



THE Force

by Suzy Bashford

WHETHER POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE, ANGER IS A NATURAL EMOTION. ISN'T IT TIME MARKETERS GOT OVER THEIR FEAR AND STARTED TO HARNESS ITS POWER?

People are scared of anger. Its rawness. Its primal nature. Its uncontrollability. Its explosive contagion.

This fear extends to brands, too. While they increasingly recognize the value of tapping into emotions in their narratives, anger is (mostly) notably absent from their advertising stories.

Yet anger is a hugely powerful tool that can elicit immediate, passionate and loyal responses. The most powerful man in the world got his job on the back of an anger-fueled presidential marketing campaign, after all.

So what can brands learn from Trump about using anger to get results?

Firstly, anger is a normal human emotion and, while often scared of it, people want and need to express it. However, it is frequently repressed. Like him or not, Trump gave many voters a vent and made it OK to feel angry, rather than it be an emotion to be kept in the closet and ashamed of.

As the world watches him unleash his wrath on every media channel from TV to Twitter, many are shocked, but at the same time his toddler-like tantrums have awakened a flicker of recognition within many. If pushed, you could almost say there was a certain authenticity in his infantile rage.

As Geoff Copps, head of research at IPG Mediabrands UK, says: "One valuable property of anger is that it is deeply felt. In a world in which trust is at a premium, anger can act as a signifier of authenticity. If the past 12 months have taught us anything, it's that positioning oneself as an outsider brand filled with righteous indignation (and promising to 'drain the swamp') can get you elected to the highest office."

By being angry himself, and acknowledging the electorate's anger, Trump made particular segments of American society feel heard. This was hugely connecting and motivated people who appreciated this validation of their anger to turn up at the polls and vote for him.

Neuroscience backs this theory. Heather Andrew, the UK chief executive of Neuro-Insight, explains that anger is an "approach emotion" that makes people "step forward and engage in some way," unlike "withdraw

emotions such as disgust, indifference, dislike, jealousy and resentment, which generally cause people to step back".

What Trump's campaign also teaches us is how the internet has changed the way anger filters through our society as a mobilizing force. It's now easier than ever to find your tribe online, who share your views even if they are very extreme. When you find them, anger carries and coheres groups to action.

Trump shows us, too, how anger can be used as the fuel to divide people in order to make your following/niche more loyal and vocal ambassadors. Anger played this same potent part in Britain's Brexit campaign, leading to its success.

As Lore Oxford, behavioral analyst at Canvas8, explains: "By positioning one body of people against another with lines like 'Breaking Point: the EU has failed us all' and 'We send the EU £350m a week, let's fund our NHS instead', the campaign provoked enough rage to impact the British public's decision-making."

This is something that supplement brand Protein World has also done, with impressive commercial results. When angry consumers took to Twitter to air their concerns about the 'Are you beach body ready?' posters negatively affecting female self-esteem, the company replied: "Why make your insecurities our problem?"

"This was followed by a passive-aggressive winking emoji," says Oxford. "And, while it may have seemed like the brand broke every rule in the social media playbook, it gained 5,000 new customers. Pissing people off in one group can align you with another."

This strategy of focusing on your niche and putting two fingers up to those who aren't in it is not new. Marmite did it successfully for years with its 'Love it or hate it' campaign. Comedian Stewart Lee, too, actually slaps scathing Daily Mail reviews of his shows across his flyers as a badge of honor, knowing these will make his niche want to come all the more.

This paradox explains why, often, sales of a brand go up during and after a scandal: Ivanka Trump's fashion brand experienced a 346% sales spike after an online boycott following the election of her father, and, despite the furor

around the Kendall Jenner-as-Pepsi-peacekeeper ad, 44% of Americans had a more favorable view of Pepsi afterwards according to research.

Clearly, anger can be a positive commercial force. But the key questions marketers need to ask themselves here are not commercial, they are moral. Does profiting in this way from anger sit comfortably with your brand purpose and what you want to stand for? In a case like Protein World, are you okay with the potential damage to young girls' self-esteem (in particular) that your marketing could cause? With so much talk of purpose beyond profit being fundamental to success today, causing this kind of negative effect - albeit outside your niche - still seems like a risky strategy for many brands.

So is there a better, more positive way to use anger for commercial ends?

Yes. Both Always's 'Like A Girl' and Sport England's 'This Girl Can' are good examples of how brands have successfully leveraged anger around gender inequality, helping people acknowledge it and manage it constructively by facilitating positive action. Even the punchy straplines help girls/women find the confidence and the words to fight discrimination, while

acknowledging a person's anger and acting on it can have a powerful effect," says Will Hanmer Lloyd, behavioral planning director at Total Media. "They feel recognized and valued."

What Hanmer seems to be hinting at here is more of a therapeutic relationship between a brand and its consumer - one where the former serves to soothe and create a 'safe space' for the latter so they can feel better and move on. Indeed, marketers could well look to psychotherapists like Hilda Burke (@HBtherapist) for inspiration when dealing with anger and how to work through it in a healthy way, so positive action can be taken. At the moment, however, brands are missing this trick.

As Burke says, when anger is portrayed in ads it can often be "presented as something negative and in rather an extreme way - something to be assuaged with the right product or service".

"In that sense, advertising mirrors how anger is perceived by our society more generally - something to be avoided at all costs. But anger, properly expressed, can be a very healthy and therapeutic emotion".

No matter, there are plenty of opportunities on the horizon for brands to help us confront

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feeling safely part of a larger group.

Researching the 'Like A Girl' ad, Jane Bloomfield, head of marketing at Kantar Millward Brown UK, found that the "tone of anger in the young girls' voices as they share their personal stories about the discrimination they've experienced when playing sports" made the ad extremely engaging: it scored in the top third for 'active involvement', with 28m views on YouTube, and was the seventh-most-watched ad on the platform - second among women.

"It's a prime example of how advertising can contribute to a brand's emotional meaning and difference for the long-term," says Bloomfield. "Though this ad is built on anger, resentment and discrimination, Always has built a new and more meaningful understanding of confidence that resonates with the next generation of female consumers."

This courageous approach is only going to become more relevant in our increasingly busy, hyper-connected, stressful lives (all factors that have been linked to anger), especially when you throw political and economic uncertainty into the mix.

"In a world where people can feel increasingly powerless in the face of globalization, large multinational corporations and removed political decision-making, a brand

our anger says Tony Davidson, executive creative director at Wieden + Kennedy (he was thinking about confronting anger in ads back in 2004 when he created the Honda 'Hate Something, Change Something' ad): "Politics and banking need reinventing. Someone is going to have to get angry enough about that. And normally when the class divide gets as big as it is now, people get angry. We're already seeing a surge in anger, exemplified in things like racial attacks."

He argues that anger should be used sparingly: "If you are a brand, you want to be light. Angry people are often not light. And anger irritates. That's why comedy is one way it works, using characters like Harry Enfield's Angry Frank. That said, the best brands get angry about something. And some brands are so vanilla that being angry once in a while wouldn't be a bad thing."

But there's no getting away from it, tapping into anger takes balls. It's not for the faint-hearted. For many marketers it will simply be too hot to handle. For others, it will set their brands meaningfully apart.



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