



Media Weekends at Bernie's
(and other highlights of the first wave of presidential
candidate announcements)
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A PEORIA Project Report
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INTRODUCTION

What is the PEORIA Project?

Welcome to the **PEORIA** Project, the GSPM's harnessing of Signal Labs's realtime, cross media story-tracking platform to analyze the "public echoes" arising from the 2016 presidential campaigns. While others during the "invisible primary" will investigate each candidate's poll standing, dollars raised and spent, and endorsements won, we track and measure **words**—the chatter about the

candidates and the echo of their campaign messages in both mainstream and social media.

PEORIA is an acronym for **P**ublic **E**choes **O**f **R**hetoric **I**n **A**merica, chosen as an allusion to the old vaudeville and marketing [phrase](#) “will it play in Peoria.”

Our fundamental premise is that how candidates and their messages play on the trail with the media and the public both affect and reflect the voters’ presidential preferences. When a candidate says and stages it right, it resonates positively with the public, creating an echo that benefits the campaign. Of course, the opposite can also occur with negative echoes. From positive to negative, people respond to crafted messages, brands, catch-phrases, sound bites, slogans, and gaffes¹ as they surface in news and social media, affecting their choices down the road.

The **PEORIA** Project follows the candidates and their campaign messages, measuring the public echoes that surface in all types of media.

What does this first PEORIA report examine?

This report analyzes the public echoes during the period from March 15 to May 15, 2015, focusing on the formal presidential candidacy announcements and the initial branding attempts of these campaigns. We assess the textual data to determine the relative effectiveness of the candidates’ performances and the campaigns’ communication strategies. Then, we assign each candidate an “echo value” rating, which ranges on a scale from 1 to 11.

In this 60-day period, **eight** individuals formally declared their candidacy for the 2016 presidential election:

¹ Of course, the public responds to images as well. We presume that any image which has a significant effect on candidate reputation and voter choice becomes a topic of discussion and acquires its own caption or summary title, e.g. “Dukakis in the tank” and “Bush looking at his watch.” We, thus, pick up memorable images through the words that are commonly used to describe them.

Ted Cruz	March 23
Rand Paul	April 7
Hillary Clinton	April 12
Marco Rubio	April 13
Bernie Sanders	April 30
Ben Carson	May 4
Carly Fiorina	May 4
Mike Huckabee	May 5

Here and there we bring in data about likely expected candidates (e.g., Jeb Bush, Scott Walker). This summer we will release a second report that includes an analysis of the echoes of the candidates who declare in June.

What Can Candidacy Announcements Do for a Presidential Campaign?

A candidacy announcement is as carefully crafted a campaign message as exists in electoral politics. Its staging today occurs as much online as it does in physical space and across mass mediated channels. It is designed by campaign strategists to make a favorable first impression of the candidate on the public within the context and narrative of the race. The announcement is timed and phrased with other likely candidates in mind. It also attempts to cast the candidate as the best person to serve as the president in this day and age. Accordingly, campaigns sow a differentiating identifier into their announcement texts: a phrase that will set the candidate apart from their competitors, providing an advantageous comparison.

Notably, it is possible that rejection of the announcement's fanfare (e.g., silence, outrage) is mostly what registers as a public echo in the aftermath of the event. Again, not all public echoes are positive, nor are they always what campaigns intend. As such, a campaign's ability to detect and adjust to either non-existent or negative feedback in a short time is also part of the story of echoes.

METHODOLOGY

Signal injects in realtime data from Twitter, public Facebook, blogs, news, social videos, broadcast (television) and Lexis-Nexis. We looked at all of these cross media channels, assigned points to the candidates, and then, determined an “echo value” rating, on a scale of 1 to 11 (more on this scale below).

1. As a general measure of candidate resonance, we looked at the announced candidate’s total number of mentions in the news and social media over the 60-day period (slide 6).
2. We also looked at each of the announced candidate’s share of voice (slide 7, column 1). On this measure, we also ran the statistics to include the more prominent candidates who are likely to enter the 2016 race (column 2). Further, we grouped the candidates by party to account for the separate party nominating contests (columns 3 and 4). Hence, the formally announced candidates have three separate “share of voice” statistics (announced only; all likely; party only).
3. To understand more fully if the mainstream media coverage reflects the social media echo (or vice versa), we divided the media into *two groups*, so that Facebook, Twitter, video (e.g., YouTube, Vimeo, etc.) and blogs were in one “social media” group and Lexis-Nexis, television broadcast news, and websites owned by traditional newspapers (e.g., washingtonpost.com, nytimes.com, etc.) existed in a second “mainstream media” group. We considered the announced candidates’ share of voice across these two groups of media (slide 8).
4. As a particular measure of the campaign announcement itself, we looked to the duration of the public echo (slide 9). In essence, we counted the number of days it took for the spike associated with the formal announcement to settle into a steady plateau level.
5. We then examined the volume of mentions and the net sentiment of the chatter associated with each of the candidate’s “announcement echo” period (slides 10

and 11). Net sentiment is calculated by subtracting the percentage of negative mentions from the percentage of positive mentions (e.g., 55% positive – 45% negative would create a 10% positive net sentiment).²

6. As each candidate’s “announcement echo” period ranges (from 6 days to 1 day), we sought to establish an equal time frame across each candidate, from which we would be able to compare the echo of the announcements. As such, we looked at the three days prior to the announcement, the announcement day, and in the three days following the announcement. We show both the changing share of voice and the net sentiment during each of these periods for the eight announced candidates (slides 12 and 13).
7. As the title of this report suggests, while Senator Bernie Sanders’s candidacy announcement on April 30 created a nearly non-existent “announcement echo” (only 35 mentions from April 30-May 2), in the days and weeks following, his total mentions skyrocket (slide 14). We investigated this spike and uncovered that it was related to Sanders’s two Sunday show appearances on consecutive weekends in May.
8. A candidate’s success, however, is not only measured in volume and sentiment, but in the campaign’s social media reach, including the engagement of its supporters and the sharing of its messages. Examining this, we first considered the most popular Tweet and the Tweet author for the candidates during their announcement echo (slide 15). As can be seen, the majority of candidates (Cruz, Clinton, Sanders, Carson, and Fiorina) managed to have their own Tweet become the most popular.
9. In addition to Twitter success, we looked at the total number of the campaigns’ website shares during three time frames for the announced candidates: the announcement echo period; the combined announcement day and the three days following; and the full 60-day period (slide 16). These numbers matter

² Signal Labs uses Natural Language Processing (NLP) to determine sentiment – positive, negative, neutral. Sentiment is directionally and comparatively accurate.

because a candidate's web site serves as the hub for the campaign to convert attention or interest into favorable attitudes and enduring support, particularly through the use of landing pages to collect visitors' e-mails and solicit funds.

10. Summarizing some of the echo data (slide 17), we calculated two variables: "chatter volume" (column 3) and "echo conversion rate" (column 5). The "chatter volume" is the total number of mentions above/below the average number of total mentions. While total number of mentions varies widely and the average is significantly influenced by the outlier that is Clinton's total (4,826,745), we hope that this statistic will begin to provide us with a midpoint that will help us divide top and bottom tier candidates (e.g., top tier candidates should be above the mean number of total mentions, and/or "successful" candidates may be those who are 1 standard deviation above the mean). The 60-day "echo conversion" rate measures the percentage of (owned URL) website shares out of the total candidate mentions (e.g., Bernie Sanders enjoyed about 9 website shares for every 100 mentions).
11. We looked at the extent to which the candidate brand, as found in the key phrase on the campaign home page, has echoed as evident on word cloud depiction of the words associated with the candidate's name (slides 19-26).
12. **The GSPM Echo Value Rating** is a summary rating of the objective data described above and our subjective sense as longtime students of presidential campaigns (slide 27).

If the candidacy announcement is the political equivalent of a fanfare, then the echo varies from:

11 - Historic. When the books are written and standards are invoked for future announcements, this will be up there.

7 - Memorable. Recall association with the candidate; effective branding of the person in the race of these times.

4 - Noticed. The intended brand echoed in the news and social media spheres.

1 - Crickets. Virtually imperceptible echo in society, albeit searchable as reaction data, and therefore more than zero.

RESULTS

Low Topical Volume and The Wiggle Room It Affords Campaigns

We expected low echo volume about the topic of the 2016 presidential campaign, and we found it. There were approximately 10.3 million mentions of the eight announced candidates in the two-month time period, which works out to 7,150 candidate mentions per hour. By contrast, the May 2 running of the [Kentucky Derby](#) stimulated public comments at more than twice that rate, 16,670 per hour, between 6 am and 9 pm Pacific Time. In spring 2015, then, heavy news coverage notwithstanding, people were more interested in talking about an actual horse race than the famously symbolic one in politics.

That's probably a good thing for the presidential process. Candidates should be able to adjust their slogans at this early stage without having to pay a high price with voters. That does not mean the candidates should be able to alter facts about their past, including their issue positions and voting records, without it being commented upon. But democracy gains when its would-be leaders make transparent message adjustments to fit changing circumstances.

By May 15, only two of the eight candidates had established some semblance of branded visibility: Cruz and Clinton. In this respect, their announcements were successful.

Five of the other candidates' brands (Paul, Rubio, Sanders, Fiorina, and Carson) remain nebulous; thus, still open to adjustment. Unfortunately, this also means that these candidates' announcements were largely a missed opportunity.

For the final candidate, Mike Huckabee, this period echoed more what he said in December about the events in Ferguson than about his announcement. This suggests that he may have framed his candidacy's brand before his announcement.

For results and more detailed analysis, see the slide deck and the notes associated with each slide.

CONCLUSION

On May 15, the **GSPM Echo Value Rating** for each candidate's announcement and for the 60-day report period were as follows (candidates in announcement date order):

Ted Cruz	7
Rand Paul	5
Hillary Clinton	8
Marco Rubio	5
Bernie Sanders*	4
Carly Fiorina	3
Ben Carson	2
Mike Huckabee	3

* = Sanders formal announcement was a "1," but his follow-on weekends with Sunday show appearances were highly successful and raised his overall rating to a "4."