

Where's the Emotion in Scottish Independence? Time for Some Clarity

This blog appeared in March 2014, six months before the Scottish referendum, that resulted in a very close contest and 55.3% saying 'no' to independence

To the more detached observer south of the border, the issue of Scottish independence and the campaigns for and against it can appear quite confusing. Given the amount of research we have done in Scotland, we are often asked for some clarity on what is going on. I should declare at this point as well, that I am a Scot.

The last few weeks seem particularly confusing. The Scots are keen to keep the pound. So for the unionist parties Mark Carney's softening up exercise and then George Osborne's statement that the Scots can't have independence and the pound, would surely be the game changer. It hasn't been, however. Some polls are even suggesting it has had the opposite effect, with support for a 'Yes' vote increasing.

Whose Independence is it?

From what we can see this whole episode goes to the heart of the issue about Scottish independence – Scots don't want to be told what they can and can't do, particularly by someone who is part of the 'remote' English establishment. As one Scot pithily summed it up to us; *"Well ye can stick yere poond then Jimmy"*. But why so much sensitivity?

Sense of Place

Part of what has kept Scotland in the Union has been a 'sense of place'. There's been plenty for Scots to be proud of, from their education to their inventions (tarmac, telephone, television, bicycle, penicillin & insulin, radar and pneumatic tyre amongst others). At one time 27% of all ships on the seas had been built in Glasgow. Coal mining was a strong reference point as was heavy engineering. The Scots had a big sense of their place in the British Empire and many went off to be part of it / run it.

Today we don't hear about many inventions from Scotland, certainly not the disproportionate number there used to be. The education system doesn't appear to be any better than elsewhere in Europe. Almost all the ship building has gone; now Glasgow is the call centre capital of Europe. Eighteen years of Conservative

government between 1979 and 1997 alienated the Scots and that very English Tory figurehead, Mrs Thatcher, finished off coal mining.

The Scots are proud of North Sea oil. But the common belief in Scotland is that the English took all the revenues (not necessarily true, but perception is all). And the Scots are canny with their money. Except the thriving financial sector in Scotland was dealt a humiliating blow when two of their cultural icons, Royal Bank of Scotland and Bank of Scotland went bankrupt and had to be bailed out by the English.

Our research suggests that a key part of the traction behind Scottish Independence is that Scotland wants to find its 'sense of place' again and what could be more defining than being independent? So telling Scots that three English parties have decided they can't have something (the pound) is likely to nurture that desire for self determination.

Pulling at Heartstrings

Our assessment is that there needs to be more emotion in this referendum, or at least in the 'No' campaign. There's plenty in the 'Yes' campaign. The 'Nos' have a platform that seems to be rooted in rationality, coupled with a very antiseptic line; 'Better Together'. The obvious question is better for whom? The answer often articulated in Scotland is that it will be better for England. Go onto bettertogether.net and you will find a drab and dreary website.

The 'Yes' campaign seems to be winning on presentation and emotion at the moment. And they've got a line 'Scotland's Future in Scotland's Hands' that taps straight into that 'sense of place'.

The Left Field Intervention

Inevitably that brings us to Kate Moss, who, on February 19th, breezed onto the stage at the Brits wearing David Bowie's iconic 1972 Ziggy Stardust stage costume. She had a message for Scotland from Bowie; 'Stay With Us'. As the consummate creative and wordsmith we believe he has encapsulated in those three words more emotion than the 'No' campaign has summoned so far – it appears to say; *we want you, we respect you, we'll miss you.*

The referendum debate is going to see-saw back and forth all summer. The 'Yes' campaign will use the 700th anniversary of Bannockburn and Commonwealth Games as emotional pulls, as well as appealing to a young more idealistic electorate. As we get nearer to 18th of September more rational factors are likely to hold greater sway and that is probably what the 'No' campaign is hoping for. The views of women voters probably will help that along. Another factor that in research we describe as 'status quo bias' is

also likely to become more important – that leap into the unknown can start to feel less attractive.

The 'No' campaign can't rely on this, however. They need a foundation based on some emotional empathy that allows people to vote 'No'. They could do worse than listen to some David Bowie.

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