

The
Electoral
Commission

MARKETING SOCIETY EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2016

CATEGORY
EFFECTIVE MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the story of how the Electoral Commission put behavioural economic theory into practice and persuaded over 1.5 million people to add their details to the electoral register.

In the build up to the 2015 general election, the Commission's data indicated that 7.5 million British citizens were not correctly registered to vote, with registration numbers having fallen by c.920,000 in the last year alone.¹ Despite a campaign to drive awareness of the need to register just 6 months earlier, the importance of the registration message just wasn't getting through.

Against this backdrop, the Electoral Commission was tasked with adding 1 million new additions to the electoral register, with a focus on core under registered groups, including young people, black and ethnic minorities, and home movers. This was an ambitious target given only c.500,000 new registrations were added to the electoral register in the run-up to the 2010 general election, and that was with 15% more budget.

We needed a new approach to drive behavioural change en masse. For inspiration, we turned to behavioural economics and the theory of loss aversion, developing a campaign to drive voter registration by simulating the sense of loss from being denied the right to vote.

Our creative angle took this strategy out of the voting hall and into everyday situations that everyone could relate to immediately. It was brought to life through a media strategy that ensured the idea worked as hard as possible across broadcast, social, and partnerships to drive action.

The results were compelling. During the course of a single month, the campaign surpassed its objective by over 50%, with particularly impressive impact across hard-to-reach under-registered groups.

We hope you enjoy reading the full story.

¹ The Electoral Commission, The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain (July 2014).

1. From brief to strategy

SAFEGUARDING DEMOCRACY

Alongside freedom of speech, the right to vote is one of the fundamental tenets of democracy. The responsibility for safeguarding well-run elections rests upon the shoulders of the Electoral Commission, an independent body set up by the UK Parliament. The 2015 general election was the first nationwide electoral event in Great Britain since the shift from household registration to the new Individual Electoral Registration (IER) system. It was also the first national electoral event to fully benefit from the introduction of the new online registration system at gov.uk/register-to-vote.

VOTER INERTIA

One of the biggest challenges the Electoral Commission faces is voter inertia. The Commission's data indicated that 7.5 million British citizens were not correctly registered to vote at their current address, with registration numbers having fallen by c.920,000 in the last year alone.² This was despite a campaign to drive awareness of the need to register just 6 months earlier, which included a letter sent to every household in the UK, and a major above-the-line campaign highlighting the letter's importance.

We needed a new approach to jolt people out of their state of inertia and persuade them to take action before the 20th April registration deadline. The challenge for advertising was therefore not only to create awareness and challenge misconceptions, but, crucially, to drive change in behaviour. If we couldn't get people to actually go online and register to vote, the campaign would be deemed a failure, no matter how engaging its design.

CAMPAIGN OBJECTIVE

Specifically, our key objective was: to drive **1 million new additions** to the electoral register. This was a particularly stretching target – only c. 500,000 new registrations were added to the electoral register in the run-up to the 2010 general election.

A BROAD AUDIENCE

Research identified a wide range of groups less likely to be on the electoral register, including recent home movers, students, 18-24 year olds, social and private renters, and people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. From a socio-economic and demographic perspective, the target audience couldn't have been wider.

ATTITUDES TO REGISTRATION

Despite the breadth of our audience, further analysis revealed that they shared two common barriers to registration:

1. Ignorance: despite previous major campaigns to drive awareness, they still didn't realise that they weren't automatically registered to vote. Many assumed you are automatically registered when you turn 18, or if you pay council tax.

2. Inaction: they had the intention to register at some point, but simply hadn't got round to it amongst all the other things on their 'to do' list.

Fundamental to both these barriers was a lack of engagement with the registration message. We considered trying to segment our audience further, as a means to more tailored messaging that would engage people at an individual level. However, the scale of the task in relation to available budget meant this more segmented approach wasn't practical. Furthermore, we could not draw on political issues to rouse emotional engagement and cut through the sea of media commentary, political campaigning and the everyday distraction of

² The Electoral Commission, The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain (July 2014).

people's daily lives. As custodians of the democratic process, the Electoral Commission has to remain 100% neutral.

Which left us with the killer question; how to speak to everyone at the same time in a way that's informative and neutral, yet also impactful and persuasive enough to motivate them to *do* something? With more targeted and political levers unavailable, for inspiration we turned to academic research into how the fundamentals of human behaviour are influenced.

LOSS AVERSION STRATEGY

Daniel Kahneman's theory of loss aversion is well established in the worlds of behavioural economics and psychology. It refers to people's strong preference for avoiding losses over acquiring gains. A compelling body of research indicates that perceived losses have twice as much influence over behaviour as equivalent gains.³

Clearly, we *hate* to lose. But loss aversion also highlights how much the *way* something is communicated impacts our behaviour. We wanted to harness this power by shifting the focus of our message. Looking at our proposition from the perspective of a loss aversion strategy moved it from a purely informative space, "you have to be registered to vote", to a more motivating proposition "***don't be denied your right to vote***". A small step, but a highly influential one.

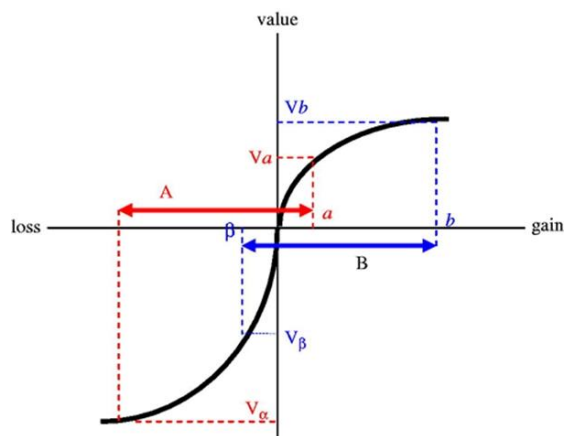
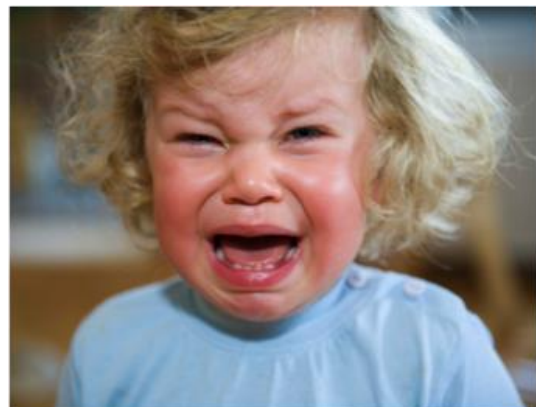


Diagram describing the loss aversion equation



Or in other words, we like having our cake...



But we hate losing it even more

³ Kahneman, D. and Tversky, A. (1992). "Advances in prospect theory: Cumulative representation of uncertainty". *Journal of Risk and Uncertainty* 5 (4): 297–323.

2. Bringing to idea to life

OUT OF THE VOTING HALL AND INTO THE EVERY DAY

Loss aversion had unlocked a persuasive proposition. However, to penetrate our audience's lack of engagement we needed to find a relevant way to express it, or risk becoming just more election noise.

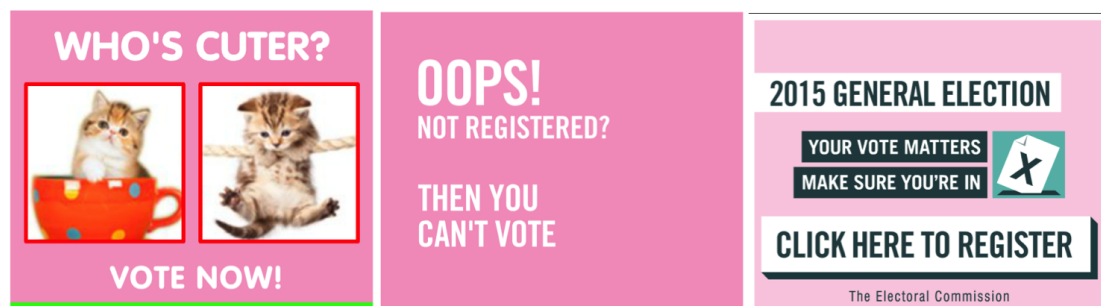
Qualitative research indicated that depictions of the voting hall felt too distant and bland for most people. It lacked interest and played into their perception that voting wasn't an issue requiring immediate attention. Conversely, trying to inject more energy into our ideas, quickly pulled us into politicised waters, or led to reliance on fanciful, humorous scenarios that trivialised the point as much dramatising it.

The breakthrough came when we took the idea out of the voting hall and into everyday situations we can all relate to. By bringing to life the emotion of being denied even the most minor everyday expectations, research indicated we could trigger people's instinctive aversion to loss and drive home our registration message in a way that felt relevant and immediate.



TV featuring customer being denied his right to ketchup

Online advertising borrowed from popular digital trends to trigger people's loss aversion. For example, initially unbranded banners denied people the right to choose the cutest pic between two kitten images, giving them a small taste of 'loss', before delivering our registration message.



Digital banner

Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO) provided a natural angle for our loss aversion strategy in social channels. FOMO has become so well established since the birth of social media that it even entered the Oxford Dictionary in 2013.⁴ Facebook and Twitter enabled us to seed the loss aversion thought through the voice that resonates most with our target audience, their mates and peers. #RegAFriend encouraged people who had just registered online to spread the news through Facebook and Twitter in order to galvanise their community through the power of FOMO.

A BROAD AUDIENCE REQUIRES BROAD MEDIA

Bearing in mind the scale and breadth of our target audience, we shaped our campaign around a big, broadcast approach, spearheaded by TV. However, this simple blueprint was fine-tuned through behavioural data and learnings from previous campaigns, ensuring our investment created the most possible influence.

We developed an econometrics model to enable us to understand the drivers of historic voter registration and determine the legacy impact of our campaign activity. This information fed into the media plan to develop a more effective U-Shaped phasing approach over a 5 week campaign window. Data analysis suggested that response to registration advertising was often delayed. With this in mind, our campaign launched with heavy-weight spend to build momentum. From there, activity continued at lower mid-campaign levels to mitigate against awareness/response delay, before shifting back up a gear with a heavy push in the final deadline week, to capitalise on a sense of urgency and deliver short-term response. This broadcast approach was complemented by a highly targeted digital strategy, using online search and behavioural cues to deliver our message to 'register online now' to people when they were most receptive to it.

PARTNERSHIP POWER

Partnerships enabled us to amplify the message further and create maximum social influence. Our first major partnership kicked off 100 days before registration deadline, coinciding with National Voter Registration Day in February. For the first time, **Facebook** added information directly into 15 million UK users' newsfeeds; driving them to register through the platform. Each registration was shared via the newsfeed of all their friends, building momentum and awareness throughout the day.

In March, we partnered with the **NUS** and other youth organisations to create #RegAFriend. The campaign urged young people who had already registered to encourage non-registered friends through the power of FOMO, by sharing messages and photos via social media. Thousands of people put their support behind the campaign, including **celebrities** such as Paloma Faith and Rick Edwards.



#RegAFriend

⁴ Oxford Dictionary

This was followed by a partnership with **Gogglebox**, creating a bespoke ad featuring the stars of Channel 4's biggest show amongst 18-25's.

Finally, mirroring our U-shaped approach in broadcast channels we launched our **Twitter** partnership one week before the registration deadline. A reminder to register was added to the timelines of all UK Twitter users. Thanks to the synergies between Twitter's brand image and our democratic message, we were able to negotiate this activity without any fee exchanging hands, and the message appeared as an integrated part of Twitter's organic stream.



Gogglebox Channel 4 partnership targeted at youth demographic

3. Results

Registrations outstripped our target by more than 50% with 1,561,0931 additions to the electoral registers in Great Britain during the campaign period, against a Key Performance Measure (KPM) of 1,000,000.⁵

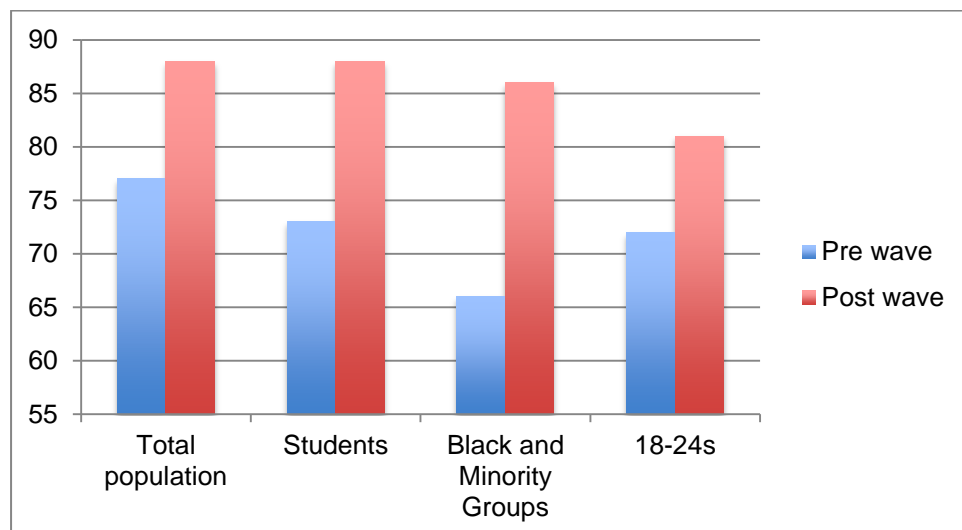
COMMUNICATIONS PERFORMANCE⁶

We got peoples attention: with prompted Campaign recognition of 81% across the UK, against a KPM of 60-70%.

Communication clarity: over three quarters (**78%**) spontaneously mentioned at least one campaign message correctly, with **85%** agreeing that ‘the ads made it clear that you have to register to be able to vote’.

Successful targeting: impressions of the campaign were strongest amongst key unregistered groups. For example, three quarters (**75%**) of 18-24s agreed (vs. 46% overall) that ‘the ads were aimed at people like you’ and ‘told you something you didn’t know before’.

Registration messaging: in spite of the already high awareness at pre-wave of the need to register in advance across the sample (77%), there was a significant post wave increase to **88%**. Large improvements were also seen among the key unregistered groups; specifically, ‘awareness of the need to register in advance’ increased across all groups, with significant increases among 18-24s (72% pre and **81%** post), students (73% pre and **88%** post) and Black and Minority Ethnic Groups (66% pre and **86%** post), bringing them in line with the GB average.

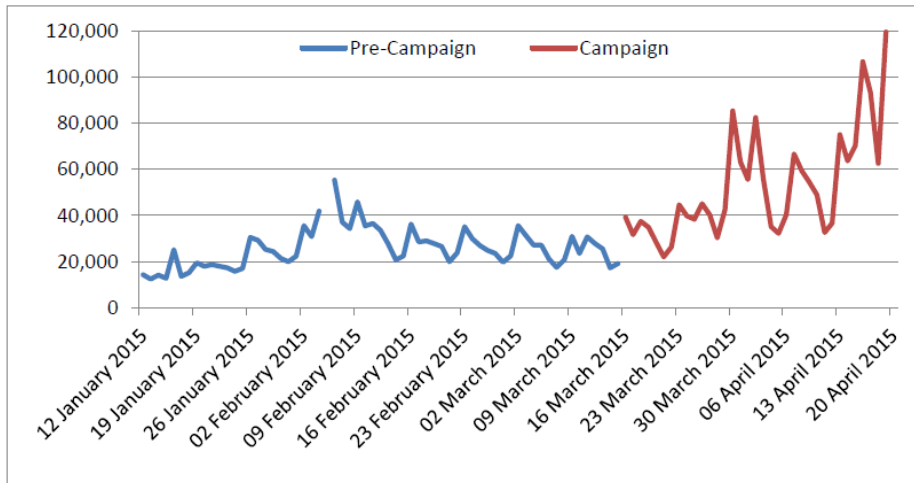


Registration messaging across campaign target groups

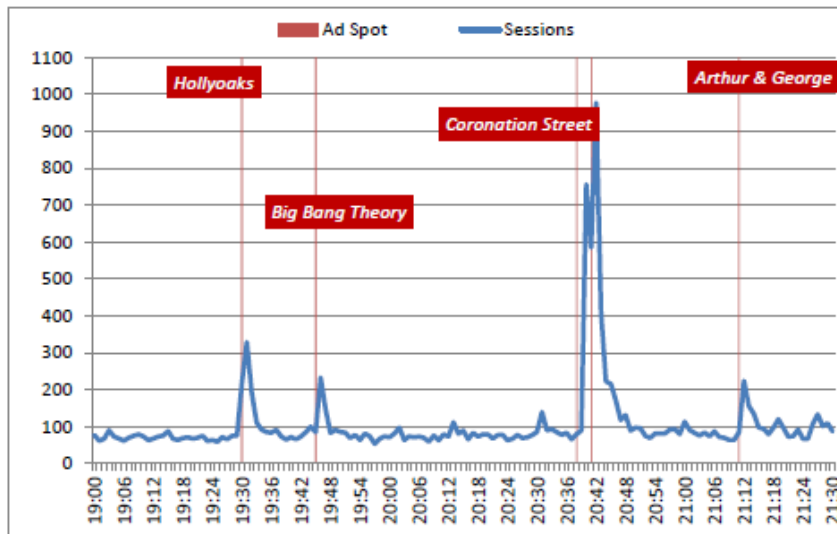
⁵ Source: Promoting voter registration at the May 2015 elections - A review of public awareness activity conducted by the Electoral Commission and other organisations, July 2015

⁶ The Electoral Commission; TNS Pre wave: 6th – 18th March 2015, Post wave: 17 April - 5 May

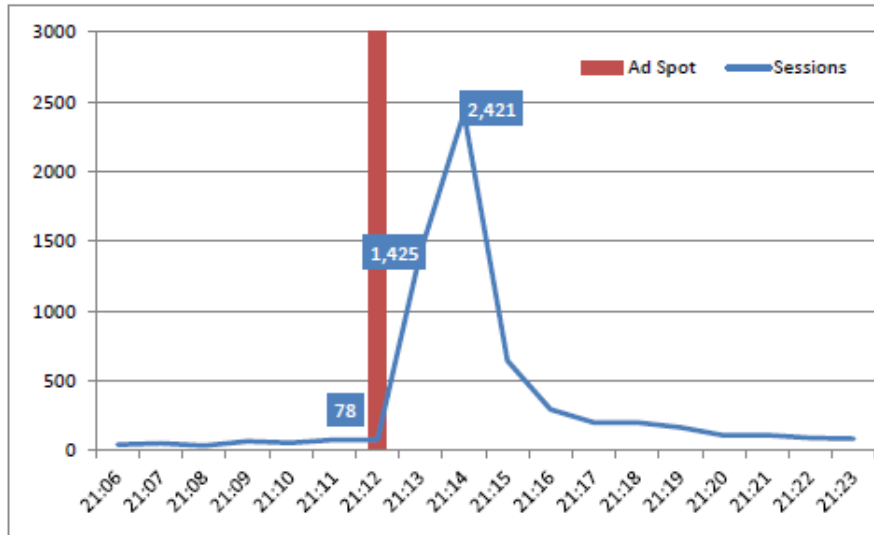
Awareness that you can now **register online at gov.uk/register-to-vote** saw a marked uplift post our campaign launch, and after each ad aired:



Online applications to register in Great Britain per day before and during campaign, excluding National Voter Registration Day and the registration deadline day



The impact of multiple TV spots across the evening of the launch of the main campaign



Progression of user sessions on gov.uk/register-to-vote on 27 March 2015 in reaction to the Gogglebox ad broadcast

We got people to take action: amongst those who had seen or heard any element of the registration campaign, **11%** claimed to have taken action as a result of advertising exposure. Again however, the campaign generated a far higher level of action amongst key target groups, with 1 in 4 students (**26%**) and 18-24 year olds (**24%**) reporting having taken action.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Whilst traditional payback calculations are not possible, we can demonstrate campaign efficiency through our targeted messaging and media strategy. The campaign delivered substantial cost savings with a cost-per-registration of **£1.98**. A comparative figure for the previous general election campaign in 2010 is £5.97, three times as high.⁷

ELIMINATING THE ONLINE FACTOR

The launch of full online registration in 2015 was a major step forward for the Electoral Commission. It provided a contemporary and convenient mode of registration, compared to the online journey in 2010, when visitors to the Commission's website would be required to download, print, fill out, and finally submit their registration details via post.

The increased online convenience made an important contribution to the overall uplift in new registrations, by helping to reduce the likelihood of 'dropping off' during the process by 30%. However, this improvement in conversion may also have been positively impacted by a more compelling, better-targeted communications campaign, in turn attracting an audience with a greater intent to complete the registration process.

What is clear from Google Analytics data is the dramatic change in the number of unique visitors to the Electoral Commission's website across the campaign period. In 2010, the number of visits to the website during the campaign period was 2,643,498 compared to 5,096,631 visits in 2015.[2] This represents an increase of 93% in web traffic, well beyond the 15% uplift in internet penetration over the 5 years between general elections.[3] It was also achieved despite a sizeable reduction in campaign budget, -15% compared to 2010.

[Word count: 2286 excluding references]

⁷ Promoting voter registration at the May 2015 elections - A review of public awareness activity conducted by the Electoral Commission and other organisations, July 2015.