Words can affect elections as well as reflect pre-election trends -- to the extent words circulate society and penetrate public consciousness (e.g., “47%”).

Today, whenever words travel online, they can be converted into data. We can measure words circulation: by volume, over time, across news and social media channels, as connected to other words, even (roughly) according to the sentiment (positive/negative) attached to them.

Importantly, candidates say many words and campaigns are built around messages. This project is about understanding how those words and messages “play in Peoria.”

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

The primary research question is: what’s being said about the candidates and their campaigns?
• A candidacy announcement is as carefully crafted a message as exists in campaign politics. Strategists deploy it to make a favorable first impression of the candidate on the public within the narrative of the race. The announcement is timed and phrased and staged with other candidates in mind. It attempts to cast the candidate as the best person in the field to serve as president in this day and age. Relative success may be seen in the reception accorded in mainstream and social media.

• We examine here Zignal data about the twelve candidates who announced in our second time period of analysis, May 16 to July 29, 2015. The second time period was extended slightly to allow a week’s worth of conversation about Scott Walker. John Kasich’s campaign formally began after this time period, and so he is not included; nor is Jim Gilmore.

• The candidates examined are, in order of announcement: Rick Santorum (May 27), George Pataki (May 28), Martin O’Malley (May 30), Lindsey Graham (June 1), Lincoln Chafee (June 3), Rick Perry (June 4), Jeb Bush (June 15), Donald Trump (June 16), Bobby Jindal (June 24), Chris Christie (June 30), Jim Webb (July 2), and Scott Walker (July 13).

• As will be demonstrated, the talk about the presidential campaigns was mostly about Donald Trump upon his entrance midway through our study period.
Trump’s dominance is all the more impressive given that the number of Trump mentions during the first 30 days of this period (May 16-Jun 15) was close to zero. As will be shown later, Sanders is the only candidate besides Trump who increased his share of voice during the “post-Trump” period (June 16-July 19).

The candidates are divided into three tiers (these will be discussed more later) – Conversation Starters (in red), Reserves (in blue), and on the Taxi Squad (in yellow). Trump was the only Starter in the GOP field, joined by two Democrats, Clinton and Sanders. Five GOP candidates who nationally all attracted between 3 and 8 percent of Share Of Voice, make up the Reserves. The remaining candidates garnered less than 3%.

That said, both Chris Christie and Rick Perry appear to be more in the conversation when the talk is only about GOP candidates. Hence, it would appear that out of the 20 candidates in this report; eight of them are seriously in contention for the GOP nomination.

Total Mentions over the 63-day period show us how much people were talking about the 2016 presidential contest. The total mentions of all candidates during this period was 21,848,035 (about 14,449 per hour); about 15.2 million were the Republicans only – AND notably, almost half of that was about Trump, in only the second half of the time period.

To put the presidential campaign conversation in social context, we note (as we did...
• The talk about Trump peaked or spiked seven times in the last half of our study period. All seven of these Trump Towers attracted more mentions than any of the other twelve newly announced candidates did at any time. In fact, even when talk about Trump was in a relative valley, the mention level still exceeded the mentions for all the other candidates on all days except for five candidate announcement spikes, for Perry, Bush, Jindal, Christie, and Walker. Two of Trump’s Towers occurred on the same day as Christie and Walker.

• Many candidate announcements barely registered in the month of Trump’s dominance of the conversation.

• The only candidate who has garnered a larger spike than Trump’s largest, on his announcement day, was Hillary Clinton (over 800K), as shown in the previous PEORIA report.
• Trump talk muffled the announcement echo of Bush and those who followed. The average share of voice during pre-Trump announcement echoes was 30.9%. After his announcement it was 12.3%. In the previous PEORIA report, the average share of voice for each candidate during their echo period was 35%.
• No candidate announcement suffered as much deprivation of conversational attention as Bush. This slide shows the announcement share of voice for the three days before, the day of, and the three days after the event. This allows for a more standard comparison of how they performed on their share of voice. Bush went from having over 80% share of voice on his Announcement Day to having only 15% SOV in the three days after. That drop is large in magnitude and clearly is related to Trump announcing on June 16th – the very next day after Bush announced.
As we discussed in our last report, we’re interested in similarities and differences between mainstream and social media voices. While it is too early to understand which ways the causal arrow goes (do the news media cause social, vice versa, or are they independent conversations) we are keeping track of the differences.

Our prime research questions in this regard: Will one type of media identify the eventual party nominee earlier than the other? Who are the darlings in each category? What are the dynamics between types of media and how do those change with different circumstances?

For now what is clear is that the mainstream media distributed attention across the field of (new) candidates much more than social media, where The Donald dominated, and Bush and Walker fared next best.
The Echo Conversion rate measures the ratio of campaign web site shares to total mentions. It indicated the effectiveness of the candidate’s campaign organization and network of supporters.

While Trump (in yellow) has a large number of website shares relative to the other newcomers in our second study period, his Echo Conversion rate is tied for the poorest among those candidates where a rate is detectable.

In contrast, Jindal and Santorum (in red), had good conversion rates despite their low volume of mentions.

The mean number of mentions helps us place this in perspective. It stood at 1,018,451 for the period. This was less than for the first period we studied (1,289,326), notwithstanding the presence of talk about Trump. However, subtract Trump and the mean for the second period drops to 465,174, greatly below that for the first period.
• We now pull back to look at both time periods together, spanning just more than four months. BT, or Before Trump, denotes the three months prior to his candidacy announcement; AT, After Trump, refers to the 33 days following.

• Trump certainly pumped up the volume of mentions – more than double the number of mentions per day.
• Before Trump (on the right side of the chart) it was the Hillary Show. And while she still has a larger total number of mentions, she has been running for more than two months longer than Trump.
• Generally speaking, the conversations have become more negative since Trump entered the race. Only 5 candidates had positive conversations swirling around them: three Democrats – Chafee, Clinton, and Sanders – and two Republicans, Carson and Fiorina.

• Those two Republicans were away from the fracas of accusations and insults involving Trump. The five most involved in these hostile exchanges all suffered negative net sentiment, including Trump. Cruz, who expressed support for Trump, and Paul, who stayed neutral fared better.
• This is somewhat amazing – Trump also changed the main topic of conversation. Given that finance reports were due at the end of June, and that the numbers would be mostly reported between 6/30 and the end of the period (7/19), it is surprising how little the conversation about money increased. These were the first finance reports for the candidates: the so-called “invisible primary’s” first test in actual comparative numbers. They were also the first in this cycle of large dollars being collected apart from the campaigns, in Super PACs and non-profit organizations. Yet the number of mentions about money only increased by only about 4,000 more per day (a 35% increase).

• By contrast, the controversial and emotional but second-ring issue of immigration leaped ahead in total volume after Trump’s entry into the race, more than doubling the number of mentions per day (a 54% increase). In addition (but not shown here), immigration became one of the five most-talked about issues for every candidate entering in the second two-month time period except for Scott Walker.

• In essence, Trump’s entry, and of course his incendiary remarks about undocumented immigrants coming across the Mexican border, changed the conversational agenda.
• As with the Echo Conversion Rate, the content of the most shared campaign tweet is an indicator of campaign proficiency, in this case the capacity to get out one’s message.

• This table shows the most shared campaign tweet from the newly announced twelve candidates during the three-month Before Trump time period. Only three campaigns (in red), Bush, Chafee, and Santorum, were able to have their announcement Tweet become the most retweeted of the period. In all cases, the volume was low.
In marked contrast, there was more volume and more on-message content in the most shared campaign tweets from the previously announced eight candidates during this pre-Trump period.

The highest volume for a second group candidate belonged to Bush, at 1,378. Hillary Clinton’s campaign announcement tweet during this period was retweeted over 95,000 times. Ted Cruz managed more than 13,000, and Rand Paul, Marco Rubio, Bernie Sanders, and Ben Carson all had their campaign tweets retweeted over 2,500 times. While they had up to two months longer for the tweets to float through and be retweeted, still these numbers are much larger than the second wave’s numbers. The contrast of focus on garnering campaign support is dramatic.
This table displays the content of the most shared campaign tweet from the newly announced twelve candidates during the post-Trump period.

- Two candidates, Trump and Webb, had their announcement tweet shared most (in red).
- Three candidates, Graham, Bush, and Jindal, had a tweet about Trump shared most.
- Two candidates, Perry and Christie, had a tweet about non-political content shared most.
In the After Trump period, Hillary Clinton’s campaign tweet about climate change was extraordinarily successful. It was retweeted more than 57K times, while The Donald’s best tweet only made it to 11K. The Bernie Sanders tweet about Charleston also amassed an impressive number of retweets.
• Is Trump Really Leading? In other words, are there signs that voices in the conversation might be converted into Republican votes and delegates?

• Taking a look at the Republican field (without Kasich), we created a weighted index of total mentions. First, we divided the four+ months into 4 periods (March 15-April 15; April 16-May 15; May 16-June 15; June 16-July 19). Then, we weighted each period so that the more recent counted as the more important. As such, we multiplied the candidates’ total mentions in the first period by 1; the candidates’ total mentions in the second period by 2; the candidates’ total mentions in the third period by 3; the candidates’ total mentions in the fourth period by 4. Then, we added those together, and calculated the share of voice (in %). As you can see, Donald Trump, who had nearly a zero share of voice prior to the last period still wins out. Beyond this, the field (at least on SOV) appears to break into our three tiers – Starters (above 10%); Reservers (between 3-7%); and Taxi Squad (below 3%).
A very different three tiers emerge when we follow the same calculation method (weighting each period and adding them together), but use the number of retweets for the campaign’s Top Campaign Tweet over the number of Twitter mentions. Hence, the total number of retweets was weighted for each period and the total number of Twitter mentions was also weighted. Using the weighted numbers, a percent of retweets per Twitter Mentions was then calculated.

As can be seen, Pataki and Carson had the highest percentages, but some of this is simply a function of volume (see next slide). Also, Pataki was tweeting about the Women’s Soccer Ticker Tape Parade in NYC in the 4th month (the one with the weighting); Chris Christie, similarly, was tweeting about the World Cup Soccer Final during the 4th month.

Rand Paul is the only candidate who makes into the top six on both of our Twitter-based metrics. He is also the only one whose tweets relayed his issue positions (on tax cuts, NSA security, etc.). The other Republican candidates’ tweets were either responding to events (gay marriage/SCOTUS decision; Planned Parenthood; Iran Deal) or to Donald Trump’s comments about Senator McCain and others.
• These are the unweighted Twitter retweets and Twitter mentions. As becomes clear, aside from Donald Trump, Ted Cruz not only has a higher volume of mentions, but also a higher number of retweets than all of the other GOP candidates. It would seem that he only appears in that middle tier on the previous chart because so much of his volume happened in time periods 1 and 2. Simply ranking the candidates without weighting would likely show that the top tier (by RT volume) is Trump, Cruz, Carson, and Paul; the middle tier is Scott Walker, Jeb Bush and Marco Rubio, and the third tier includes the rest. This provides a different take than the other two looks at this field.
Finally, our summary ratings of how well the campaigns are leveraging the conversations about their candidates. The scale goes from 1 [Crickets] through 4 [Noticed] and 7 [Memorable] all the way to 11 [Historic].

While Donald Trump would probably score an 11 on volume and share metrics alone, the inclusion of echo conversation and message re-tweets drops his rating to 7. It is not clear that his campaign is converting talk into support that will in turn translate into votes and delegates at the Republican National Convention.

Because of these conversion metrics, Ted Cruz outranks Trump. So do two Democrats, Clinton and Sanders.

In the final analysis the talk about Trump seemed to hurt more candidates than it helped.
QUESTIONS?

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