

You'd be forgiven for thinking that the official election campaigns have already begun. Every time the media even get near the subject of politics, it's all about the election: whether it's regarding [party pledges](#) ahead of the election, speculating about [future coalitions](#) after the election, or poring over the implications of the [latest political scandal](#) for the election.

Yet the public is still to be subjected to the full force of the media machine, which will kick into top gear after parliament dissolves on March 30. During this shift, we will see the national newspapers beginning to take clearer political sides.

Taking sides

As with every election – and indeed throughout every parliament – each party vies for the favour of the media. Will The Guardian back us on this policy? Will The Mirror not attack us for this? These are the sort of questions that must run through the minds of the media strategists of each party. In the coming weeks, we will no doubt see every paper choose sides [like they did in 2010](#). But some have already made their preference abundantly clear.

Last week, the sunnation.co.uk posted an article with the headline: “[PLAY OUR BRILLIANT ZOMBIE SHOOT “EM UP: THE WALKING ED!](#)”. Now, I often try to stay away from promoting awful advocacy journalism and giving such articles a higher view count than they deserve, but this is something that has to be seen to be believed.

In essence, it is a rudimentary flash game that tasks the player with throwing bacon sandwiches at an ever increasing horde of zombified Labour MPs. There are multiple things to note here. Firstly, as a gamer, I can tell you that this is not a “shoot ‘em up”, as they describe it. Secondly, as someone with a sense of artistic taste, this game is not brilliant by any stretch of the word.

But finally – and most importantly – it is clear where The Sun's allegiances lie this election cycle, so one can expect more gimmicky attacks on Labour as polling day draws near.

#bewareofthehashtag

Over in the Twittersphere, there were two really good examples of traditional media and new media synergising in trying to get young people involved with the election. Channel 4 staged an event called “ [If We Ran Things](#) ”, in which young people were able to express their political priorities, both in the studio and via the hashtag [#IfWeRanThings](#).

The live event, which was run in partnership with Twitter, provides further evidence of the coming together of old and new media. The [digital debates](#) , which were to be hosted by YouTube, promised a similar outcome. That is, before the traditional broadcasters managed to [sort out the leadership debates](#) , leaving their digital counterparts dead in the water.

This week, as part of its [Free Speech](#) series, BBC 3 was encouraging its audience to use the hashtag [#AskATory](#) to put questions towards their all-Conservative panel. Now in using such hashtags, one has to ask what could possibly go wrong, just as one of the show's guests, [Toby Young did](#) . Well, when a target is this tempting, the soldiers of satire come out in force on Twitter.

To paraphrase the philosopher Thomas Hobbes: the life of a hashtag is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short. Assuming there are no bombshells or revelations, these sort of programmes – with their online outreach and calls for hashtags – only show us the persistent cynicism of online users. At least we can hope that this cynicism spurs people to go out and vote on election day.

Steven Buckley does not work for, consult to, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has no relevant affiliations.

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