

All publicity is good publicity for Malema

The old adage about "all publicity being good publicity" is proving itself to be chillingly true as far as [Julius Malema](#) is concerned. Whether he realises it or not, if one looks at what is happening right now from a dispassionate, objective, marketing point of view, he is succeeding quite spectacularly with each and every one of his objectives.

 By [Chris Mberdyk: @chrismoerdyk](#) 28 Jul 2011

And even in the unlikely event that he could end up in jail or guilty of fraud or corruption, he will come out of all that smelling of roses because in the eyes of his followers he will be seen to be a martyr.

Malema is the man to many

In assessing the Malema brand, one has to start with his primary objective. And that is to ensure that the ANC stays in power. His role is crucial because 60% of the voting public of this country is under the age of 30. On top of that, roughly 20% of the entire voting public consists of unemployed, largely uneducated young black people with no hope in sight.

It is a safe assumption that, with this constituency following Malema during the last local government elections, he single-handedly brought in more votes for the ANC than probably the entire cabinet put together. And on his own he garnered as many votes as the DA.

Reputation management

The next question that is being asked right now is how all the anti-Malema media coverage with regard to his wealth, his tenderpreneurship and generally all things dodgy, is affecting his reputation among his followers. How is Cosatu's tirade against him affecting his reputation? And all those right-wing court cases?

In short - not at all.

You see, there is this perception that poor people, like those who follow Malema, don't like overt displays of wealth and debauched fats cats living it up, driving flashy cars and drinking single malt whisky.

Studies I did when I was working for BMW showed quite the opposite. I could never understand why poor people didn't throw stones at luxury cars out of sheer frustration at seeing so much wealth being flaunted when they were starving.

But, a number of trips into desperately poor informal settlements showed me that they didn't resent wealth they aspired to it. So much so that in one poor township they painted "BMW" on the side of their corrugate iron and packing case "community centre" because "BMW is something we can hope for".

Aspirational not irrational

My journeys into the world of extreme poverty showed me that poor people also have aspirations.

In fact, they desperately need aspirations and dreams to take their minds off being hungry and cold.

So, there is no question in my mind that those masses of young uneducated, unemployed black youths will follow Malema actually see him as an icon. They see his wealth as something that they can aspire to.

Let's face it, Malema has never hidden the fact that he is, strictly speaking, unemployed; that he was poor; that he is certainly uneducated. And it is these very things that hold him in good standing among his followers. He was one of them and has now managed to drag himself up into a position of enormous political power and, at the same time, able to wear designer clothes, drink expensive whisky, drive flashy cars and live in multimillion rand houses.

He's da man

I am convinced that his followers don't resent those things; they admire them and aspire to them.

I am sure they just love seeing him treat his ANC bosses with disdain; having a full go at Cosatu and the Communist party; belittling big business; waxing lyrical about nationalising mines and grabbing land - and getting away with it with relative impunity. He is more than just their hero; he is their hope, their inspiration, their manifestation of lives they could lead.

And the more Cosatu, the media and right wingers attack him and drag him through the courts, the more his followers just see this as their leader being martyred. Being bullied.

Clever or lucky?

Whether or not Malema actually planned and executed this strategy, I have no idea. I don't know whether he is extremely clever or just plain lucky. Frankly, given that the ANC seems to condone everything he does, I suspect that the odds are in favour of him and the ANC being extremely clever with this particular strategy.

And when I see journalists packing out ANCYL press conferences and then complaining that no questions were answered, I have to think that all what is happening is that a whole lot more publicity is going out to Malema's followers about how he is being bullied and attacked. And it gives him the opportunity to show them that he can take it on the chin and come back fighting.

From a dispassionate marketing point of view, whether he knows it or not, Malema is doing what every company desperately wants to achieve - and that is to entrench brand loyalty.

And, strangely enough, all those detractors who are constantly badgering him about his wealth, entrepreneurial activities and all sorts of dodgy dealings are actually doing nothing more than acting as his involuntary advertising agents.

The solution

So, what can be done about the seemingly impenetrable brand fortress that is Julius Malema if the law will just make him a martyr and the media just keeps boosting his popularity?

Well, I suppose once again from an utterly dispassionate marketing point-of-view, the only way to dent his image would be for all those right-wing organisations, from Afriforum to the AWB, to stop waging war with him but to come out in support of him.

You have to wonder just how those millions of unemployed, uneducated black youths would react if they saw

khaki-shirted white right-wingers marching through Ventersdorp and toyi-toying round the Voortrekker monument carrying banners saying, "Julius, jy's ons man - Viva Malema, Viva."

Makes you think, doesn't it?

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- Daily Maverick: [Youth League's distraction machine kicks into action - again](#)
- Bizcommunity: [Today's question: does the ANCYL lack imagination?](#)

For More list added at 1.53pm.

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