

Jeremy Corbyn's going to appear on Gogglebox - Is that wise?

The Labour leader follows a raft of politicians to have made appearances on popular TV shows



(Image: Channel 4)

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When Jeremy Corbyn appears in a special charity edition of [Gogglebox on Friday](#) he will be the latest in a long line of high profile politicians to subject himself to the vagaries of reality television.

Similarly, “brave” is the fabulously [hirsute Tory MP Michael Fabricant](#), who will appear sometime soon as a contestant, also for charity, on Channel 4’s Celebrity First Dates.

These things aside, Gogglebox is a curious success story where the appeal is essentially in the audience watching people who are watching and commenting on programmes that TV viewers can’t actually see.

It’s an insight into human behaviour, really, and it’s no coincidence that the format is based on one of the premises of the sitcom [The Royle Family](#). The writers of that show, Craig Cash and the late Caroline Aherne, were the original narrators of Gogglebox.

It is also a show that allows ordinary people to be witty, disgusted, charmed, tearful and ultimately natural in a recognisable habitat.

It’s a microcosm of British society which is also a welcome antidote to the plethora of reality shows dedicated to showing the less well-off members of society either taking drugs, scrounging for benefits or checking out of police stations.

Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn (Image: PA)

So it’s perhaps unsurprising that Corbyn has agreed to appear on Gogglebox. The opportunity allows this self – professed [lover of EastEnders](#) to watch and comment on television programmes popular with his core constituents.

It will, at best, cement his reputation as a man of the people in direct opposition to the cold and distant Theresa May.

There are, however, dangers for politicians who appear on reality shows, as the experiences of George Galloway and Edwina Curry confirm.

In 2006, Galloway appeared in Celebrity Big Brother where his lasting contribution was to mimic a cat on all fours pretending to lick cream from the hand of actress, Rula Lenska.

CELEBRITY BIG BROTHER 2006

For many in the House he had debased politics and Labour London assembly member John Briggs said he was: “One of the biggest laughing stocks in London politics since the Second World War.”

But to be fair, the incident is something which Galloway, in a career that has been marked by controversy, has never publicly disavowed and after all these years he is still involved in frontline politics.

Edwina Currie is long gone from the braying House but her appearances on I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here! in 2014, Strictly Come Dancing in 2011 and Gordon Ramsey's Hell's Kitchen in 2004 suggest a regular revenue stream and a person who is unfazed by the whimsicalities of the TV voting public.

Edwina Currie

On Hell's Kitchen, though, her famed resolve was tested by Ramsay whose foul mouthed bully routine was in full effect. At various points he [labelled Currie](#) "poisonous", "diseased" and "a fucking b****" stating that she was, "like like your old granny who just won't die".

It's difficult to comprehend how in any sense this could have constituted entertainment and thankfully such behaviour on television today would be rightly unacceptable. But then, this was 2004 not 1974 and Trump is in the Whitehouse. So who knows?

To appropriate a [quote attributed to](#) Winston Churchill, the first Prime Minister of the TV age, it's easy to see reality shows as examples of television's "cheap and vulgar entertainment" and the great leader was notoriously dismissive of the medium.

He did, however, understand its potential power – as did Harold Macmillan who became PM in 1957.

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Macmillan was the first Prime Minister to [be interviewed in a television studio](#) and he was able to make considerable use of his wit and skills as a raconteur. His mastery of the aside, his Edwardian sense of good manners and subtle use of the understatement served him well.

He also allowed cameras inside Downing Street [for the first time in 1959](#), arguably destroying some of the mystique and aura of politics in the process because the viewing public finally had access to the inner sanctum of British power.

Television for Macmillan was a tool to be utilised and he realised that political debate was moving away from content and towards an approach which was concerned

increasingly with the way politicians behaved and were perceived, rather than with what they were saying.

Though it may surprise some people Margaret Thatcher appreciated this, too. From the early 1970's onward she employed [Gordon Reece](#), a media consultant who had worked with the likes of Bruce Forsyth.

Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990 (Image: PA)

He instilled in her a sharp appreciation of the possibilities of television and gave her the confidence to exploit her femininity. He coached her in the lowering of her voice and even advised her on the clothes she should wear.

Thatcher saw the limitations of the one-on-one interview. To her, one minute's news coverage was worth one hour's political conversation. She realised the importance of style and presentation. Substance could be secondary.

Nowhere is this point more clearly illustrated than in her appearance on the "Jim'll Fix It" show in 1977.

Senior Tories were appalled, as Thatcher would have been 10 years previously, at a Tory leaders' attempt at populism. Yet Thatcher was aiming at a section of society that would be of vital importance in the upcoming election – traditional Labour voters.

More, Reece encouraged Thatcher to be filmed undertaking "normal" activities such as shopping and housework, in an attempt to woo a new generation of Tory voters. The idea was to court the electorate with personality and not policy.

Which brings us right back to Jeremy Corbyn. Perhaps Labour's greatest achievement of the last election campaign was its success in challenging the right wing press portrayal of its leader as a mad, bad Marxist.

The appearances at Glastonbury and [even the appearance on the front page of heavy metal magazine, Kerrang!](#), were intended to reveal a leader of eclectic tastes and wide appeal. And with the slogan "for the many and not the few" far from exhausted, Gogglebox is just another way of demonstrating just that.

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