

An archive of media references to the Cameron personal narrative and his repositioning of the Conservative party in his first 100 days as Conservative Party leader.

(km, 12.4.06 version)

David Cameron, it is very widely agreed, is repositioning/rebranding the Conservative Party, i. e. presenting a changed identity of it to the UK electorate. He is doing this in the light of where the Tories' political competition is in terms of policy and personality. Also doing it because the Tories lost power in 1997 and have failed in two general elections to win it back. Below are 17 media references which are offered as instances of the rebranding exercise. Those references are interpreted by category afterwards.

The term 'branding' has its origins in marketing for products, and from there it migrated to the promotion of corporate bodies in business, public and voluntary sectors. If this note was written in 1997, 'repositioning' would have been used to describe the process in hand, but now it has an outdated air in the face of the continuous intrusion of market behaviour into all aspects of public life.

References

11.12.05 – *The Observer*, p. 19, carries a page entitled the 'The Cameron Phenomenon' with pics showing the new leader on his bike; buying milk; tieless on a bridge with an environmentalist. Cameron was elected party leader on December 6. The headline for the accompanying article by Ned Temko is 'Within minutes of victory Cameron's camp set in motion a tightly organised timetable'

1.1.06 – The national papers carry a page advert from the Conservatives headlined 'The world is changing . . . and so are we' There is an inset photo of Cameron. One of the declarations is 'We should not just up for big business, but stand up to big business when it's in the interests of Britain and the world'. See *Sunday Telegraph*, p. 7.

1.1.06 – The same edition of *The Sunday Telegraph* as above carries on its front page the report that 'Mr Cameron claims that fighting global poverty is now the Tories "moral obligation" and adds that "The right test of our policies is how they help the less well-off in society, not the rich'. Patrick Hennessy was the author of 'Cameron ditches health policy in high-risk manifesto'.

1.1.06 – *The Sunday Telegraph* again has Mathew d'Ancona (p. 19, 'Geldof gives Cameron his Clause Poor') saying that inviting Geldof onto the party's environmental working party is ' . . . a gimmick, and risky one, too. But it is also – potentially – of immense symbolic value to the Tories are they return to the electoral mainstream'.

1.1.06 - The *Sunday Telegraph* diary (p.18, 'The week that Was') carries a piece about Cameron's 10-to-15 a day cigarette habit and his attempts to stop. 'I've got to be much more disciplined', he is quoted as saying.

5. 1. 06 – Cameron tells the BBC

(http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/4585264.stm. Accessed 12.4.06) that ‘I’m a big Bob Dylan fan’ and that he played poker at Oxford but ‘I lost money and stopped’.

8.1.06 – Frank Kane in the business section (p.2 ‘Cameron should check out Tesco’s economic policies’) of *The Observer* has left his business friends ‘giggling with embarrassed disbelief’ that Cameron will ‘stand up to big business’. These friends say ‘he’s only doing it for the votes. Don’t worry. He doesn’t really mean it, you’ll see’.

12.1.06 – *The Guardian* G2 section reports 9p. 3, (‘Hi Kids, I’m David Cameron. Keep it real’ by Andy Beckett) that a ‘chatty message’ from the new leader appeared on the website myspace.com for ‘young people’ with the words ‘Hi, I’m David . . . Here is a selection of the tunes I like . . . ‘.

29.1.06 – *The Observer*, p. 1, ‘Cameron: Blair was right’ by Ned Temko reports that Cameron will praise Blair for his understanding of the political mood of the UK in the 1990s, and that he will claim to be Blair’s ‘natural heir’;

5.2.06 – *The Observer* ‘Pendennis diary’, p. 44 by Oliver Marre refers to ‘Dave’ Cameron and that he is ‘. . . cooking for his [media] guests’ under the headline ‘Loving the enemy’;

5.2.06 – *The Observer*, p. 29, ‘The Old Tory beasts are doing David Cameron’s work for him’ by Andrew Rawnsley reports that the Thatcherite Lord Tebbit says mockingly that Cameron is turning the Tories into a ‘New Modern Compassionate Green Globally Aware Party’;

8.2.06 – *The Guardian*, p. 31, ‘How fate and politics might strop Gordon Brown fulfilling his destiny’ by Jonathan Freedland notes that ‘Cameron keeps making the right moves. That cycle ride to the House of Commons was a cynical photo op – but the image seems to have lodged in the public consciousness, a visual shorthand for young, environmentally friendly, new kind of politician – everything the Cameroons want to say about themselves;

10.2.06 – *The Guardian*, 10.2.06, p. 33 ‘May the best man win – and not just for the sake of the Lib Dems’ by Polly Toynbee refers to ‘. . . the Cameron rebadging . . .’;

1.3.06 – *The Guardian* reports (p. 15, ‘Cameron’s statement of beliefs stresses social responsibility’ by Julian Glover that he said ‘I stood for the leadership because I was fed up with hearing that this party [Conservatives] is out of touch, backward-looking and lacks compassion. That’s not the Conservative party I’m leading’.

5.3.06 – *The Financial Times* magazine (pp16-21 ‘Into the Lite’) carries a portrait by John Lloyd of Cameron: the latter makes a joke about just having put on his tie, and of having being to the Dunfermline by-election when the small Tory vote collapsed further - ‘Yes ,well, I went up there. I think I met all our voters’.

18.3.06 – December 17, 2005 was the date of Cameron’s election to party leadership and the *The Daily Telegraph* remarked on completion of his 100 days in the post with

‘Cameron builds his own kind of Camelot’ p. 10. Writers Rachael Sylvester and Alice Thomas reported ‘He is determined to be at home by 8pm – family life, he said, is vital to his sanity. ‘I never leave before 7.50 in the morning, when we have help . . . It is possible to have three children and lead the party, but I have to delegate’.

22.3.06 – Cameron is filmed on BBC1 TV 9pm news riding to the Commons to reply to the Chancellor’s budget on a bike with helmet.

We can allocate aspects of these media references by various dimensions.

Location: Cameron goes shopping; goes to Parliament by bike; stands on a bridge with environmentalist;

Dress: tieless and wears a cycling helmet;

Slang: ‘Cameroons’

Ideology: believes in standing up to big business; helping less well off, and in a forward-looking, compassionate conservatism;

Celebrity friendly: has hired Bob Geldof for environmental advice.

Human qualities: trying to stop smoking; likes popular music, especially Bob Dylan; cooks for home guests; puts going home ahead of working late; played poker at university but lost money and stopped; jokes about small vote for Tories in Dunfermline by-election;

Ascribed role and address: Blair’s natural heir; rebrander of Conservative Party; journalists call him ‘Dave’.

There is another dimension as well: the narratives of leaders of major parties seeking to win back power. Since 1997, two other Conservatives fit that bill: William Hague, Iain Duncan-Smith. Did they construct a personal narrative? Did they try to rebrand the party as well?

Fog *et al* (2005) offer a theory of corporate storytelling in their *Storytelling: Branding in Practice*. It is a DIY textbook for PR people and its examples are commercial ones, but it does speak a hope that politicians will want to hear: ‘. . . the brand story gradually becomes synonymous with how we define ourselves as individuals . . . They (sic) help us communicate who we are’ (p.20). Electors who hear a political party tell a story they identify with, vote for that party. Fog *et al* also say that storytelling is the means to the goal of branding, and that stories have four features (p.31) – message, conflict, plot and characters. They add three authorial tactics (be specific about events; be distinctive about characters; be credible to listeners) making for effectiveness (p.118).

Is the Fog *et al* model any use to us?

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