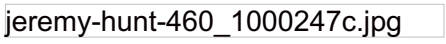


Presentation IS politics (Polis@Conservative Conference)

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2008-9-29

Presentation is now utterly part of good politics was the consensus that emerged from the Polis fringe [meeting debate](#) at Conservative Party conference. Journalists [Ben Brogan \(Daily Mail\)](#) and [Stryker McGuire \(Newsweek\)](#) agreed with [Jeremy Hunt MP](#) (Shadow DCMS Secretary and blogger) and Conservative candidate [Priti Patel](#) that you need to look and sound good as well as have something to say. Most of the panel made the obvious contrast between hapless Gordon Brown and personable David Cameron. Our event partner [YouGovStone](#) had done research which showed that their influentials think that Cameron is a triumph of style over substance but that he will still win the next election. But as [Sarfraz Manzoor](#) from the Guardian pointed out, Brown has been a disaster because of his policy decisions (or lack of them) as much as his unfriendly public persona. 

Ben Brogan said that we now live in an age of emotional intelligence. Politicians need to be ‘comfortable’ in themselves with living in the media gaze. Cameron is, Brown isn’t.

As Stryker McGuire put it, the American public can’t know every detail of policy but they can judge which Presidential candidate they trust. The current TV debates may turn upon a phrase or comment but that could be fair. We have a choice between ‘hot’ instinctive McCain and ‘cool’ deliberate Obama – which style do you prefer?

Priti Patel thought that presentation is about how you ‘amplify’ your ideas. If you only have 30 seconds then don’t complain, just make sure you get the core message across.

Of course, everyone in the room was united in their rejection of the tactics of Alastair Campbell. But it took a journalist from PR Week to remind us that the Cameron Conservatives have just as many spin-doctors as New Labour enjoyed.

Jeremy Hunt insisted though, that they had learned from the media mistakes of the Blair years. Indeed, he admitted that Campbell’s diaries had been part of his summer reading list. Hunt said that the New Labour desire to control their image had backfired. Now there was an appetite for authenticity.

I think he is right. The fact that Jeremy Hunt was voted [Most Fanciable MP](#) in a Sky News [poll](#) is nice, but not necessary to his political success. Authenticity is about more than good looks or an attractive turn of phrase (and Hunt has both). Instead it was his thoughtful [comments](#) on social responsibility and the BBC that represents the kind of substance upon which he will be able to build a political career:

“The problem is that in Westminster we know that a speech by a politician will have a fraction of the influence as a programme on the BBC. The BBC has huge, huge influence and it could be a huge force for good. So I’d like to see their vision of how they can play that constructive role.”

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