

Twitter eclipses The Sun, finds new stars for UK election

March 17 2015, by Andrew Newby



Britain's 2015 general election is likely to be remembered as the Twitter election

"It's The Sun wot won it," the best-selling British tabloid declared after the 1992 general election.

This time it is more likely to be Twitter wot wins it, helping to fragment the vote in an election campaign that has brought smaller parties to the fore.

Online campaigning has given prominence to parties like the Greens and the anti-European Union UKIP that opinion polls indicate will far outweigh their future power in parliament following the May 7 poll.

The Scottish National Party (SNP), which could play a "kingmaker" role, has also won praise for a [social media](#) strategy that helped it come within reach of winning an independence referendum last year.

Adam Sharp, head of news, government and elections at Twitter in Washington, DC compared the upcoming vote to US President Barack Obama's re-election in 2012.

"We expect 2015 to go down as the Twitter election in the UK just as 2012 became the Twitter election in the United States," Sharp told AFP.

It could also become known as the YouTube election—given the proliferation of attack ads that skirt restrictions for political broadcasts in a new trend similar to US presidential campaigns.

'Face-to-face meetings'

Since Britain's last [general election](#) in 2010, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other social media services have also mushroomed in popularity.

One party that has benefited more than most is the UK Independence Party (UKIP).

"UKIP are doing very very well in building up support online," said Darren Lilleker, associate professor in political communication at Bournemouth University.

UKIP has 346,000 "Likes" on its Facebook profile, only narrowly

behind the Conservatives on 354,000 and way ahead of Labour on around 220,000.

The SNP has 183,000 "Likes" and the Greens 155,000, with the out-of-favour Liberal Democrats, the junior coalition partner, trailing on just above 105,000.

On Twitter, the Greens are the third most popular party, trailing the Conservatives and Labour but ahead of UKIP, the Liberal Democrats and SNP.

Twitter's bosses say their quick-fire service of 140-character messages allows users rapid access to a range of news sources but also enables politicians to communicate directly with the public.

"Candidates who make authentic meaningful connections with their constituents will swing the [election](#)," Sharp said.

The Greens said they too have been a major beneficiary of this, overcoming scepticism in mainstream media.

"Social media enabled us to broadcast our message without having to rely on the traditional media," said Green Party campaigns director Chris Luffingham.

"We could tell our own story, unfiltered," he said.

Members of the centre-left Labour party too are social media enthusiasts, believing online campaigning gives them a chance to counteract the advertising spending power of Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservatives.

"Labour takes a different approach from the Tories' high spending ads

campaign. Labour is working to out-organise the Tories," a [party](#) official said.

The Conservative Party declined to reveal its approach to social media, saying that it never comments on campaign strategy.

Ultimately, Lilleker said that old-fashion methods are still best even in a digital age.

"We did some research among campaigners across the UK and face-to-face meetings are still seen as the key way to meet and persuade people," he said.

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