

# Petulant Britons on the edge of mass disobedience - new report

Submitted by: The Inkling Agency

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Hi,

I thought you might be interested in a new report which shows that life in Britain today has finally pushed us over the edge. No longer prepared to put up with unwelcome authority, unnecessary rules and regulations, silly systems and poor service, Britons are finally making their voices heard and getting their own back. We had enough of the 'computer says no' attitude of people supposed to help us. Crucially, in the run up to the election, it shows that we are becoming increasingly disobedient, fed up with the status quo. Whether it's transport, call centres or the nanny state that's winding us up, the gloves are off.

Reading about the actions of Petulant Britons makes us laugh and often we secretly approve of the behaviour - see below for a breakdown of categories and a snapshot of examples. Case studies, interviews, Publicis' recommendations on how to deal with Petulant Consumers, or indeed how to be a petulant consumer, a quiz and a full report are available:

EMBARGOED UNTIL APRIL 26TH

Petulant Britons on the Edge of Mass Disobedience:

Publicis report warns against communications cowardice and encourages brands to embrace rebellious consumers

It used to be just divas and celebrity chefs that threw their toys out of the pram or had a tantrum to make a point. Now everyone's at it.

According to a new report from Publicis, life in Britain today has finally pushed consumers over the edge. No longer prepared to put up with unwelcome authority, unnecessary rules and regulations, silly systems and poor customer service Britons are finally making their voices heard - and getting their own back.

Like a nation of petulant children, we're misbehaving and enjoying it. Yes, People Power is Back. While this is clearly an issue for the state, it also has significant implications for business and the way marketers target and treat customers. With this report, Publicis proves that marketers can harness petulance to great effect, but ignore it at their peril.

Publicis surveyed 1,000 people - and the results show that we are getting crankier:

- 70% of us think people argue more for the sake of it these days (rising to 77% among under 34s and 78% among C2s) and
- 44% enjoy having a good rant (47% of men and 50% of singles)
- 67% think we're getting cross in public more often (especially 35-54 year olds)
- (But 87% think that's a bad thing)

Britons feel it's their democratic right to assert themselves. But it's not just about getting angry. We want to make a point:

- 92% agree that people are more willing to say what they think
- 63% have been irritated by someone we didn't know in the last year (69% of singles, 71% of workers, 71% with kids in the house)

Paul Edwards, Chief Strategy Officer at Publicis sees irony in the findings, "Despite resistance to European rules and regulations, we are rejecting the British stiff upper lip in favour of more European behaviour – volatile, verbally and emotionally demonstrative, but most of all, petulant."

This is shown not just to apply to every day matters, but to the more important things in life. Edwards goes on to point out that "We have found a nation actively choosing not to conform. They're in the mood to punish. The key for us as marketers is how we harness this new spirit of rebellion."

It is the kind of action we decide to take and the sheer enjoyment it gives us in either doing it or hearing about it that makes us petulant. Some of it is political – an opportunity to the rally against the present Government for a perceived unfairness, an infringement of civil liberties and the ever encroaching nanny state. Take the huge increase in hunt attendance since the controversial February ban as an example. But Petulant Britain goes well beyond politics. There's cold calls and junk mail for starters. Here are some tips from Publicis's survey participants:

- Send back all your direct mail to the offending company, which is abusing your letterbox in one prepaid envelope;
- Tackle unwelcome telemarketers head on with the offer: "No I'm not interested in talking about double glazing but would you like to talk about Jesus?"

"It seems that we no longer condemn outright those who intend to break the law or disapprove of those who do not conform," said Paul Edwards. "Protest is back in fashion and in 2005 it comes with a sense of humour. It's not just about the winning, it's about the satisfaction of making your point and getting your own back. Most of all, we are petulant because it can be deeply satisfying."

Publicis' survey reveals that:

- 95% of us admire people who do something rather than just moan (98% ABs)
- 57% disagree that people should stop asserting themselves and accept the status quo (71% 45-54 year olds)
- Only 10% did nothing about it when irritated by someone they didn't know and

So why are we petulant? There are a number of factors:

- We are tired, working the longest working hours in Europe;
- Nanny state laws and EU regulations frustrate us, backing us into a corner;
- Our lack of trust in and respect for politicians makes us less likely to conform – MORI reports

that 71% of us think they do not tell the truth and YouGov finds that 40% of us think they're 'childish and infantile';

- We believe companies are trying to get one over on us with poor products and service or inflated prices;
- There appears to be so much choice – but it's rarely on our terms: what real choice does 140 brands of water really offer and the ubiquity of Tesco on the high street, offers us choice, but only that which it decides to offer us
- Increased wealth and technology give us the means to stand up for ourselves and make our opinions known; we believe we're entitled to a little respect and happiness and we want it now;

### Impact of Media and Technology

The media fuels our petulance by lauding the efforts of the common man against the system or by reporting the behaviour of Petulant Personalities like Gordon Ramsey, Tom Conti, Wayne Rooney or Sharon Osbourne.

We enjoy watching arguments on reality television and are constantly asked to vote people on or off programmes or are invited to have our say via text, Internet or red button technology.

And Speech radio allows us the perfect outlet for a rant. Witness LBC's total listening – or in this case talking – hours, which stand at a record 10.7 per listener a week. Opinionated Londoners are taking to the airwaves too!

And the growth of blogging is rife. From the unfairly sacked to the badly treated customer, the internet now allows every single one of us the chance to complain - to millions. Websites like eopinions.com service this and protest websites are growing in number, fast.

All of which would appear extremely bad news for both businesses and brands.

### Implications for Brands and Communications

With this report, Publicis warns marketers to sit up and take Petulant Britain seriously. When it comes to getting our own back, protests are designed to punish. Britons are becoming more demanding, and much less forgiving:

- 29% have felt like getting our own back on someone or a company this year (37% under 34s)
- when irritated 48% withdrew their custom (58% of men), 42% told others not to use them (48% of men), 38% hung up the phone

"We are making our views public and sharing them with our peers – a petulant person makes a lot of noise," warns Paul Edwards. "But complaining is not necessarily the end of a relationship, so how you handle the complaint is paramount.

"The public believes it's being spun to, so brands need to be extra careful about the claims they make and the transparency they offer. Misdemeanours are easily exposed but not quickly forgiven. Brands

need to embrace not ignore petulant consumers.”

Perhaps it's time for a new realism in communications. With consumers increasingly adept at decoding messages and brands subject to unprecedented scrutiny, could the shiny happy world of marketing messages be out of step with the nation's collective mindset?

The very act of petulance shows that consumers are reacting 'against' not 'for' things. They are demanding honesty, principles and bravery. Real choice on their terms and real differentiation. What real choice does 147 different brands of bottled water offer? Tesco Express acts as an editor of choice, rather than offering what consumers might want. The unlikely alliance of WI and Friends of the Earth against what Tesco has done to choice on the high street proves how widespread the sentiment truly is.

We keep telling people what to do, as if they'll unquestioningly buy into it. Yet, it's clear the language of persuasion isn't working. Take the '5 a day' campaign. We're actually eating less fruit and veg now than when it started. And might the London 2012 bid work better if the ads said "Beat the French" rather than just 'Back the Bid'?

Publicis believes that the industry needs to change and stop living in the past to create distinct and relevant advertising for today's consumers.

IKEA has attacked the snobbery of design in its 'Elite Designers Against IKEA' campaign rather than celebrate its 'designer' pretensions; and Birds Eye has responded very quickly to the scrutiny surrounding the healthiness of packaged foods by not only making changes to their products, but by adopting the line "We don't play with your food." It's far more impactful than "Our food is free of additives and salt". Even UKIP managed to motivate voters with its anti-Europe, anti-immigration stance, while the rest of the parties stimulate nothing more than indifference among most voters.

Publicis' reaction to today's consumer has seen them recruit Petulant Hero Sharon Osbourne for its ASDA campaigns, and portray housewives, not as perfect housekeepers keen to show us the scientific properties of Bounty and prove how clever they are, but as tough men in dresses tackling the seedy windows of Amsterdam in a bid to clean things up. Moreover, the launch campaign for Renault Modus and current Hula Hoops work encourage childish behaviour. Importantly, it's all done with a sense of humour, not taking itself too seriously.

#### The Power of Petulance and How to Harness It

- Don't be afraid of Petulant Britons, they present a threat but also a great opportunity
- Permission based petulance - give consumers the chance to react against something, they're used to it and enjoy it
- Give petulant behaviour an outlet e.g. ads designed for brandalism, a forum for consumers to share opinions and make themselves heard, a rant line even! Not only are consumers engaging with your brand, but it gives you an opportunity to create a relationship with them and surprise them
- Don't be afraid of negative language or imagery – it's in tune with the nation's collective

consciousness

- Listen more - don't screen out rejectors in research, they have just as much to teach you about your brand
- Be truthful in claims, authentic and transparent – it's always better to have nothing to hide
- Offer true choice and ask what the customer would like
- Genuinely satisfy real consumer needs with NPD
- Put an early warning system in place – you need to know when one person's rant is only the tip of the iceberg and the sign of much larger problems down the road
- Learn to spot the difference – be wary of those campaigning against you under the guise of petulance
- Make sure your call to action is right for the message
- Make sure your direct campaigns are properly targeted, your data clean and well managed. Don't bombard people. Be smart.
- Make your campaigns holistic – conflicting messages don't work, communications that work together create relationships

#### CASE STUDY SNAP SHOTS:

##### Petulant Motorists

Clamping, traffic wardens, speed cameras, the Congestion Charge, petrol prices, fines for apparently not driving with due care and attention - the beleaguered motorist has had enough. Not only that, but the tax payer's paying for it! Official channels for complaint are useless and the rules seem designed to catch us out, milk us of as much money as possible and turn us into criminals for the most minor misdemeanours. This has driven even the most upstanding citizens to become petulant: last month churchgoer Liz Nelson staged a sit in on a tow truck after she felt unfairly picked on for having a tyre on the curb in a road on a Sunday where there were no parking restrictions outside her church during Sunday Mass - the congregation, priest and ultimately the media got involved. At the other end of the scale, you've got Petulant Superheroes Captain Gatso, who dismantles speed cameras and Angle Grinder Man, who removes clamps. Give them a call and they'll sort you out. Motoring issues have even driven celebs to petulance - Tom Conti - is campaigning vociferously through the media against Congestion Charge enforcers prosecuting people who genuinely forget to pay the night before, resulting in the bailiffs at your door; and Gordon Ramsey who refuses to pay tickets issued to him as he jumps out of his car for a few minutes as he visits his restaurant. There are lots of organisations and websites springing up designed to help us get around or away with motoring issues - Check out: [www.ukspeedcameras.co.uk](http://www.ukspeedcameras.co.uk) as an example.

##### Petulant Commuters

Commuters are a tough bunch. They tend to operate in gangs. The day in day out frustration of being a commuter and being in the same very small, hot and late boat as others, has caused these people to get together and hit back. There's nothing like direct action. Kevin Morris once leafleted all his fellow commuters encouraging them to take part in a no show your ticket day. The authorities were unable to deal the mass action - it made the news. South West trains had an issue on their hands when commuters staged a revolt on their train, which due to timetable changes was now no longer stopping at Clapham Junction. They pulled the cord and refused to leave the train. Hannah Roberts has made it her mission

on First Great Western that when standard is dangerously overcrowded - she encourages a mass move into first class, and refuses to pay for the upgrade claiming that they should either restrict boarding, or for safety reasons allow the overflow into first class. Inevitably, when faced with numerous angry commuters, the train managers back down. Check out [www.backing-blair.co.uk](http://www.backing-blair.co.uk) and link to the Going Underground song. It may not change anything, but it makes us laugh and feel good about making the point!

#### Petulant Victims of Crime

Victims of crime are taking the law in to their own hands. Just like Jimmy O'Malleys approach, when his laptop was stolen. On finding out who the thieves were, instead of calling the police, every morning he bribed all the local tramps with a six pack of beer. In favour, they would defecate and urinate in the thieves front garden. People are fed up of not seeing any action when it comes to burglaries and thefts and therefore have decided to take matters in to their own hands in order to feel better.

#### Political Petulance

The nanny state and the behaviour of politicians is making us lose respect for authority. Sometimes we're unable to comply, at others unwilling, and often simply poorly informed of the rules. Common sense, it would seem, has deserted the system. This sentiment certainly isn't going to help Labour win votes, but it won't help the other parties either, as we feel they're all much of a muchness anyway. It's not apathy but a complete disregard for what politicians have to say that causes large section of the population to not vote. In fact, we feel we should take matters into our own hands - it can be more effective, but mostly we do it because it makes us feel better. Witness the mass increase in attendance at hunt meets since the ban in February. Many of us enjoy talking to political canvassers, inviting them in for a chat. Not to be converted of course, but for the opportunity of a good rant and argument. But it's not just the public which is petulant - Tony and Gordon's relationship has had it's moments, particularly over that book; Ken refusing to apologise for his comment to a Jewish journalist; and the recent spat between John Reid and Paxman are just a few examples. You Gov reports that 40% of us think the election campaign is childish and infantile. Enough said.

#### Personal finance/money

Banks. God, they wind us up. Their incompetence, sloppiness, lack of professional service and the whole call centre issue drives us mad. Even the fact that generally, good service and savings are restricted to new customers. The question is how do we get back at them? Well, many of us have become branded 'rates tarts' - chasing the best rates. We've become familiar with sending nasty letters. But what really gets you noticed? Switching banks does, but you could always take Ed Dewar's approach. RBOS kept messing him around about a mortgage, so he called a national journalist who wrote a major feature on the issues he had had. And he switched banks. Or at the other extreme there was farmer Harry Sutcliffe done over by Barclays who hit the news by spreading muck all over the branch.

#### Petulant Shoppers

Rude sales staff who couldn't care less. Shops that point blank refuse to have a discussion about

refunds. The rise of ebay - cutting out the middle man, the shop. Internet sites rating and berating shops and companies. We have transcended being assertive and savvy consumers and are now petulant. Joanne Lucas-Evans was annoyed by supermarket check out girls' attitude, so decided to fill her trolley full of perishables - whole salmon, cream etc and leave it in the queue. Hannah Roberts, annoyed at the fact that a shop wouldn't refund her for a jacket, went back night after night to put all the bins in front of their shop so that they couldn't get in in the morning. This more European style of behaviour is reflected on the continent. In Italy for example, there is a group protesting against stealth price rises as a result of the Euro. Called the 'Disobbedienti', they go into shops numbered about 30 and fill their trollies full. They get to check out and demand either a lower cost or they will leave. Most of the time they leave the shops without paying and redistribute the goods.

### Petulant Personalities

We learn by example, and petulant behaviour is championed by and most obvious among the famous. From Sharon Osbourne to the royals, they're all at it. Footballers and managers are particularly subject to bouts of petulance, and children emulate this behaviour. The period during the run up to Charles' wedding saw both Prince and Queen showing their petulant colours - he won't be told what to do and she won't let them have a full breakfast, only a buffet! We're all now liable to bouts of diva behaviour. What would the average man's rider look like? a) train to work must be clean and on time b) must get a seat on the way home c) traffic wardens must demonstrate ounce of common sense d) I will get to speak to someone who knows what they're talking about straight away when I call BT/my bank/council/mobile provider e) sales assistants will help me instead of just ignoring me and being rude f) train operators will give a toss when I ask when my train might arrive. Celebrities are protesting more than ever, using the media as a conduit for change.

### Technology

Technology is driving this trend. We are used to voting on TV shows via text, email, red button and expect our views to be heard. Whether it's Big Brother or 5 News, our views count. Except in public life of course. We therefore use the internet to share opinions and tips and employees and individuals use blogs to have a rant. Technology has democratised information, and we're using it to get our own back. See - [www.ukspeedcameras.co.uk](http://www.ukspeedcameras.co.uk) and [www.backing-blair.co.uk](http://www.backing-blair.co.uk). Clever companies should be harnessing this and encouraging the sharing of views. How you manage complaints is paramount

For further information, demographic breakdowns or a full copy of the report please contact Veronique Attas, the media foundry, 020 7792 0185.

### Notes on Petulant Britain

Petulant Britain is 2005' trends report from Publicis' Trends and Knowledge Group. It was created using a tailored quantitative study, its proprietary research tool Context Analysis, which identifies emergent trends, a review of consumer behaviour across key consumer sectors consulting Mintel, TGI and marketing data, as well as Government statistics, books and other published data.

The fieldwork consisting of a nationally representative sample of 1000 telephone interviews among Britons aged 15+ was conducted in February 2005 through NOP World, United Business Media.

Publicis' Trends and Knowledge Group has been monitoring this emergent trend for the past four years. The Petulant Britain report follows 2001's The Dissatisfaction Syndrome which identified that despite increased wealth, people were unhappy with their lives, and 2002's The New Assertiveness, which saw people asserting themselves and making their dissatisfactions known.

Notes on Publicis:

Publicis London is the UK's 4th largest advertising agency (ranked by AC Nielsen MMS billings). Publicis Group includes Publicis, Publicis Dialog - specialists in relationship marketing, contract publishers Publicis Blueprint, PR specialists Publicis Consultants and Carre Noir, the branding design agency. Comma, which provides creative marketing services, completes the picture.

Publicis London is part of Publicis Groupe SA, the largest communications group in Europe and fourth in the world. The Publicis Groupe SA incorporates a strong network of worldwide communication agencies, including Publicis Worldwide, Saatchi & Saatchi Worldwide and Leo Burnett Worldwide. Both the Zenith Optimedia Group and Starcom MediaVest are also part of the Publicis family.

See [www.publicis.co.uk](http://www.publicis.co.uk) for recent press coverage and further information.