MEDIA WEEKENDS AT BERNIE’S
(AND OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FIRST WAVE OF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE ANNOUNCEMENTS)

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How do we know who’s winning before the votes come in?
Campaigns can’t win without the right words. We rely on words to construct our views of the world.

• To caption pictures.
• To tell stories.
• To voice opinions.
• To share findings.
• To rouse and coordinate actions.
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 eight candidates who announced in our time period of analysis, March 15 to May 15, 2015.

• They are, in order, 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), and Mike Huckabee (May 5.)
• Total Mentions over a 60-day period show us how much people are talking about the 2016 presidential contest.
  • But note that Kentucky Derby averaged 16,670 mentions per hour (between 6AM and 9PM Pacific Time), whereas, over the course of this 60-day period, ALL formally announced presidential candidates averaged only 7,150 mentions per hour
  • Hence, low volume; the public’s attention is not really focused on the race, even if the money-raising is intense.
• The spikes in mentions to date correspond with the announcement days of each candidate.
• We looked at three groups when we considered share of voice, the percentage of mentions devoted to each candidate:
  • Announced Candidates only,
  • Announced and Likely Candidates all together, and
  • Announced and Likely Candidates by party (Republicans and Democrats).

• Note: we included the candidates by party groups, under the notion that specific partisans are likely listening/responding/reading about one set of candidates more than the other. This helps to see how the party nomination race is shaping, in particular, the Republican field.

Takeaways:
• Clinton received the lion’s share of mentions, as a whole, among the announced, and of course among Democrats.
• Cruz performed best among Republicans –and we’ll see a main reason why in a moment.
• Rand Paul, Marco Rubio, and Jeb Bush received similar shares.
• Long-term, we’re interested in similarities and differences between mainstream and social media voices. At this stage, that means journalists and activists, respectively. Will one group identify the eventual party nominee earlier than the other? Who are the darlings in each category?

• We have more questions than answers at this stage of our project. For now, we note that Cruz fared better in social media, while Paul and Rubio did better in news channels.
• This metric shows how many days it took for the announcement spike in talk to subside and plateau.

• Senator Cruz surely benefited from going first, the echo of his announcement fanfare lasted almost a week. Clinton opted to go low-profile, but her formal entry into the race, a topic of speculation for years, inevitably generated the loudest and longest echo of the group. We wonder if Rubio’s echo would have lasted longer had he not announced the day after Clinton. We also wonder if Carson and Fiorina diminished not only their shares of voice, but also the duration of their echoes by announcing on the same day.
Here we provide data on Announcement Echo Shares of Voice and Net Sentiment, the percentage of positive mentions less negative mentions as estimated by Zignal text analysis algorithms.

• Out of the top tier candidates, Rand Paul performed the worst in terms of net sentiment, and while this is a tricky measure (because so many of the mentions are difficult to categorize using only equations and automation), his -13.6% would seem to suggest that his roll-out was sub-optimal. A testy exchange with Savannah Guthrie on NBC’s “Today Show” may have figured into this. That said, in terms of total mentions and share of voice, Paul did very well, coming in third behind only Clinton and Cruz.

• Again, Clinton far exceeded her opponents – nearly double the positive mentions of Cruz, and a very positive net sentiment (26.6%). She has her critics, but they were drowned out in the week of her announcement echo.

• Interestingly, though Carly Fiorina had far fewer total mentions, her net sentiment (14.8%) outperformed all Republicans. In short, she may not be all that well-known, or creating much of an echo, but she is creating a favorable impression among those with whom she does find resonance.
• This chart simply visually shows the net sentiment from the Announcement Echo period, which is communicated in numbers on the previous slide. Seeing it in this format helps to show how poorly Paul and Huckabee performed, and how well Clinton, Carson, and Fiorina performed albeit in vastly different volume scales.
• This slide shows the Announcement within a slightly different format. Rather than measuring the different time periods of each candidate’s announcement echo and comparing across those different periods, this chart places all candidates within the week around their announcement (3 days before, day of announcement, and 3 days after). This allows for a more standard comparison of how they performed on their share of voice.

• From this perspective, it becomes clear that few likely heard about Fiorina (and no one likely heard about Bernie Sanders), but that most Americans heard something about the announcements of Cruz, Clinton, Paul, and Rubio. Each were able to capture at least 25% of the share of voice on their announcement day.

• This view also shows how the candidates “built towards” their announcement day and how well they sustained afterwards. On this measure, Cruz appears to be the winner. He appears to have fallen the least in terms of his share of voice in the three days following his announcement. Additionally, Rand Paul and Marco Rubio appear to have gone from a relatively small share before to not only a large share on the day of the announcement, but also a much higher sustained level in the days immediately after. Clinton’s cluster looks about as one might expect – building enthusiasm and excitement (and volume) the day before, hitting a high (though not as high as Cruz) on the day of her announcement, and then falling to moderately high level.
• This slide depicts the net sentiment about candidates in the three days before, the day of, and the three days after their announcements. It is a way of assessing how well campaigns perform during events. As the drops indicate, the immediate reception for seven of the eight candidates featured more boos than applause. The flak was especially pronounced for Cruz, Paul, Rubio, and Huckabee, descending into net negative territory. While Clinton dropped, her post-announcement net sentiment was higher than her pre-announcement level.

• Although we lack precise evidence, two explanations suggest themselves. First, each debuting candidate is outnumbered by competitors, whose most active supporters dominate the echoes at this stage. Second, it is a sour time in American politics, and this may be the result of what has been discussed by Abramowitz and Webster as “negative partisanship.”

• The Bernie Sanders pattern is the outlier. We think that progressive activists warmed to his entrance, as did everyone who wants to see Clinton face primary competition. Bear in mind that the mention volume for Sanders is much smaller than for all the other candidates except Fiorina.
Indeed, what brought public attention – from total mentions to website shares – to Bernie Sanders was not his announcement, but the two Sunday television talk show appearances he did on back-to-back weekends. Exposure on network news remains a potent amplifier in American politics.
• Being able to land the most popular tweet during a planned event such as the candidacy announcement is a mark of a campaign with a good digital operation and an enthusiastic social media base.

• Again, Hillary Clinton and Ted Cruz got their message out the best on Twitter.

• Rand Paul was more successful than Marco Rubio, despite having fewer shares. That’s because the top circulating tweet about Paul was a neutral Tweet about his announcement made by the BBC, whereas Rubio’s was a joke offered up by comedian Daniel Kibblesmith that overall reads negatively. In short, more negative shares is not likely better than fewer neutral shares.

• Mike Huckabee might have preferred a joke to the harsh criticism that circulated most about his name on Twitter upon his announcement.
• Again, this is an indicator of the campaign’s competency and the enthusiasm of its supporters.

• On this score, Cruz far outperformed his GOP competitors.

• Again, Paul and Rubio appear to be “tied.”

• Carly Fiorina’s tech-savvy maybe more important to her campaign than Ben Carson’s popularity, if they can get e-mail addresses and sign-up supporters, for which website shares are key.
The mean number of mentions per candidate is: 1,289,326. The standard deviation is 1,656,833. Thus, Clinton is the only one outside of +/- 2 SDs (3,313,666) in terms of her total, and it is surely her total that is acting as an outlier among the group. Still, we believe it is important to begin tracking this statistic.

In the final (comparative) analysis, campaigns need the echoes from announcements to yield closer looks at their candidate by the public, as indicated by mentions which include a link to the campaign web site. We call this the echo conversion rate. In the bottom tier, Sanders did quite well and Carson did quite poorly. In the top tier, the same pattern we have seen throughout this section holds: Cruz and Clinton capitalized better than Paul and Rubio.
• Campaigns sow differentiating identifiers into their announcements, including a phrase intended to brand the candidate in the public’s mind.

• We rely on two indicators of how well the branding process fared in our two-month time band. First, we display a word cloud and look for the size (which reflects frequency) of campaign key words, as evident on its web site home page. Second, we evaluate the largest words in terms of their fit (or lack of fit) with the top issues being discussed in association with the candidates’ names.
• Note: Excluded “common identifier” words -- president, senator, republican, state, senate, and Texas.

• Top honors for a tight loud brand echo go to Cruz. His home page keyword “courageous” (modifying “conservative”) shows up prominently, as does “promise,” a positive word that was part of a “promise of America” refrain in his announcement speech. However, the main motif of that speech “Imagine” does not appear.
• Note: Excluded “common identifier” words -- republican, senator, Kentucky, campaign, sen, presidential, announces, officially, official, Tuesday, president, election, White House, news, running

• Rand Paul’s signature issue, privacy violations by the National Security Agency, is not perceptible here. Nor are the keywords on his home page, “Defeat the Washington Machine.” Instead, as with Huckabee, the stand-out words reference comments he made with respect to racial tensions: “Baltimore,” “lack” [of] “fathers,” and “race.”
• Note: Excluded “common identifier” words -- 2016, America, president

• Clinton’s “champion [for] everyday Americans” shows up abundantly in her word cloud. However, Benghazi topped her issue associations, followed by “abortion” and “donations.” None of these three issues jibes well with her brand.

• The profusion of words reflects both the high volume of her echo along with the fact that she means many things to many people.
• Note: Excluded “common identifier” words -- 2016, president, senator, presidencial, senador, candidatura, mundo

• Marco Rubio’s word cloud is heavily Spanish. His key words “peace through strength” are not to be seen in Spanish or English. But his top issue associations, Iran Venezuela and Israel, are foreign countries which harmonizes with the Reaganesque foreign policy slogan. He does appear to have something akin to “strength” on his word cloud, and that is “power.”
• Note: Excluded “common identifier” words -- 2016, senator, campaign

• The words “Teespring” and “shirt” on Bernie Sanders’s word cloud refer to the company selling his campaign t-shirt, a sign of small donor fundraising success. Sanders’s branding word “revolution” does not appear in his word cloud.
• Note: Excluded “common identifier” words -- 2016, president, presidential

• Ben Carson’s slogan may be “Heal. Inspire. Revive.” But there are no indications that that is the way he is received. The appearance of “bumper” and “sticker” suggest a possibly popular sale and distribution item. As for “Carly” and “Fiorina,” this may result from a pairing of the two announced candidates who are not and have not been office-holders; “Carson” appears on Fiorina’s word cloud, although in smaller size.
• Note: Excluded “common identifier” words -- 2016, president, official, news

• Invisibility applies to Carly Fiorina’s website brand -- she of “limitless possibility.” Still, “website” and “app” show up prominently, which suggests that she has managed to keep her website front and center during her mentions of her campaign – and given that her echo conversion rate is about 4%, she is clearly doing well. Also, her video interview that she did on Periscope attracted a great deal of attention.
Note: Excluded “common identifier” words -- 2016, president, Arkansas, maker.

• “Thug,” “Gangsta,” and “life” stand out on Mike Huckabee’s word cloud, whose slogan is “From Hope to Higher Ground.” The three words harken back to Huckabee’s December 13, 2014 comments about Michael Brown, the man whose fatal shooting ignited the Ferguson, Missouri protests.

• Together with the Rand Paul word cloud, the evidence indicates a possible source of support for candidates in counter-reactions to the protests.
• Taking all of the comparative and branding evidence into account, we rate the candidates here according to the quality of their announcement echoes and overall reception in our time period.

• We will return with our second report, and perhaps double the number of candidates, shortly after our second two-month time period concludes on July 15, 2015. The first significant financial disclosures occur during this upcoming time band as well.
QUESTIONS?

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