

POSITIONING

# Hope is Very Much a Strategy



**M Muneer**

Abraham Lincoln must be turning in his grave for not taking into consideration us Indians when he delivered those famous lines, “You can fool all the people some of the time and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.” For, what has the political class been doing to us since Independence?

Hope. It is a powerful emotion that can dramatically influence human behaviour. It is almost like faith, a confident trust in someone or something. It makes us aspire for more — like in Bollywood movies — for a better (even if implausible) future and drives us to dream and act.

Hope is a fabulous marketable commodity. It’s not a buzzword. It’s a real feeling of possibilities. People look towards politicians for hope, as well as to countries, social groups, families and religion.

Hope is not strategy is what experts say. But hope as a positioning strategy works eternally and is a trillion-dollar industry. Take the key positioning of most products and services. Soaps, shampoos, cosmetics, B-schools, lifestyle products, politicians. Remember the promises of roti, kapda aur makaan? Or the recent bijli-paani?

Most leaders, once elected, simply forget about fulfilling that hope. Pri-

me Minister Narendra Modi hasn’t. He launched the demonetisation drive for a seemingly impossible mission, with less-than-optimal execution: to rid the country of black money. Modi found a connection with the masses, for whom the idea of the rich suffering was hitched to a brand new hope. And the reports of CEOs attributing poor results to demonetisation actually helped reinforce that hope.

That the Opposition failed to bust the myth of the ‘rich are miserable’ aggravated their failure in UP. Modi went further to achieve another impossibility: the abolition of beacons on official cars, the symbolism of VIP-ness. The strategic framework for managing hope has delivered results. Show the overall possibilities first. Follow them with the possibilities in the individual, and finally those in the process.

Then comes the second track: of aggrandising this craving, amplifying

hope. This can be more tricky. What this involves is increasing the perceived importance of the outcome, and increasing the degree of its association with an acclamatory goal. It is worth looking at cow vigilantism or the triple talaq controversy through this lens. It may be to divert attention from the core issues — growing unemployment, deteriorating security, escalating cost of living, troubling non-performing assets, and poor execution of many flagship projects — so that the ‘craving’ gets boosted.

Going by the strategic framework, Modi is likely to announce new schemes and mechanisms to reverse the effects. He will even deliver some promises to keep the hopes alive for the rest of his term as prime minister.

By following the two tracks, Modi will continue to retain the loyalty created via hope. Because of this, many will forgive below-expected performance. People will ignore, or rati-

onalise, average-to-poor performance when hopes are high in a brand, person or outcome. More importantly, they need less persuasion than to be convinced further.

Herein lies the Catch-22 for the Opposition: damned if they oppose, damned if they don’t. The Opposition needs a better strategy than to steal the hope platform. Secular? Nah. Anti-Modi rhetoric? Nope. Demolishing the claims of the growth agenda? Maybe for diluting the hope platform, but not to bring in new hopes.

Instead of applying Newton’s third law to every NDA action, they should focus on the core ones driving optimism and try and demolish them. Without bringing disdain, they will not be able to build new hopes. Figure-fudging issues is something that will find currency with the business community. A grand alliance is also unlikely to bring any new hope, as it is just a coalition of the same perceived corrupt and feudal set.

Does the Opposition have a clear vision that enhances hope? None was visible in the silence on cow vigilantism, anti-Muslim or Dalit outbreaks, triple talaq and so on. Instead, it could embrace a disruptive strategy that will damage the NDA’s hope strategy.

There are three key traits that are the hallmarks of people who can instil hope in others: one, caring deeply about, and working for, people; two, having the focus on what is possible and matters most to people; three, speaking from the heart, a.k.a. ‘mann ki baat’. Modi ticks all these boxes.



Much more than just hot air

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The writer is chief evangelist, Medici Institute