



'Brand Anna' decoded through the public relations prism

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Section: [News](#) Category: [Advertising](#)

Public relations firm Hanmer MSL analyses the Anna Hazare campaign through 'PR lenses', and offers brand marketers insights into the process of brand building. afaqs! studies the findings.

That Anna Hazare is a solid brand is old news. Now, public relations (PR) firm Hanmer MSL has, through its PR case study on the Anna Hazare campaign, decoded the reasons for the success of this staggering effort. The study has broken down the elements of the campaign's success into nine lessons on brand building.

According to Jaideep Shergill, chief executive officer, Hanmer MSL, such a case study could benefit a wide TG (target group) including brand managers, brand marketers, marketing and management students, and junior-level professionals in the communications business. "A real-life case study like this can be an eye-opener for today's marketers who tend to think of complicated solutions for their brand-related issues. The Anna campaign reminds us that simplicity is the key to successful branding."

A few basics

The case study first outlines a few fundamental premises before delving into the lessons. First, it states that 'A good product generates its own PR.' This, according to the study, is the success of Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement.

Then, the study compares the Jan Lokpal Bill to a product that satisfies a specific need, namely, the need to eradicate corruption. Lending the product with clear messaging and communication is the man himself -- Anna Hazare -- poised as the victorious brand ambassador.

Further, the study is furnished with a detailed timeline, outlining the chain of events that transpired right from the very first anti-corruption rally held in Delhi (January 30), until the day Anna broke his 13 day-long fast (August 28).

The case study also addresses how the government sent out wrong messages in response to Anna's campaign, all through. It also highlights the overwhelming media impact of the campaign and its success on social media.

Lessons on the idea, symbols and consumer engagement

Lesson One is to have an idea that connects. A strong and independent Lokpal -- which could investigate ministers, the bureaucracy, the judiciary, and even the prime minister -- was an idea that Indian citizens took to instantly. This was an idea that was overdue and one that all Indians could relate to instantly, given the kind of corruption the country has been riddled with in the recent past.

Lesson Two is about creating symbols and icons to support the brand. The case study cites names of some commercially successful brands that bear strong symbols such as Nike and its 'swoosh'/tick mark, and Apple and its bitten apple symbol. Similarly, every public movement has its own symbols and icons, states the study. Mahatma Gandhi's freedom movement, in part, rode on the backs of symbols such as the charkha, and Gandhi himself was an icon that symbolised non-violence. Anna Hazare and the white 'Gandhi topi' gave this campaign some essential symbols.

Lesson Three reads 'Offer a consumer experience'. Each brand has a distinct character, according to the study, and it is important to make the target consumer experience the same first hand. In Anna Hazare's case, he chose the Ramlila Maidan, in order to ensure consumer engagement. The venue was chosen for its size as it permitted thousands to participate and experience the movement first hand, experience their own power, and consequently mobilise change, states the study.

Lessons on test marketing, packaging and media planning

Lesson Four addresses successful test marketing of the product, prior to its launch. Anna's first fast at Jantar Mantar showcases that it is wise to test the waters well before the large-scale roll out of the product in question. The study declares that doing so provides the vindication for a larger movement.

Lesson Five urges brand builders to package the product right, reminding us about the fourth of the four Ps of marketing, (the other three being product, pricing and promotion). Anna Hazare's white dhoti-kurta and squeaky clean image were the perfect packaging elements of his campaign against corruption. Intriguingly, these elements managed to rope in the support of today's denim-clad youngsters.

Lesson Six talks about a thorough media plan. According to the study, the Anna Hazare campaign was launched between the World Cup and IPL, thus filling the media vacuum that existed then. Moreover, team Anna was readily available for media interviews. Interestingly, Anna himself, was not over-exposed in the media; he spoke once from Tihar Jail, and addressed the media several times at the Ramlila Maidan. Another smart move on part of Team Anna was that it had very few voices in the media -- only Anna, Kiran Bedi, Arvind Kejriwal and Prashant Bhushan spoke to the media, thus minimising the scope for distortion of the message.

Lessons on competition, imagery and taglines

Lesson Seven urges us to out-think the competition. In this case, the government is seen as the competing brand, one that Anna Hazare managed to stump.

Lesson Eight professes using the right kind of imagery to complement the brand in question. The image of Anna meditating at Rajghat, or lying down at the Ramlila Maidan, proved to be iconic. Similarly, when he broke his fast, he took water from a Dalit girl and a Muslim girl, an image that connoted so much, all at once. Even the large physical picture of Gandhi in the backdrop contributed to the imagery that accompanied Anna's campaign.

Lastly, Lesson Nine is about having an effective tagline. 'I am Anna Hazare' was more effective a tagline than 'I am for Anna Hazare' could probably ever be. It is personal, participative, and gave citizens a means to internalise the struggle. Consequently, it urged people to act.

Branding: Intentional or incidental?

Sunil Lal, member, IAC (India Against Corruption), and the brain behind the branding element in Anna's campaign, tells afaqs! that the team visualised the whole campaign before executing it. It was at this stage that the team knew that it would be crucial to connect with the TG (target group) at an emotional level so that they would relate to the brand. "To popularise a brand, one must first understand the psychology of the brand, and one must be clear about how one wants to project the brand to the TG," explains Lal.

He, however, claims that the elements of branding such as the imagery, symbols and tagline used in the campaign, were purely coincidental, insisting that no one actually sat down and coined the slogan 'I am Anna', and that no one deliberately motivated people to use the symbolic 'Gandhi topi'. All these symbols were merely adopted for the sake of branding, at a later stage, says Lal.

"As for the campaign for the 'Jan Lokpal', we created a series of ads using images of persons from different walks of life with a red-coloured placard demanding 'Anna Ka Jan Lokpal Lagoo Karo (adopt Anna's Jan Lokpal). This was deliberate as we wanted to connect with the target audience and simultaneously pressurise the government psychologically."

Well, it clearly looks like it was an effective blend of intentional and incidental branding.

Lesson learnt?

The biggest takeaway from this campaign is perhaps the importance of establishing an emotional connect between the brand and its TG.

Lal says, "We should not try to push the product or the service towards the audience in a bid to motivate them to purchase it. Rather, we should connect with them emotionally so that they realise that the product is a part of their lives."

According to Vibha Desai, independent brand consultant, the most important thing that brand managers can learn from the Anna campaign is that it is most essential to have an honest cause. "Today, most marketers operate at the surface level and don't go into the emotional issues," opines Desai, adding that it helps to have a 'real' campaign. But, isn't it difficult to do so with mainline brands such as FMCG or telecom players? "Well, mainstream brands like Tata Tea and Idea Cellular took up relevant social campaigns," she fields.

Manosh Sengupta, brand-parent, nurturer and mentor, brand@itude, feels that symbols and icons like the 'Anna topi' are physical manifestations of a cause and serve to convey the brand's message by helping members of the TG identify themselves with a movement. "It's amazing how it is no longer the 'Gandhi topi'; rather it is the Anna topi," he enthuses.

Secondly, Sengupta points out how this campaign teaches marketers that it is the credibility of the brand ambassador that is of utmost importance. "Glamorous actresses endorsing a brand like Lux, or an actor of Shah Rukh Khan's stature endorsing a car worth Rs 7 lakh, is all very well, but the TG knows that they are not actually using these products in real life," he explains.

He reminds us that marketers today grapple with engaging the youth, without realising that today, youngsters can see through obsolete and 'out of context' brand metaphors.

Lastly, Sengupta shares that for a brand to succeed, it ought to articulate a sense of destiny and vision. "Brand Anna succeeded because it was able to answer the question -- 'How am I impacting the eco-system, and how do I add value to the environment/society in which I exist?'" , he concludes.

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