



'Led By Donkeys': Britain's New Fab Four

Politics

Tony Broadbent Wed, 10 Jul 2019 15:30 GMT



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It was the 5 July Tweet that did it. That reminded me of their simple genius all over again. Brought them and their work deservedly back to top of mind.

And then there they all were, the very next day; all four likely lads, in the pub where it all began; being interviewed on the 'CBS Saturday Morning' TV news programme, here in the US. Smart. Funny. Witty. Engaging. All very passionate, even if still, somewhat surprised, about what they'd wrought.

No. I'm not talking about John, Paul, George, and Ringo; 'The Fab Four from Liverpool'; but James, Oliver, Will, and Ben: 'The Fab Four from East London'. The "anonymous" creators of the superbly crafted and very edgy nationwide rethink-'Brexit' billboard campaign that quickly morphed into the truly surprising advertising phenomenon: 'Led By Donkeys'.

"Lions led by donkeys," the ominous turn of phrase employed by German officers during the First World War to describe "the brave as lions" British soldiers sacrificed on the battlefields of Belgium and France by Britain's stubborn and woefully incompetent generals and politicians.

"Led by donkeys," an all too telling expression that, as you'd expect, still carries a huge emotional weight in the United Kingdom.

Truth be told, it was the very first time I'd actually seen and heard James Sadri, Oliver Knowles, Will Rose, and Ben Stewart in the flesh, so to speak. As, by their own design, up until only very recently, they'd kept themselves anonymous. Their identities and motives now publically revealed, by their own hand, in an effort to refute claims made by right-wing critics that say they're nothing but a shadowy group of politically motivated trolls funded by dark money. Or worse: "Greenpeace campaigners." Heaven forefend!

The simple, stark reality being 'Led By Donkeys' is an entirely amateur freelance operation; at first, entirely self-financed; later, fully funded by social media-based 'crowd funding'.

The genius idea of 'Led By Donkeys': To throw politician's own words right back at them. To challenge all the many highly questionable pre-'Brexit' pronouncements made by Britain's would be leaders; such as Nigel Farage, Boris Johnson, and Michael Grove; by plastering them up on massive billboards at random spots all around the country. Then posting the billboards as Tweets to bring them to even greater public attention.

An idea the four friends came up with "over a pint" down their local pub, in Stoke Newington, in London's East End, one evening in mid-December 2018, because of their collective despair over the "lies, lunacy and hypocrisy" of the whole wretched 'Brexit' mess.

The New Fab Four's first idea was to emblazon the self-serving 2015 Tweet by then Prime Minister David Cameron; comparing his own political prowess to the then leader of the Labour Party; across a giant billboard, as it perfectly encapsulated the total failure of Britain's political leadership.

David Cameron: "Britain faces a simple and inescapable choice—stability and strong government with me, or chaos with Ed Miliband."

Words, enough, surely, to haunt Mr Cameron, if he hadn't immediately resigned as Prime Minister in the aftermath of his botched 'Brexit' Referendum and, himself, become as a ghost.

The unexpected and widespread impact of their first billboard inspired 'Led By Donkeys' to gather other politicians' vacuous Tweets and turn them into a national campaign that has since gone on to capture the imagination of millions of people and, not surprisingly, spark heated debate.

That 5 July Tweet that caught my eye? The one that showed the latest 'Led By Donkeys' billboard pasted up in London Street, Andover, in Hampshire ("where hurricanes hardly ever happen"). The poster's main graphic consisting of multiple rows of both male and female full-face, head, and shoulder emoji of all ethnicities; around 160, in all; all meant to represent the multicultural melting pot that is the UK.

WHO GETS TO CHOOSE THE NEXT PRIME MINISTER? 99.7% of us don't. Only 0.3% do*. That's not democracy. | *125,000 Conservative Party members.

A photo of the billboard, in situ, then immediately posted on Twitter, with the added caption: "Tomorrow 0.3% of the population starts voting on who runs Britain. The rest of us aren't invited."

And if 'Led By Donkeys' is not quite intended as being Britain's answer to 2017's Academy Award® winning dark comedy crime-drama 'Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri', then it most certainly drew inspiration from it, as it, too, "deftly balances black comedy against searing drama."

You betcha.

'Led By Donkeys' is on point. Fit for purpose. Ticks all the boxes. And, more importantly, it's working.

Even if all four lads, optimists to a man, all believe, in their heart of hearts, that, in the end, 'Brexit' simply won't happen.

From their lips to God's ears.

Especially as, even after three years of politicians promising how easy and profitable it would be for Britain to leave the European Union, without any of them having a bloody clue as to how to successfully bring it about. And with Prime Minister Theresa May's reckless mismanagement and, yes, the feckless lack of leadership by the Labour Party's Jeremy Corbin, fully to the fore. There's still so much work yet to be done in the ceaseless endeavour to fight farce with swallowed words and wallpaper paste.

With so much farcical pre-'Brexit' political verbiage still to contend with, where, oh, where do 'Led By Donkeys' begin next?

To wit, or rather the complete lack of it, as witnessed in these past utterances:

Nigel Farage: "I never promised it would be a huge success." #Brexit | 29 May 2018. | He didn't Tweet it, he actually said it! On his LBC radio show. What changed?

Michael Grove: "The day after we vote leave, we hold all the cards and can choose the path we want." | 9 April 2016 | He didn't Tweet it, he actually said it! In a speech at Vote Leave HQ. What changed?

David Davis: "If a democracy cannot change its mind. It ceases to be a democracy. | 9 Nov 2012 | He didn't Tweet it, he actually said it! In a speech 'Europe. It's time to decide.'

The Davis quote meant to throw a spotlight onto his opposition to a Second Referendum, despite increasing evidence that an awful lot of Britons who initially voted “Leave” would now like to “democratically” change their mind and “Remain.”

The text of the Tweet that featured the Davis billboard: “Unlike @BorisJohnson’s numerous extra-curricular income streams, these posters are paid for by the public. If you want to chip in (and thanks SO much to people who already have.)

“Let’s paste these Tweets all over Britain. This ‘Brexit’ chaos is founded on the forgotten lies of our leaders. Let’s remind the country of them with giant billboards and more. Crowdfunder.co.uk

My new all time favourite ‘Led By Donkeys’ posting: the 2 July billboard, located at Radford Road, Coventry, then Tweeted, worldwide, that showed a picture of RMS Titanic; her stern up, her bow already submerged, as if frozen at the very moment she’s about to slip and slide beneath the waves forever. The Tweet captioned: “The new Captain is @BorisJohnson. The rest of us are @LeoDiCaprio.”

Boris Johnson: “Brexit means Brexit and we’re going to make a titanic success of it.” | 3 Nov 2016 | He didn't Tweet it, he actually said it! At an awards ceremony.

Britain’s new Fab Four; James, Oliver, Will, and Ben; each one a true ‘Working Class Hero’ to my mind, for as Fab Ben Stewart commented recently: “We’re simply trying to create a conversation between ‘Leavers’ and ‘Remainers’. It feels like the country is about to slip into an even more polarised state, with a revoke or no-deal dynamic emerging. What can we do about that? I don’t know. But you have to hold people accountable.”

Well, three cheers, to that!

More strength to your elbows and loads more wallpaper paste to your buckets. And, hopefully, lots more spot-on billboards and nicely pointed Tweets to come, all around the country, so as to help keep all those know-nothing, ne'er-do-well ‘Brexit’ politicians on short notice.

Thank you lads. There will be beer.

#LedByDonkeys | @ByDonkeys