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Rudd rewrites playbook on wedge politics

Marcus O'Donnell

University of Wollongong, marcuso@uow.edu.au

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Abstract

It's the end of day eight and Kevin Rudd's surprise debate announcement on same-sex marriage is still making news - maybe he is the suppository of all wisdom.

SBS Evening News led with an exclusive from Karen Middleton that even Julia Gillard was thinking of changing her mind on the issue. The staunchly anti-marriage-equality, former PM was apparently seeking a meeting with Ellen Degeneres and her Australian born wife Portia de Rossi during their Australian visit in March. Middleton reported Gillard was considering using a photo-op with the stars to announce a change of heart. But it didn't come off.

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It's Time For Marriage Equality...Labor social media campaign

It's the end of day eight and Kevin Rudd's surprise debate announcement on same-sex marriage is still making news - maybe he is the [suppository of all wisdom](#).

SBS Evening News led with [an exclusive](#) from Karen Middleton that even Julia Gillard was thinking of changing her mind on the issue. The staunchly anti-marriage-equality, former PM was apparently seeking a meeting with Ellen Degeneres and her Australian born wife Portia de Rossi during their Australian visit in March. Middleton reported Gillard was considering using a photo-op with the stars to announce a change of heart. But it didn't come off.

Rudd didn't need lesbian star power as camouflage but his announcement was carefully staged. His 100 day plan looks even more tactical than I had initially thought when I posted [my reaction](#) last night, and it's an interesting piece of campaigning from several perspectives.

Firstly it demonstrates links between mainstream campaigning and social media and secondly with this announcement he is rewriting the playbook on [wedge politics](#).

[Michelle Grattan](#) reported this morning that Rudd sent an email to supporters straight after the debate:

“I am the first Prime Minister of this country going into an election promising to support marriage equality. So if you support equal marriage, I will need your support.”

Grattan predicts Rudd will push more on the issue, because he “can make Abbott look out of time” and sure enough Abbott has had to [justify his stance](#) today in response.

This morning’s [Guardian](#), also headlined their debate coverage with the marriage promise and pointed out that the ALP had a [social media campaign](#) ready to go after last night’s announcement. #Itstimeformarriageequality trades on Gough Whitlam’s famous 1972 slogan and ties into the #itstime hastag already in use by [Australian Marriage Equality](#).

So not only did Rudd go into the debate ready to make that announcement, it was a highly orchestrated piece of campaigning.

He had a follow-up email, a new campaign website, twitter feed and hashtag all ready to go. He would also have known that it was a fair bet that his surprise announcement would lead debate headlines in at least some mainstream media.

This is an excellent example of integrated digital campaigning: tying in traditional debate tactics with a well prepared social media strategy both of which buoy up mainstream coverage. It certainly grabbed social media attention with [Twitter chatter peaking](#) during the announcement.

But what is most fascinating about this is that Rudd has turned the tables on the Libs and is now using same-sex marriage as a wedge issue against them. Homosexuality and same-sex marriage is the classic wedge issue and was used as a key strategy by George Bush in his [2004 campaign](#)

John Howard was in lock-step with his Texan mate and Craig Emerson called-out Howard on his wedge politics at the time. Emerson defined it nicely:

“Ultimately it comes down to this: splitting the nation in two and picking up the bigger half.”

Rudd is hoping that in this instance the tide has decisively turned and that the “bigger half” to be won is now firmly in the pro-marriage-equality camp.

Team Rudd has obviously seen [the polling](#) that was released last week that reports same-sex marriage is one of the top four concerns of young voters. As the Marriage Equality Campaign [release](#) noted: this puts it ahead of climate change, youth allowance and the NBN.

Paul Kidd [suggested to me on Twitter](#) that Rudd’s announcement last night was not only designed to appeal to this youth demographic, but was specifically timed to encourage youth enrolments as the electoral rolls close tonight. This [tweet](#) from the PM seems to indicate he may be right.

There is conflicting research ([here](#) and [here](#)) on the way same-sex marriage played into Bush’s 2004 victory. But even the more skeptical research suggests that it had some effect. Significantly it suggests these kinds of effects may be even more critical when the vote is close and small shifts in voter intention play a decisive role.

