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### **So Who is Winning the Enthusiasm Race?**

The Visibility of the Two Campaigns on Social Media

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## So Who is winning the Enthusiasm Race? The Visibility of the Two Campaigns on Social Media

Posted on 6th November 2013 by Mark Shephard

So far as the polls are concerned the ‘no’ side are clearly [ahead in the referendum race](#). But are they also ahead when it comes to engaging with their supporters? After all the enthusiasm of some nationalists for letting their views be known via social media has become legendary. Perhaps in the online world, it is the yes side that is the more active and visible?

Since the middle of August we have been tracking the impact of the Facebook pages and Twitter accounts of the two principal campaigns, ‘Yes Scotland’ (YS) and ‘Better Together’ (BT). Our research, part of a wider project on the role of social media in the referendum campaign, is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council as part of its referendum initiative on [The Future of the UK and Scotland](#). On each weekday we have noted the total number of likes on the [Yes Scotland](#) and [Better Together](#) Facebook pages, and recorded the extent to which their pages had been ‘talked about’ (a measure that takes into account the average number of likes per page, number of posts to a page wall, liking/commenting/sharing a wall post, and phototags). At the same time we have also recorded on each day the total number of followers of the two campaign’s official Twitter accounts, [@YesScotland](#) and [@UK Together](#).

In Figure 1 we compare the performance of the two campaigns on these three metrics. The green continuous line tracks the number of Facebook likes (of the home pages), the purple dotted line the extent to which the two sets of campaign pages have been talked about, while the orange dashed line represents the total number of Twitter followers. In each case, a positive score indicates that the YS campaign scored more highly, a negative score that the BT side did so. (The direction of the scoring is, of course, purely arbitrary.) Thus, for example, the green continuous line indicates that at the beginning of our monitoring period the Yes campaign’s home pages had been liked on just over 9,000 more occasions than had those of the No side.

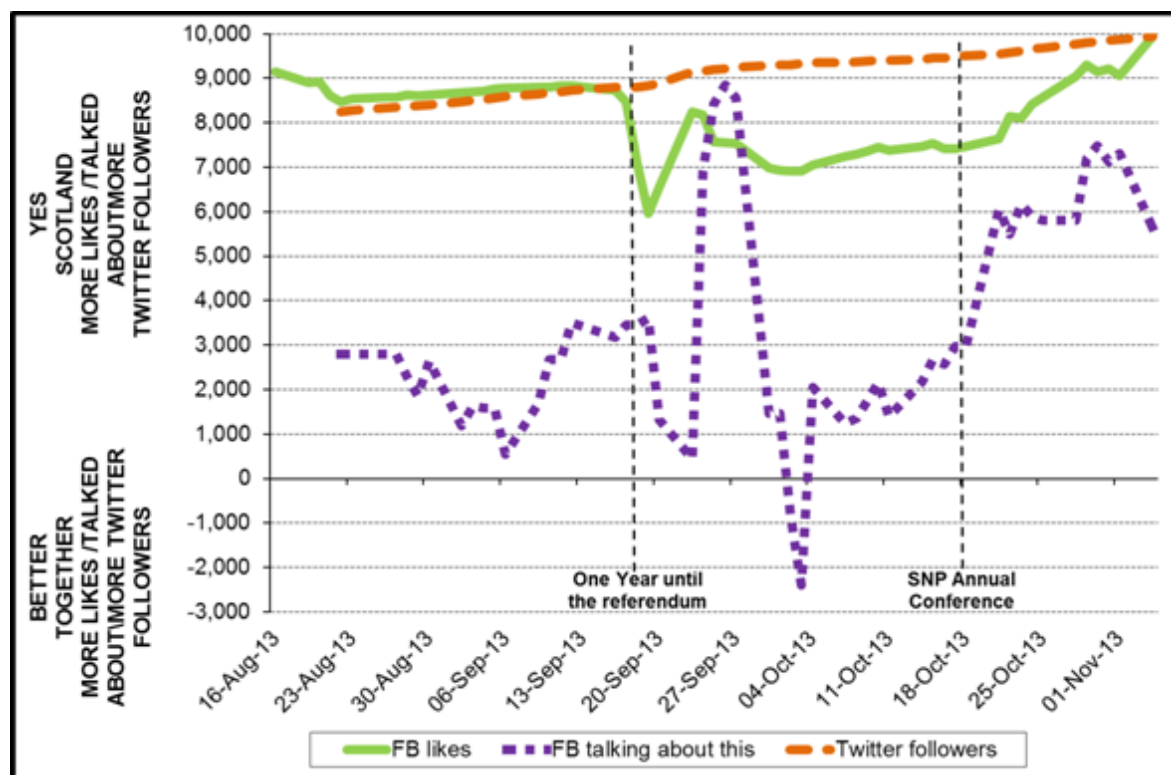


Figure 1 Different levels of Facebook and Twitter follower activity between ‘Yes Scotland’ and ‘Better Together’ campaigns August-November 2013. NB. Figures represent ‘Yes Scotland’ total numbers minus ‘Better Together’ total numbers for three social media indicators over time.

That particular gap has proven to be persistent. On average during our monitoring period the YS home page has been liked on around 8,000 more occasions than has that of the BT campaign. The extent of the gap has though varied somewhat. In particular it declined to circa 6,000 at around the time of the anniversary of one year to the referendum. This decline appears to have been occasioned by the launch on 19th September of a BT campaign called ‘Mid-Morning Sessions’, the purpose of which was to encourage BT supporters to step up their online activities by referring their friends on Facebook and Twitter to the BT campaign. However, whatever success this campaign had in generating Facebook likes appears to have been short lived. The Yes side’s lead on this metric is even bigger now than it was at the beginning of our monitoring period.

A more precise indicator of how much people are engaging with the campaigns is, though, provided by the ‘talked about’ measure (illustrated by the dotted purple line). Initially, the YS campaign was the more ‘talked about’, reaching a peak at the time of the UK party conference season. However, the BT campaign did appear to gain some traction at the beginning of October, when it was making a concerted effort to focus attention on what would happen to the currency and to taxes in an independent Scotland and when it launched several regional campaigns. For a brief while its pages were actually the more talked about. However, since then YS has regained the momentum, and its pages were particularly a focus of activity at around the time of the SNP annual conference.

The number of Twitter followers (denoted by the orange dashed line) shows much the same picture. On average the YS account has enjoyed some 9,000 more followers than has its BT counterpart, a gap that has gradually widened over time. However, the two Twitter campaigns appear to get through to fewer people than their equivalent Facebook pages – for example as of 4 November the YS twitter account had 24,541 followers but over 100,000 likes on its Facebook page. The equivalent figures for the BT campaign were

14,603 and over 92,000 respectively. Of the two mediums it seems that it is Facebook that has the bigger reach.

So in stark contrast to the picture painted by the polls, the online world is one in which there is greater activity and visibility on the Yes side than in the No camp. The question facing the YS campaign is whether it can translate its supporters' evident enthusiasm for their cause into a campaign that succeeds in persuading others to cast a Yes vote in the ballot box. At the same time, however, we should not exaggerate the degree to which either campaign is managing to secure voters' interest and attention via the online world. In both cases, the less onerous activity of 'liking' something on Facebook is proving to be far more common than the more demanding task of actively following an account on Twitter. Both online campaigns may only be scratching the surface rather than reaching out at a deeper, more meaningful level.

*This blog piece was co-authored with Dr. Stephen Quinlan, Research Fellow at the School of Government and Public Policy at Strathclyde University. Dr. Mark Shephard is Senior Lecturer at the School of Government and Public Policy at University of Strathclyde.*

Topics: [Attitudes to independence](#), [The Referendum process](#)

## About the author



Dr Mark Shephard is senior lecturer in politics at the University of Strathclyde and is principal investigator on the ESRC/AQMeN Future of the United Kingdom and Scotland research project focusing on the impact of social media on the Scottish Independence referendum.

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**prolerat** • a year ago

Most of us don't own a single square inch of Scotland.

It doesn't belong to us: we just live here and work for the people who do own it.

In or out of the Union, that won't change.

In Scotland, society is run in the interests of those who own the wealth. They argue among each other over billions of barrels of oil, GDP rates, profits and exports, because where the borders lie matters to them. Every border is an opportunity to wring cash out of other property owners.

Scotland will remain dependent upon their whims and interests whatever the outcome of the referendum.

They'll try to sway us one way or another with crumbs (or the promises of crumbs) but we'll only get what they feel they can spare to protect their privilege and wealth. We will remain dependent upon their investments making a profit for them before we can get our needs and

[see more](#)

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**David** • a year ago

Im confused. Would like to vote for independence but not a sham. How can keeping the pound where monetary and fiscal policy is dictated in London be financial independence? How can joining the EU where 70% of laws and regulations are made in Brussels be independence? Why are we not offered a real independence choice with our own currency and laws set in Edinburgh ?. Salmond often uses Norway as a shining example. They have their own currency and are not part of the EU. Can anyone explain how what is being offered is real independence ?

^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

**Maureen Luby** • 2 years ago

I agree with Richard McHarg. I, too, am going to vote YES and it is very rarely I go to the YES Scotland site as I follow many of the YES groups on FB and also the news outlets he has mentioned. I think carrying out the same kind of testing on the active YES/NO pages on FB would be extremely informative.

6 ^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

**Richard McHarg** • 2 years ago

To be honest, as a 'yesser', I rarely look at Yes Scotland's site or FB page.

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