if I had followed in my father’s footsteps I was worried that I would always be compared to him, and be in his shadow” (Smale, 2014)

Roots talks about his grandmother teaching him to cook:

“I will never forget... my saintly grandmother, who helped to make me the success I am now.” (Roots, 2016)

These relatives are central characters in their stories, their inspiration and role models.

Bilimoria identifies himself as a religious man, fitting this into his narrative:

“Parsis are renowned for entrepreneurialism and for their charity work” [Woodward, (2007), p.46]

Religion is so essential to Roots’ self-identity that he has lived under an assumed Rastafarian persona for so long that ‘not even my mother calls me Keith now, she calls me Levi’ (Roots, 2012):

“The young Levi, who left Jamaica to live in England, used to be called Keith Graham, but he didn’t know who he was. He lost his way at times and took a few years to find his real identity. It was the great reggae music coming out of Jamaica and the culture of Rastafari that inspired me to change.” [Roots, (2001), pp.16–17]

Theme 3 Community and role model

Bilimoria started his business selling Cobra Beer direct to independent Indian restaurants in the UK, observing that:

“The Indian restaurateurs are pioneering entrepreneurs. They have gone into these areas, invariably as complete strangers, and have had to win customers, and make friends... Most importantly, I have always seen them put back into the community, and engage with the community, wherever they are.” [Bilimoria and Coomber, (2007), p.111]

He has established a charitable organisation, the ‘Cobra Foundation’, which focuses on health, education and support in South Asia, and he is involved in many other charitable and entrepreneurship initiatives, for instance:

“...founder and chairman of the Indo British Partnership Network and Visiting Entrepreneur at the University of Cambridge... He is also the National Champion of the National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship...” [Bilimoria and Coomber, (2007), p.116]

Roots represents himself in his story as embedded in, and representative of, a specific community – the black Afro-Caribbean working/middle class area of Brixton in South

London. He explains that winning investment on TV enables him to act as an inspirational figure to others:

“For my community, my success on Dragons’ Den was about much more than Levi winning the investment. For once there was a black man on TV who was about to be successful in business, as opposed to being able to run fast or kick a ball.” [Roots, (2001), p.17]

Attribute 2 Entrepreneur

The second set of stories are intended to depict themselves as having key characteristics of successful entrepreneurs.

Theme 4 Outsider and migrant

This is a key element of most entrepreneurs’ autobiographies, distinguishing themselves as different from ordinary people who work for employers. This theme is intensified in the case of migrants, who are also outsiders from the nationality and cultural perspectives.

As a child in India, Bilimoria moved frequently with his father’s army postings:

“Karan attended seven different schools, before boarding at the Hebron School in Ooty.” (Bilimoria, 2016)

Roots’ childhood was also disrupted, as his parents fled poverty in Jamaica to establish a new life in London, taking their six children to join them, one by one. Roots, the youngest, was left in his grandmother’s care for the longest time, and finally arrived in London aged 12:

“Levi knew how to look after himself and keep house, but he could not read or write, or even spell his name. He could only count from one to ten. He found school a hostile environment.” [BBC, (2007), p.88]

He embraced his Afro-Caribbean cultural heritage, citing Bob Marley and Nelson Mandela as role models, and changing his name from Keith Graham to Levi Roots. His ethnic difference (and membership of a cultural sub-group) is clearly expressed through appearance – particularly his dreadlocks – and company name:

“Funnily enough, not everyone liked the name when I first thought of it. My friends said to me, ‘But, Levi, it is too black, too Jamaican, too Rasta’. And I replied, ‘But that is me: I am black, I am Jamaican, I am Rasta’. The sauce is associated with me – and so the brand is me, too!” [Roots, (2001), p.252]

Theme 5 Born entrepreneur

Both individuals refer to themselves as ‘entrepreneurs’, and provide evidence from an early age to substantiate this self-identity:

“The earliest sign I was going to be an entrepreneur came when I was eight.” [Director, (2014), p.39]

“Like many young people my first entrepreneurial venture started in the school playground.” [Roots, (2001), p.25]

They list several character traits to demonstrate their entrepreneurial personality:

“As an entrepreneur you must have confidence in your own abilities... Being an entrepreneur means being a self-starter – which means always taking the initiative” [Bilimoria and Coomber, (2007), p.6]

“...one of the key traits of successful entrepreneurs is that they have had the guts to stick it through. They’ve been able to persevere when others would give up... it is not for everybody” (Bilimoria, 2015)

“Most successful entrepreneurs are people of action. They like to make decisions quickly and to see results.” [Roots, (2001), p.79]

“Many entrepreneurs work tirelessly, taking few breaks, their minds awash with new and improved ways of running the business or closing the next deal.” [Roots, (2001), p.161]

Both cite ‘passion’ as a fundamental aspect of entrepreneurship.

Theme 6 Overcomes adversity, works hard

Having described entrepreneurs as people who “thrive on challenges... love competition” [Roots, (2001), p.164] and never give up, it is unsurprising that both men provide plenty of examples of overcoming difficulties and their extraordinary personal capacity for hard work:

“There was little in the way of encouragement. All the odds were stacked against us” [Jones, (2003), p.24]

“Every time you face a setback, there is a lesson to be learned and a skill to be gained.” [Roots, (2001), p.11]

Theme 7 Seeks and offers advice

Both founders stress how important it is to seek advice and feedback. Bilimoria continually recounts how he changed the name of his beer following pre-production market research:

“The beer was about two weeks away from bottling... The distributors had been pre-selling the beer and there was a problem. No one liked the name... Panther... ‘The lesson I learned was, as an entrepreneur, you come up with the ideas, but never ever go forward with the ideas until you have checked them with the consumer first.’ [Bilimoria and Coomber, (2007), p.23]

Bilimoria sits on many advisory boards and panels. Levi Roots mentions three mentors who helped him at different points in his life: a prison volunteer called Theresa who encouraged him to ‘see that I could be who I wanted to be’ [Roots, (2001), p.12]; business adviser Nadia Jones, who encouraged him to attend food and drink exhibitions, and his *Dragons’ Den* mentor, Peter Jones. In turn, Roots focuses particularly on inspiring children and young people.

Attribute 3 Business idea

The last set of stories are told to demonstrate their exceptional, or superior, knowledge and experience, which has potential for global business growth.

Theme 8 Bringing unfamiliar flavours to the UK

Cobra Beer and Reggae Reggae Sauce are both examples:

“...of a product being created to solve a consumer need by a disappointed consumer who then goes on to turn the concept into a successful product.” [Datamonitor, (2009), p.9]

Bilimoria explains that he was driven to create Cobra because of his passion for beer and a quest for the taste and smoothness he had enjoyed in India:

“From the time I was allowed to drink, I’ve loved beer, absolutely loved it” [Bilimoria and Coomber, (2007), p.1]

“This was my mission – I wanted to make the best-ever Indian beer, and I wanted to create a global beer brand.” (Bilimoria, 2008)

Likewise, Roots’ cooking stems from a nostalgia for his childhood food:

“When Levi moved to England to join his family he yearned for the music and sunshine of Jamaica. Cooking helped restore the Caribbean flavour that was missing from his life!” (Jones, 2016)

“Everything associated with the Levi Roots brand is a way of leading people towards an awareness of Caribbean music and culture, and the fabulous taste of Caribbean food.” [Roots, (2001), pp.59–60]

Theme 9 Brand focus on exotic heritage

This passion for tastes from home has directed the branding of their companies and products. Cobra Beer centres on its ‘Indian-ness’, even though ‘The beer famous for being “Indian” hails from Bedfordshire’ (Clark, 2003) – and although market research showed that:

“...the least important thing to the consumer was that Cobra Beer was imported from India.” [Bilimoria and Coomber, (2007), p.46]

Bilimoria does not feature in branding, packaging or marketing materials, but his public and media activities are all based on his status as the company’s figurehead. Cobra Beer is distinctive in that its story is depicted on its bottles, including several of the themes identified in this research paper – family, outsider and migrant, overcomes adversity, bringing unfamiliar flavours to the UK, exotic heritage and global growth.

“It’s the first time in the world that a product tells its story visually as part of its packaging,” says Bilimoria proudly.’ [Bilimoria and Coomber, (2007), p.98]

The essence of Reggae Reggae sauce is the founder himself, so his name and image appears on all the company branding and packaging:

“The Levi Roots logo is about representing me and my music. I wanted my guitar to feature on everything we produced. The team at Sainsbury’s wanted my face on there, too.” [Roots, (2001), p.140]

“...it’s Levi Roots’ personality that’s at sale” (Roots, 2008)

His company’s website provides a detailed biography of Roots and information about the Caribbean, as well as the products:

Figure 4 Embossed beer bottle depicts the Cobra Beer story (see online version for colours)



Source: <http://www.cobrabeer.com/en/products/cobra-premium>

Figure 5 Reggae Reggae foods website – Levi roots and the caribbean (see online version for colours)



Source: www.leviroots.com/destinations

As well as portraying their products as having delicious, exotic tastes, both men consistently express a core characteristic – ‘smooth’ or ‘fun’:

Figure 6 Cobra beer’s core characteristics – Indian and smooth (see online version for colours)



Source: www.cobrabeer.com/en/check

Figure 7 Reggae foods' core characteristics – Caribbean and fun (see online version for colours)

Source: www.leviroots.com/news/levi-roots-tv-advert/

Theme 10 Diversification and global growth

The final key theme repeated most is diversification and global growth:

“Bilimoria began trialling a wine brand in 1999. He states his aim is to capture the third of customers who don’t drink lager with their meal.” [Jones, (2003), p.25]

“Bilimoria now has plans to set up his own brewery in Hyderabad to support sales of Cobra to India.” (Clark, 2003)

“Cobra Beer is rolling out a drive to alert women to a low-fat version.” (Precision Marketing, 2006)

“Cobra Beer is extending its brand with the launch of Cobra Bite, a fruit-flavoured premium lager range” (Whitehead, 2007)

“You’ve got to think global from Day One.” (Bilimoria, 2015)

Similarly, Roots has expanded from sauces into a diverse product range:

“...we were concerned that it might be a one-hit wonder – which is one of the reasons we have been so aggressive with our product expansion” [Roots, (2001), p.266]

6.2 Consistent patterns of storytelling

Several things are apparent from the findings of this research. Both entrepreneurs tell extremely similar stories, despite significant differences in class, education and social capital. They follow traditional entrepreneurial narratives, with ‘a close link between how entrepreneurs tell their life story and the way they run their businesses’ [Johansson, (2004), pp.284–285]. Their stories follow a standard sequence of episodes, shown in Table 1, which illustrate the key themes outlined above. They always tell the same story, to every audience in every situation, and the same story is told about them by others.

Table 1 The case studies' standard sequence of episodes

<i>Episode</i>	<i>Bilimoria: Cobra Beer</i>	<i>Roots: Reggae Reggae Sauce</i>
An adored older relative... introduced him to...	Father in India The taste of Indian beer	Grandmother in Jamaica Jamaican ingredients and cooking
when he moved to England...	As an adult, to attend university	As a child, to join his family
he missed the taste	Beer sold in UK Indian restaurants was too gassy	Jamaican food was not available
He had a first career...	As an accountant at Arthur Young and Cresvale	Musician, engineer, plumber
overcame obstacles...	Opposition from family for leaving corporate life	Prison sentence, unable to make a living from music
began as an entrepreneur...	Imported Indian items	Musician, developed his sauce at annual carnival
more experience...	Gained qualifications (MBA) and contacts	Sold food with sauce on and some sauce in bottles
found a first mentor... then set up Cobra/RRS...	Head brewer in Bangalore With co-founder Arjun Reddy and a loan	Prison volunteer Theresa Selling sauce in bottles
obtained customer feedback...	Changed the name 'Panther' to 'Cobra'	Adjusted flavours to develop the recipe
sought further advice...	Joined networks and organisations	Business advisor Nadia Jones, Dragon Peter Jones
gained investment...	Bank loan, 'invoice discounting' financing method	Peter Jones and Richard Farleigh from Dragons' Den
sold to niche market in UK...	Direct to Indian restaurants	Caribbean sections of small supermarkets
expanded into mass market...	Supermarkets, pubs and clubs	Supermarkets; licenced to Subway, Domino's, KFC
<i>Suffered a crisis</i>	<i>Ran out of money</i>	<i>Taken to court</i>
recognised and rewarded...	CBE; crossbench peer in the House of Lords	Speaker, entrepreneur adviser, celebrity
diversifying product range...	Fruit-flavoured, strong/low-calorie beer, wine, etc.	Sauces, drinks, puddings, recipe kits, cook books, etc.
gives back to the community.	Advisory groups, Cobra Foundation, charity work, etc.	Speeches, presentations 'Papine Jerk Centre', etc.

6.3 Crisis

Both men have experienced a major crisis which cut to the core of their own identities as individuals and entrepreneurs. Bilimoria often refers to this incident, while Roots omits it from his narrative. Bilimoria was forced to sell 50.1% of his business to the American firm Molson Coors in 2008, when Cobra Beer was on the verge of bankruptcy. According to his retelling, this crisis fits neatly into the narrative pattern shown in Table 1, being just

another obstacle to overcome, which provides useful opportunities to learn, develop as an entrepreneur and. In contrast, Roots never refers to being sued by a friend who claimed he stole the Reggae Reggae recipe from him, although the court case forced Roots to admit he had lied about the origins of his sauce (Guardian, 2011). However, this does not appear to have had any negative impact on his business.

7 Discussion

Our examination of the main themes has raised five significant observations.

7.1 Observation 1: both entrepreneurs use stories to demonstrate the three attributes of the conceptual framework

Our hypothesis is that migrants use storytelling as a tool for business growth because the stories they tell enable them to ‘create an image of legitimacy for investors, customers and employees’ [Larty and Hamilton, (2011), p.222]. Both entrepreneurs deliberately and continually use storytelling in this way, to obtain support of various kinds – including financial investment, sales and enhanced personal and business reputation – and thereby ensure business success.

Having analysed the data, we have amended our original conceptual framework to include the key themes manifest in the two case studies, under each of the three attributes. Some of the points we had expected to see – such as market knowledge – were mentioned, but not as core themes. Some appeared as different parts of the narrative – for instance, hard work was framed as part of ‘entrepreneurship’ by both men, rather than ‘individual’. Other themes not included in our original framework became evident during the research analysis – such as family and religious values:

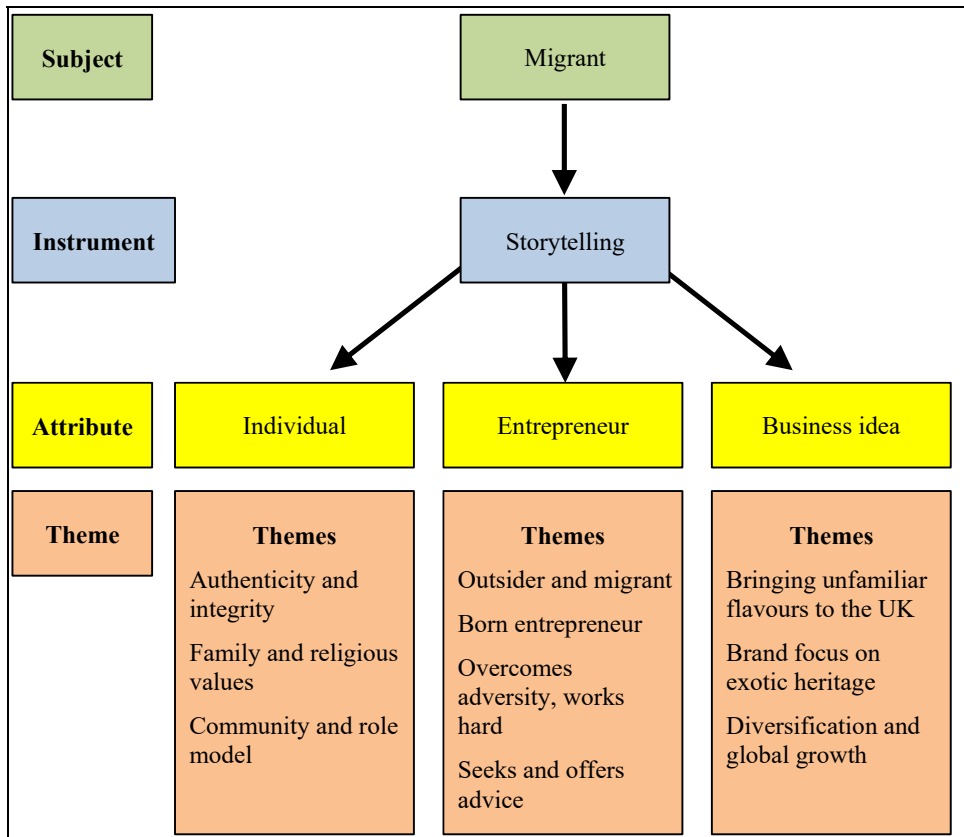
7.2 Observation 2: both entrepreneurs recount the same themes in a similar pattern, and are consistent in the narratives they tell

We found this rather surprising, since we had chosen these specific case studies partly because we thought they would contrast with each other. In fact, both the themes and the patterns of the overall narratives are remarkably similar, as shown in Table 1.

7.3 Observation 3: close adherence to archetypal entrepreneur masternarratives

Bilimoria is Indian and Roots Jamaican, so neither fits the dominant entrepreneurial archetype of being Western and white (Mölbjerg Jørgensen and Boje, 2010; Nicholson and Anderson, 2005) – although, of course, they are both male, which is also often cited as a key characteristic. Despite this, they both strongly align themselves with the ‘conflicted social archetype, simultaneously perceived as an aggressor and a winner, a victim and an outsider’ [Anderson et al., (2009), p.126], in order to be acknowledged and accepted within ‘existing legitimising norms’ [Valliere, (2015), p.87] of who and what constitutes an entrepreneur (Steyaert, 2007; Watson, 2009).

Figure 8 Conceptual framework showing the case study key themes (see online version for colours)



7.4 Observation 4: storytelling is a form of social constructivism, so truth is not an essential requirement of storytelling for business growth

Situating notions of the entrepreneur in the wider context leads on to ‘acknowledging the ontological dimensions of narrative’ [Hamilton, (2014), p.709] – that the person telling a story is more important than what they are saying [Guber, (2007), p.55]; their narratives are ‘ideological’ rather than representational [Anderson and Warren, (2011), p.593]; and they ‘filter’ out specific events and include ‘events either from real life, from memory, or from fantasy’ [Reveley, (2010), p.286] in order to construct a recognisable and credible identity ‘through interaction between the individual, society and culture’ [Down and Warren, (2008), p.5].

7.5 Observation 5: most of the stories place the speakers at the centre of their business narratives and focus on emotional, rather than rational, aspects

Our findings confirm the assertion that ‘storytelling is far more convincing to an audience than rational arguments, statistics, or facts...’ [Kaufman, (2003), pp.11–12], especially considering that Roots’ foundation myth was proved to be untrue. It validates the

approaches of business consultants like Denning and Kahan, who advocate provoking an emotional response in their audiences in order to achieve a desired outcome. All agree with Bilimoria and Roots that passion generates support.

8 Conclusions

Our research data included the stories told by the two men, but also about them, and we found a remarkable lack of divergence between the two. The only incident that was related by observers but always omitted from the entrepreneur's own storytelling was Levi Roots' court case. We found a striking similarity between the two men's stories and narratives, which revealed that they both align themselves closely to dominant metanarratives and archetypes of the entity 'entrepreneur'. It is clear that positivistic notions of 'truth' and 'reality' are not important for successful use of storytelling for business growth; and that emotional rapport is more effective than logical evidence. We reviewed our research in relation to organisation studies into foundation myths, 'cherished storylines' (Smith, 2005), eliciting an emotional response from an audience, branding, and using celebrity to enhance company legitimacy.

The limitation of the study was that it only examined two entrepreneurs – who are both men, live in London and have successful businesses in the same sector. Further studies could apply the conceptual framework to entrepreneurs who differ in sex, ethnicity, nationality, location, business sector and organisation type, e.g., not for profit. In addition, as Bouchikhi (1993) observes, most entrepreneurship research focuses on successful individuals, so failed entrepreneurship might offer an interesting contrast in future studies. Additional research could explore how storytelling is used within organisations at different stages of maturity, such as when a founder exits their business, and how storytelling is used at different levels within established organisations, such as by middle managers, that is, by people who lack the intrinsic personal investment and passion of company founders.

The objective of this study was to ascertain if storytelling can be used to create and sustain business enterprises and the case studies show that it is, indeed, a useful instrument for achieving this. We reached two main conclusions. First, both of the migrant entrepreneurs studied use storytelling as an effective tool to achieve business growth, by retelling accounts which are consistent in terms of themes and narratives. Second, the key themes of all their stories form patterns which aim to convince the audience that the speaker has three key attributes: they are a trustworthy individual; they are a genuine entrepreneur; and they have a compelling business idea. The two entrepreneurs studied are, of course, protagonists in their own stories. Bilimoria's cultural heritage and quest for perfection is visible in his narratives, whereas Roots himself is evident in all his company materials – his name, image and music. His company website address is, in fact, his own name.

This article suggests that other entrepreneurs might benefit from purposefully applying this kind of framework to their own enterprises, in order to increase their potential for successful business development. The findings are also relevant to aspects of organisational and management studies which have already touched on storytelling to some degree, such as strategy, leadership and change management. Furthermore, the conceptual framework could be applied as a practical tool to enable strategic entrepreneur planning. By considering which attributes they most urgently need to demonstrate, to

which audiences and for what purpose, this activity would enable an entrepreneur to clarify the essence of their enterprise, to fully understand the requirements that establishing and running a business will impose on themselves and their families, and to identify the core elements of their business strategy which they should be focusing on, in order to maximise their chance of success.

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