

# Can Tesco regain its dominance by emulating a Tory turnaround?

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Rita Clifton



COMMENT



Much like the new Conservative majority government, Tesco may subvert expectations and re-establish its market authority.

Just over a week ago, nearly all pundits, pollsters and the parties themselves thought there would be a minority government in the UK – it was just a matter of which configuration. People were convinced that this election would make it clear that coalitions were an inevitable feature of the future.

Reading commentary on [Tesco's](#) historic £6.38bn loss, you could be forgiven for thinking that, similarly, its destiny is a reduced future.

To add political insult to business injury, Will Hutton even thundered in The Guardian “Tesco’s fall tells a wider story about our failing capitalism”.

Tesco’s fall actually shows that commercial democracy works; do the right thing for customers and they ‘vote’ for you with their purchases and opinions, behave badly and they will vote you out faster than any government.

What are the chances that Tesco can confound expectations the way the Tories have?

## The Margaret Thatcher of retailing

During one of several interviews about Tesco over the past year, I mentioned that the grocer had been the ‘Margaret Thatcher’ of retailing – respected but not particularly liked...which was all very well when Thatcher was leading, but when the chips were down, people lined up to give her a good kicking.

Equally, after years of seemingly charmless dominance, people put the boot in to Tesco when its performance stumbled.

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But they’ve both now got their likeable ‘Daves’ and while Cameron might not be described as “drastic” and “dynamic”, at least he got into shirtsleeves and broke a sweat the week before the election.

Dave Lewis has got to get the brand to feel like the people’s champion again.

## Shy Tesco syndrome

If there was a ‘shy Tory’ syndrome where voters haven’t liked to admit their allegiance, opinion research would also tell you that some shoppers claim to love independent stores, while using major chains.

Tackling the equivalent of a ‘shy Tesco’ shopper and making people feel proud about saying they shop at Tesco would be a real result.

Starting with its staff, this needs confidence and belief and while the anonymous employee website [Glassdoor.co.uk](#) is hardly forensic science about staff engagement, it’s interesting to see Lewis is highly rated, even if perceived prospects are still low.

It’s difficult to fault Dave L’s start. Hire a star chief executive? Check. Selling off extraneous assets? Check. Symbolic move of head office? Naturally. And unlike the Tory leader, he can fire the staff who don’t get with the programme.

## An ‘empathy era’ on a mass scale

Tesco is a brand with ambition and customer obsession in its DNA. Hiring a Unilever brand man rather than a traditional store man as its boss fits with a fresh take on growth opportunities, wrapped around customers’ lives and helping them in every way they need. A true ‘empathy era’ on a mass scale. And one making money from sustained relationships with people, rather than false and strained ‘commercial income’.

It’s the most efficient way brands can succeed in today’s transparent digital world, where every behaviour is visible and counts - either to get fans or detractors.

Go Dave - but in a good way.

› **Rita Clifton CBE is an international branding expert and business leader.**