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The Cadbury Brand – does it matter if it is British or American?

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Ultimately a brand stands by the quality of the product it represents. If people like the product, find it reliable, trustworthy, even in modern parlance iconic, they will buy it. While the takeover of Cadbury by Kraft has led commentators to make much of the loss to Britain of Roses chocolates, Crunchie, Flake and even Dairy Milk, the fact is that these brands will go on, and as long as they offer the public what they want in chocolate taste, at an appropriate price, Cadburys will continue to be strong in the minds and mouths of the UK public. There is of course very reasonable concern that these much-loved brands will be fighting to gain attention in a much bigger food company whose interests span far wider than confectionery, but confectionery is a very important part of Kraft's business and one which they are likely to make more of. Why? Confectionery amongst other supermarket brands is much less subject to the 'own label' threat. Confectionery is a competitive market but one with plenty of room for growth, opportunities for new product development along with a strong truly global customer base. Cadbury itself has not always been what it seems; the licence to make and sell the Cadbury brand in the US had been in the hands of Hershey since the late 1980s.

In the new world of Cadbury owned by Kraft, three issues remain, one potentially more important to the Cadbury brand than the others. Firstly, much of the sense of loss comes from the idea more than the reality of Cadbury as a family owned British brand, although in reality the Cadbury family had had little to do with the business for many years and as with so many global companies its owners were no longer individuals but large global investors. Secondly, for the people of Birmingham, Kraft's takeover of Cadbury may mean a loss of jobs but more importantly the end of an historical era, that had witnessed a Quaker family setting up a business that really wanted to do good, although if begun today would most likely be criticized for paternalism. But out of this comes the final and perhaps most compelling reason for Cadbury to have remained 'British' and based firmly in Bourneville where its history of doing good business began; there are real opportunities in the market for a truly ethical chocolate brand that people love the taste of. Through the Cadbury Cocoa Partnership and chocolate such as the truly iconic Dairy Milk becoming certified as Fairtrade, the Cadbury brand was fulfilling its historical destiny perhaps. We shall have to wait and see whether such an important twenty first century brand value can be maintained under new ownership, and how much ultimately it matters to the consumer.

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