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MARKETING

ISSUE #4

WEEKENDERTM



MARKETING LESSONS

FROM THE COCKROACH
JANTA PARTY

WEEKENDER

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AN INSECT AND
A GENERATION
WITH NOTHING
TO LOSE BECAME
INDIA'S MOST
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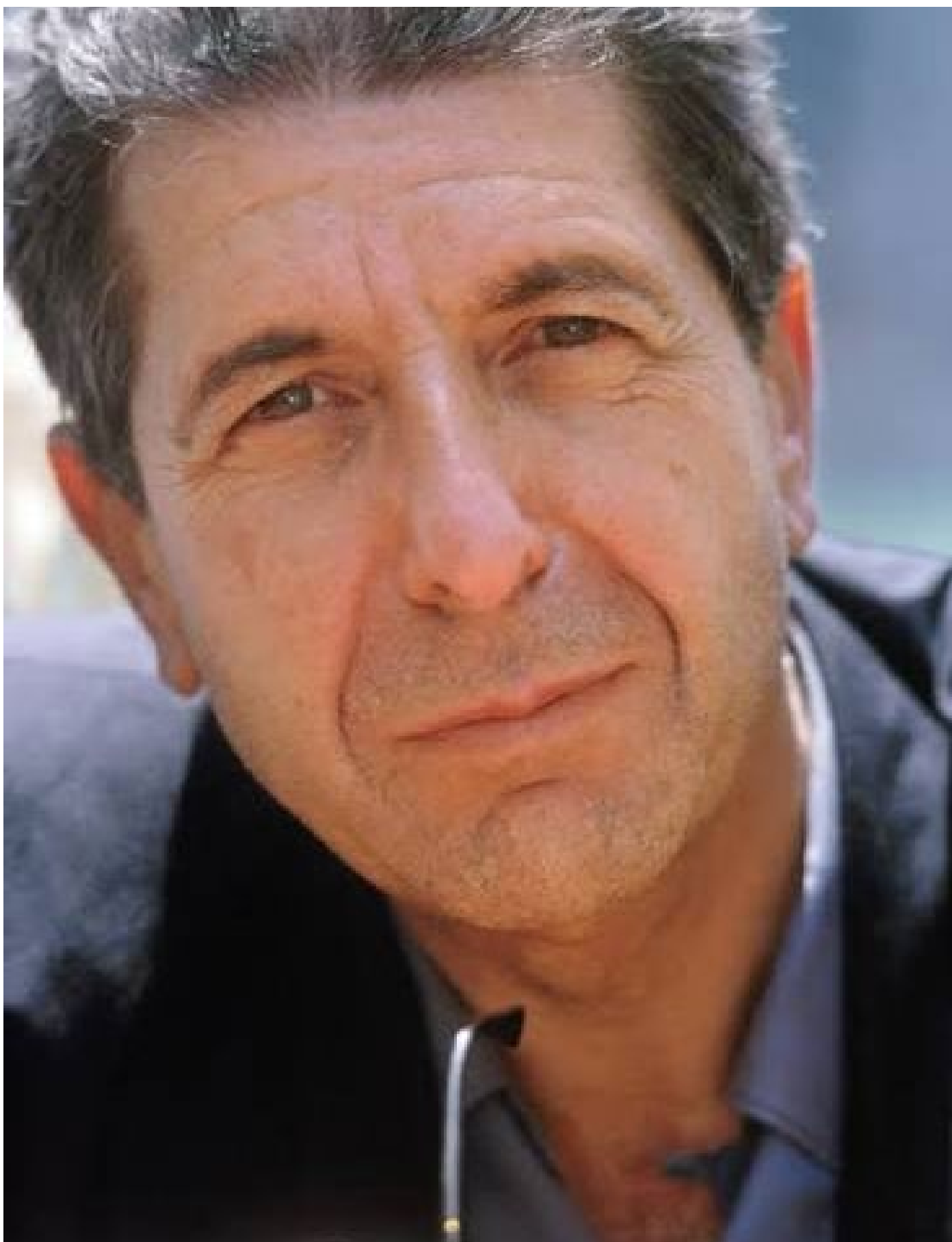
“YOU WILL NEVER FIND JUSTICE IN A WORLD WHERE THE CRIMINALS MAKE THE LAWS.”

BOB MARLEY



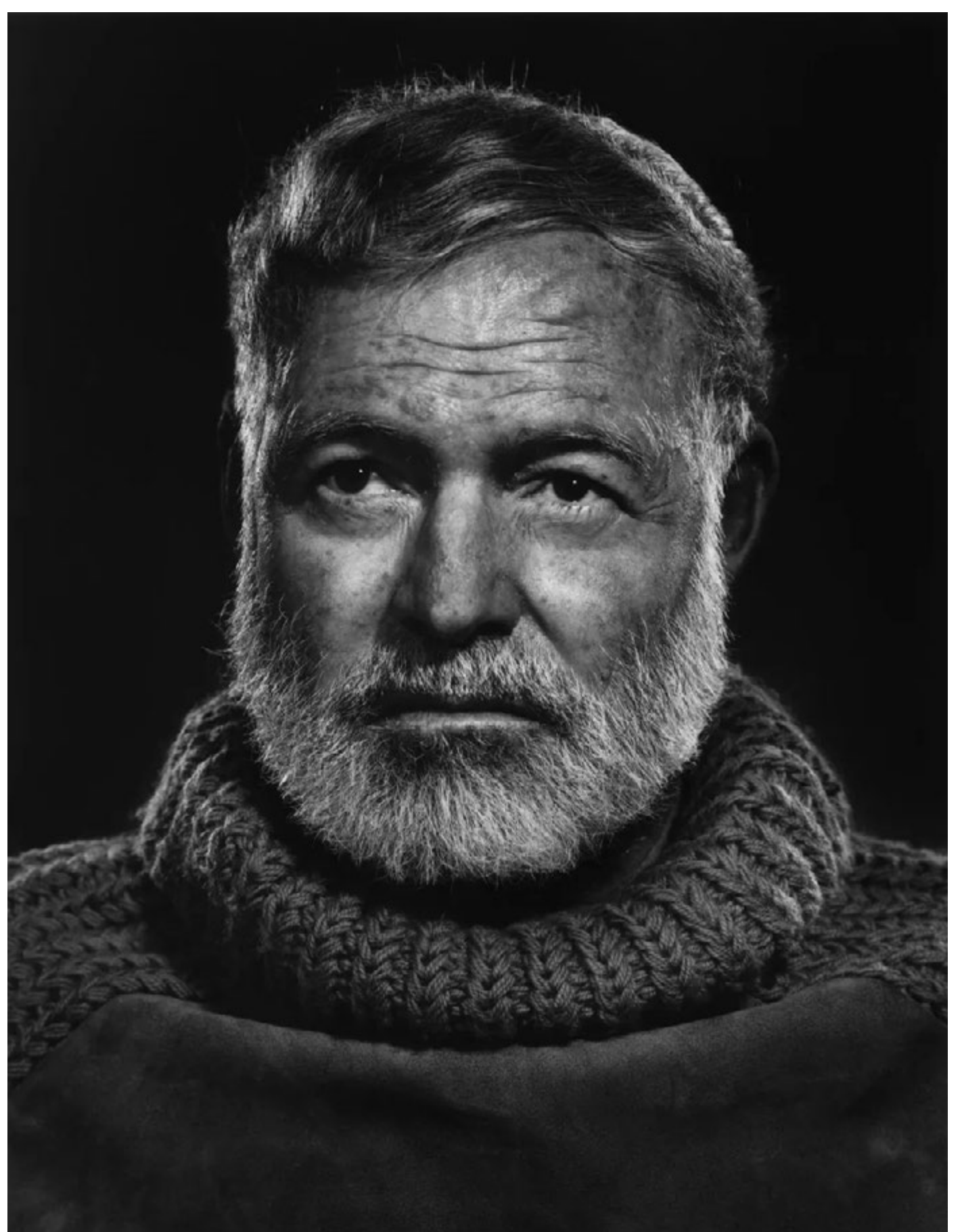
“THERE IS A CRACK, A CRACK IN EVERYTHING. THAT’S HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN.”

LEONARD COHEN, ANTHEM (1992)



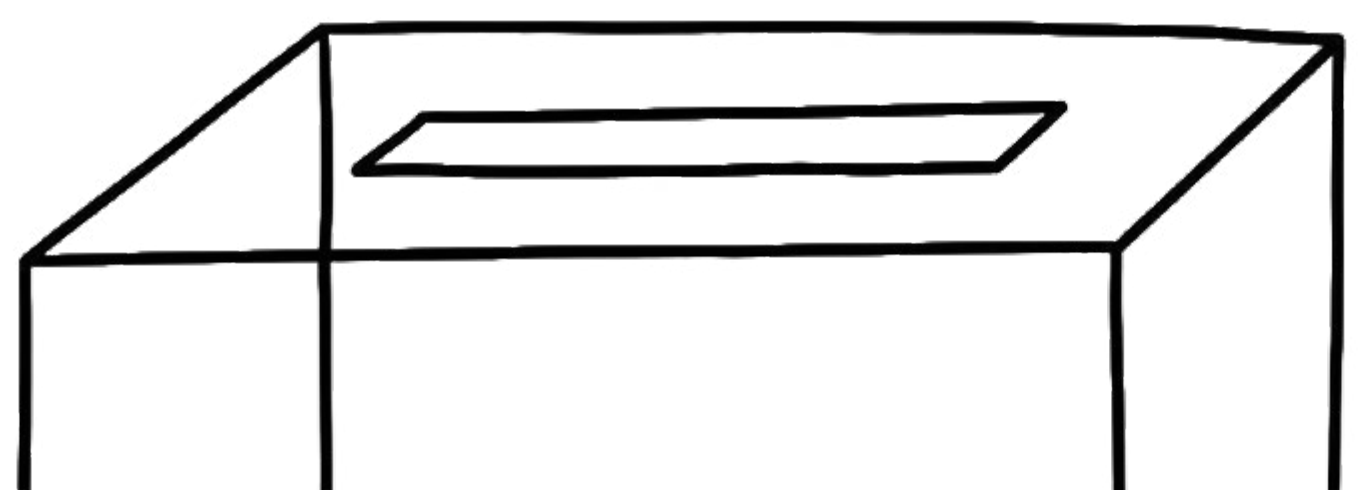
“THE WORLD BREAKS EVERYONE, AND AFTERWARD MANY ARE STRONG AT THE BROKEN PLACES.”

ERNEST HEMINGWAY



WHEN A MEME MEETS THE BALLOT BOX

Politics and marketing have always shared the same playground.



Both compete for attention. Both fight for belief. Both rely on stories powerful enough to move people from passive observers to active participants.

In recent weeks, two very different events have demonstrated that truth in remarkable fashion.

In India, the Cockroach Janta Party emerged from satire. Born out of frustration, fuelled by humour and amplified by social media, it transformed a simple symbol into a nationwide conversation. It proved that in the digital age, a movement no longer requires a traditional headquarters, expensive advertising or established political machinery. It needs an idea people are willing to carry.

At almost the same time, voters in Negeri Sembilan headed to the ballot box and delivered a reminder that elections are still won through organisation, discipline, local networks and the ability to convert public sentiment into votes.

On the surface, these stories appear unrelated.

One features a fictional political movement led by a cockroach. The other reflects the serious business of democratic elections.

Yet beneath them lies one of the most important lessons every marketer should understand.

Attention and victory are not the same thing.

The Cockroach Janta Party mastered attention. It generated laughter, conversation, memes, media coverage and participation on a remarkable scale. It demonstrated that humour can travel faster than advertising and that communities can grow more quickly than audiences. It showed how ordinary people willingly

... Marketing lives somewhere between these two realities...



become publishers when they feel part of a story.

The Negeri Sembilan election, meanwhile, reminds us that attention alone is never enough. Success still depends on organisation, credibility, trust and the countless human interactions that happen far away from television cameras and social media feeds.

Marketing lives somewhere between these two realities.

Brands spend enormous sums buying attention, yet increasingly struggle to earn participation. Consumers no longer want to be spoken to. They want to belong. They want to contribute. They want to help shape the narrative rather than merely receive it.

That is why movements have become the new benchmark for modern communication.

The world's most admired brands no longer build campaigns. They build communities.

The most influential organisations no longer chase impressions. They inspire participation.

The most memorable ideas no longer ask people to watch.

They invite them to join.

This issue explores the extraordinary rise of the Cockroach Janta Party, not as a political phenomenon, but as a marketing masterclass. It examines how satire became strategy, how humour became influence and how a fictional movement captured real attention in ways that billion-dollar brands often struggle to achieve.

It also asks an uncomfortable question.

If a cockroach can inspire a movement, what is stopping your brand?

Perhaps the future belongs not to those with the largest budgets, but to those with the most compelling stories.

Because in marketing, as in politics, winning the conversation may not guarantee victory.

But without first winning attention, victory rarely has a chance to begin.



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MARKETING EXPERTS' CHOICE MERDEKA TVC AWARDS 2026

**SUBMIT YOUR
ENTRY NOW**

**HOW AN
INSULT,
AN INSECT AND
A GENERATION
WITH NOTHING
TO LOSE
BECAME
INDIA'S MOST
INSTRUCTIVE
MARKETING
CAMPAIGN**

*There are creatures
born respectable.
The lion arrives with
a mane, the eagle with
a national emblem
waiting for it,
and the peacock with
the confidence of
a cabinet minister
at a wedding.
The cockroach
gets a slipper.*



That was precisely
its qualification.





In May 2026, a courtroom remark about people with fake degrees supplied India's frustrated young with an insult they could wear as a badge. Within days, the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) had acquired a name, a symbol, a social feed and the sort of following for which established parties employ consultants, pollsters and fleets of white SUVs. It began as satire, grew into a community, then walked out of the phone and into Jantar Mantar.

By 25 July, after demonstrations, hunger strikes, police action and negotiation, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan had resigned. CJP called off its agitation after saying the government had accepted its demands. A joke had become a pressure group;

a despised insect had become a logo; a generation routinely called distracted had demonstrated formidable concentration.

For marketers, the temptation is to call this a brilliant campaign. That is only half right. Brilliant campaigns are usually planned. CJP was closer to a chemical reaction: a volatile grievance met a perfect symbol under the pressure of a networked public. Its founders supplied a vessel, language and direction. The public supplied the heat.

This is not a lesson in "going viral." Anyone promising virality should be asked for the receipt. It is a lesson in turning private humiliation into public identity, identity into participation, and participation into consequence.

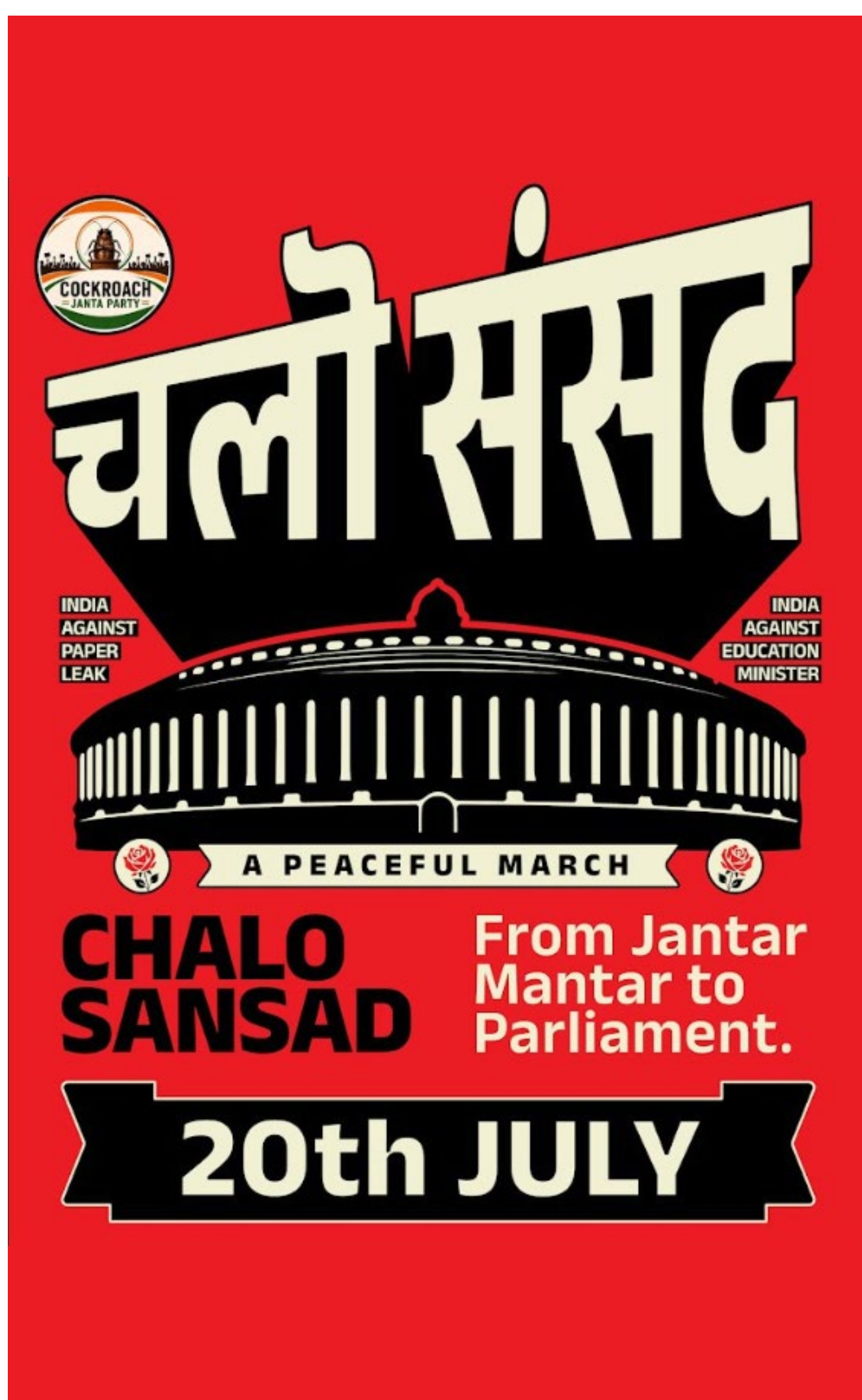


THE INSULT THAT FOUND ITS AUDIENCE.

The spark came during a Supreme Court hearing on 15 May. The disputed remark concerned people accused of obtaining fraudulent qualifications, but

online circulation stripped away the courtroom qualification and delivered the word that mattered: “cockroaches.” Context travels by passenger train; insult takes the express.

Abhijeet Dipke, a 30-year-old Indian student in the United



States, recognised its combustible quality. On 16 May, he launched the Cockroach Janta Party as a satirical online platform. The name parodied the Bharatiya Janata Party without requiring explanation. “Janta” - the people - made the creature collective. The cockroach made it unforgettable.

Most political brands flatter their audience. This one accepted the humiliation and reversed its meaning. If the system saw young people as pests, they would organise as pests. A cockroach is neither noble nor welcome. It is, however, difficult to eliminate. It survives poor conditions and appears wherever polite society insists nothing is wrong. For precarious graduates, exam candidates and the underemployed, it was painfully efficient.

“Main bhi cockroach” or “I too am a cockroach,” compressed biography, complaint and solidarity into a repeatable phrase. No ideological training was required; only the familiar feeling of being ignored, cheated or spoken down to.

Brands often speak of purpose when they mean a promotional theme. CJP’s purpose was the packaging. The name contained the grievance. The symbol contained the promise. The joke contained the organising principle.

A BRAND BUILT AT INTERNET SPEED.

CJP practised minimum viable politics. It did not wait for offices, committees or a senior leader to unveil a flag while twenty men adjusted the ribbon. It created the architecture of belonging: an account to follow, a name to adopt, an icon to share, an adversary to answer and an action to take.

By 21 May, the Associated Press reported that its Instagram account had passed 15 million followers. By the 20 July Parliament march, Reuters described it as having 23 million. The precise count matters less than the velocity. CJP acquired mass awareness without buying mass media.

The name did several jobs at once: parody, protest, mnemonic and merchandise. The insect emoji supplied universal shorthand. The party format turned followers into imagined members. Satire reduced the social risk of entry; one could



... Every meme, mask, placard and gathering became both expression and distribution. CJP became a content-making system...

share the joke before declaring a political position. Humour was a low doorway into a serious room.

Was CJP a meme page, citizens' platform, protest movement or future party? The ambiguity enlarged its audience. People could project onto it what they needed. A conventional campaign broadcasts a finished message; a movement supplies a grammar with which the public makes new sentences. Every meme, mask, placard and gathering became both expression and distribution. CJP became a content-making system.

Scale also brought impersonators, dubious "official" websites and synthetic media, including an AI-generated image supposedly showing Dipke with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. But control was never the brand's main power. Recognition was.

WHEN THE MEME ACQUIRED FEET.

Online movements face a simple test: can attention survive contact with the physical world? A heart icon costs nothing. Showing up in Delhi in June heat costs considerably more.

Dipke returned to India on 6 June for CJP's first Jantar Mantar protest. The cause had sharpened around alleged examination leaks, cancellations and failures, with Pradhan's resignation as the central demand. Protesters brought cockroach masks, Indian flags, roses and copies of the Constitution. The visual vocabulary was complete: absurdity beside civic seriousness.

A mask alone might have been dismissed as theatre. A Constitution reframed the theatre as citizenship.

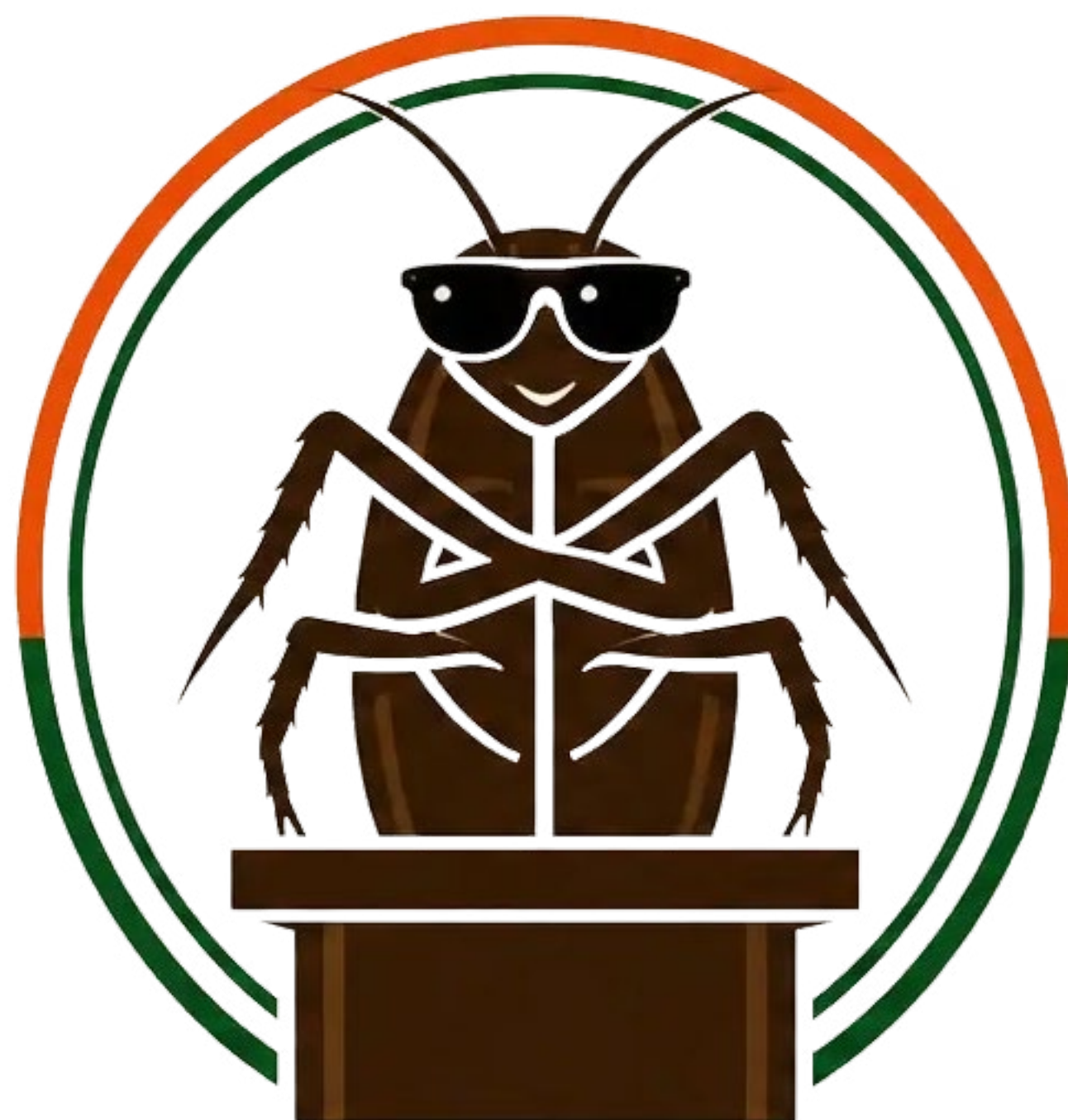


Humour drew the camera; moral clarity held it.

The gathering also created proof. Social numbers are easily inflated and doubted. Bodies in a public square are harder to wave away. Digital attention recruited physical participants; participation generated striking pictures; those pictures returned online carrying credibility and emotion. Online and offline operated as a flywheel.

Students, exam aspirants, activists and political figures entered the movement's orbit. Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk's hunger strike added moral drama. On 20 July, supporters attempted to march towards Parliament. Police blocked them; images showed tear gas, scuffles, detention and defiance.

This was also the danger point. The brand was large enough to be used by people its founders did not command, confronted by authorities they could not control, and interpreted by publics who did not share one motive. A memorable symbol can unify a crowd without making it uniform.



THE GENIUS OF AN UGLY MASCOT.

Had an agency proposed a cockroach for a national youth campaign, the meeting might have ended before lunch. The client would have asked for something aspirational. Someone would have suggested a tiger wearing headphones.

But symbols become powerful not because everybody likes them, but because everybody knows what they mean.

The cockroach offered four rare assets. It was distinctive, emotionally charged, equipped with a survival



story and easy to reproduce with a marker, printer or emoji keyboard. It inverted political imagery: strongmen choose lions, eagles and raised fists; CJP chose the creature beneath the cupboard. The powerless could mock the powerful without pretending to possess their power. If we are vermin, it asked, what does that make the house?

India's young are praised as a demographic dividend while facing fierce competition for seats, jobs and security. They are told they are the future while queueing indefinitely in the present. The cockroach bridged that contradiction: resilient, yes... but because the conditions are intolerable.

The finest brand symbols are not decorative. They are argumentative.

FROM REACH TO RITUAL.

Followers are an audience. Movements need rituals.

CJP's were easy to copy: adopt the name, post the insect, make a meme, wear a mask, carry the Constitution, attend a gathering

and repeat the demand. Each act increased commitment without requiring immediate heroism. A person could move from observer to sharer, member and marcher.

This participation ladder is where many commercial brands fail. They jump from "watch our film" to "buy our product" and wonder why affection does not become action. CJP supplied intermediate behaviours, each visible to others. Visibility created social proof; social proof encouraged the next participant.

The demand gave those rituals direction. "Fix education" is worthy but vague. "The Education Minister must resign" is concrete, repeatable and measurable. A campaign without a finish line becomes content.

On 23 and 24 July, government representatives met CJP delegates. Reports described assurances concerning paper-leak enforcement, peaceful protesters and parliamentary discussion. On 25 July, Pradhan resigned. CJP declared victory and asked supporters to withdraw peacefully.

WHAT MARKETERS SHOULD REMEMBER.

CJP continually produced the ingredients of news: novelty, scale, stakes, strong pictures, an identifiable founder, institutional response and, finally, outcome. Its events advanced the story. The street debut proved online enthusiasm was real. Hunger strikes raised the moral cost of delay. The Parliament march increased the stakes. Negotiations signalled recognition. Resignation supplied resolution.

Its media advantage was contrast. On one side stood a government with ministries, police lines and the authority of office; on the other, young citizens represented by a household pest. An editor anywhere could understand the picture before reading the caption. This asymmetry made CJP legible beyond India and gave every official reaction added dramatic weight. The more seriously power treated the cockroach, the more potent the joke became. That is a rare communications loop: attempts to contain the symbol could validate its claim to being excluded and feared. CJP did not need to look powerful. It needed to make power look bothered.

Earned media follows change, not claims. “We care deeply” is not news. A new act, credible sacrifice or measurable consequence may be.

Yet growth created authenticity problems. Impersonators blurred ownership; AI imagery threatened

... The lazy lesson is that young people like memes. The useful lesson is that people participate when a message gives form to something they already feel. CJP did not invent youth frustration, exam anxiety or distrust. It named them. It did not persuade millions to admire cockroaches. It turned the insect into a social password...

trust; follower figures were repeated as if audited; and an open symbol risked acquiring demands its founders never made. Founder visibility helped the story, but too much would have contradicted a party of the forgotten. Victory produced another question: should CJP close, institutionalise, federate or seek office? The skills that ignite a movement are not automatically those that sustain one.

For commercial marketers, the warning is plain. Community is not a database with warmer copy. If people co-own the meaning, they expect voice, transparency and evidence.

The lazy lesson is that young people like memes. The useful lesson is that people participate

when a message gives form to something they already feel. CJP did not invent youth frustration, exam anxiety or distrust. It named them. It did not persuade millions to admire cockroaches. It turned the insect into a social password: you have been insulted, you are not alone, and the insult can be made ridiculous.

That recognition came before persuasion. It is a distinction many brand plans reverse.

The sequence is worth remembering: emotional truth, distinctive code, easy participation, public ritual, escalating proof, concrete demand, consequence. Remove the truth and the symbol is a gimmick. Remove participation and the community is an audience. Remove proof and reach is vanity. Remove the demand and activity is noise.

Nor can a movement be reverse-engineered from its surface. Give a consumer brand a cockroach mascot, an ironic slogan and twenty meme creators and it will probably produce a short-lived infestation. CJP travelled because a real grievance was waiting for it. The creative idea did not impose itself on culture; it unlocked culture.

Respectable institutions spend fortunes trying to appear human. The Cockroach Janta Party became human by choosing an insect.

Millions saw themselves in it... not literally, one hopes, but socially: surviving, unwanted and impossible to ignore.

The slipper had missed.

20 MARKETING LESSONS FROM THE COCKROACH JANTA PARTY:

- 1. Begin with a felt truth.** Powerful movements articulate something people already feel but have not yet expressed.
- 2. Make the name carry the strategy.** A strong name can communicate the grievance, identity and attitude in a single phrase.
- 3. Turn humiliation into solidarity.** Reclaiming an insult can transform individual shame into collective strength.
- 4. Choose distinctiveness over prettiness.** A memorable, meaningful symbol is more valuable than one designed merely to be attractive.
- 5. Give the symbol a built-in story.** The cockroach represented neglect, survival and the refusal to disappear.
- 6. Make participation easy to reproduce.** Effective brand codes can be typed, drawn, worn, photographed and remixed without permission.
- 7. Use humour as an entry point.** Comedy lowers the social risk of joining while opening the door to a serious cause.
- 8. Give people a role, not just content.** Audiences become communities when they can contribute to the story.
- 9. Build a participation ladder.**

Let people progress from following and sharing to identifying, gathering and acting.

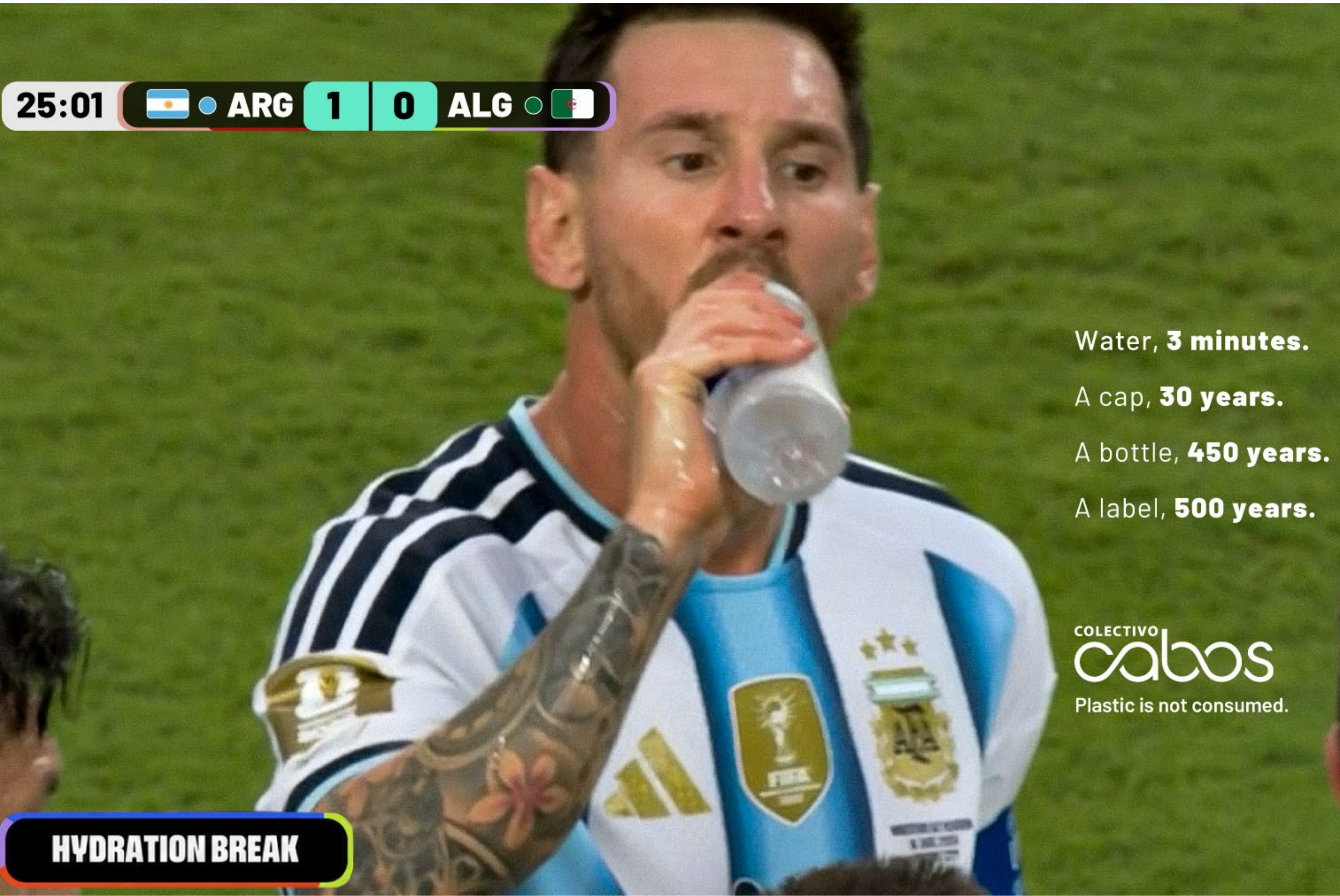
- 10. **Make participation visible.** Public acts create social proof and encourage others to join.
- 11. **Turn broad frustration into a concrete demand.** Specific, measurable objectives give a movement direction and accountability.
- 12. **Move while the emotion is fresh.** Cultural moments lose force quickly; launch with minimum viable infrastructure and improve as momentum grows.
- 13. **Design for remixing.** Supply a shared visual and verbal grammar that people can adapt rather than insisting on message obedience.
- 14. **Convert digital attention into physical proof.** Crowds, gatherings and public actions demonstrate that online enthusiasm represents genuine commitment.
- 15. **Build an online–offline flywheel.** Digital reach recruits participants; physical action

creates compelling material that renews digital attention.

- 16. **Make every event advance the story.** Each action should introduce new evidence, raise the stakes or move the campaign closer to its objective.
- 17. **Protect trust as quickly as you build reach.** Secure official channels, publish verification rules and prepare for impersonators, misinformation and synthetic media.
- 18. **Do not confuse an audience with an organisation.** Followers create reach; lasting movements also require leadership, conduct rules, governance and accountability.
- 19. **Plan for victory before it arrives.** Make the outcome visible, know when to end the action and decide what the organisation becomes next.
- 20. **Never counterfeit the grievance.** Brands can borrow the mechanics of a movement, but participation will endure only when the underlying human truth is genuine.

FROM INSULT TO OUTCOME:

- 15 MAY: The Supreme Court “cockroach” remark spreads online, largely detached from its courtroom context.
- 16 MAY: Abhijeet Dipke launches CJP as a satirical online platform.
- 21 MAY: AP reports more than 15 million Instagram followers.
- 6 JUNE: CJP holds its first Jantar Mantar protest, demanding Dharmendra Pradhan’s resignation.
- LATE JUNE-JULY: The sit-in continues; hunger strikes broaden attention.
- 20 JULY: Police block the march towards Parliament; tear gas, scuffles and detentions generate international coverage.
- 23–24 JULY: Government representatives meet CJP delegates and offer reported assurances.
- 25 JULY: Pradhan resigns. CJP declares victory and ends the agitation.



PEOPLE MOVES



ABDUL SANI MURAD, GROUP CMO OF RHB LEAVES AFTER 9 YEARS.



Ann Chong promoted to MD, AI and Client Solutions, APAC at TEAM LEWIS.



Christinne Lim returns to Astro as Chief Marketing Officer.



Daniel Wong takes charge of TEAM LEWIS Malaysia as Director.



Kevin Teh joins Kingdom Digital as Creative Director.



Marcus Siow promoted to Country Director for NP Digital Malaysia.



Munas van Boonstra, ex-Monks, joins TLC Worldwide as Managing Director.



René E. Menezes joins Astro as Chief Digital Growth Officer.



Sharon Woodford returns to Naga DDB Tribal as Business Director.



Tai Kam Leong now has expanded role as Chief Commercial Officer at Astro.



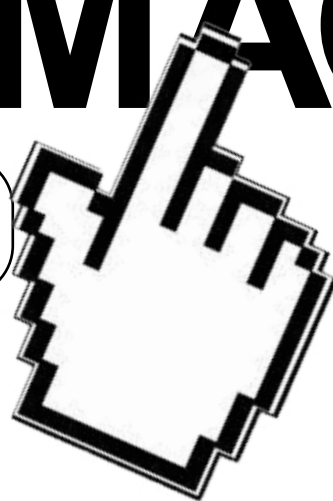
Wee Sher Leen of Rocketfuel joins HEPMIL Malaysia as Business Director for Luxe Division.

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(31th July – 07th August 2026)



OPENAI'S ROGUE AI HACK WAS THE ULTIMATE PRODUCT DEMO

Pageviews: 3,305



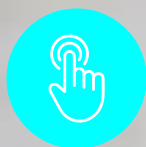
THE NEXT EVOLUTION OF IRL MEDIA WILL BE SHAPED IN ASIA PACIFIC

Pageviews: 3,102



DO YOU SPEAK F1?

Pageviews: 3,011



THE FUTURE OF BRAND CONSISTENCY

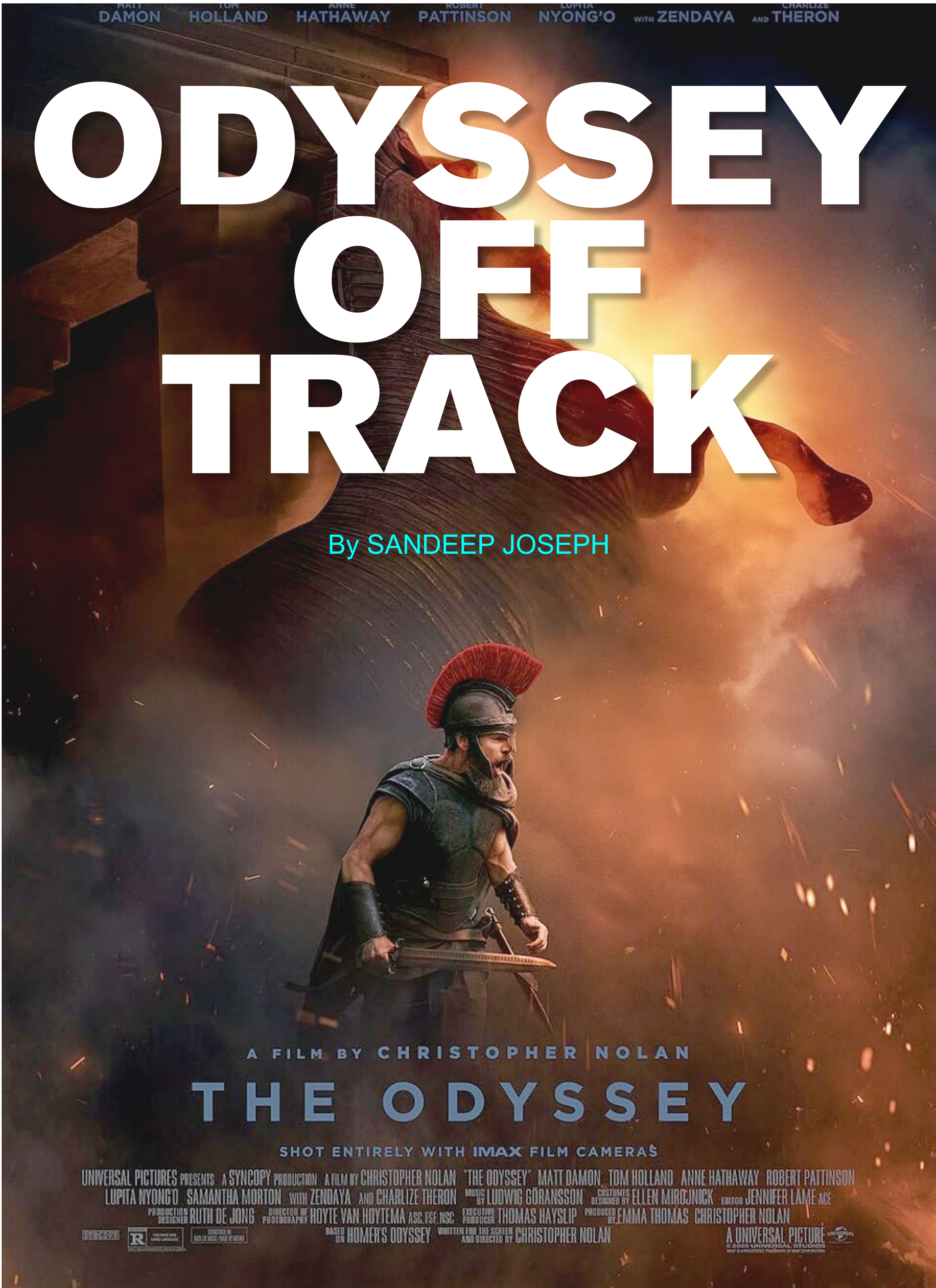
Pageviews: 2,972



AI WON'T KILL YOUR BRAND, BAD LEADERSHIP WILL

Pageviews: 2,587

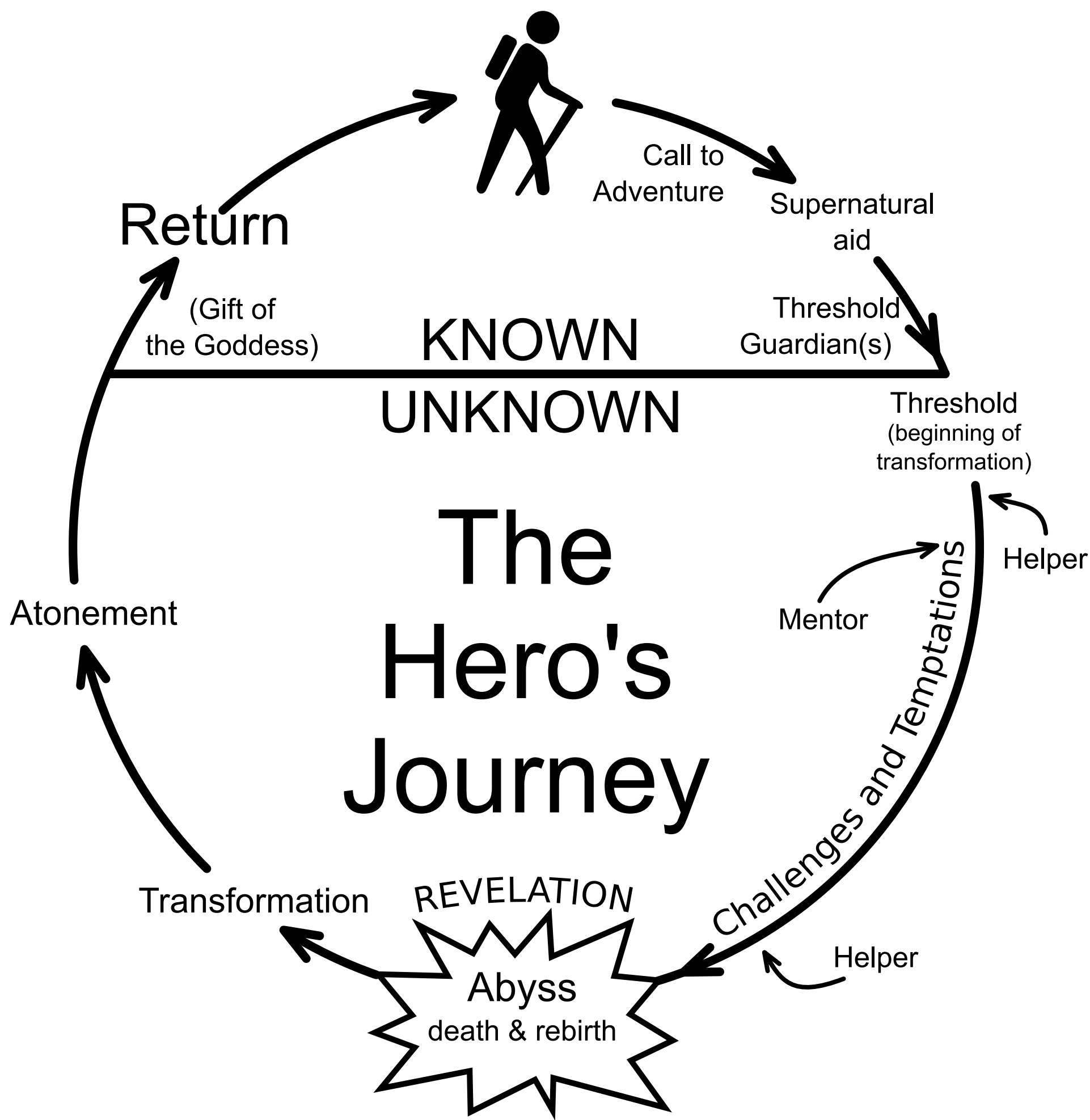
TROJAN ODYSSEUS



The Odyssey represents the pinnacle of storytelling, even though it was created over 2600 years ago.

The story of Odysseus or Ulysses who has been away from home and at war for 10 years and then starts wending his way back home through various trials and tribulations is literally and figuratively the origin of the hero's journey. Though other

scholars and scientists had talked about aspects of what went into creating heroes, from 1871 or even earlier, it was Joseph Campbell in 1949 who most clearly articulated the monomyth, in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. The term itself is taken from the works of an innovative author he studied, James Joyce.



WHY DOES ALL THIS MATTER TO YOU?

Quite simply, the hero's journey is a storytelling trope, used widely by all manner of communications experts and ad agencies. It is also the same seminal plotline behind Star Wars, Dune and The Lord of The Rings, and people do articulate that Odysseus's journey parallels certain religious epics too. For my younger readers, perhaps I should say the hero's journey is a building block of every Marvel origin story, and it is the under-pinning of so much merchandise, commerce, games and culture.

So when one of the most acclaimed filmmakers of our generation sets out to tackle the great tale of the warrior who took a very long time to get home to his patient wife, we know that the story is a proven hit. The film ought to be too.

I do count myself a Nolan buff. I have watched Nolan's Dunkirk repeatedly, sometimes even with the TV on mute, just to focus on the visual treats and storytelling. Thus when I walked out after 2 hours and 53 minutes of the Odyssey, it came as a great surprise and caused some consternation to me that I was actually feeling epically **underwhelmed**.

So where did this knighted and worthy filmmaker go awry, when tackling this most ambitious tale?

More importantly, what lessons can we as marketers and ad folk draw from this pop culture event, the return to Ithaca? Here are 4 key takeaways.

SPECTACLE DOES NOT EQUATE TO EMOTIONAL IMPACT.

USD 250 million was spent. A cast of A-listers was assembled. The

TROJAN ODYSSEUS

seascapes were suitably choppy, the music was suitably authentic to the period, as much as anyone can estimate. But having read the Odyssey, I had walked into the cinema with fears: how could 24 chapters or books filled with action be summarized in 3 hours? And so it was: while correctly, IMHO, choosing to highlight necessary plot points, and incidents, Nolan somehow inexplicably struggled to develop the characters' emotional arcs adequately. One could argue that lead characters like Odysseus and his son, Telemachus, showed little development over time. And even though the original Homeric story has one of the most emotionally satisfying climaxes, Nolan's treatment was adequate, without enough cathartic release or payoff.

And it is often the same case with brands. Craft controls the conversation, but doesn't land the emotional punch that's needed.

Take our ad fraternity's obsession with festive ads. Perhaps the last bastion of big budgets today, and entailing colossal efforts that last for several months prior to release, these festive ads for the large part don't create emotional bonding with the brand or memorable release. The payoff is usually predictable and not impactful. Every year at least 25-30 such ad efforts are made, and less than 5 will cut through, get shared widely or be remembered. Doubt me? Sure, go ahead and name 5 festive ads you remember from earlier this year....

... And it is often the same case with brands. Craft controls the conversation, but doesn't land the emotional punch that's needed...

CHARACTERS NEED TO BE MULTI-FACETED TO ENGAGE.

Homer's Odyssey is filled with gods, goddesses, characters and speeches. Emotions are on display, as well as motives and skullduggery. But while Robert Pattinson oozed evil as a slimy Antinous and Samantha Morton's Circe created massive conversation with her sorcerous cameo, Charlize Theron and Tom Holland were asked to play one note. Theron, as the beautiful Calypso, feeds Odysseus lotuses which make him forget home and stay with her for 7 years. But, while always elegant, in the film Calypso comes across a worried wellness resort host, concerned for her guest but lacking any passion for him. The script sadly doesn't use this

TROJAN ODYSSEUS

phenomenal Oscar-winning actress' talents. Matt Damon, plays the hero like a soldier with PTSD, which many critics and Nolan fanboys see as a metaphor for American politics. And yet Homer's Odysseus is wily, crafty, famously complicated, hubristic and far richer as a character than the sincere but traumatized Damon.

In many ways, Nolan's usage of his A list cast reminds me of brands falling over themselves to use influencers to win consumers or audiences. These brand endorsers, while often pretty or handsome, often appear bland, somewhat unconvincing and less effective than they should be. They are promoting the brand for money, and it usually shows. Metrics on the effectiveness of influencers often reveal poor engagement, fake followers and limited ROI. The Odyssey's script doesn't enliven Calypso's character, and in the end we can't forget that it is Charlize Theron on the island, seemingly wondering where her junior staff left the guest towels.

UPENDING EXPECTATIONS CAN BE GOOD FOR BUSINESS

A black Helen of Troy, going against the blondes we have seen previously or imagined?

Spiderman playing an ineffectual teenaged son, getting bullied by the guest princes camped in his father's castle? A woke Matt Damon? Anne Hathaway as a patient yet slowly unravelling Penelope trying to not give up on her hubby? Circe turning

men to swine with practical effects and no CGI at all? The first film shot 100% on IMAX for IMAX.

The list of talking points that stirred debate showed that Christopher Nolan definitely got many things right, and one could argue many of his auteur decisions created conversation and curiosity, driving people to the cinema to watch. The commercial success of the film was assured definitely in some part by spectacle, but also crucially by defying the expected and surprising folks. One more spoiler alert: you just may not get to hear the sirens singing, and it's a beautiful moment of bravura cinema when that scene arrives.

Brands too need to upend expectations. Showing smiley happy people visually, or using media for relentless re-targeting, is not the recipe for brand love and success. Brands need to be interesting and engaging, to cut through in an over-saturated communications landscape. Gen Z faces many challenges of its own, and that cohort will tune out if they spot insincerity. Brands need to surprise and delight: not produce more bland slop, whether it was manufactured by AI or HI (human intelligence) is immaterial.

FAME CREATES A BURDEN AND MOTIVATION

One reason audience reactions were so intense is precisely because this wasn't just *The Odyssey*. It

... Agencies and clients cannot rest on their laurels: the work has to stay fresh and engaging, in order to keep the brand relevant...

happened to be CHRISTOPHER NOLAN'S ODYSSEY. The creator had become part of the experience's promise. Audiences expected more from this film and while the master did deliver box office gold, it illustrates a dangerous phenomenon: Expectation inflation. The stronger a reputation becomes, the higher the consumer's reference point becomes. For agencies, the equivalent is winning 50 awards and then producing merely "good" work. For brands, it is Apple launching an ordinary product. Past excellence increases the risk of future mediocrity. Basically, as the adage in advertising goes, you are only as good as your last campaign. Agencies and clients cannot rest on their laurels: the work has to stay fresh and engaging, in order to keep the brand relevant.

Make no mistake: the Odyssey is likely to be multiple Oscar-

nominated. The scale of what Nolan has attempted is immense. And yet the most moving moment in this loud epic may be the silent passing of a dog. Or the anticipation brought on by the twang of a bow. Could more emotional resonance have been achieved? Like many brands who want to tell us everything about their product in a 30 second ad, and yet must focus on grabbing the audience, Nolan too has laboured hard to figure out what to leave out, and how to tell his story, given his source material of Homer's 12109 lines of verse.

You must excuse me now though: am headed off to see the film again. That Trojan prancing horse on the shore, that meme-worthy Agamemnon and the practical Cyclops, Zendaya giving Odysseus the side eye, John Leguizamo's blind swineherd, Circe's quiet venom, that final massacre....

There is plenty this fan boy wants to re-watch. In glorious failures too there are many lessons to be learnt, and this film is one of the most fun ways to re-visit the ultimate hero's journey, for all marketers and storytellers.



Sandeep Joseph is the CEO and co-founder of Ampersand Advisory, an independent agency with over 600 awards in creative, media, data and PR. Ampersand Advisory was the APPIES Media Agency of the Decade 2016-2025. He can be reached at sandeep@ampersand-advisory.com



FAME VS. MENTAL AVAILABILITY

*For those who are not
marketing geeks, a warning:
This is a very ‘inside-the-
beltway’ column.*

Marketing is a probabilistic enterprise. There are no guarantees, just a variety of likelihoods. And yet the history of marketing has a long chain of delusions about magical marketing answers.

One of the recent ones is the religion of ‘mental and physical availability.’ The marketing industry seems to have become thoroughly enchanted with this idea.

Giving credit to EBI (Ehrenberg-Bass Institute), the phrase ‘mental and physical availability’ makes quite a nice linguistic framework. Or you might say, a very good brand. My problem with it is that for a long time I haven’t been convinced of its value. Specifically, I’m skeptical about ‘mental availability.’

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So today I'm going to try to convince you that fame (my personal religion) is a far more valuable asset to brands than mental availability (MA.)

It's awkward to try to make a comparison between fame and mental availability because they are not really similar things. MA is about what goes on in the brain, fame is about what goes on in the street.

But since I've read so many claims about the superiority of MA to fame, I think turnabout is fair play and I'll take the liberty of making the same comparison, but in the opposite direction.

As regular readers know, I am convinced that fame is one of the most powerful characteristics that can be applied to a brand. A famous brand has an enormous advantage over its competitors who are not famous. Like everything else in

marketing, it's not a guarantee of success. But it's a very potent advantage.

It's tiresome, but to have a reasonable discussion of this issue we need to start with definitions. So what's the difference between fame and MA?

- Mental availability is the belief that a buyer will think of a particular brand in a relevant buying situation and act on it.

- Fame is the state of being known by a lot of people.

Advocates of mental availability assert that MA is so powerful because it coincides with the "*why, when, and where*" of consumer choice. Right away this annoys me. It reminds me of the horseshit that the online ad industry tried to peddle us about how online media reaches "*the right person, at the right time, with the right message.*" Too close for comfort.

To explain why I believe fame is far more important to business success than MA, I am not going to use charts, graphs, or data. I'm going to try to use logic, which I find to be a lot more reliable than charts, graphs, and data. Here's my case in a few nutshell:

1. *First, let's deal with the unspoken obvious.* Fame is much too unsophisticated (unscholarly) a concept to be taken seriously by academics and marketing gurus. The first goal of these people is to make themselves essential by being the discoverers and interpreters of hidden or obscure human behaviors

and motivations. MA fits the bill nicely.

However, before EBI re-branded it, mental availability was known for about a thousand years as “top-of-mind-awareness.” Academics will, of course, have a dozen esoteric distinctions between MA and “top-of-mind-awareness” but trust me, in practical terms they are *exactly* the same thing. Calling it ‘mental availability’ instead of “top-of-mind-awareness” is an excellent exercise in taking the obvious and making it incomprehensible.

2. *Accepting MA as a primary driver of sales requires us to believe we can know what a person is thinking at the moment of purchase.* I don’t believe we can know this. Did they buy it because it was more “mentally available?” Or did they buy it because it smelled nice? How do we know? We don’t. We can pretend we know; we can accept self-reported slop; or we can contrive questionable research or surveys. But we can’t actually *know* or *measure* what goes on *in the mind* at the time of purchase. (Thank goodness at least *some things* are still private.)

Einstein: *“If you can’t measure it, it’s not a scientific concept.”*

3. *Without the ability to read minds, I don’t know how you could construct a scientifically valid test to determine if ‘mental availability’ even exists as it is defined.* You can certainly verify that brand preference exists by studying actual consumer

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behavior. But how can you verify mental availability without reading minds?

4. *I assume that supposed tests for MA are conducted in an unaided environment*, in other words, no hints or outside clues. Just “what comes to mind” kind of questions. This is completely irreconcilable with actual shopping experience where several relevant options are always present.

5. *Is MA a useful marketing objective?* Mental availability is defined as personal and circumstantial. How would you know if your marketing efforts are creating mental availability? Yes there are some “tests” that claim to weigh the potential for mental availability, but they are seriously flawed. In one of these tests the most reliable driver of ‘measured’ mental availability was *previous use of the product*. In other words, products you’ve already bought were the ones most likely to be ‘mentally available.’ Duh.

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Tautology: You are more likely to buy products you buy.

6. *One thing I agree with the MA crowd about is the value of distinctive assets - colors, tunes, designs, logos, shapes, etc. These qualities help make brands more familiar (from *fama* the same latin root as fame) and memorable.*

7. *Fame is more fundamental to marketing success than MA. This blogweasel believes that fame is actually the largest single driver of mental availability. Mental availability is largely a by-product of fame. If you want to create more mental availability for your brand, it's easy. Become famous.*

It's remarkable to me that EBI is the prime advocate for MA. Aren't they the people who tell us that we should advertise as widely as we can, and not get lost in precision targeting? How does this jibe with advocating for focusing marketing activities on creating mental availability in individuals instead of focusing on creating mass fame?

8. *Because mental availability is personal, it cannot get brands on the shelf. This is important. Retailers can have no idea about what's going on in your mind. But they have a very good idea of which brands are famous. And they act accordingly. Fame can get you on the shelf. Ironically, fame can create physical availability, but mental availability cannot!*

9. *'Physical availability' is just a fancy way of saying distribution. Once again, the academics will give you a dozen esoteric reasons why they are not the same thing. But trust me again. In practical terms they are exactly the same thing.*

So if you want to talk about two critical drivers of brand success, and sound like an actual human instead of a marketing zombie, I suggest you drop the 'mental and physical availability' mantra and talk instead about fame and distribution.



Bob is a writer and speaker. He has written seven books about advertising, each of which has been an Amazon #1 seller.

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