

Tanmay Bhat, Content Entrepreneur & Co-Founder of AIB
on
Viral and influencer marketing for startups

Ankur Warikoo (Host): 0:05

Hey everyone, welcome back to yet another episode of Building It Up with Bertelsmann, India's first podcast that focuses on the growth stories of Indian startups. Today, I do not have a tech entrepreneur, I do not have someone who's even run his own business in the true sense of it, if I may say so, but is possibly one of the finest comedians that this country has seen. Tanmay Bhat, the former founder of AIB (All India Bakchod) or rather the founder of former AIB. What I want to spend time with Tanmay today is, his fascinating look of how content plays such a critical role in a startup success and growth story. I could not think of someone better than him because he comes in with a very puritan objective, first principles view of how content can truly change lives and he did that remarkably through AIB and all the other projects that he's done. And in today's conversation we just spend time in discovering how he thinks about content and how startups can gain from it. Thank you so much Tanmay for joining us on this podcast. Pleasure to have you, man.

Tanmay Bhat: 1:04

Anytime, I'm excited.

Ankur Warikoo (Host): 1:05

I am excited too

Tanmay Bhat: 1:06

I am excited too, regurgitate Naval Ravikant's gyaan and make it seem like it's mine.

Ankur Warikoo (Host): 1:11

All the wisdom you've gathered over the last year or so. But let's go back. So, you are someone who came on stage and I would not use the word, but let me just do that, you literally created the stand-up comedy scene in India.

Tanmay Bhat: 1:28

I didn't create it to be fair. Stand up comedies in India has been around for many, many decades. I was part of the first generation of the English stand- up comedians.

Tanmay Bhat, Content Entrepreneur & Co-Founder of AIB
on
Viral and influencer marketing for startups

Ankur Warikoo (Host): [1:38](#)

Yes. I stand corrected with that. And you popularized it to a massive extent.

Tanmay Bhat: [1:45](#)

I think we were the first guys to get to mainstream internet comedy, I would say. I think we became bastions of free speech in the process of doing so. So now we've become, we've gotten cemented almost like the Biseri of internet comedy now, "mujhe AIB type ka kuch chahiye" is what I hear other creators enigma.

Ankur Warikoo (Host): [2:08](#)

And how did AIB happen? How did you get together all four of you?

Tanmay Bhat: [2:13](#)

So, the germ, so there's a comedian called Gursimran Khamba, who is co-founder of AIB. "Woh Bombay shift ho raha tha" and I went to watch him, then we went out for a drive that night and he said, do you want to do a podcast together? I said, yeah, Khamba was an immensely funny comedian. So I was like, I will do anything with you Sir. And we started doing this podcast and then Rohan (Rohan Joshi from AIB) and Ashish (Ashish Shakya from AIB), I was very close to them because we were working with Vir Das at that point. And we were just thinking when our powers will combine, can we sell an auditorium? All I wanted to do was sell an auditorium because at that time Vir Das was the only comedian selling out auditoriums. So we said, "ki hum sab ke dus dus hazaar followers hai Twitter pe", if we all combine maybe we can do one, and we did. And then OML (Only Much Louder) came into the picture and said you guys should get on YouTube. And then we made a video and it got 5 Million views, and we were like instead of getting validation from 800 people, it's so much better, where it can be scaled using tech (technology). So, we started doing Youtube and then one thing led to, it became an addiction to just keep finding new avenues to talk about things.

Ankur Warikoo (Host): [3:21](#)

And this would be what I would admit the first troop loop content led start up.

Tanmay Bhat, Content Entrepreneur & Co-Founder of AIB

on

Viral and influencer marketing for startups

Tanmay Bhat: 3:27

I mean TVF (The Viral Fever) was before us to be entirely fair. TVF whenever you would watch TVF videos, TVF would have done about 10, 15 videos before us. It was the numbers they would do, is what also made us feel like, Oh we can do this, but we're not going to do the same thing. We will have our own flavor to it. So I think, I would credit to Arunabh Kumar (TVF founder) where it's due. They were the first guys to find the potential of doing comedy on the internet that was different from what happened on television. We just happened to blow up and we were bold enough that our brand became this sort of thing that started defining it.

Ankur Warikoo (Host): 4:03

And in the journey, I'm sure you would have learned a lot about digital distribution, content, how does it play a part, what provokes, what gets excitement and so on and so forth. And of course, until then it was just limited to you and AIB and building that. At any point of time, was AIB then doing stuff to help brands use what you had learned?

Tanmay Bhat: 4:25

So not, not unless monetized very heavily. The big learning with the AIB was unlike a lot of other creative art forms, like making videos is the one of the most expensive ways of expressing yourself. The feedback loop was a lot shorter in today's day and age. We will be able to put out a video every couple of weeks. And then social media happened when Instagram happened. We were able to put up 10 content pieces a day. And when your feedback loop is extremely small is when you really learn what an audience wants and what clicks with an audience. We began as comedians on Twitter, where feedback loop is like 20 times a day you could put out. It began with that to then expand it to different medium and then eventually came back to social media. So it helped me understand what works with an audience, fairly quickly. And once your feedback loop is extremely small, it's your judgment that becomes so strong that you're able to tell between a good and a bad idea that saves you time, etc, etc,

Ankur Warikoo (Host): 5:17

Awesome. What you spoke about and I found fascinating, is that you feel that there is somehow a bridge that needs to be created between Bangalore and Bombay, because, there's this positive attributes on both sides that can leverage each other.

Tanmay Bhat, Content Entrepreneur & Co-Founder of AIB
on
Viral and influencer marketing for startups

And what you came back with is, content can be such a powerful mover in a startup's journey and they just do not see it because they're not in that crowd. They just see money, money, money, "toh ek ad chalado, ek newspaper".

Tanmay Bhat: [5:45](#)

They don't realize the importance of what content can do for you and the brand. And content, not just in terms of ads, you can hire an agency to give you campaign for 30 days. I'll give you a great example, let's look at Zomato right. Let's look at what Deepinder (Deepinder Goyal, Founder of Zomato) got with Akshar Pathak (Art Director, Zomato). Every time you talk to anyone, the Zomato is the one example that keeps popping up as this is the brand that has figured social and etc, etc. Why does, why has Zomato, why is Zomato on top of mind today? Because of consistency. Akshar Pathak was part of one of the earliest founding teams, at Zomato. He has been there for years. He left and he came back to Zomato. What does that tell you? If you have that one person from early days, is when your brand can truly, two campaigns are not going to make the brand. Three campaigns are not going to make your brand. You have to be consistently on it for years. The early days used to be like, a big leverage was capital, today a big leverage is attention. And I think it's time that like CMOs (Chief Marketing Officer) need to make way for like MBAs need to make way for eccentric artists to come in and be like, we are a part of this. Because artists are obsessed with detail. It's that sort of stuff that really over the long term makes an impact.

I think at a VC (Venture Capital) level, every time a VC is funding a startup, they should lead. If there was a yellow pages book of a thousand copywriters, each of whom are given a copy test that you could access immediately, I would suggest every VC to look it up, look at to a founder or two founders. Be like hire one of these creative guys now and make them a part of all your decision making now because it will pay off in two years. Instead of just working on product, instead of just doing this and then eventually going to an agency and being like "ab tum log campaign banao", it's too late. By then, it's too late.

Ankur Warikoo (Host): [7:46](#)

And someone doesn't own that story and that journey at all. Like they are just being paid and leave.

Tanmay Bhat: [7:50](#)

Tanmay Bhat, Content Entrepreneur & Co-Founder of AIB

on

Viral and influencer marketing for startups

Yeah because you don't understand that creative people, especially copywriters, they are generally creative. Like two of the head writers at the AIB, they work X copywriters from agencies, right? They came in and within a year I was able to mould them into becoming sketch writers. Now they're writing movies and one of them has founded his own news company now. Because they realize the potential that, oh, I'm a thinker, I can mould myself to do whatever I want. And I spent time in Bangalore, I thought I was a comedian. But when I went there, I realized I have great insights to pitch for products, for marketing, for **ing** UI (User Interface) and UX (User Experience) and what can I do that can bring more people into top of funnel? And I just need somebody to talk to me in a language that I understand. That's it. Most, creative people are called in at a time where most decisions are already made and now you communicate this to the public. No, failure company with art, this is what Kunal emphasizes a lot.

He's like, fill your company with artists because then your product will become an art, an art piece, which I don't see a lot of. Like I find it fascinating. I was doing some social media work for one of India's top five well-funded massive company, right? And we gave them, I was helping them out with social and four-five of the ideas that I pitched, it was for the first time they were seeing viral, true virality. And then I asked them, what are you paying your social media agency? They said, we're paying them 2 lakhs a month and this is all that we can pay you. I was like, are you insane? Are you crazy that you're paying them two lacks a month? Do you understand the amount of attention they are bringing to you? How can you pay someone that little for. That's what I went like you guys don't get it. You won't get it. And I met a bunch of founders in Bangalore also where I was like, you got to start thinking content first from your platform. You are no longer just delivering food, or getting cabs or whatever else that is. You've got to start thinking content first from the platform. And I think a lot of venture guys don't get it. And I think a lot of founders don't get it. The ones that do, you'll see the difference in, you can see the difference in this thing, right? That's the difference that when you blend the right brain and left brain together.

Ankur Warikoo (Host): [10:06](#)

And what in your opinion, if you were to be prescriptive, if I may use the word for our listeners, the trouble is that most of the founders are from an engineering background. They are meant and trained in bits and bytes. You don't want, there is no continuum. There is no grey, always right or wrong. So, they don't inherently get it. Is your advice, fill your team with the complete opposite end of the spectrum. But how

Tanmay Bhat, Content Entrepreneur & Co-Founder of AIB
on
Viral and influencer marketing for startups

does one, and that's where the practical challenges, how does one come to terms with that very different mindset, because it will be a conflict. It will be friction in some sense and then

Tanmay Bhat: [10:48](#)

It's not. It's not. I will tell you a sentence that Kunal uses often, is find people in your team who know how to get applause from an audience, right? Because sometimes you can't explain gut. Sometimes when you're having an artistic mind, then you just know why one idea is better than the other, that is important. If that filter can be applied at every decision making, that is really great. The key to hiring being one of the key things is to find people who aren't rigid, right? Like the thing it's when creativity meets pattern finding is when truly big macro ideas come about. That combination is there and it's hard. And as founders, I think your job is to, it's like you're trying to make this **ing** magic formula, right? Your job is to find the perfect mix and keep experiment and get the **l** out of the way and find the next problem to solve. Yeah.

Ankur Warikoo (Host): [11:45](#)

What are your predictions for content and content marketing in the country? Like if you were to stand here today as an advisor, or as a consultant to companies, where should they be placing their bets in the next five years? How should they be thinking about things? Let's start with how do you think about things?

Tanmay Bhat: [12:05](#)

I think, I think the advertising agency model is going to start getting questioned very soon.

Ankur Warikoo (Host): [12:11](#)

That's such a happy thing to hear.

Tanmay Bhat: [12:14](#)

Yeah, I am surprised that it's still here. I'm surprised that there are still five middle men between what should cost you 20 lakhs to make is costing five crores to make. I'm surprised why. I think every company needs to have an in-house dedicated creative team. A social media is going to play a far more like, Facebook and Google will get you, get people in, but eventually to keep them hooked, you need to start getting better at social. Again, social media agencies are going to become a thing.

Tanmay Bhat, Content Entrepreneur & Co-Founder of AIB

on

Viral and influencer marketing for startups

Influencers, I think more and more influencers are going to get smarter in the coming years. I think the tech world and the entertainment world is slowly, slowly, slowly coming together. And I think the people who managed to get this thing faster, there's a lot of money to be made there.

Ankur Warikoo (Host): [13:05](#)

Does this influencer marketing work in India? Or is it just

Tanmay Bhat: [13:09](#)

It's not immediate results driven. If you're looking for results to come in immediately, no. The key to influencer marketing is to find ideas that the influencer would want to do anyway. Most brands get this wrong. Most brands think, throw ten lakhs at this person, they will do what I want to do. I said no, if you find what they would want to do anyway, you can save nine lakhs. I will happily take far little money. And if you had a creative team in house, if you had artists in house, they will tell you that “ki yeh mein kyu karunga”, I would never do this for myself. So, I did this when I was in for six months for a bunch of companies in Bangalore. I was being the client for other influencers because I was like, you guys, you'd spend, this person is not worth this much money and this activity's not worth this much money. Then I would propose ideas and I would call the influencer up and I would be like, you should do this. By the way, I found you a brand that is willing to pay you to do this. And it was just such an easy negotiation. It's way easier to get people to do that. So, go to the place where they all go to high motivation ideas already and that is what will get your views and people need to build long-term relationship with artists as well.

Like I think not enough influencers meet CEOs and or brand managers one-to-one. I don't think that happens. I think it's still, influencers by the way also think very short term. Like some of the most popular influencers, I know, I am like, have you gotten met the CMO of this company you have done three videos for. No. Why should I? I mean, are you crazy? This is your business. You are, this is a B2B business for you. Why are you not doing drinks with this person? Why are you not being this person? Why not? It's the same people moving around in the same bunch of brands in the same city. This person is the gate for all money that's going to come to you, why would he not do it?

Like when the AIB YouTube channel was going on, we were making x crores a year, off just three or four brands. It was just, it was very simple, that there are four friends that I have, I will work with them. The ease of work with, it will be very easy to work with them because I spend time with them and it's good money and it's money that will be consistent because of the relationship that you build with them. Again, something that I learned with Naval itself, which is, relationships also have compounding returns. But, I think a lot of artists don't, they don't recognize it. They don't recognize how far this stuff can go.

Tanmay Bhat, Content Entrepreneur & Co-Founder of AIB
on
Viral and influencer marketing for startups

Ankur Warikoo (Host): [15:41](#)

What are the myths that you would break when it comes to the content for startups and founders? Thing that they think or absolutely that works and they are like, no, it doesn't, like you are thinking it wrong.

Tanmay Bhat: [15:57](#)

There are a lot of myths. People think, I mean this one is like, people think virality is a scientific process that is bought by money. Yeah. "ek viral video bana dena". People assume that, also, they don't take enough shots. How do I say it? Virality, consistent virality is a product of taking many shots of things that didn't go viral. Right? I keep saying this to every founder. So, you need to make your feedback loop faster. You need to know if you're going to do three big campaigns or you need to do 15 small shit, for you to eventually be like, this is where I put my money in. It's like when I'm thinking of a stand-up set, right? What I do is I tweet five things, I will Instagram story 10 things and then I'll be like, is this worth talking about? Is this thing worth spending time with? So, it's the same for brand positioning also.

Like if you want to take three years-two years finalizing what your next venture is going to be? You are talking to 500 people to do that, right? So, you have to recognize what your brand is going to be and you also need to do a lot of things. But the other thing is the world doesn't, the people don't care about you, as much as you think they do. They don't. They are scrolling and you come and you do your thing and you off. Nobody cares about you. You have to do things for people to care. So, if you're too afraid to do things, people will not care. Why am I thinking of Zomato examples? It really says a lot, dude. It says a lot, there are so many examples of Zomato. But yeah.

Ankur Warikoo (Host): [17:40](#)

Like another myth, if I may say, people think is content marketing cheap, inexpensive "honi chahiye". It's content marketing "toh matlab free mein banna chahiye"

Tanmay Bhat: [17:50](#)

"Yaar 10 lakh ka 15 lakh hoga kya fark padega tumko". Like I will give you, I was helping a founder with making a brand film for them and it was costing them whatever, say 20 lakhs, it was costing them. And I

Tanmay Bhat, Content Entrepreneur & Co-Founder of AIB

on

Viral and influencer marketing for startups

said you know, what would be cool? What if we did this whole thing in one take? Then I called the production guy, and I said, how much would this cost you? I called the director, if I had to do it in one take. He said, it would cost us 7-8 lakhs more is my estimate. I called the founder, I said 8 lakh “rupay or kharchte hain”, you will get higher retention on this. Just trust me, it will look better. Immediately yes. And this was a good founder, who got it, who got the value proposition I was saying is that this will be magical.

The difference between good, great and magical is a few lakh rupees that you shouldn't have to haggle for this stuff. That five lakhs rupees, will give you disproportionate returns. So yeah, a lot of people assume that. Also, I don't know, we are still in that mentality, VCs should cost five crores. Digital film should not be over, it's stupid.

Ankur Warikoo (Host): [18:53](#)

Benchmarks set by someone else

Tanmay Bhat: [18:56](#)

Benchmarks set by **ing** agencies for years now. Because that is their bread and butter. Six companies in the world that are controlling everything, and we still don't get. A lot of decisions taken by brand managers, like, a lot of it is like, I don't want to do anything that can get me fired or I need to do something to save my own ass. Which I think, it's not a good thing. You have got to be creative enough in a fearful way.

Ankur Warikoo (Host): [19:25](#)

On that note, and tell me if you're okay answering this, do you think it's okay for brands to take strong controversial stance where they shouldn't have any business taking? Like should brand take stands on politics? Should they take stands on religion? Should they take stands on stuff that happens in the society or is it like, nope, my job is to produce shoes, my job is to deliver food, my job is to make income statements and I will just stick to that. If I do a good job, people will love me for the brand. “zabardasti khade hoke mein iske saath hun mein iske saath nahin hun”. Just your view.

Tanmay Bhat: [20:06](#)

Yeah, I think brands have to operate like people at this point. They have to.

Ankur Warikoo (Host): [20:10](#)

Tanmay Bhat, Content Entrepreneur & Co-Founder of AIB
on
Viral and influencer marketing for startups

And that is a strong suggestion that you

Tanmay Bhat: 20:13

Yeah brands have to operate like people. And when people make the news, I will tell you, it's better to be hated than to not be worthy of being hated. A, once you are hated, it can be turned into being loved quickly. This is an emotional country, right?

I'll give you an example. A core thesis being, if you are being hated, it's better than not being worthy of being hated. What this means is, if there's outrage about your brand, it only means your brand is something that people think will get them attention by outraging. That's not a bad thing. Okay. You are what the last news cycle is, but you need to have the confidence to know "ki yeh jayega toh agla wala ayega" So, now brands operate this way, then they can be a little more fearless. This is my general thesis on this. Depends on what brand you are and at what stage of growth that you are at also. If there's a lot at stake, maybe be a little careful. I would say, if you're completely unknown, if there is something that blows over you, relax, don't worry. You can fix it. This is a country that will like

Ankur Warikoo (Host): 21:27

Shortest memory possible.

Tanmay Bhat: 21:29

Shortest memory possible, I mean that's not this country specific, but it's an emotional country. When a country reacts emotionally, when a country gets offended very easily, it's a sign of insecurity. And when you really get offended, you're showing, here are all my buttons that you can press to get an emotional reaction out of me. So, then you know what buttons you can press to get them to start loving you also.

Ankur Warikoo (Host): 21:49

But that's a powerful insight, man. And then on that note, thank you so much for being a part of this.

Tanmay Bhat: 21:57

Thank you so much for calling me

Ankur Warikoo (Host): 21:49



Tanmay Bhat, Content Entrepreneur & Co-Founder of AIB

on

Viral and influencer marketing for startups

This was honest, this was beautiful insights and I am sure the audience will learn a lot. I am going to do a quick link. And with that we come to the end of yet another episode of Building It Up with Bertelsmann, India's first growth focused podcast. I am your host Ankur Warikoo and until the next episode, do not forget to subscribe on iTunes, Saavn, SoundCloud and also check out a video on YouTube and Facebook. Until the next episode, I will see you all.