LUCKY FOR SOME

OPINION:
HAS VIDEO KILLED
THE RADIO STAR?

‘TWAS EVER THUS;
LANGUAGE AS A
COPING MECHANISM

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TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING

OPINION:
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CULTURE, MEDIA & SPORT | FEATURE
Bingo has a reputation for being a social game, played in traditional halls across the UK mostly by women. But research reveals that it’s also big business throughout the world…
From the media storm over Blair's super-casino plan to the current political debate over fixed-odds betting terminal machines in betting shops, we are used to seeing gambling in the UK news. But a new research project aims to explore a gambling sector that is less often in the headlines: bingo. Led by Dr Kate Bedford, Reader in Law at the University of Kent, the Bingo Project is examining the regulation of bingo across the globe, and asking what the game can tell us about how law shapes play and risk-taking.

Using case studies of bingo regulation in the UK, Canada, Brazil and the European Union (EU), the research team is looking at how this distinctive but little-understood gambling sector is regulated in different countries. Dr Bedford is working with Dr Oscar Alvarez-Macotela, an expert in stock market regulation, and Professor Toni Williams, a leading critical consumer finance law expert. The project is supported by a voluntary advisory board that’s chaired by gambling policy expert Professor Gerda Reith and includes several leading academic experts on gambling, as well as representatives from the Gambling Commission (which regulates most gambling in the UK), the Bingo Association (the trade association representing the industry) and gambling law practitioners in the UK and abroad.

BINGO? REALLY

Bingo is a lottery-style game where players cross numbers, called randomly by a caller, off a purchased ticket to form patterns and win prizes. The tickets were traditionally paper-based and marked off using large pens (‘dabbers’ in bingo lingo) but in newer forms of the game the tickets can be virtual and the numbers can be crossed off automatically. Bingo spread globally through military and missionary circuits in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and emerged as a key source of fundraising in many religious groupings, unions, charities and social clubs.

The game also has a distinctive player base in many countries, dominated by older working class women. Dr Bedford says that this dimension of the game was inspiration for the research: “I’ve played bingo since I was a child and it has been part of the fabric of my family’s life. Our first family holiday was at a caravan park in South Wales: on the last night my mum won the full house game in the bingo so we got the same holiday for free the next year. The knife set in my kitchen was won for me by my grandmother over ten years ago: she won a prize bingo game just before Christmas in her local hall and chose the knife set as her prize because she knew I needed household supplies! The game can play a very important role in women’s everyday lives, not just in terms of winning but in terms of going out, socialising and staying connected to family.”

Perhaps because of its distinctive player base, bingo is markedly under-researched. It attracts a fraction of the academic and policy attention given to casinos, for example, yet in the UK bingo halls outnumber casinos four to one and employ more people. In Alabama, regulatory disputes about bingo, not casinos, dominated the 2010 governor’s race, and in Canada more people visit Ontario’s bingo halls than visit Toronto’s iconic CN tower. In Brazil, when President Lula da Silva attempted to criminalise bingo in 2004 there were protest marches in Rio by players and employees of clubs.

The Bingo Project aims to learn more about how the bingo sector is regulated in different countries to provide a fuller picture of how gambling law relates to broader patterns in our economic, social and political life. Dr Bedford said: “We want to know more about the key legal and policy challenges involved in regulating bingo in different places, as they are experienced by people who are involved in the bingo sector. These include people who make laws and policies; people who enforce those laws and policies; people who manage commercial bingo games, whether online or in halls; paid workers; charities and religious organisations that use bingo to fundraise; volunteers who work for those charities; people who run bingo in alternative forms (like drag bingo); and, of course, bingo players themselves.”

THE STORY SO FAR

The Bingo Project began in September 2013 by exploring the impact of changes made to UK gambling laws since 2005 on the commercial and charitable bingo sectors in England and Wales. Dr Bedford and Dr Alvarez have been engaged in fieldwork up and down the country, interviewing bingo operators and regulators, and visiting commercial halls, social...
The Bingo Project aims to learn more about how the game can play a very important role in women’s everyday lives, not just in terms of winning but in terms of inspiration for the research: “I’ve played bingo since I was a child and it has been part of the fabric of my family’s life. Our first family holiday was at a caravan park in South Wales: on the last night my mum won the full house game and was able to take us on our next holiday.”

Dr Bedford says that this dimension of the game was under-researched. It attracts a fraction of the revenue. In Alabama, regulatory disputes about hall closures and protect jobs in what was seen as a soft form of gambling that was important to community life.

In the first year, the team has identified several key regulatory debates about bingo in the UK. The discussion points include the following:

First, the definition of the game itself, prompted by technological developments and the embrace of ‘bingo variant’ games by some sectors of the industry.

Also important is where bingo should be played. This is linked to the potential for licensed bingo to be launched in non-traditional environments, such as pubs.

Another concern is the relationship between a bingo licence and the ability to run other kinds of gaming especially on machines.

Local level discretion within councils with regard to bingo licensing decisions is a key debate too.

Finally, the uneven operational impact of growing regulatory emphasis on social responsibility regarding underage players, vulnerable players or problem gamblers requires further discussion. This impact varies across different parts of the sector – it is a key concern in commercial bingo halls but is rarely raised in the social club sector.

Over the next year the researchers will present their analysis of these findings to different groups including the Gambling Commission, the Institute of Licensing and the bingo industry.

From late 2014, the team will turn its attention overseas. In Canada, unless it is run by a provincial government bingo can only be played in support of charitable causes. The Bingo Project will be researching how hotly debated regulatory reforms in British Colombia and Ontario affect charities and community groups, for whom bingo is an important source of revenue. In Brazil, the criminal law was proposed as a solution to perceived corruption within bingo, but the President was unsuccessful in outlawing the game. Here the Bingo Project will examine the reasons why bingo was a target for the criminal law at a time when gambling restrictions were being lifted in other parts of the world, and at how different stakeholders responded. Finally, in the EU, the research team will review the laws governing the online bingo sector, which currently vary significantly across the 28 member states.

As the project develops, the team will make more of its academic and non-academic bingo-related research materials available to interested visitors via its website. Public events will be held to discuss findings, and the project will close with a conference in 2016. You can follow the work on Twitter (@bingo_project), contact the team via its website – particularly if you have a bingo story to tell that might help them to understand bingo regulation better.

www.kent.ac.uk/thebingoproject
WHAT EFFECTS HAVE ONLINE MUSIC VIDEOS HAD ON THE SALE OF MUSIC NOW THAT YOUTUBE IS THE ‘NEW’ MTV?

MANY REMEMBER THE introduction of MTV in the 1980s with glamorous video premieres of artists like Madonna and Michael Jackson. Before it descended into Pimp my Ride and My Super Sweet 16, and before pesky ringtone ads, MTV was the marketing innovation of the music industry, adding a visual component to what used to be just audio.

MTV has now been replaced by YouTube. Almost 70 per cent of the 1,000 most popular uploads are music videos. But YouTube is different. People can stream videos on demand so that record labels no longer control advertising through exposure to videos. With MTV, you could only watch what was ‘on rotation’ (some top 100); now consumers can choose among gazillions of videos.

Recent surveys show that many people (especially teenagers) use YouTube as their main source of music consumption. This raises the question of whether the role of the music video has switched from promoting records to substituting for records.

A superficial look at the data isn’t useful: songs that are popular on YouTube may also be popular in the sales charts, on iTunes for example. The reason could be that people see videos and then buy songs, but it may also be that people watch videos of good songs, or they simply buy good songs just because they are good, not because they watched the video.

THE GERMAN MODEL

For the complete picture we would have to make it impossible to substitute YouTube views for purchase for some (randomly selected) songs, but not for others. Here Germany provides the perfect example. Due to a royalty dispute between YouTube and representatives of the artists (the German royalty collection society GEMA), about 80 per cent of the most popular music videos are blocked. This has been going on since 2009 but it’s only part of the story. In October 2013, the industry responded to the deadlock by launching an alternative platform to give consumers access to music videos. VEVO, a joint venture between Sony and Universal, is part of YouTube in most other countries, but runs its own site in Germany.

Comparing Germany (no music on YouTube) to other countries (music on YouTube) lets us answer whether consuming music on YouTube makes people buy less music. VEVO constitutes a second experiment by taking some music videos online while leaving those not by Sony or Universal artists unavailable.

We find iTunes sales in restrictive Germany similar to iTunes sales in other countries, taking other country differences and time trends into account. But maybe people watching music clips on YouTube simply have no intention of buying songs because music and video are separate things. That’s possible, but we also find that more restrictions lead to lower album sales in Germany compared to other countries. And looking at the introduction of VEVO in Germany, sales of songs that now have a video increase relative to those that don’t.

All this suggests that record labels do not lose money from online music videos, but that videos seem to be effective in advertising. So should the industry simply stop worrying about streaming videos, unlicensed cover songs (there are nearly 40,000 cover versions of Adele’s Rolling in the Deep on YouTube) and perhaps illegal copies?

Not necessarily: one-hit wonders may suffer because their key sales channel is under threat. But something similar to the MTV model where streaming videos are teasers that whet the appetite for further (paid) music by the same artist would certainly benefit an established artist with a back catalogue. So a ‘one-size-fits-all’ copyright law may have different effects for different artists and the benefits from advertising through exposure on free channels will have to be considered when weighing up the costs and benefits of copyright protection.

By Professor Tobias Kretschmer and Dr Christian Peukert

Professor Kretschmer is Head of Institute for Strategy, Technology and Organisation, Munich School of Management; Dr Peukert is a senior research associate at the University of Zurich

cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/dp1265.pdf
Before it descended into Pimp my Ride and My of artists like Madonna and Michael Jackson. in the 1980s with glamorous video premieres Super Sweet 16, and before pesky ringtone ads, a second experiment by taking some music makes people buy less music. VEVO constitutes an answer whether consuming music on YouTube is different. People can stream videos on advertising through exposure to videos. VEVO, launching an alternative platform to give songs, but not for others. Here Germany For the complete picture we would have to comparing Germany (no music on YouTube) and the costs and benefits of copyright protection. for different artists and the benefits from artist with a back catalogue. So a ‘one-size-fits-all’ artist would certainly benefit an established the appetite for further (paid) music by the same where streaming videos are teasers that whet perhaps illegal copies? of Adele’s Rolling in the Deep on YouTube) and increase relative to those that don’t. songs that are popular on YouTube may also video has switched from promoting records to industry, adding a visual component to what MTV was the marketing innovation of the music 111

\[\text{Negative stereotyping of people in financial need will not easily be overcome}\]

\[\text{How the press and Twitter reacted to Lee Rigby’s murder}\]

\[\text{British Soldier Lee Rigby} \text{ was murdered by Islamic extremists on the streets of Woolwich, London, on 22 May 2013. The incident was widely reported by the British press and public with the public relying heavily on social media. To better understand discussion around the incident, the subsequent trial and sentencing, Robbie Love, Professor Tony McEnery and Mark McGlashan at the ESRC Centre for Corpus Approaches to Social Science (CASS) at Lancaster University examined 2,235 news articles and 1,180,278 tweets that occurred during these periods. The subsequent database totalled almost 26 million words. Using techniques pioneered at Lancaster University to allow researchers to analyse large bodies of data, they found that, despite differences, the reactions of the traditional media and social media were heavily intertwined. Tweets relating to these events were more volatile in opinion than press reporting. Talk ranged from outpourings of condolence at hashtags #rip and #riplee rigby, which were frequent across all periods, to appeals for capital punishment and blatant racism and Islamophobia. A key incident captured in the Twitter data was talk surrounding a reactionary protest march conducted by the English Defence League after Rigby’s attack. The hashtags #islam, #muslim and #edl were frequent during the periods of attack and conviction and were embedded in tweets expressing both Islamophobic sentiment in addition to negative reactions to Islamophobia.}

\[\text{SPREADING THE NEWS}\]

While discussion on Twitter was broadly reactionary and characterised by nebulous opinions, the press reporting discussed a much wider range of implications of the murder detached from the initial details or reactionary language – such as the Muslim identity of the murderers in more detail, while attempting to distance the murder from Islam by characterising it as an isolated incident. Despite the differences between the press and Twitter, there was a high level of interaction between the two. Seventy per cent of the top ten retweets from the sentencing period were originally tweeted by news outlets, showing that Twitter users often referred to the traditional media, perhaps as validation of their commentary or in trying to help spread the news. Overall the research shows that language is more important than ever as a tool for coping with horrifying news events and influencing public opinion and attitudes. Rather than social media ‘replacing’ traditional media, the two heavily intertwine. Social media might be less regulated than the press, but not all reactions to such events were as ‘knee jerk’ as expected.

\[\text{cass.lancs.ac.uk/?p=1052}\]
DIGITAL DIVIDE?

Britain has one of the world's largest internet economies but digital inequality still exists meaning some local economies are disadvantaged

The internet has made an enormous difference in our social life, culture and economy, which makes it surprising that we know almost nothing about local patterns of internet access and use across the nation. No one knows, for example, the proportion of internet users in Glasgow, because national surveys simply don't have enough respondents to make reliable city-level estimates. New research by Grant Blank, Mark Graham and Claudia Calvino from the University of Oxford has revealed for the first time the local patterns of digital inequality across Britain.

The work was done using statistical techniques to combine two important but very different datasets – the national census, and the Oxford Internet Surveys (OxIS) run by the Oxford Internet Institute at the University of Oxford. By definition, census data is available for very small areas, and reaches (basically) everyone in Britain. But, unfortunately, because it is so expensive to run, the census doesn't collect many variables; it has no data on internet use, for example. The OxIS dataset, drawn from a random sample of around 2,000 British people, is a rich source of information on all kinds of internet activity, behaviour and attitudes.

It turns out that OxIS and the census (happily) use exactly the same boundaries to define local areas, generally of around 40-250 households. This means the researchers could directly compare the two datasets – combining understanding of internet use and behaviour (from OxIS) with local-level demographic information (from the census) to estimate and map internet use across Britain. OxIS shows whether someone is likely to use the internet from very basic data like their age, income and education. And because the census records these demographics for everyone in Britain, the depth of OxIS can be combined with the breadth of the census, using the strengths of one to offset the gaps in the other.

This approach obviously assumes that the people living in each of the census 'small areas' will match national patterns of internet use; ie that those who are better educated, employed and young are more likely to use the internet. The research also assumes there is no cultural skew (for example, 'Northerners prefer the internet'), or anything unusual about a particular group of households that makes it buck national trends (for example, 'the young people of Wytham Street, Oxford, hate the internet').

The resulting map shows that usage is concentrated in the South East, with London dominating. Bristol, Southampton and Newcastle upon-Tyne also have high levels of use, and the rest of the south (including rural Cornwall, interestingly) with estimated usage levels of 78-83 per cent. Leeds, York and Manchester are also in this category. The entire North East region is in the lowest category (59-70 per cent estimated use). Cities show much the same pattern, with southern cities having the highest estimated internet use and Newcastle and Middlesbrough, again, the lowest.

Boosting local economies

There are clear policy implications from this work. Britain has one of the world's largest internet economies, contributing an estimated 8.3 per cent to GDP and strongly supporting jobs and income growth. People benefit from better communications and businesses are likely to locate to areas with good digital access, thereby boosting local economies.

Because the internet has made such an enormous difference to our social life, culture and economy, it is important to bring people online, to encourage them all to participate and benefit. But despite the clear benefits...
of the internet, there is a marked inequality in its uptake and use (the so-called 'digital divide'), and very little is known about who is and isn’t connected. Without knowing something about local-level patterns, it is impossible to identify which area would benefit most from policy intervention to improve access and encourage use.

Using these statistical techniques opens up a whole new area for social media research and policymaking around local patterns of digital participation. For example, the very low estimated use in the North East is striking. And worrying. But Cornwall (despite being so rural) is above average in terms of likely internet users and is also the recipient of a major European Regional Development Fund effort to extend the county’s broadband. But the researchers find that possible access to the internet via fibre-optic cable is just one part of the story of internet use; this is the first estimate of the likely use at a local level, based on what is already known about the people who live there. In future, researchers will expand the model to include urban-rural differences, the index of multiple deprivation, occupation data and socioeconomic status into the analysis to provide even more detailed data.

www.oli.ox.ac.uk

**THE WORLD WIDE WEB**

When Tim Berners-Lee invented the world wide web, he opened up the internet to use by the masses. Here we have a brief history of its development and significant milestones.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Berners-Lee proposes a 'global hypertext' project known as the World Wide Web</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Berners-Lee invents the first server</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>The first web pages begin to appear</td>
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<tr>
<td>1993/4</td>
<td>Browsers are developed such as Mosaic and Netscape Navigator, accelerating the web’s progress into mainstream usage</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Internet Explorer 3.0 is given free to users with Windows 95</td>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>Google arrives to open a gateway to the whole web</td>
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<td>1998</td>
<td>Blogs develop, offering real online opportunities to interact and express</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Wikipedia, the free web-based encyclopedia, becomes available, and can be contributed to and accessed by anyone</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Berners-Lee receives a knighthood. Facebook first appears. By 2006 it has encouraged millions to be more active online</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Advanced 3G networks mean the internet can be accessed on the go on mobile phones</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Mid 2000s</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>The beheadings of American, British and French nationals by jihadist extremists are made available online</td>
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TWO-WHEEL REVOLUTION

The British are cycling more and more, bringing benefits to our health, wellbeing and the economy

‘ROCK STAR’ CYCLIST Sir Bradley Wiggins has made the mod look cool again, while Victoria Pendleton CBE has encouraged us to grab the family and take part in a big bike event. We Brits are lapping up cycling to the tune of £3 billion a year across bike sales, accessories and cycling-related employment. This has been driven by the ‘Olympic effect’, Tour de France victories, awareness of our growing waistlines and a whack to our wallet thanks to the arrival of a recession.

‘Why would I cycle to work?’ has been replaced by ‘please make way for my Brompton fold-up’ as 1.3 million new cyclists were added in 2010 in the lead up to the Olympics and 3.7 million new bikes sold. This was up 28 per cent from the previous year, generating £1.62 billion with £51 million of this going to local manufacturers. Halfords, the UK’s largest cycle retailer, saw a 5.7 per cent increase in like-for-like sales from cycling early in 2012, while Tesco reported a 130 per cent increase in bicycle sales after the 2008 Beijing Olympics due largely to ‘the Team GB effect’.

Research before and after the Olympics indicated that over two and a half times the number of people were motivated to cycle following the Games, with ‘Social and Occasional Cyclists’ the largest group influenced. But not content with only buying a bike, we Brits also coughed up around £850 million a year for lycra gear, helmets, ‘customisation’ and other accessories, sold to us by some of the 23,000 people employed in UK cycling that contribute over £500 million a year to the economy.

SAFETY CONCERNS

We would cycle more, but ‘safety’ is the most commonly cited reason we don’t, and what makes the National Cycle Network’s 14,700 miles of traffic-free routes especially appealing. Unfortunately this doesn’t cover cycle-only lanes from our homes to work and we have a long way to go to catch up with the Netherlands, a country that is the ‘poster child’ of cycling and the only European nation where cycle ownership is greater than 100 per cent (proving that something other than mobile phones can outnumber people).

The Dutch may also be smiling because ‘the bike is right’ notion makes accidents with cars the driver’s fault, spurring cultural change and helping to make the bike the preferred means of travel for all trips under 7.5km and for 15 per cent of all trips above this distance. In the UK, just 2.2 per cent of us rate the bike as our main mode of transport. Increasing this can have significant benefits for our health as well, with only Icelandic and Maltese nationals more obese than the Brits in Europe.

But it’s not all bad news as regular cyclists have been shown to be absent from work one day fewer each year than non-cyclists and infrequent cyclists. That means that the UK’s current regular cycling population of 4.3 million could already be saving the economy £237 million a year in absentee costs.

If cycling were adopted more widely and intensively the benefits could be many: demand for tailors could surge as alterations to take in clothes soar; some strain on the NHS could ease; roads and trains could become less congested and our air cleaner; people could smile as they pedalled past each other quietly and without stress. Better yet, we could witness the most significant Dutch cycling benefit: men-who-wear-lyca replaced by cyclists wearing clothes that reflect their destination. We can dream, and hope.

eprints.lse.ac.uk/47253
cerp.lse.ac.uk

TIME TO CHOOSE CYCLING*

Chris Boardman’s recent report highlights interesting statistics about how Britain’s awareness of cycling issues is growing as it slowly moves towards being a cycling nation...

2% of all UK journeys are by bike
64% say better infrastructure would make them cycle more
250% New York City’s huge growth in cycling in four years
7% Seville grew cycling from 0.5-7% of all journeys in just six years
£2 Current annual UK spend per head on cycling
£27 Current annual Dutch spend per head on cycling

Source: *Time to #ChooseCycling, by Chris Boardman, MBE, policy adviser for British Cycling, the sport’s governing body
TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING

Does excessive interaction with social media increase the risks of emotional problems?

A NEW STUDY OF 10-15-year-olds has found that watching too much TV or social media interaction really can be bad for you. Researchers examined how young people spent their time out of school and analysed their happiness levels to see how growing trends of spending more time online or in front of a screen might be affecting wellbeing and happiness levels.

They found that young people who spend more than an hour a day chatting on social networks or games consoles are more likely to experience socio-emotional difficulties, like depression and anxiety, than those who stick to just an hour a day. But those who keep fit through sport and exercise (less than a third do so daily) are more likely to be happy and experience good emotional wellbeing.

The researchers, led by Dr Cara Booker from the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex, followed the lifestyles and emotional wellbeing of around 5,000 young people aged 10-15 who are part of Understanding Society, one of the biggest panel studies in the world, that follows individuals and households in the UK.

They found that 63 per cent of young people were using social networking sites like Facebook for at least an hour every single day. Television consumed more than an hour a day for more than 75 per cent of young people.

Young people who chatted on social websites between one and three hours were about 40 per cent less likely to be happy as those who chatted for less than an hour a day.

Young people who were on social media or computer games for more than four hours a day were more than twice as likely to have socio-emotional difficulties – such as problems with their peers or being hyperactive – than those who spent less than an hour a day on them. Children who were watching TV for more than four hours had significantly lower odds of happiness, so this really could be detrimental to health.

Dr Booker said: “More than half of UK youngsters are using social media for at least an hour a day and our study shows this interaction can help happiness levels. But when they overdo it the risks of depression and other emotional difficulties increase dramatically.” The researchers found the same problems with those young people who are spending a lot of time playing computer games or watching television.

This research should prove useful to policymakers concerned with increasing the nation’s health and to parents and young people who want to make the right choices now for the sake of both their mental and physical health in the future.

When they overdo it the risks of depression and other emotional difficulties increase dramatically

How much social media interaction is good for you, and how much is bad?

Professor Rachel Gibson, University of Manchester

CELEBRITY IMPACTS

When celebrities work for good causes, we assume that this attracts attention. This can be effective for working with business and government, but it can be limited among the wider public. Research by Professor Dan Brockington finds that celebrity can work well for fundraising but not awareness-raising. In focus groups on media consumption of development issues, for example, celebrities are rarely mentioned as a source of information or influence. But celebrity advocacy does make an impression on politicians and business leaders, who enjoy meeting celebs and believe that they influence the public – good news for well-connected charities who build credible brand associations with particular public figures. But this also promotes certain forms of elitism and domination, which is less healthy in the longer term.

Professor Dan Brockington, University of Manchester

www.celebrityanddevelopment.wordpress.com

TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING

DIGITAL CAMPAIGNING

A new study examines how the internet is affecting electoral participation and campaigning. Researchers from the University of Manchester explored the digital content and social media of political parties and undertook interviews and surveys with voters and party web campaigners. The research was based on the US 2012 experience and suggests that digital campaigning doesn’t necessarily make participation a priority. For example, social media platforms in the most recent election served largely as sources of data on individuals and their personal networks. In the UK, while larger parties may see the internet as a new channel for their strategic Getting Out The Vote (GOTV) efforts, smaller parties such as the Greens benefit most by mobilising their activist base to recruit new supporters.

Professor Rachel Gibson, University of Manchester

news.aph.org.uk

ajph.aphapublications.org
IN WHAT WAYS HAS THE BRITISH POLITICAL SYSTEM BECOME INCREASINGLY PRESIDENTIALISED?

ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS any student will learn about politics in the United Kingdom is that we have a parliamentary rather than a presidential system. But the reality is that British politics has become increasingly ‘presidentialised’ and nowhere is this more evident than in contemporary media coverage, exacerbated since 2010 by the introduction of leaders’ election or referendum debates. Wasn’t it always like this? You could point to Margaret Thatcher, Harold Wilson, Harold Macmillan, David Lloyd George or William Gladstone as presidential figures in British political history. But this is to miss several key points.

First, as research in our project Advancing Understanding in News Information, Political Knowledge and Media Systems Research illustrates, political reporting is now routinely focused on the prime minister and the leaders of the major parties. That trend may be increasing: in the 2001 and 2005 elections, about one in every two newspaper stories that quoted a politician quoted the leader of the Labour, Conservative or Liberal Democrat parties; in the 2010 election campaign, that had increased to roughly seven in ten of the quotes.

Second, there has been a change in the nature of media coverage of leaders, with much greater attention to his or her personal life than before. And third, the shift in media coverage has extended to leaders’ spouses, who are now much more a focus of attention than in the past.

So how has this affected British politics? This may depend in part on what the public looks for in its ‘British presidents’. American academics write of a ‘presidential prototype’ against which possible presidents are assessed, and where the specific qualities of competence and trustworthiness are especially important. Our research from the last two general elections suggests that perceptions of a leader as trustworthy matter even more to voters in Britain – perhaps as a result of issues like the war in Iraq and the expenses scandal. But competence, at least as represented by ‘knowing what he is talking about’, matters less than in the US, and responsiveness more.

SHORT-CUTS TO DECISION-MAKING
Should this affect people’s votes? It is easy to dismiss as trivial judgements of whether one leader appears more trustworthy or more responsive to the concerns of ordinary people than another. But political researchers long ago gave up on the notion that most members of the public are interested in politics, educate themselves on where parties stand on the issues and vote accordingly. Instead, most voters use a variety of short-cuts that allow them to make the most informed vote they can with the least amount of effort.

What people think of leaders can be a reasonable summary of whether the leader, when they became prime minister, would enact the kinds of policies the voter favours. But the extent to which voters can make these judgements is still dependent on the quality of the information they receive. That may be misleading because so much of the election coverage of leaders is itself driven by their personalities and those of their spouses, and by how they are doing in the polls, rather than by the policies they stand for.

The partisanship of the British press also means that most voters are subject to a partial view of their leaders. Even if voters are not affected by press coverage because they are aware that it is partisan, the evidence from the US is that even such partisan outlets as Fox on the right and MSNBC on the left undermine views of the candidates they oppose but do not enhance the views of the candidates they favour. Partisan press coverage of leaders may therefore contribute to negative perceptions of leaders of all parties. And in a parliamentary system voters cannot express their frustration with their ‘presidents’ by voting directly against them. Thus the presidentialisation of our politics is ultimately detrimental to British democracy.

OPINION
PM OR PRESIDENT?
By Professor Susan Banducci and Dr Daniel Stevens

Perceptions of a leader as trustworthy matter even more to voters in Britain

PROFESSOR SUSAN BANDUCCI AND DR DANIEL STEVENS
Both are at the University of Exeter. Professor Banducci is Professor of Politics; Dr Stevens is an associate professor
THE PIONEER

DR LUDWIG GUTTMANN, a Jewish doctor born in Germany and specialising in spinal injuries, comes to England in 1939. In 1944 he takes up a post at Stoke Mandeville hospital to treat patients with paraplegia. But Gemtmann is concerned with more than the patients’ physical problems – he believes in rehabilitation. The seeds of a movement are sown...

SPIRIT IN MOTION

As the Paralympic movement grows in stature every year, we look at the history of the games

1948 The Stoke Mandeville Games, for the Paralysed, an archery event between two teams of disabled athletes, takes place at the hospital on the same day as the opening ceremony for the 1948 Summer Olympics at Wembley.

1952 The International Stoke Mandeville Games (ISMG) takes place – the first international Games, where a team from Holland also participates.

1953-1959 International Stoke Mandeville Games

1960 The nineteenth ISMG* takes place in Rome – overseas for the first time. It features 400 athletes from 23 countries and later becomes known as the first Paralympics. The competition is confined to those with spinal cord injuries.

1968 Tel Aviv, Israel, where the Summer Games take place, is deemed unsuitable as a venue because of its high altitude and lack of oxygen.

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2016 The International Paralympic Committee celebrates its 25th anniversary in September.

2018 Tanni Grey-Thompson is created a Life Peer.

FACTS & FIGURES | CULTURE, MEDIA & SPORT

BRITAIN IN 2015

DR LUDWIG GUTTMANN, a Jewish doctor born in Germany and specialising in spinal injuries, comes to England in 1939. In 1944 he takes up a post at Stoke Mandeville hospital to treat patients with paraplegia. But Guttmann is concerned with more than the patients’ physical problems – he believes in rehabilitation. The seeds of a movement are sown...

SPIRIT IN MOTION

As the Paralympic movement grows in stature every year, we look at the history of the games

1948 The Stoke Mandeville Games, for the Paralysed, an archery event between two teams of disabled athletes, takes place at the hospital on the same day as the opening ceremony for the 1948 Summer Olympics at Wembley.

1952 The International Stoke Mandeville Games (ISMG) takes place – the first international Games, where a team from Holland also participates.

1953-1959 International Stoke Mandeville Games

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