

Election 2016: Labor campaign donned battle gear while Liberals wore slippers



Bill Shorten and Labor showed up in battle gear ready to win the election, Malcolm Turnbull and the Liberals turned up in slippers ready for a fireside chat. Andrew Meares

by Geoff Denman

Advertising is a purely market-driven exercise that is shaped by what consumers respond to.

So don't blame advertisers for those annoying supermarket jingles – they are like that because they work with consumers.

It is the same with political advertising.

Don't complain about negative advertising – it's there because it works and it works because voters respond to it.

The sad fact is if you are an Australian politician it is [easier to convince voters](#) that they can't trust your opponent than it is to convince voters that they can actually trust you.

For a while Malcolm Turnbull was an exception to this.

In October 2015 Turnbull would have been able to run an effective positive campaign telling voters to trust him because most voters actually did trust him – just as they trusted Mike Baird in the earlier state election.

However Turnbull managed to squander that trust by backing away from big issues he clearly supported before he was PM and then prevaricating on other issues such as the GST.

It was a similar story when Kevin Rudd backed away from "the greatest moral, economic and social challenge of our time" with the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. That did not end well either.

The polls clearly showed Turnbull's standing and trustworthiness dropped dramatically, which also took away the option of a positive campaign founded on his integrity and popularity.

The problem for the Coalition is it campaigned as if that trust was still there.

In the end Labor turned up in full battle gear ready for a fight while the Liberals turned up in their slippers ready for a fire side chat.

The reason Turnbull decided not to be the PM many voters were expecting him to be and perhaps not the PM he wanted to be is another subject.

However the denial of what that tactic cost him politically was a good example of "pride goeth before a fall".

The Liberals should have recognised that Turnbull was no longer the golden political asset of just six months ago and campaigned accordingly.

That should have meant they would go hard and often go negative – contrasting themselves on the economy and jobs, unions and border protection.

The other great cost of losing trust and then being in denial about it, was that Turnbull was totally unprepared for effective negative attacks himself.

It is highly unlikely [the Mediscare campaign](#) or any other scare campaign would have stuck eight months ago. Indeed initial mud throwing about his wealth and investments backfired badly.

However Turnbull's reversal and prevarication on so many things provided an opening for effective negative advertising – and with Mediscare Labor drove a dirty big truck through it.

The timing of Mediscare just before the media blackout gave no time for the Coalition to respond or to stop its momentum. Indeed I suspect the Liberals responded late because they continued to believe that Turnbull's personal standing was still strong enough for the outrageous claims to fail.

The Mediscare campaign is a worrying omen. The standing of politicians is at an all-time low, but rather than try to improve that situation our political parties show an eagerness to try to exploit it. Mediscare is big step down the road towards American-style attack ads, which are often completely untrue and an affront to any sensible debate.

So political advertising is negative and no one likes it. But it will continue to be negative as long as it works – and it will continue work as long as so many voters have lost faith in our politicians.

Unfortunately it has all become something that feeds off itself.

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