

The UK General Election and the Media

Politics as a cross media study

The UK general election on May 7th gives us a perfect opportunity to examine how the media is used to win the hearts and minds of the general public. Each of the main parties will spend many millions of pounds on their cross media election campaigns in order to win support from the electorate. Some of this money will be spent on direct publicity eg creating adverts which will be placed on billboards or in newspapers during the campaign period. This is sometimes called 'above-the-line' advertising. Other elements will be less direct eg creating online videos or posters which will be spread by supporters (viral advertising) and using a range of social media. In interviews and debates leaders will also repeat sound bites which they hope will be picked up and broadcast on the nightly news bulletins. Because it is indirect it is sometimes called 'below-the-line' advertising. Cynics often dismiss this as 'spin' and has been satirised in shows such as The Thick of It which lifts the lid on modern day politics and politicians and the role of the 'spin doctors' in manipulating the news. Note also the role of our partisan press and neutral (by law) broadcasters.

What are the seven main parties taking part in the general election next month, and who are their leaders?

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Look up their respective party logos or symbols and analyse them, explaining how you 'read' their ideology or values

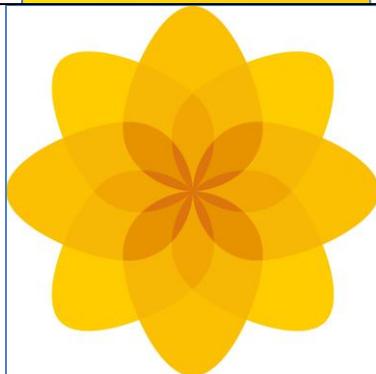
If you were the campaign manager for a political party, how might you use the media to build support?

Some people argue that people vote on the basis of impressions or feelings rather than specific policies. In a sense we choose to support a party or an individual's brand value rather than their use value. Do you agree? Explain your answer.



Green Party



Plaid Cymru
Party of Wales

Party Election Broadcasts

Ofcom Rules state: 'PEBs on television on behalf of 'major parties' throughout Great Britain must be carried in peak time (6.00pm to 10.30pm), as must PEBs on Channel 3 in the relevant nations on behalf of the SNP, Plaid Cymru and the major Northern Ireland parties. RCBs on behalf of designated organisations must also be scheduled in peak time.' Major parties now include the Green Party and UKIP following their electoral successes in recent council and European elections.

1 Why are channels required by law to broadcast PEBs and PPBs (party political broadcasts) during the course of the year at peak times? You could refer to the BBC Charter which states it must follow public service broadcasting aims of 'informing, educating and entertaining' audiences and the general role of broadcast media in a democracy.

2 What are the main codes and conventions of a PEB? Think of length, narrative, use of slogans, personalisation, etc

3 Look carefully at the Liberal Democrat and Green Party PEBs.



Spin it to win it: what does that Miliband-Salmond poster tell us about the battle of the political brands?

As the election heats up, the Tories' poster of Ed Miliband in Alex Salmond's pocket has been the first to cut through and set the agenda – and the first to draw the inevitable parodies. But do attack ads make a difference? And have the parties finally mastered the dark arts of online PR? We polled the experts

'Single-minded, bold and visually rewarding' ... but will it convert anyone? M&C Saatchi's new poster for the Conservative party

Sam Delaney, Lord Tim Bell, Alastair Campbell, Gail Parminter, Benedict Pringle, Kate Stanners, Shaun McIlrath

'Surely there are things people lie awake worrying about more than Salmond and Miliband in cahoots at No 10?'

Sam Delaney, author of Mad Men & Bad Men

Seasoned political ad men from both the left and right will tell you the same thing: a great campaign depends on identifying your strongest central message, and repeating it again and again in a way that the public will find compelling.

The best-ever example of this was the Tory campaign of 1992, when John Major defied all the odds by running a campaign that focused relentlessly on the one issue that research showed they could still trump Labour on: tax. Labour's Tax Bombshell and the Double Whammy posters devised by the brilliantly brutish Saatchi campaign team set the tone that year.

This time that same team seemed to have settled on the so-called economic recovery as the key theme. But then this Salmond/Miliband poster appeared. Creatively, it's the best poster of the campaign so far – managing to express a

powerful message in a single, entertaining image. But strategically, it seems a bit strange.

Is the threat of a coalition government involving the SNP really something that looms large in the floating voter's mind? It would seem unlikely. Advertising that appeals to fear works, but surely there are things people are lying awake worrying about at night more than Salmond and Miliband in cahoots at No 10?

Still, we must assume that campaign veterans like the men from M&C Saatchi would have founded their poster on pretty forensic focus grouping. The Ukip spoof, which followed soon after, is unlikely to have worried them: since 1979, when they goaded Denis Healy into angrily criticising their Labour Isn't Working poster, the men from Saatchi have been in the business of provoking the opposition into a reaction that will prolong the coverage given to their own ad. If the SNP issue wasn't already a central concern of this campaign, it is now.

And anyway, in an age where everyone seems to be a bedroom Photoshop genius, no poster is immune to online parody. In fact, they'd have probably been disappointed had it not been spoofed – which would have indicated that no one had noticed it in the first place. Will all of these ads being shared hundreds of thousands of times online make a difference to voter's opinions? Unlikely. Research from the 2010 election proved that most people's social media "friends" are likely to share the same political beliefs and values. That's why you're friends with them. So if you're a Labour supporter excitedly sharing an anti-Cameron meme to your 350 Facebook mates, the chances are you're just preaching to the converted.

• *Mad Men & Bad Men: What Happened When British Politics Met Advertising* by Sam Delaney is published by Faber at £14.99. Buy it for £11.99 at bookshop.theguardian.com

'People are more likely to receive a message if you deliver it with humour than if you shout at them'

Lord Tim Bell, advertising executive who advised Margaret Thatcher during three successful election campaigns

I think the poster is a very good Saatchi advert for the Conservative party: it's single-minded, bold and visually rewarding. It's also very funny. People are more likely to

receive a message if you deliver it with humour than if you shout at them. Most of the time what politicians say is fairly boring, and if you make it funny, people are more likely to pay attention to it. That's why Boris Johnson has done so well.

At present it's quite difficult to spot the difference between one party and another because they are all trying to get on the centre ground. But if you occupy the centre ground, you are more likely to get run over. It's very difficult for people to see clear policies and ideas, and so their decision falls on the personality of their leaders. This is why the advert is so good: it falls on the personality of Ed Milliband and Alex Salmond.

There are bound to be parodies. But they only remind people of the original, which is what happened with our Labour Isn't Working campaign. The best thing to do is to ignore them.



Guardian cartoonist Steve Bell's parody of the new Tory poster campaign. © Steve Bell 2015

Nowadays I think people are much more superficial in the way they look at things. They respond more to images as opposed to long sentences, and social media encourages this. But the real function of social media is to replace one-on-one contact with grassroots activists on the doorstep, which people

have stopped doing now. However, social media is just a distribution system, and ultimately not much has changed: it is still the message that matters, not the

medium. If it's an important message, it goes into people's consciousness and stays there. This image works well on social media and as a poster, and I hope Saatchi produce more.

'What it says is that Cameron has more or less given up on winning a majority. He wants to change the subject'

Alastair Campbell, strategist who masterminded three Labour election victories

There was a wonderful moment before the 2001 election when adman Trevor Beattie and I went to show Tony Blair the latest attack ad that Trevor's agency had come up

with. You may remember it. Margaret Thatcher's hair on William Hague's head, with the slogan, "Be afraid. Be very afraid."

Tony could sometimes be a bit squeamish about negative campaigning. Sure enough, when we unveiled it, he winced and said: "You can't do that." But then he started laughing. "You've just shown why we can do it," I said. "It's funny. If it's funny, it's hard for anyone to take offence."



TS Eliot defined wit as "the alliance of levity and seriousness by which the seriousness is intensified". That was one witty poster – smile, but understand this is a nasty, rightwing party you might be bringing in unless you stick with us. Compare it with the Tories' totally unwitty "devil eyes" poster of 1997, or indeed their poster of Ed Miliband inside Alex Salmond's pocket.

Like everything involving David Cameron, it is tactical, not strategic. He is an incumbent prime minister trying to stay in the job. This requires a record you can defend, a plan for the future and attacks on your main opponents. Because he is not strong on one and two, he is focusing mainly on three.

'If it's funny, it's hard for anyone to take offence' ... Labour's 2001 ad depicting Tory leader William Hague with Margaret Thatcher's hair. Photograph: Reuters

But what does that poster say, once you get through the belittling of Miliband and the aggrandising of Salmond – who, incidentally, looks a bit touched-up for glamour, as Cameron was in another Tory poster disaster, the one in which he said he would cut the deficit not the NHS? What it says is that he has more or less given up on winning a majority. He wants to change the subject to coalition, and he wants to suggest that Labour-SNP would be some kind of lethal combination, no doubt forgetting that in a previous tactical incarnation he allowed the Scottish Tories a virtual coalition with the SNP from 2007 to 2011.

When you boil it down, the poster basically says: "We are going to spend this campaign saying Ed Miliband is crap." But if he is so crap, Mr Cameron, why are you scared to debate him?

As I know you won't answer the question, I will. Because you didn't do well last time. Because you actually don't have a good record to defend or a plan for the future. And because you're worried that if the public see you and Miliband unmediated by a rightwing media, the Labour leader might actually come over as decent, principled, clever and focused on big challenges for the future – rather than big pictures of Alex Salmond looking like Kevin Spacey's Francis Underwood.

• *Winners and How They Succeed by Alastair Campbell is published by Hutchinson at £20. Buy it for £16 at bookshop.theguardian.com*

'I fear it will only really appeal to people who already vote Tory'

Gail Parminter, creative director, Madwomen

Simplicity and humour make this poster successful. It highlights a genuine worry in a tongue-in-cheek way. It's not telling us anything new, but it's acknowledging a concern and making us laugh about it. But I fear it will only really appeal to people who already vote Tory – it will make them feel good about themselves. I doubt it will make anyone change their mind about who they vote for. This is the Tories talking to Tories. I would imagine that Labour voters would see the funny side too, which means the ad isn't really as powerful as it's hoping to be.

The cartoons and parodies show how the poster isn't being taken seriously. Any advertising that goes on the attack leaves itself exposed to counter-attacks, and the agency will have known this. Most brands deliberately steer away from such tactics for that very reason. As a piece of advertising, it's a great poster – but as a political tool, probably not so great. If I were Cameron, I wouldn't have gone for it. I would have spent my advertising budget elsewhere.

The problem with political advertising is that the elements that make a successful poster are not necessarily the right elements for getting a political message across. As part of a campaign, a simple, hard-hitting poster can be very effective – but only if you get it spot on.

‘Craft and care has gone into this ... it’s the most memorable political poster in years’

Benedict Pringle, advertising executive, founder of politicaladvertising.co.uk

The first feature of a good political poster is the presence of intellectual clarity. That might sound simple enough. But consider that the accepted rule of thumb for the length of a poster headline is eight words and the job becomes more daunting.

What makes the poster featuring Ed Miliband in Alex Salmond’s pocket so impressive from an advertising perspective is that they have managed to bring to life the possibility that a vote for Labour could help usher the SNP into Downing Street without even using a headline.

The second feature of a good political poster is the creative impact.

The Conservatives have got everything right in this regard, brilliantly juxtaposing two characters to create a deeply provocative image. They have made Salmond look powerful and authoritative by dressing him in a sharp blue suit and matching tie. His facial expression is calm (even smug) and comfortable; have they perhaps retouched his skin to make it look like he’s arrived back from a holiday in warmer climes?

Miliband, on the other hand, is made to seem like a young, confused boy. He carries a stupefied facial expression; he’s wearing a white shirt that looks like it has been washed too many times, paired with a Just William-style tie.

In a world where almost anyone can make something that resembles a campaign poster, it can be easy to devalue the skill required to create a brilliant piece of political advertising. But craft and care has gone into this. They have delicately balanced a huge number of variables, and in doing so have produced the most memorable political poster in years.



Ukip’s spoof of the new Tory ad, showing David Cameron in the pocket of EU Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker

‘It is a shame that the first piece of work to cut through this year is scaremongering’

Kate Stanners, chief creative officer, Saatchi & Saatchi

The last election was also predicted to be the first digital election, following on from the Obama campaign in the US in 2008. In reality (and perhaps somewhat depressingly), it ended up being the TV election, as it was the televised debates that got us all talking. The winner then was Nick Clegg. How swiftly things can change.

This year, we may finally see what turns out to be the UK’s first genuinely “social” election. True, not much of the political parties’ communications have had a lot of traction to date. But this week we have seen the first piece of campaign marketing to cut through. A simple visual that runs the risk of being a meme: open season for who’s in whose pocket.

If we were still working with Labour, I might advise them to respond with something that talks less about being in someone’s pocket, and more on the notion that Britain and Britons would be out of pocket under a Tory government. It is a shame that the first piece of work to cut through this year is scaremongering, rather than putting forward a case for who and what we are voting for.

That’s where I believe the real danger lies: we are facing an election where people might choose to register nothing but their apathy, and record numbers of people will not vote at all.

The Scottish referendum was interesting because of the high turnout, and because it particularly engaged with young, first-time voters. There was a simple yes or no, in or out. One message. People knew what they were voting for.

Parties need to learn from this by focusing their messaging: give us one good reason to vote for them, one thing to make us care, and stop telling us about the politics of politics.

‘It’s exactly what we expect a political ad to be, and therein lies the problem’

Shaun McIlrath, Global creative director, Iris Worldwide; handled the 2010 Lib Dem ad campaign

It's a clear and impactful execution, so you can't really knock it as an ad. But it's not actually the ad that bothers me: it's the strategy.

This is simply the latest iteration in a long-standing, vaguely sordid British comms tradition like seaside postcards – peddling its own kind of salacious little thrill. It's exactly what we expect a political ad to be, and therein lies the problem.

What we have here is a debased currency debasing itself further. Consumers hate politicians and, for the most part, they deserve our loathing. They are peddlers of broken promises whose greatest claim is often that they're simply less crap than the competition.

Voters paint in broad strokes. And right now, broadly, the Conservatives come across as out of touch, amoral and elitist – all about money, in all the wrong places.

Labour feel weak and slightly hopeless, able to define themselves only by what they're not – namely Conservatives.

There is no Obama-style hope or optimism, no vision, no substance. In short, there are no ideas, only fears. And a strategy based on endless fear-based knocking leads to apathy, or worse, extremism.

In advertising today, we talk about “ideas that can be advertised”, as distinct from “advertising ideas”. The latter is a snappy campaign line or theme. But the former is something that's inherently valuable – a product or service that's useful (even if its use is only to entertain). You can choose to advertise it if you wish, but often it will spread organically because people will gravitate to it.

Voters need an idea of substance, something that they can rally around. This first salvo indicates it's not coming. This contest will be like 70s TV wrestling for moral weaklings – with all the fake blows, bluster and mock outrage you'd expect from a Saturday afternoon bout in Sheffield.

As the papers loudly declare party allegiances, it won't just be one that wins

Press partisanship has returned with a vengeance, but multi-party politics and a diverse media means we are light years away from one title deciding the election

A Scottish edition of The Sun endorsing SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon, and an edition of the Sun on the same day endorsing the Conservatives. Photograph: AFP/AFP/Getty Images

Within 48 hours of Rupert Murdoch arriving at News UK's London offices this week, the Sun became the first newspaper to declare which party should win on 7 May. Or rather, which parties.

During the week before he flies back to the US this weekend, it became clear that the man considered the Sun's "editor-in-chief" wanted the paper to give its wholehearted backing for David Cameron's Conservative party, while its Scottish sister title endorsed the SNP.

The split might mean that party leader Nicola Sturgeon is portrayed as both a "beast" about to ruin the country and a Jedi knight set to save Scotland in the same title, but the decision was entirely consistent with Murdoch's pragmatic view of politics.

The media mogul takes a liking to the party most likely to win *and* the one most likely to further his own commercial interests. What's more, Tory gains in the south and SNP gains in the north would snooker Labour's Ed Miliband, who has made no secret of the fact he thinks News UK – also the owner of the Times and the Sunday Times – is too powerful and press regulation too weak.

By getting the Sun talked about again – prompting a Newsnight debate and all – the move also has some of the hallmarks of Rebekah Brooks, the former News UK boss who lost her job over phone hacking in 2011. She has been at Murdoch's side this week with a rehabilitation so far advanced she is even rumoured to have been offered her old job back, a position she has refused.

Murdoch's liking for an SNP he considers anti-establishment would warrant a whole separate analysis, yet the attack on Miliband's Labour is far from being a Murdoch phenomenon.

The rightwing press has not been this stridently anti-Labour since 1992, when the Sun famously claimed to have “won” the election for the Tories after pasting Neil Kinnock’s face on a lightbulb. David Deacon, professor of communications and media analysis at Loughborough University, which has analysed election coverage since 1992, says “press partisanship has returned with a vengeance” this year.

The Mail, the Times, the Telegraph and even a Daily Express owned by the Ukip-funding Richard Desmond are all expected to back the Tories ahead of 7 May. Even the more sedate Financial Times backed a “Conservative-led administration” on Thursday afternoon in a sign that business readers at least remain unconvinced by Miliband.

The percentage of newspapers expected to back the Tories is likely to be even higher than the 72% of circulation that backed the party in 2010 according to Deacon – although there remain several titles happy to back Labour, including the party-loyal Daily Mirror. That includes The Guardian, which has published its election leader under the headline: “Britain needs a change of direction. Britain needs Labour.”

But does any of this make a difference to the actual vote? The 1992 election – the last time the Scottish Sun wholeheartedly endorsed the SNP – also marked the high point for perceived influence with then Sun editor Kelvin Mackenzie’s lightbulb moment. The paper’s circulation has fallen from three million in 2010 to the 1.85m current readers of the paper, now edited by David Dinsmore, an affable Scot.

As circulations have declined, online news has grown and with it the power to counter any perceived mainstream media bias. Witness the shrill front page coverage of Miliband’s decision to be interviewed by Russell Brand in a YouTube show watched 500,000 times within 24 hours. One senior executive at a leading rightwing paper said Murdoch’s emphasis on the Sun showed his age: “It’s no good Rupert shouting about political coverage. The Sun has lost its mojo and Dinsmore is not getting the same impact as Kelvin [Mackenzie], but nor did [former editors] Mohan and Yelland. That caravan has well and truly moved on.”

And yet, newspapers still appear to punch above their weight by setting the agenda. One recent example was the Telegraph front page story about 100 big businesses backing the Tories which, although now partly discredited as a party PR exercise, led that day’s TV bulletins.

Research by Weber Shandwick on political engagement, in association with Research Now, also found that 57% of respondents put “TV programmes and leader debates” at the top of their list, with newspapers and magazines at 46% and only 22% citing social media. The sheer scale of the web might be one reason for this. Deacon at Loughborough says, “Yes people are on Facebook and Twitter but it is diffuse and I remain to be convinced that they have crowded out mainstream media.”

While the story of declining readership is old news, multi-party politics is not. In 2010 “Cleggmania” blindsided a press keen for Gordon Brown to lose. This time round it’s even more complicated.

David Yelland, who edited a pro-Labour Sun from 1998-2003, suggests that not being sure of who to attack could have exacerbated the early attacks on the Labour leader. “I don’t think they [the Tory press] have anything left on Ed Miliband. They’ve done his father, his family, even his eating of a sandwich, there’s nothing left in the tank.”

So why keep on? Leaving aside a stance on taxation unlikely to be popular among media-owning plutocrats, Miliband’s stance on press reforms is really unpopular. As one senior newspaper editor said: “If Miliband gets in, it will be a disaster. The first thing he’ll do is Leveson.” In some ways that could be his selling card. As Yelland says, “If [Ed Miliband] is elected he will be the first PM for generations ... to get into Downing Street knowing he owes no debts to any editor, any proprietor or any newspaper.”

Whatever happens on 7 May, it is highly unlikely that any one paper will be able to claim to have won it for any party. “We are light years away from the 1980s when the power-broking role of the popular papers really could be said to have delivered C2 voters to Margaret Thatcher,” says Deacon. Light years is a place far, far away from light bulbs.

Your Country Needs You!

Last September's Scottish independence referendum included 16 and 17 year old voters for the first time. What role did the media play in the battle for hearts and minds in perhaps the most important vote in a generation? Expat Scotsman, Tom Brownlee surveys the battlefield



On September 18th 2014 Scottish adults voted on the question, 'Should Scotland become an independent country?' 'Yes.' 'No.' 'No, thanks.' 'Are you yes yet?' 'Better Together.' 'Aye!' 'Naw!' 'Mibbe?' However they presented it to the four million registered voters, each side of the Scottish independence referendum campaign employed both new and old media platforms. In the pro union camp – vote 'No' - stood the Conservative, Labour and the Liberal Democrats. The independence cause – vote 'Yes' - was led by the Scottish National Party, the Greens and loose network of support groups such as Commonweal. Indeed, the network of pro-advocates relied on d social media and old fashioned canvassing to outflank what it perceived as the pro union bias of the 'old media' of television, radio and the press - 95% of which urged its readers to vote 'no' on September 18th. That said, the circulation and resultant influence of Scottish newspapers have seen steep declines in recent years. For instance, the once proud national newspaper The Scotsman struggles to sell more than 20 000 copies each day – a quarter of its circulation at the start of the millennium. While Yes Scotland energised a wide sweep of the nation, its message was ultimately rejected by 55% of those who voted on the day.

So what do we mean by propaganda and how did the two sides try to over the Scottish public? Wikipedia's definition is as good as any: 'Information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a political cause or point of view' . In a sense, propaganda's appeal is to one's sense of reason (the head) and to our emotions (the heart).



In some ways the famous and much imitated Lord Kitchener WW1 recruitment poster has provided a template for propaganda pieces. The message – fight for your country – is communicated through direct address and the use of personal pronouns (Yes. YOU). It further works by establishing relationships of hierarchy and deference; and signifiers of class, position and authority are asserted through the military uniform the flamboyant, hyper masculine moustache, and the fixed male gaze. Combined, these signifiers sought to cement Kitchener's authority over his male audience. They are 'hailed' or interpellated (Althusser, 1972) as British men (cannon fodder?) who naturally defer to their social superiors. The appeal is essentially through the iconography of masculine pride and patriotic duty. It

might seem crude now but it established the generic conventions for propaganda for a sizeable portion of the 20th Century and endures today: see Putin.

In terms of new media Twitter and Facebook have played an increasingly important role in shaping public opinion – see Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign or Kony 2012 as examples of bottom up campaign strategies based around social media – and certainly provided a dynamic forum during the Scottish referendum

campaign. Ultimately, however, as the historic date got closer most voters seem to have turned to traditional forms, particularly through television, for guidance. The three minute television campaign broadcast remained a powerful tool for each campaign. I will analyse three key broadcasts from the final weeks before the vote.

By using the conceptual framework to deconstruct this sample we will see how a mix of advertising 'know how' and political spin can be used to shape opinion. Heavy opinion polling indicated that large sections of the electorate remained undecided throughout the period. Reaching them was the key to success. While the 16 – 17 year olds were enthused to play their important part in the national conversation, they still only represented 3% of the voters. That small percentage perhaps explains why this group appears only peripherally in each of the three broadcasts in question.

1 The Woman Who Made Up Her Mind or #Patronising BT Lady

Polling suggested that a sizeable proportion of women voters were genuinely undecided. These swing voters were invaluable to both sides and Better Together's (BT) August broadcast sought to speak directly to the concerns of this niche



demographic. Thus The Woman Who Made up Her Mind was born. It starts with her sitting in her kitchen drinking a cup of tea while her husband and children are away. Cast as the embodiment of the 'supermum' archetype she confesses that juggling the demands of job, home and family has prevented her from following the debate too closely. By breaking the fourth wall i.e. speaking directly to the camera, the character seeks to create a sense of complicity and identification between herself and the female viewer. Her personal struggle with the decision before opting to vote 'no' is supposed to reflect a frank and non partisan approach to politics. The producers are using the popular advertising technique of personalisation in order to characterise and play to a certain socio-demographic type. Previously market researchers have identified social types such as 'Worcestershire woman' or 'Basildon man', for instance, as a means to address their values and attitudes. The character in this advert might be called 'Fearful Fiona', the average woman anxious about her family and, by extension, her nation's financial future.

What the BT advertisers failed to anticipate was the scope for a subversive reading of the text. Their representation of the average housewife seems to have stepped out of a '70s TV detergent commercial who might be confessing to substandard laundry. BT was swiftly accused of stereotyping Scottish women as politically ignorant, family-obsessed housewives with lower levels of education than men. Yes

campaigners pounced on the opportunity for some mischievous satire by creating the 'Patronising BT Lady' meme which went viral within hours of the first broadcast. The widely parodied Better Together broadcast wasn't aired again.

2 Yes campaign: "Look out world: here I come"

<http://www.youtube.com/user/YesScotland>

"I can dress myself", whispered by a wee lassie, establishes independence as the theme of the Yes broadcast. Again, the main message is anchored by a woman (that crucial demographic again) who, symbolically, is a florist – *the* 'flower of Scotland'. Speaking frankly to the camera she asks, rhetorically: "independence. It's what we want in our lives - so why not for our country?" Bathed in an optimistic glow of bright colours, the chorus of persuasive, aspirational characters delivers a message of sunlit hope. Both literally and metaphorically, the emphasis is on dynamic movement, whether it is within the frame or in panning and tracking shots. This version of Scotland is going places. Each section of society – young and old, male and female, rural and urban – are characterised in the campaign video. To balance the female spokesperson, the producers place a muscular Scotsman (a modern day Braveheart?) seen running through a rugged Highland landscape, which has connotations of natural strength, power and virility, both of the land and its people. Overall it echoes Obama's 'Hope' message of 2008 and contrasts with the fretfulness of the previous BT broadcast. "Look out world, here I come," says a long-haired student, as Highland lochs sparkle, children play happily in the sunshine, and active old folks joyfully dance in a presumably comfortable and fulfilling retirement.

3 Better Together campaign broadcast: Solidarity forever

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-29230269>

The subtext behind the final piece is the battle for the traditional Labour vote which seemed to be drifting towards the 'Yes' camp. The narrative falls into two portions - past and present – but the message is simple. Choose solidarity,



Voice of God narration: "Solidarity, here and abroad. Equality, at work and at home."

not separation. Montage sequences are used to build momentum throughout the piece. The first minute is devoted to a nostalgic tribute to the sacrifices of previous generations suggested through flickering, black and white archive footage of the

labour movement, including millworkers, hospital staff and soldiers. 'Real' people are shown in large groups as a metaphor for a social solidarity which transcends nationality or region. In its nostalgic pitch to both older and younger voters, the producers emphasise traditional values, both in the message and in its narrative structure. A male voiceover (voice of God narration) guides and anchors our interpretation of the visual wallpaper on the screen.

The only other spoken words come from the soberly attired (dark suit, navy blue tie) former Labour Prime Minister and redoubtable Scottish MP for Kircaldy and Cowdenbeath, Gordon Brown. Speaking directly to the audience, Kitchener style, this familiar figure offers reassurance to an older and perhaps more cautious target demographic in a way that seeks to avoid the faux pas of earlier broadcasts. It is a classic two step flow approach which seeks to win over wavering Labour supporters in the final days before the vote. But where Kitchener points at the subject, Brown's open handed gesture suggests openness and friendship. He has influence rather than power over his audience. Where the earlier Yes advert stresses aspiration, movement and progress, BT's brand values are of community, stability and solidarity. 'Yes' scored a majority with people aged under 50 while 'No' was the choice of the over 55s.



Your country needs you: Former Prime Minister and Scottish MP, Gordon Brown speaking directly to the audience

While each side deployed the iconography of the Scottish landscape and buildings, they both resisted the obvious temptation to wrap themselves in plaid. Romantic 'tartanry' is the province of Visit Scotland, the country's tourism marketing agency, and not the reality for the vast majority of people living, working and **voting** in Scotland today.

Eventually, the majority of Scots voted to keep the country in the UK. After two years of electrifying debate up and down the country, in classrooms and school assemblies, across the internet, in TV debates and in acres of newspaper space, at public meetings, over a pint and over the dinner table, Scotland can boast of having some of the most politically aware and media literate citizens in the UK. With the upcoming UK General Election featuring resurgent Greens and, of course, UKIP, it promises to offer a thrilling clash of political styles and modes of political persuasion. General Election 2015 could prove equally exciting for students of political propaganda as last year's referendum.



David Cameron feeds an orphaned lamb

The science of the lambs: understanding David Cameron's farmyard photos

From Thatcher's calf to Cameron's lamb, party leaders on the campaign trail are quick to seize a cute photo op. So why was Nick Clegg's hedgehog handling such a turn-off – and should Ed Miliband pose with a pooch?

Will future historians call the 2015 campaign the Springwatch election? First we had Nick Clegg's calamitous trip to a hedgehog sanctuary in the West Midlands. Then, on Easter Sunday, David Cameron created his version of Lambing Live, bottle-feeding and gently nuzzling a lamb at Dean Lane Farm in his Oxfordshire constituency. The odds on Ed Miliband being pictured adopting an abandoned greyhound, or Nigel Farage petting a prize bull, must be shortening by the hour.



“A break from campaigning on Easter Sunday to try my hand at feeding a newborn lamb,” was how the prime minister billed the pictures on Twitter but, of course, the shots were pure political theatre. Despite the showbusiness cliché of never working with children or animals, there is a long history of politicians risking everything to be photographed with beastly creatures.



Maggie, a two-day-old Charolais calf, is the star of what is often regarded as the defining photo opportunity of modern British political communications. In April 1979, Margaret Thatcher was on the campaign trail in East Anglia when she had the opportunity to cuddle a calf. As the BBC political documentary-maker and author Michael Cockerell memorably observed: “When Margaret Thatcher first became Tory leader, she reacted towards TV like a primitive tribesman faced with a white man’s camera: as if somehow it would take her soul away.”

During the 1970s, she sought advice from Gordon Reece, a former TV producer, and changed her hair, clothes and voice. And Reece, according to Cockerell, introduced the election photo opportunity.

When Thatcher’s big chance came with Maggie, she wasn’t about to let it slip: she held on to the calf for 13 minutes, solicitously asking the assembled photographers whether they had all the pictures they needed. Denis Thatcher famously muttered: “Be careful, dear, or you’ll have a dead calf on your hands.” Poor Maggie does look rather lifeless in one picture, but Thatcher got away with it: apparently the calf passed away not long after the photocall.

It is easy to laugh at such crude image manipulation. Who, really, is going to vote for a party led by someone who is adept at cuddling farm animals? In 1979, the Prime Minister, Jim Callaghan, was contemptuous of the leader of the opposition’s feeble-looking stunts. “The voters don’t want to see you cuddling a calf,” he told Thatcher. “They want to be sure you’re not selling them a pig in a poke.” And yet the calf did appear to soften what Cockerell calls Thatcher’s “ferocious” image at the time: the Conservatives won the election, as well as virtually every seat in East Anglia.



Thatcher never lost her passion for photocalls and embraced animals again ahead of the 1987 election, when her minders believed the Iron Lady image required another softening. So Thatcher borrowed a dog – a cavalier king charles

spaniel – and went for a beach walk on Constantine Bay, Cornwall, with Denis bringing up the rear. The pictures looked natural and rather nice, but the words were less than convincing. “I would love a dog,” Thatcher claimed. “But my job won’t allow it.”



American presidents would see through that feeble excuse: a dog is an essential part of the White House furniture. Virtually the only time Tony Blair appeared with animals was when the dog in question was George W Bush’s beloved spaniel, Spot. The dog is pictured gambolling between the leaders after their lunch at Camp David in 2001, giving a cosy, friends-over-for-the-weekend feel to a meeting where a war was almost certainly being planned.

Animals have been at the forefront of political image-making in the US for more than a century, ever since President Theodore Roosevelt was pictured standing triumphantly over big game he had dispatched. (Shortly after completing his presidency, Roosevelt went on safari with his son, Kermit, slaughtering 512 animals, including 17 lions, 11 elephants and 20 rhinoceros.)

Roosevelt was a proud hunter-conservationist in the era when the term was not an oxymoron, but more recent American presidents have had to watch their enthusiasm for country sports as carefully as Tory politicians in Britain. Dick Morris, Bill Clinton’s image-maker, warned the president not to holiday in Hollywood or Martha’s Vineyard, prompting Clinton to ask if it was OK for him to go fishing, provided he didn’t catch anything.



Roosevelt with an elephant he shot and killed in Africa

Obama hasn’t dared shy away from the White House pooch tradition. Even Vladimir Putin, the modern-day heir to Teddy Roosevelt’s unreconstructed action-man tradition, was often photographed looking cosy with his black labrador Koni, until

the animal's death last year. Given that the British are as much a nation of dog-lovers as any other, perhaps it is surprising that dogs do not feature so highly in British political communications. Animals, in fact, are rarely embraced by politicians of the left: David Blunkett's guide dog was an exception, but it was very much a working dog. When John Prescott appeared with a crab in a jar in 1997, he ruined the moment by calling it Peter, after his enemy Lord Mandelson.

So it is no surprise that Ed Miliband shuns real dogs, and grins and bears



David Cameron hugs a husky

comparisons with Gromit. Instead, he has taken a Callaghan-style approach to Cameron's mastery of political theatre. In July last year, not long after Miliband's misadventures with a bacon sandwich, the Labour leader congratulated Cameron for making "his name as leader of the opposition for some fantastic photos, like hanging out with huskies in the Arctic Circle", and said he deliberately didn't seek

to compete with the former Carlton TV PR man with such visual spin.

While the White House has its dog, in recent times Downing Street has had a cat. Blair caused a minor scandal when Humphrey the cat was evicted from Downing Street six months after he came to power. Cameron later installed Larry as the resident mouser – once again demonstrating that the right appear to be far more comfortable with pets than the left.

Obviously, no one is going to vote Conservative because Cameron cuddled a lamb, but despite all the mockery on Twitter, Tom Mludzinski, head of political polling at ComRes, says: "The Tories have pulled this off incredibly. For David Cameron to be on the front of pretty much every paper is a massive boost for them. It puts him in everyone's minds." He sees the photos as one half of Cameron's two-pronged communications: to appear prime ministerial but also to be the family man.

In contrast, Clegg's escapades in the hedgehog sanctuary didn't work, partly because voters simply don't trust him, according to Mludzinski. But the pictures also looked bizarre because hedgehog sanctuaries aren't part of everyday life. One overlooked aspect of the Cameron pictures is that feeding a lamb is something thousands of families with young children will have tried on petting farms over the Easter

holidays. And some of those doing this – mums – are part of a demographic Tory spinners know that Cameron struggles to impress.

A more subtle line communicated by the picture is Cameron's adroitness and social ease. "That plays into the narrative around Ed Miliband – that he is awkward, and can look a bit worried and not comfortable with people," says Mludzinski. "We're seeing Cameron and the Tories really pitching the election battle as between him and Miliband. It's another 'Can you imagine what Ed Miliband would look like doing this?' moment."

Michael Cockerell doubts that the Cameron lamb pictures will have the impact of Thatcher with the calf. "The audience has now got much more sophisticated," he says, "and the perception of a politician is built up in the years between elections." But the first rule of political theatre is never to choose a role that makes you feel uncomfortable, and Cockerell agrees with Mludzinski on this point: Cameron demonstrated his competence in bottle-feeding a lamb. Whether he would look so at ease distributing donations from a food bank, as Twitter critics have suggested, is another matter.