

29th January 2010

## Why 'digital election' marketing poses a new challenge for UK politicians

*By Jimmy Maymann, chairman at goviral.*

The government will soon announce that the next general election will take place in May. The formality of the announcement will come on the back of weeks of unofficial campaigning that we are currently enduring.

As the build up gathers pace, we constantly hear references to this being the UK's first 'digital election'.

Our politicians look to the United States and dream of replicating Barack Obama's successful use of social media. Of course in the States politicians can come from relative obscurity untainted by the past to win power.

Not so in the UK where, despite attempts to build up communities of supporters, all are tarred by scandal. We remember expenses.

Any brand tainted by recent scandal would never dare to launch a large scale marketing campaign but the nature of democracy means our political parties are forced into it.

The result is that the first 'digital election' will be a very difficult experience for main stream parties.

It will see more ridicule poured on them. The coming three months will see more reactions similar to what has happened around to the Tory poster campaign featuring a photoshopped David Cameron and the slogan "We can't go on like this. I'll cut the deficit, not the NHS"



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The launch of this poster was quickly followed by the launch of mydavidcameron.com which has provided a platform for numerous spoofs to be created some of which, it has to be said, are hilarious.

For the Conservative Party it has proved to be a big distraction as they seek to press home their advantage in the polls. It risks derailing their key campaign messages much more effectively than anything the Labour Party could throw at them.

Politicians are quickly learning what many brands have learnt already. If you don't give consumers content they trust and find engaging, something politicians can't deliver in the current climate, then you will quickly find yourself in the middle of a storm.

They are quickly learning the extent to which consumers have taken control. This election really will be a conversation with the electorate but it's not going to make easy listening for the main parties.

The ad agencies involved in the campaigns need to avoid leaving open goals like airbrushing photos but even so, the electorate is going to set the agenda for this campaign more than ever before.

This fact means that despite the pain, it might also mean that the parties will be forced to actually engage with people's real concerns.

To end on a positive note, this might prove to be the start of a process of rebuilding trust.

That will depend on the winner maintaining the same level of online activity after the election as before, not disappearing for the next five years. The online conversation has to be always on.

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