

A High Price for No Emotion

Time for Some More Clarity

This blog appeared in March 2015, two months before the General Election, that resulted in the SNP winning all but three seats in Scotland and Labour losing 40 of its 41 seats

What happened in the Scottish Independence Campaign looks to be coming home to roost in this year's general election. We believe there is a lot that marketing can learn from last year's campaign – it's not the winning that counts, but how you win.

When we wrote about the Scottish Independence campaign, almost exactly a year ago, we commented on the lack of emotion in the 'No' campaign. We said there needed to be a foundation established based on some emotional empathy that allows people to vote 'No'.

At the time, the only person who seemed to have conjured any emotional expression was David Bowie, coming left field and delivered by Kate Moss, the message; 'Scotland, Stay With Us'. It appeared to say; *we want you, we respect you, we'll miss you.*

By comparison the 'Yes' campaign's presentation, coupling emotion and sense of the moment was tremendous. Their 'Scotland's Future in Scotland's Hands' line tapped straight into that 'sense of place' we can see a lot of Scots want.

As the campaign built through the Summer, Jim Murphy, Scottish Labour MP did his best with his solo '100 streets in 100 days', but the only real emotion the 'No' campaign mustered was a blistering last minute tour-de-force by Gordon Brown in Loanhead, an old mining town just outside Edinburgh. This may go down as his moment of political redemption.

So What Happened?

The 'No' campaign got more votes, but in the eyes of the Scots it hadn't won. While Edinburgh voted emphatically 'no' (because 'turkeys don't vote for Christmas'), the rest of Scotland was a lot less keen on the union. Many of those who voted 'no' did so with heavy hearts, drawn by a vision, but held back by fear and a sense of personal self-preservation.

It's easy for those in the rest of the United Kingdom to say they made the right choice and the collapse in the price of oil surely underlines that. Talking to people in Scotland today (as we have) they wouldn't necessarily agree.

The oil price seems to be almost an irrelevance to this debate. As one person said to me; *"you English would be delighted if we'd got independence and then gone bust"*. As a Scot I was disappointed at my categorisation, but the point was well made. What the Scots knew in their hearts was that the English were angry with them and within hours of the vote David Cameron made that very clear.

What the Scots Think Happened

In their eyes an agenda was set out that Scotland will have new powers (perhaps so it can 'stew in its own juice') and it will become a lesser part of the union. As for the oil price, for the Scots the insinuation that they can't stand on their own two feet and deliver for themselves or as part of the union, is simply too humiliating to be contemplated.

If you look at Scottish politics over the twentieth century; for the first half its ties with Northern Ireland meant it was a unionist Conservative heartland. In the second half that shifted to the reference point of class and it became a Labour heartland. To assert its place in the union and the world, it now looks as if it is shifting again, this time to a nationalist platform, with Labour at risk of losing many seats to the SNP in Scotland.

'No' Emotion

The 'No' campaign failed to express what Scotland's 'sense of place' in the union is and that is what is now coming home to roost. For many Scots, events following the independence vote have simply underlined that.

What happened last year looks likely to change the political make-up of the United Kingdom this year. For anyone, in what is often a very utilitarian marketing discipline these days, there is a very clear lesson – if you don't win hearts, you are likely to lose heads over the longer term and that could include your own.

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