

Opinion: ‘Atmanirbhar’ campaigns - implications for marketers and campaign managers

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Now is the time to look inwards into our glorious history, culture, and traditions

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India’s Prime Minister, Narendra Modi is regarded as an accomplished leader with tremendous oratory skills. In his fourth address to the nation (dated 12 May, 2020) since the COVID-19 outbreak, he suggested that the state of world today teaches us that an ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’ (self-reliant India) is the only path.

Media (including social media) was quick in reacting to PM Modi’s call. Articles, memes, cartoons, etc. both, supporting and rejecting (even ridiculing) the idea flooded various media outlets. But, if one can look back in time and without prejudice (not easy in today’s times), is the idea actually worth ridiculing?

The call for ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’ is not even new – it resonates well with erstwhile ideologies and campaigns (political, business, social or otherwise) such as ‘Swaraj’, ‘Swadeshi’, ‘The Green Revolution’, ‘The White Revolution’, ‘Import Substitution’, and also with innumerable campaigns of home-grown (Indian) organisations such as Tata Salt’s ‘Desh ka namak’, Patanjali’s campaigns, etc.

It even resonates well with the indigenisation efforts of world-renowned Indian Public and Private Sector Undertakings/Institutions such as ISRO, DRDO, BARC, HAL, Tata Group, etc.

What does this renewed interest in 'atmanirbharta' (self-reliance) mean for marketers and campaign managers working for/with home-grown organisations?

First and foremost, marketers and campaign managers need to accept the resurgence of nationalist fervour propelled by the COVID-19 crisis, especially its place of origin. The changes introduced in the economy and functioning of businesses are here to stay and so is the renewed interest in all things home-grown. Marketers and campaign managers need to quickly adapt to the new normal. Second, as social distancing measures will now be the norm, marketers and campaign managers need to be more self-reliant in designing and executing marketing campaigns. Physically meeting and discussing your campaign plans with your research and advertisement agencies and overseeing the executions of the campaigns will not be a regular affair. Hence, developing and executing such campaigns will require the marketer to do a lot of background work before engaging agencies to run the campaigns. Third, marketers who still haven't had the chance to join the digital marketing bandwagon now is the right time. In fact, this is the last chance for them. Fourth, marketers and campaign managers need to have more local content to recapture the imagination of the Indian public. To develop more locally-grounded content, marketers and campaign managers need to work with Indian aesthetics (in place of western concepts and constructs), culture, and traditions.

In other words, now is the time to look inwards into our 'atman' (soul) i.e., into our glorious history, culture, and traditions. Now is the time to be an 'atmanirbhar marketer'.

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