



**Tipping Point or Falling Down?
Democracy and the British General Election 2010**

**Fire up the Quattro
Labour is shot in the foot but Gene Hunt's not to blame**

During the first week of this election campaign, Labour launched a mildly negative advertisement portraying David Cameron as Gene Hunt, the acerbic and complex fictional character first seen in the award-winning drama series *Life on Mars*, and currently featured in *Ashes to Ashes*.



Within hours, the Conservatives responded with this:



Whatever your political leanings, you just have to score that 1-0 for the Tories. You also have to wonder how Labour, armed with its professional advisors, Saatchi & Saatchi, could have walked right into that one.



With the Gene Hunt ad, Labour (or, at least, the Miliband Brothers, according to the Daily Telegraph) is trying to use current and 'cool' cultural references in an attempt to 'get down with youth' – to remind them that the 80s were a terrible Thatcher-dominated hell for young people and that the 'nasty party' had not really changed at all. David Miliband is quoted as saying, "Ed and I became politically active in the 1980s. [The] poster is a powerful reminder of the damage which the Tories did to Britain in the 80s." Depending on your political and cultural orientation this is more or less laudable,

However, for any campaign idea to have legs in terms of a concept to build upon in further communications it needs research and development by communications professionals. This can be done relatively quickly – but surely not on the timescale that it seems was involved.

According to the same Telegraph article, Saatchi & Saatchi, being strapped for money to develop a creative concept, used 'crowd-sourcing' – pretty much asking anybody interested to have a go - to ask 'the base' for ideas. All very leading edge and creative you would think.

To quote the article - "Labour's Ashes to Ashes poster was created by Jacob Quagliozi, 24, a Labour supporter from St Albans, who entered a competition organised by the party's advertising agency, Saatchi & Saatchi, which invited supporters to meet a brief posted online last weekend. "

Last weekend? As an experienced marketing and communications consultant the first thing that I would have done after selecting the concept and execution would be to test it on the target market. If the brief was only put out last weekend and produced by the end of the week it is highly unlikely that this happened. And if it didn't, why was it produced at all, never mind launched with such brouhaha?

I'll stick my neck out at this point and say that the ad was produced because 'Labour decision makers liked it'. This leads to the obvious but more interesting question, "Why did Labour decision makers like this ad?" The answer lies with values systems.

Labour decision makers and supporters - who try in all earnestness - are very unrepresentative of the general population. They need professional expertise to get their desired message across in a manner that can be positively associated with by their target audience. Or they shoot themselves in the foot.

For the last ten years, we have been asking a survey question that helps put 'politics' into context as a self descriptor of identity. 'My political convictions' is one of 30 descriptors, ranging from 'being a parent' (the most popular choice) to socially recognized definitions like 'my sex', 'my skin colour', 'my religion' and other factors like 'my country', 'my town', or 'my standard of living'.

The questions is asked in two ways:

1. choose all the facts you feel are important in your identity – who you feel you are,
and
2. choose the three most important to you.

The following maps show the "likelihood of choice" across the Maslow values space. They are scaled so that the dark purple areas always represent maximum likelihood. If you are unfamiliar with CDSM's Maslow space, take a quick look at the last page of the Introduction to this series. (www.cultdyn.co.uk/ART067736u/Tipping%20Point%20LD%20Intro.pdf)



Only one in eight of the population claims that their political convictions make up any part of their self identity! Seven out of eight of the British population does not feel that politics has any relevance to their self identity.

To put this into some sort of context, almost 19%, close to one in five, chose 'my body, face, and hair' as a self identifier. An ad for L'Oreal "Because You're Worth It" is more likely to make a connection with self identity than any politically slanted ad.

The Map clearly shows that the Pioneer area of the map is much more likely to hold high concentrations of people who claim their political convictions are part of their self identity.

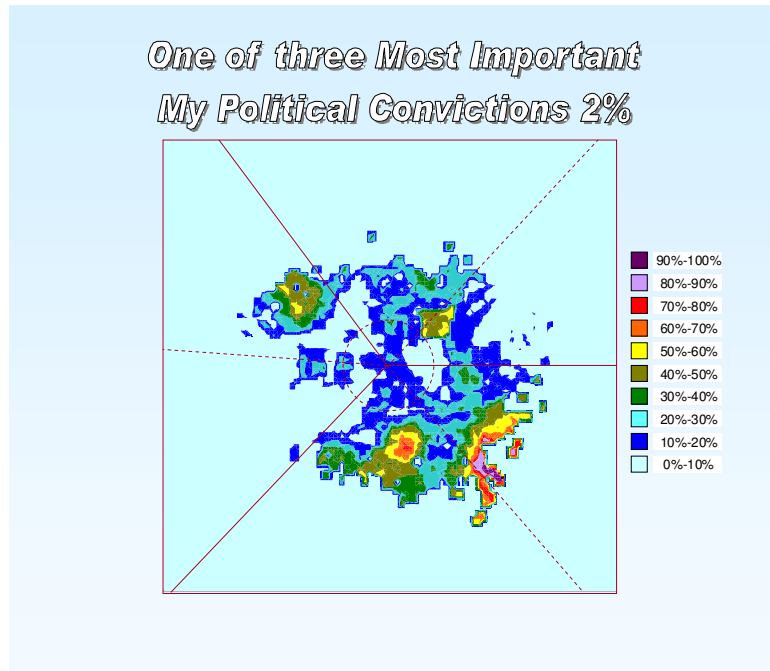
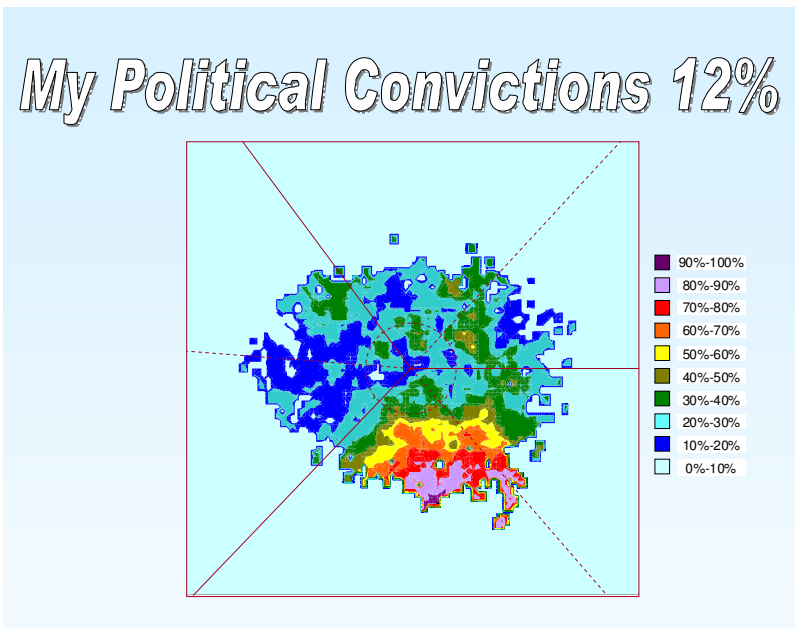
It is more than likely that political party activists – those using the Labour Party website – and Labour Party Ministers - would choose their politics as a self identifier.

Now let's take a look at the values map in terms of those who claim that their political convictions are one of the three most important facts in their self identity.

Straight away, the sheer irrelevance of current politics is exposed. Only 2% of the population lists this factor as one of the three most important elements of their self identity.

Those most likely to choose this are once again in the Pioneer part of the Map. The major hole is in the Prospector group, with values held by many of the people raising young families with both parents working full time.

In terms of the thirty choices presented to over 5,000 respondents in 2008, 'My political convictions' was equal last – 30th in a field of 30 (along with 'being European') – in popularity of choice.





Going back to our original question “Why did Labour decision makers like this ad”? We can now begin to grasp that if party activists and Ministers are used to pick an ad they are

1. very unlikely to hold similar values to the target market with which they are attempting to communicate,

and

2. they are about as likely to be moved by an ad for L’Oreal as others are to be moved by their advertising.

This ad/poster campaign idea was formed within a values set that defined ‘the 80s’ as a bad time for their dominant values and was approved by a values set that agreed with this orientation. The decision was made on the basis of ‘This works for me. The 80s were bad and Gene Hunt is bad, so portraying David Cameron as Gene Hunt is a clever and witty way to get down with youth and make him look, like, very bad.’

The problem with all this is that the fictional Gene Hunt is seen as only slightly different from a real person liked by millions of the British population - namely Jeremy Clarkson. Bluff, outspoken, politically incorrect, makes you laugh, is macho as hell and doesn’t care if what he says offends you.

That set of characteristics, in a real person, really can offend the (Pioneer) values set of the creators and decision makers involved in the process of trying to portray David Cameron as having those qualities. The first problem is that this is far less likely to be true of the wider population and, particularly, those ‘uncommitted’ or ‘floating’ voters in the Prospector area. The second problem is that those same characteristics in a fictional character can be very appealing – even to those with Pioneer values.

Probably the most important dynamic in this marketing miss-step - I’m being kind - is that David Cameron’s team could not have produced a believable set of ads or run a campaign that said he had these characteristics. Thanks to the Brothers Miliband, the Tories now can use the image in a positive manner. This is the very definition of an own goal.

So should Labour have used this ‘new marketing technique’ of crowd-sourcing? The answer is ‘only if they have clearly defined the values of the target market, tested the concepts and images on a similar market, and made the decision to go to production once they received positive feedback from their research’. To rely on the perceptions of ‘likability’ of only 2% of the population, or 12% at a push, is tantamount to suicide.

In any political or competitive process, organizational actions do not take place in a vacuum. Competitive pressures ensure that rivals will note all communications in their markets. Poorly thought through strategies and tactics can open campaigns and communications to ridicule. In the 24/7 news cycles of a ‘multi-mediated infosphere’ this is even more true than in the past.

In political terms this means that James-Carville-like ‘rapid response teams’ developed by the Clinton campaign team in 1992, will be, or should be, part of any national political campaign strategic framework.

The opposition Conservative Party has now appointed the ad agency M&C Saatchi – the breakaway founded by former Saatchi & Saatchi directors and members – to handle their communications. Their rapid reaction led to a piece of communication that highlighted the positive qualities (as perceived by non-Labour supporters) called into focus by the Labour ads.



Cameron's weakness among his own supporters and the largely disconnected electorate is seen to be his 'lack of a centre', a willingness to waffle about policies, and his perceived lack of 'hardness' and the 'go for it-win at all costs' approach which will resonate with non-Labour supporters.

M&C Saatchi's response was immediate, humorous and establishes the basis for a tougher image. Not only was it tougher, but ironically the references to the 80s and the current TV show made it more 'modern' than anything Labour was saying.