

Donald Trump and the “Oxygen of Publicity”: Branding, Social Media, and Mass Media in the 2016 Presidential Primary Elections

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Can political communication specialists benefit from developments in social media intelligence in the business sphere? This paper was designed to address one of the most significant questions in political communication today: To what degree can online content be analyzed to better understand citizen behavior? The corporate world and management studies academics have focused a significant amount of attention on translating online data into actionable intelligence about consumer behavior. At the same time, political scientists are increasingly using online data to test and refine a range of theories, particularly relating to public opinion and voting behavior. This paper, which reports on a joint management/political communication seed grant project from the ADVANCE program at the University of Maryland, explores the extent to which each field can usefully inform the other. We used the early primary campaigns for the U.S. 2016 presidential elections as a case study.¹

The largest challenge of the study was trying to establish elements of Republican presidential candidate brands during the study period from July through September 2015. While prominent Democratic candidates such as Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders demonstrated identifiable political brand elements on their websites, clear issue statements were missing from websites of Republicans such as Donald Trump and Jeb Bush in July 2015. Thus, the puzzle shifted from whether political brands were resonating in social media in the same way as corporate brands to attempting to define and track political ‘brands’ in the media ecosystem in general. This led us to a broader study of the media ecosystem and brands in election campaigns, finding that traditional media outlets continue to play a large role in amplifying and spreading particular political ‘brand’ elements (e.g. Trump’s immigration stance) in ways that overwhelmed attempts by both seasoned and novice presidential campaigns to attract voter attention in a very crowded race. Social media then amplified this brand through a focus on immigration that was stronger than the volume on messages in other issues examined in this study. Thus, social media intelligence and branding can be a useful part of understanding political brands, but only when this intelligence is deployed within a broader understanding of media ecosystems.

¹ The authors would like to thank our research assistants at the University of Maryland for their work on the project: Justin Hudson (Philip Merrill College of Journalism Doctoral Program); Paul Cranford and Jun Rossetti (Robert H. Smith School of Business Master’s Program in Marketing Analytics). The ADVANCE grant that funded this research is *Building a Voter Intelligence Dashboard: Applying Social Media Brand Metrics to Political Campaigns*.

Using both social media analytics and traditional media content analysis, we suggest a campaign message flow model for measuring and analyzing how ideas packaged as ‘brands’ can be tracked in a media ecosystem. This model fuses methods found in brand analytics with robust political communication methods. We also consider the relationship between extremism and media, suggesting that British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s conviction that the mass media gave credence to extremism through the “oxygen of publicity” may be the most relevant model for understanding the role of the media in the 2016 U.S presidential elections. Ultimately, our cross-disciplinary approach to social media intelligence holds promise in analyzing how candidate brands/messages are remediated through the legacy media and how these brands/messages resonate among voters

Literature review

Corporate Social Media Intelligence

Commercial brands have increasingly monitored social media activity in recent years to gain insights into their customers. Several studies have linked the volume of social media activity to sales performance (Dellarocas, Zhang and Awad 2007; Moe and Trusov 2011; Dellarocas and Narayan 2006; Tirunillai and Tellis 2012). The text content of the social media activity also has aided in prediction, competitive benchmarking, and strategy design (Schweidel and Moe 2014; Bollen, Mao and Zeng 2011; Netzer, Feldman, Goldenberg and Fresko 2012). However, studies also have shown that many metrics collected by social media listening platforms are superficial and often suffer from bias (Schweidel and Moe 2014), emphasizing the importance of having a more complete contextual understanding of the users underlying the social media data and metrics.

Social media intelligence developed for businesses suggests that you need to observe and analyze brands within social media ecosystems, particularly given that consumers tend to comment in different ways on different social media platforms. So merely looking at volume or even sentiment of tweets (even if that sentiment measure can be made significantly more robust than its current state) is giving partial or even misleading signals for businesses. As a result, commercial brands need to consider mentions on Twitter, Facebook and in key blogs as well as group those messages into how they relate to key brand perceptions and preferences. For example, it is not enough to know that people are mentioning your product on social media, it is important to know how they are talking about key aspects of your brand such as specific features, preference, price, support, reputation, etc.

Political social media intelligence

As in the business sphere, the data that is generated by social media has created both great opportunities and significant challenges for political scientists. While the creation of a huge volume of messages generated by individuals provides a new and unprecedented amount of data, social scientists face the same conundrum as other researchers in the digital age. In particular, is it most useful to fit this data into existing theories and methods? Or does the nature of the data call for completely new approaches, particularly as this level of information richness threatens to overwhelm traditional ways of doing

research? Indeed, the scope and volume of data generated by social media have propelled social science into questions of ethics, methods, theory, and reporting that significantly challenge academic tradition. The field of political communication is finally reaching some synthesis in which discussions of traditional theory and online data are starting to coalesce. This section will focus on one strand of this: the deployment of social media data in understanding political campaigning (including news coverage) and election outcomes.

Political scientists have been hopeful that affordances of internet communication technology would empower citizens through a range of features in the digital sphere, including the ability of citizens to post content, the strong networks created by social-networking platforms, the vastly augmented ability to collect information through search engines, as well as instantaneous horizontal communication among citizens. In particular, hopes were raised as barriers to online access and participation were lowered as inexpensive smartphones became ubiquitous in the United States. Although studies have shown a variety of ways in which ICTs bring benefits to citizens, particularly during election campaigns (Gainous and Wagner 2013, Karpf 2013; for a meta-analysis of user-engagement research, see Boulianne 2009), evidence that this has created significant change in relationships between elites (candidates) and the masses (voters) so far is not strong.

For example, Stromer-Galley (2014) argues that the idea that online communication technology has “been used by political campaigns in truly democratic ways is largely incorrect” (p. 2). In her book on presidential campaigning from 1996 through 2012, Stromer-Galley notes that “paradoxically, political campaigns in a democracy ... are undemocratic affairs” as they are used as a means to an end, rather than an opportunity for in-depth citizen engagement and empowerment (p. 2). Instead of changing this power dynamic, Stromer-Galley argues, information communication technologies “magnify that reality, rendering it visible,” meaning that affordances of interactivity typically are harnessed by campaigns and only promoted when they serve the “strategic aims and goals” of the campaign (p. 2). In other words, it is difficult to find any significantly different ways that the internet is changing the traditional nature of the campaign, in which candidates broadcast messages and voters are left to consume (but not affect) the nature of those messages. There is significant evidence that campaigns are able to leverage online information to better identify potential supporters, in particular for Democrats to get a larger number of small campaign donations to finance campaigns (Magleby, Goodliffe, and Olsen 2014).² However, this success at more effective fundraising rather underlines Stromer-Galley’s point that campaigns are using online data for an extension of marketing rather than an augmentation of citizen engagement.

² The authors also make the point that fundraising activity online is far more than sending Email solicitations; rather, it takes place across many platforms and is often most successful when linked to a particular speech or event that engages voters with the race. Interestingly, given that the same tools are available to them, Republicans appear to be less effective at fundraising via online methods, although this is not the focus of the discussion here.

If there is relatively little evidence of the use of citizen feedback and engagement to influence U.S. election campaigns, what can social media content tell us about the thoughts and feelings of potential voters during the campaign? Understandably, much of the focus on social media research in political communication is on the ability to predict election outcomes. Twitter is the social media platform studied most commonly for a range of reasons. These reasons include relative ease of accessibility to data when compared with Facebook, the word limit on posts that make coding less complicated, as well as the way in which user, time, and content are conveniently fused for the researcher. While researchers acknowledge that Twitter is a skewed sample, its benefits are perceived to outweigh its drawbacks as a measure of social media opinion.

Lamos, Preotiuc-Pietro and Cohn (2013) present an overview and address some of the critical problems in mining social media content to determine vote intention. Their work compared tweets relating to political parties in 2012 elections in the United Kingdom and Austria, finding that a more refined methodological approach that uses strong automatic filtering of words as well as filtering of users to compute positive and negative scores relating to parties was more effective than earlier attempts. The work uses large sets of tweets (2 million from the United Kingdom and 800,000 from Austria) and the authors demonstrate that their multi-layered analysis is able to replicate the same level of party support as reported by dozens of opinion polls. This is an aggregate score, however, and the authors don't report on which individuals changed their minds over the course of the campaign, so it is impossible to tell the exact nature of the swings in support. Did people change their minds over the course of the election or did more people more clearly articulate their preferences? If they did change their minds, what were their 'triggers' – and can this be captured by these methods? Lamos et al. argue that analysis of social media content can be quicker and as reliable, if not more so, than public opinion polls, although there is the concern that social media can be manipulated via automated postings or even an orchestrated posting campaign by supporters. Moving forward, it would be illuminating to use social media data to understand more about reactions to particular campaign statements, events, appearances, scandals, news stories, etc. Ultimately elections are about winners and losers, but a focus on the process rather than the outcome could strengthen the understanding of political communication (Patterson, 1994).

Synthesizing social media research in business and political communication

Both businesses and political campaigns ultimately live or die by the final results – sales or votes – but as Moe and Schweidel point out, the correlation between social media volume and gross outcomes often falls short of providing reliable predictions.

Rather, organizations should use social media data to get specific and targeted response to various aspects of their brands. If this idea is applied to political campaign, how do we define 'brands' in the context of political communication? In attempting to make academic synergy between business and political science studies of online brands, this paper posits that a useful vector is the consideration of nuanced sub-elements of a campaign and how ideas surrounding these sub-elements travel through media ecologies. For example, how can one define the different specific elements of the Trump campaign or the Clinton campaign? Following on from the studies by Gibson et al. (2003) as well

as work in defining political narratives derived from Budge et al.'s analysis of political party platforms (2001), the idea here was to find a) the emphasis that the two candidates gave key issues in the campaign via their websites; b) how they chose to send messages over social media related to these issues; c) how the mass media covered these issues; and d) how the audience responded on mass media.

1. Party ID and Brand. One can draw a parallel between classic ideas of party identification and 'brand' – the Democrats and Republicans both offer a political 'product' that has been presented under the same title for many decades. There is a wealth of study and analysis, much of it linked to the American National Election Survey, which has looked at how Americans identify with either Democrats or Republicans since 1948.³ However, this is problematic when thinking about how to mine brand opinions from social media for this study. While it is relatively easy to identify whether people are supporters of Republicans or Democrats from their social media content or networks, this does not tell us much about how citizens are reacting to the sub-attributes of a brand or a specific candidate. It also draws us into the on-going debate about the robustness of partisan identification as well as the issue of the sliding meaning of what it is to be Republican or even Democrat in race in which deep divisions emerged among both party identifiers. Also, given the loose affiliation between party organization and presidential campaigns, we decided the individual campaigns of candidates were more useful in a definition of 'brands' within the presidential election. Thus, the study focused on individual campaigns rather than political parties, while acknowledging that party brands might be much more relevant in party-based systems that are more prevalent in most democracies (such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, etc.).
2. Defining candidate 'brand' elements. How do candidates define themselves and their brands, particularly in crowded primary races? With the lack of an incumbent in the race, candidates from both parties needed to define themselves to reach voters (although arguably some candidates did a poor job with this, based on their marketing efforts). Following on from work by Gibson et al., we looked at the websites of three major candidates in the early primary season (summer 2015) to ascertain their statements on key political issues as defined by a survey by the Pew Research Center in late 2014.⁴ For issues, we decided to focus on the economy, healthcare, immigration, and Iran (due to the controversy over its nuclear program that was being discussed at the time).⁵ What was surprising is that two main Republican candidates that we had selected to study (Trump and

³ Details of the American National Election Study can be found at <http://www.electionstudies.org/OurStudies/OurStudies.htm> (last accessed August 15, 2016).

⁴ See <http://www.people-press.org/2014/09/12/wide-partisan-differences-over-the-issues-that-matter-in-2014> (last accessed August 18, 2016).

⁵ Terrorism remained an issue of concern, although more to Republicans than Democrats. We decided not to focus on terrorism, as we were worried that the terrorism discourse is much more fundamentally patriotic and nationalistic rather than rational. It's a valid argument to say that immigration became that in 2015, but we were not aware then of the scope and depth of Trump's anti-immigration rhetoric.

Bush) did not list coherent policy positions or platforms at the time, although the Democratic candidates (Clinton and Sanders) did have traditional political platforms online. In fact, it was impossible to ascertain from the websites what concrete policies that Trump and Bush were suggesting or supporting in relation to the economy, healthcare, immigration, or the Iranian nuclear program.

This was surprising, if not shocking, in particular because of the growing commitment of political campaigns to web-based campaigning (Magleby, Goodliffe, and Olsen). It seemed strange that there was no mention of policy at this point for the Republican candidates on their central campaign websites. While Trump might be said to be more interested in image and rhetoric, Bush had participated in elections before and it could be expected he would have stated his policies as part of a political brand. Thus, it was enormously difficult to see what the Republicans were attempting to ‘broadcast’ about their policies if they were absent from their official websites. Unfortunately, the nature of the televised candidate debates also gave little scope for articulating credible policy.

For this project, we were interested in applying social media intelligence to campaign brands, particularly by paralleling Moe and Schweidel’s model with brand sub-attributes defined and measured (as opposed to overall brand mentions or sentiment as measured by sentiment dictionaries). Given that we could not identify political brand sub-elements as how candidates articulated stands on particular issues on their websites (because the Republicans we studied didn’t do this), we used official candidate Twitter accounts as a proxy for their campaign statements. We also moved on to identifying campaign issues deductively from surveys and our own observation of U.S. politics and measuring how these moved through the U.S. media ecology. We dropped Bush from the study in particular because he had a relatively weak Twitter presence, making it hard to use this as a measure.

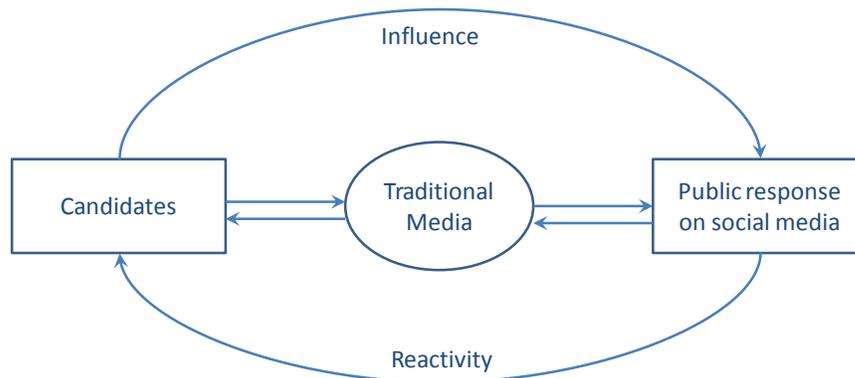
3. Brand and media ecology. Traditionally, there have been many metrics that measure the amount of media coverage in a political campaign. There has been attention to how much money candidates spend on advertising, which types of content are effective, as well as how successful candidates are at garnering editorial coverage.⁶ There is a wide range of studies on editorial coverage as well, with a particular emphasis on detecting bias or unfairness in the coverage. For example, work on the 2008 election found that reporting on Hillary Clinton in the Democratic primary employed genderized coverage to treat her more critically than Obama (Patterson, Perry-Giles 2014). In recent years, there has been a rising interest not just in campaign messages, traditional news coverage or online attention, but also in understanding the relationship among the three. In particular, Chadwick’s hybrid media theory (2013) has been very useful in pointing out that there is no longer ‘offline’ or ‘online’ news but that traditional media, online media, citizen journalists, interest groups, activists, and attentive users online

⁶ While political communication specialists call ads ‘paid’ media and news coverage ‘editorial’, business labels it ‘paid’ and ‘earned’ media.

have created a dynamic news environment that is no longer defined by the traditional gatekeepers of journalists and politicians.

If candidate statements, traditional media coverage, and campaign messages no longer essentially define the media environment, how can we define and track a brand in a political campaign? In other words, we could not for this project define a particular message emanating from a candidate and then track how it resonated into traditional media and social media. Rather, taking elements of the model developed by Moe and Schweidel to measure social media intelligence, we expanded this to develop a campaign message flow model that shows how specific issues within a campaign flow among candidate campaigns, traditional media, and social media (see Figure 1: Campaign Message Flow Model). We also used this as an augmented way to consider how brand messages flow in a more dynamic way throughout a media ecosystem.

Figure 1: Oates and Moe Campaign Message Flow Model



In Figure 1, we have operationalized the flow of messages in a campaign with the traditional mass media as the main source through which candidate messages flow and the central messaging platform to which the public respond. In creating the Campaign Message Flow Model, we are attempting to show how messages can take dynamic and differing paths. For example, a candidate could tweet a message about immigration and this message could then be redistributed and commented upon on social media with no coverage from traditional mass media. However, analysis for this paper suggests that messages are more likely to flow from the candidate via a traditional campaign event (such as a speech or debate), be covered in the traditional media, and then this traditional media content will be shared and discussed on social media.

Given the features of the new media ecology, which includes the ability for many-to-many simultaneous communication without formal access to publication, etc., it is important to consider how messages and reactions to messages flow outside of traditional media gatekeepers (such as newspapers and television). Thus we have included the idea that the candidates can influence the public directly in the top arrow (labelled influence) and that candidates can respond directly to public sentiment/comments through the bottom arrow (labelled reactivity). In addition, the model acknowledges the feedback loops between candidates and the media that may have nothing to do with the public – candidates often speak directly to news organizations both on and off the record, media outlets often use their influence to get information out of campaigns, and campaigns often attempt (sometimes successfully) to shape traditional media coverage through use of influence, persuasion, threats, etc. The arrows linking candidates and the traditional media represent this relationship. By the same token, journalists generally are concerned with how their audience is receiving news – and the audience is often complimentary or (more often perhaps) critical of news coverage on social media and through comment on mass media sites (not an object of study here, but of interest to many communication scholars). This flow of influence is represented by the arrows between traditional mass media and public response on social media.

Methods and results

Analysis of Twitter data

We gathered all tweets authored by the official Twitter accounts of the candidates (@realDonaldTrump and @HillaryClinton) from July 1, 2015, to September 24, 2015 using Brandwatch.⁷ We used political tweets as proxies for issue statements in the campaign. We chose this time period as a part of the early primary season that embraced a range of interesting events, including two Republican debates (August 6th and September 11th); the release of statement on the economy by Clinton in July 2015; as well as Clinton turning over her private computer to the Justice Department as part of the investigation into her Email security when she was Secretary of State. Trump was received a lot of attention during this time period for his comments on immigrants, specifically after a speech on June 16th in which he said:

*When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best ... They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.*⁸

⁷ The authors would like to thank Brandwatch, an international social media analytics company based in United Kingdom, for giving us access to the tweets for our analysis. We also collected tweets from the Jeb Bush Twitter account, but ultimately did not include the analysis (in part because the volume was low – half that of the Clinton official Twitter account). We also acknowledge that Clinton has a separate ‘elections’ account (@VoteHillary2016) but we decided to focus on one central account for each candidate.

⁸ See

http://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2015/06/16/trump_mexico_not_sending_us_their_best_criminals_drug_dealers_and_rapists_are_crossing_border.html (last accessed August 19, 2016).

While this speech garnered significant controversy, Trump also became a focal point for public discussion on anti-immigrant forces by suggesting on June 28 on CNN's *State of the Union* show that Mexico should be forced to "build a wall" along the U.S.-Mexican border to keep out illegal immigrants.⁹ There was public outcry after Trump ejected an anchor from Univision, one of world's most influential Spanish-language media organizations, from his press conference on August 25, 2015.

Daily tweet volume ranged considerably, from 0 to 57 tweets daily for Clinton as a candidate and 0 to 68 for Trump as a candidate. Overall, Trump tweeted more, with a total of 1,785 tweets and an average of about 21 tweets per day. Although Clinton tweeted less (a total of 941 tweets with an average of about 11 per day) she was more likely to tweet in a way that was easier to identify with specific issues. However, this analysis made it clear that tweets are not 'politics as usual' – despite searching for an array of search terms relating to the election in the tweets, the majority of the tweets for both candidates did not fit into our categories defining the economy, healthcare, immigration, Iran, or even the broader 'personality' category that we had devised (see coding appendix below for terms). Rather, most tweets we collected were essentially devoid of meaning in the traditional political sense, often expressing just vague thanks or support to followers. With those caveats in minds, however, there were some interesting differences between how the two candidates used Twitter during this period.¹⁰

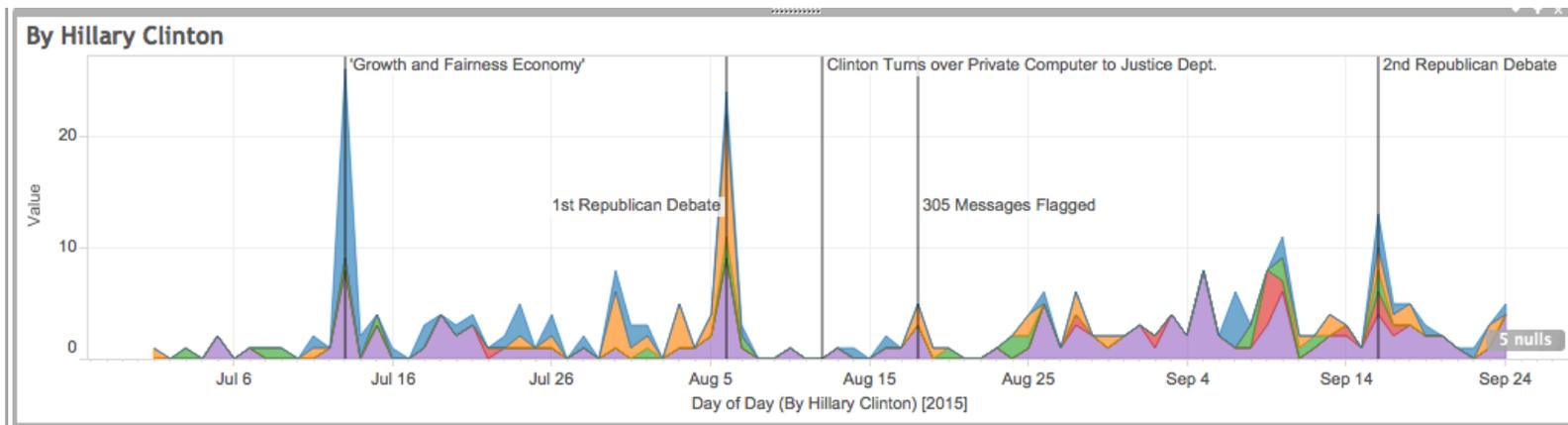
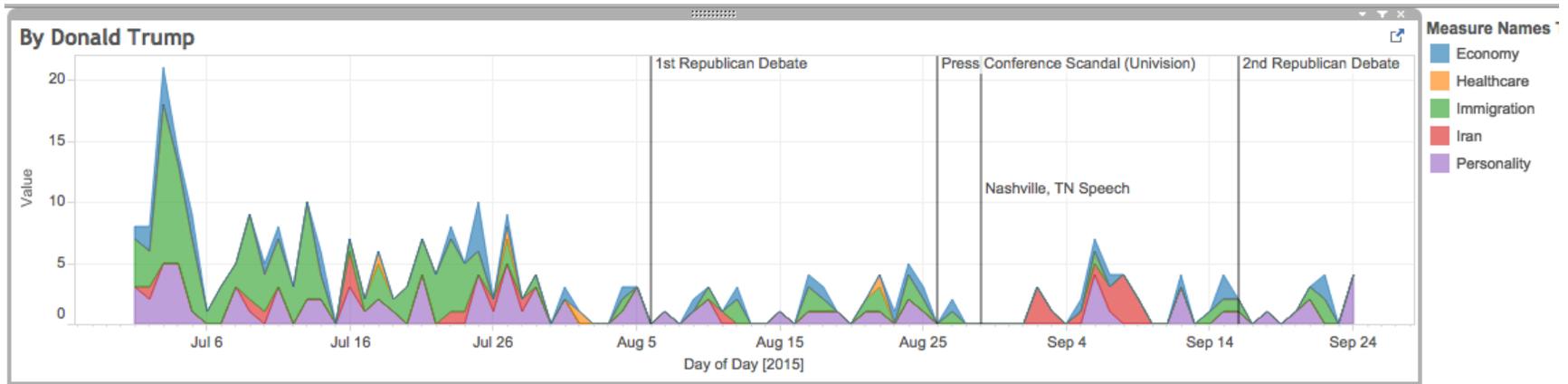
⁹ See <http://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2015/06/28/donald-trump-mexico-immigration-wall-intv-tapper-sotu.cnn> (last accessed August 19, 2016).

¹⁰ In the analysis for this paper, we considered all tweets equally and did not code retweets differently. An 'original' tweet is when someone writes comments within the Twitter limit of 140 characters. A 'retweet' is simply passing along a tweet composed by someone else. Many tweets are simply links, often to news stories. This analysis could benefit from further qualitative investigation into the content of tweets – and especially how often they link to traditional media content of newspapers, television networks, radio, etc. – but this was beyond the scope of this paper.

Figure 2: Tweets Authored by Trump and Clinton Mentioning Issue/Personality Keywords, 1 July to September 24, 2015



Only tweets that included key words (issues/personality)

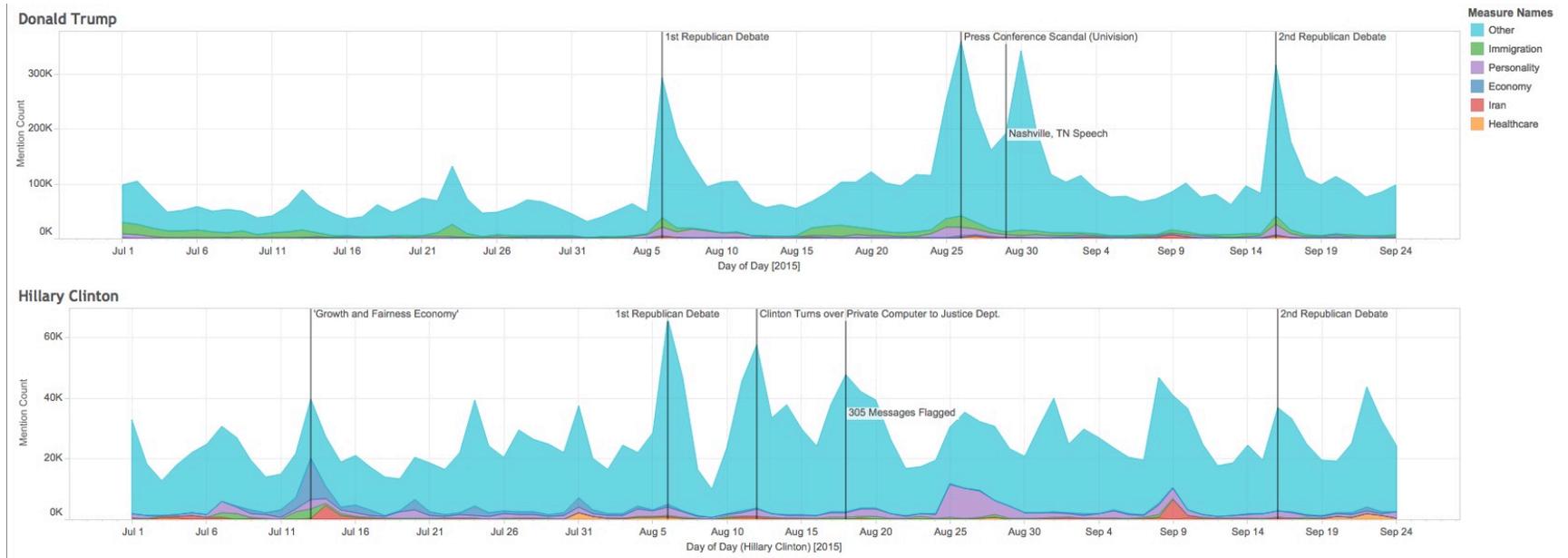


Turning first to Clinton, the clearest correlation between her campaign communication and Twitter activity came on July 13th when 17 out of the 31 campaign tweets (55 percent) were focused on the economy (see Figure 2). This came on the day that she launched her “Growth and Fairness” economic platform. Here we see Twitter clearly functioning as a ‘megaphone’ for the campaign. Yet, this is the only day in the study period in which one could identify a very clear link between Twitter and candidate-generated messages. Clinton continued to tweet about the economy through the period under study, although never reaching the same peak in volume. She also had a peak in tweeting about healthcare on August 6, which was the day of the first Republican debate in the period studied. Indeed, healthcare remained another issue on which she continued to tweet over the course of this period, although she tweeted about this less than on the economy in general (as measured by our key words). There clearly was an attempt by the campaign to use Twitter as a way to signal Clinton as a strong and capable leader in terms of personality as there was a consistent thread of tweets that we labeled as ‘personality’ tweets.

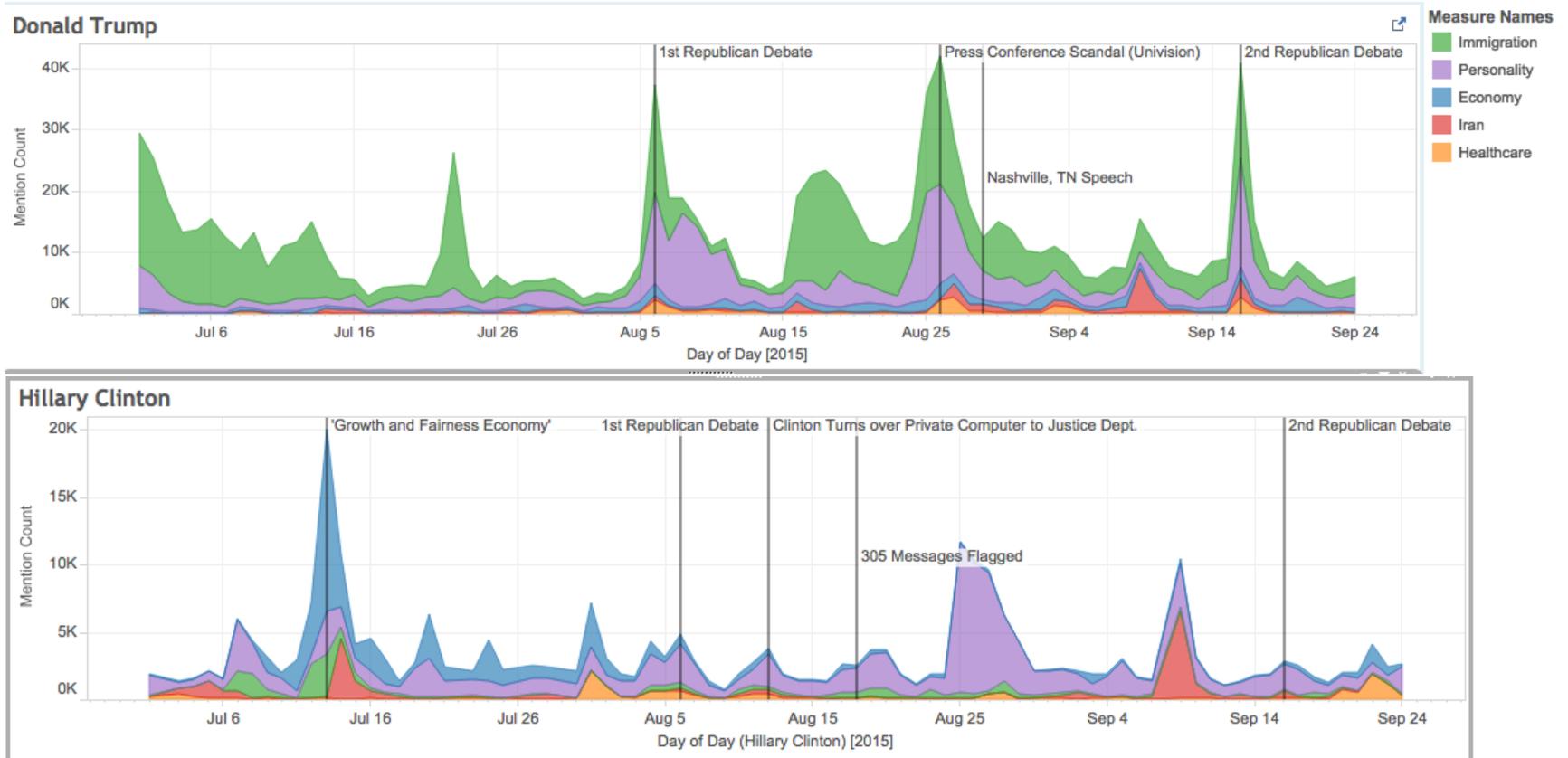
For the tweets coming from Trump, one might expect a significant percentage to deal with immigration given his controversial comments on building a wall at the U.S. border. Of all the tweets relating to issues (economy, healthcare, immigration, and Iran), Trump unsurprisingly had the largest volume of tweets relating to immigration. However, these tweets were never a major proportion of his tweets in general (peaking at 13 tweets on immigration out of a total of 59 tweets -- or 22 percent -- on July 3rd) and the number of immigration-themed tweets faded over time (see Figure 3). Aside from immigration, there was little political content (as measured by our keywords) in Trump’s tweets. It’s interesting to note that, after immigration, the second most visible issue in his tweets during this period concerned Iran. This fits his pattern of attacking Clinton’s record as Secretary of State (in which she was involved with the Iranian negotiations).

If there was little issue content in the tweets originating from the candidates, we would expect relatively little issue content from tweets discussing the candidates as well. While it would be heartening if voters were actually more focused on issues than the candidates themselves, we felt this was unlikely. As discussed below, however, although the proportion of tweets focused on issues was low, because there were far more tweets *about* the candidates than *directly generated* by the candidates, there was still some presence of discussion about issues on Twitter. We pulled 955,193 tweets that named Trump and one of our key words (see appendix) relating to issues or personality. We pulled 272,579 tweets for Clinton with the same key words. There was some overlap, as occasionally people mentioned both candidates in a tweet in a comparative way. There were also a significant number of retweets, with some items being retweeted thousands of times. An analysis (counting the number of downloaded tweets that were labeled RT for retweet at the beginning of the tweet) showed the 59 percent of the Trump tweet volume for this period was retweets while 51 percent of the Clinton tweets were retweets.¹¹

Figure 3: Tweets Mentioning Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton by Issue/Personality Terms, 1 July to 24 September 2015



Only tweets that included key words (issues/personality)



An overview of the tweets that related to the candidates does not show a high level of political engagement at work, particularly for Trump. Many of the tweets are critical, angry, or call the candidates names (although there was not as much profanity as on other parts of the online sphere). A large number of links referred to media coverage, typically without any comment. Occasionally (particularly with Clinton), tweets praised the issues raised by the candidates. If there is one over-arching theme of these tweets, it is criticism of Trump, following by criticism of Clinton. Typical examples would be:

RT @SendPie2Senpai: Donald Trump: "babies born in the U.S. to illegal immigrants shouldn't be citizens." By that standard, only Native Americans are citizens. (retweeted 5,072 times)

RT @CloydRivers: I don't dislike Hillary Clinton because she's a woman. I dislike that people will vote for Hillary only because she's a woman. Merica (retweeted 2,805 times)

The only consistent link between our keywords and the Trump-related (as opposed to the Trump-generated) tweets were mentions of immigration and personality terms. The volume of tweets mirrored significant campaign events such as debates, possible scandals, significant speeches, etc., quite closely (see Figure 3). Perhaps what is most interesting is the sheer volume of the tweets, climbing close to or past 300,000 daily on four separate days (August 6 on the first Republican debate, August 26th after Trump threw a reporter from Univision out of his press conference, August 30th after a speech in Nashville for the National Federation of Republican Assemblies, September 16th on the second Republican debate). This was more than five times the volume of people tweeting about Clinton in the same time period, according to our data.

If you look specifically at the tweets that are linked to particular issues, there is still both a reasonable volume and reasonable link to campaign events (see Figure 3). Immigration dominates the Twitter traffic, although there is issue content in other tweets. The large peaks of Twitter activity take place during or just after significant campaign events that make the news, reinforcing the idea that social media activity is strongly linked to the regular news/news-reporting cycle in U.S. politics. This is unsurprising to a degree, particularly given studies by Chadwick and others about the intermeshed relationship among politics, news, and social media. We also show the pattern of tweets for Hillary Clinton in Figure 3.

These findings raise several points of interest:

1. Are those who are tweeting or retweeting messages with issue content supporting or opposing the candidate? Our analysis did not determine this. Indeed, attempts to use the sentiment detection on Brandwatch were abandoned, as hand coding showed that tweets that were being deemed negative or positive did not fit with our interpretation of the terms and there was far too much volume to code by hand. This is unsurprising, in that determining affect (even in the confines of

- single tweet) is very difficult only using keywords. Yet, while we could not determine sentiment, the broader point is that this tweet volume is impressive in terms of share of audience. Whether people are supporting, opposing, or even vilifying Trump, he was getting much more attention on social media than Clinton or any of his Republican opponents (as we quickly discovered in our early attempts to gather data on other Republican candidates for this project).
2. Are people on Twitter merely echoing and re-distributing snippets of news or opinion around campaign events or are there grass-root networks of discussion that arise from social media? Our data would strongly suggest the former on Twitter. The way in which the volume of tweets parallel significant campaign events suggest that social media traffic follows events rather than has a separate genesis within this part of the primary campaign. We acknowledge that we only analyzed Twitter as a proxy for social media. However, these visualizations of tweets in the early primary campaign remind us of the strong link between political events, traditional reporting to publicize those events, and social media activity.
 3. While tweets that were linked to issues were in the minority, there were still a sizeable number of tweets that could be said to be part of a discussion of politics. They are overwhelmed in volume by tweets that didn't include any of the key words on issue and personality in this study. But there were still thousands of tweets about various issues related to the candidates, an activity that was not taking place before the rise of social media. In particular, immigration triggered a very large volume of tweets related to Trump. As we will note below in the section about traditional media coverage during this time, this echoed extensive coverage about Trump's statements about immigration by the mainstream media. Thus, the social media comments served to augment and extend the traditional media coverage of Trump's views on immigration, views that were at odds with mainstream U.S. media narratives about immigration.

It would be useful to say much more about the nature of that augmentation – were the tweets contesting the candidates' statements, agreeing with them, or perhaps merely echoing them? We could not say this based on our analysis, but it points to the need for a more comprehensive approach to analyzing social media comments with computational linguistic analysis so that the nature (as well as the volume) of the discourse can be evaluated with some degree of validity and reliability. We know that people were engaged with Trump's views on immigration in social media (or at least on Twitter) during this time period. However, we don't know the nature or depth of that engagement, although we can draw some conclusions from our study. Namely, as noted above, engagement tended to follow candidate behavior, strongly suggesting that social media would generally augment, rather than contest, candidate narratives. For example, if his extremist statements were going to spark an interest in response by other candidates, we would expect to see a surge in tweets about immigration that mentioned Clinton (such as her response or different approach to the issue) but we did not find this in the data. **We can surmise that Trump enjoyed strong ownership of the immigration discourse as a sub-element of his political brand.**

Analysis of traditional media

There is no question that Trump dominated media coverage throughout the primary. *The New York Times* reported in March 2016 that Trump had amassed an unprecedented \$2 billion worth of unearned (i.e. not paid) media coverage, making him “far better than any other candidate – maybe than any candidate ever – at earning media.”¹² Given that we were a) studying a relatively short period; b) testing an idea rather than attempting to capture an entire universe of traditional media coverage; and c) felt that three national newspapers would be a relevant sample for our study, we used search terms to manually download articles from LexisNexis.¹³ From LexisNexis Academic, we downloaded 756 items from the *Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *USA Today* that were published between 1 July 2015 and 24 September 2015 (see appendix for details). After filtering out duplicate stories and non-news items, we identified 475 relevant articles (200 from the *Washington Post*, 229 from *The New York Times*, and 46 from *USA Today*).

We used a coding scheme to identify which articles mentioned one or both candidates and which issues were mentioned, along with a date and place of publication. Coding was performed by one author (Oates) and a research assistant after training and checks that inter-coder reliability between Oates and the research assistant reached 90 percent (see Coding Appendix below for more details).

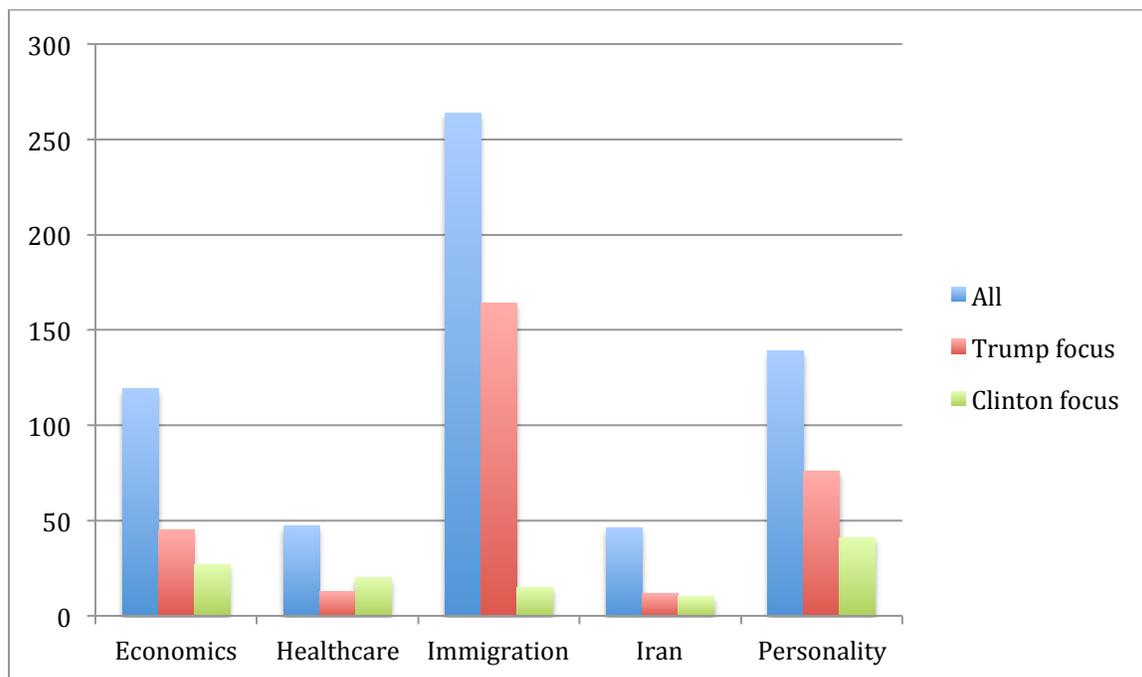
Results

Both Trump and immigration dominated in the coverage coded in the three national newspapers from July 1 through September 24, 2015 (see Figure 4). While this is a very small sample of U.S. news, these newspapers serve national markets and reflect the national news agenda in the country. Our coding found that 208 of the 475 articles (43.8 percent) in our sample were focused on Trump, while only 90 (18.9 percent) were focused on Clinton. As this was prior to a surge in popularity for Sanders, it could be argued that there was less news value in Clinton because there was less contestation of her as the Democratic nominee. In addition, we searched for and retrieved only articles that mentioned *both* a candidate and specific issues. This meant that articles about Clinton, who has been in the public political sphere for decades, that did not relate directly to our search terms were not included in our study (nor were articles that only discussed Trump business issues). However, given that the research was designed to compare candidate coverage, it is still surprising that one candidate was covered so much more than the other.

¹² \$2 Billion Worth of Free Media for Donald Trump, *The New York Times*, March 16, 2016, available at <http://nyti.ms/22ir8te> (last accessed August 25, 2016). In particular, this analysis relied on figures from mediaQuant, a firm that tracks media coverage and converts that coverage to a dollar equivalent. It should be noted that mediaQuant included social media in this figure; however they are still a useful comparison.

¹³ For more details, see the coding appendix for this paper.

Figure 4: Candidates linked with issues or personality keywords in newspaper articles, 1 July to 24 September 2015



Source: Coding of 475 articles from *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA Today*.

The topic of immigration dominated stories that mentioned Trump, Clinton, or both – whether in substance or merely with a minor reference. Immigration was mentioned in 264 out of the 475 stories or almost 56 percent of the stories analyzed. This is compelling evidence that Trump was able to dominate the traditional media with his anti-immigration messages, despite the fact that immigration was only one of an array of issues that concerned the voters. Nor were the mentions of immigration – which almost all directly referenced Trump’s hard-right policies– limited to only stories about the Trump campaign. Rather, the reaction to Trump’s views dominated a range of stories about other candidates and even other issues in the campaign. It would seem that a mention of Trump almost always elicited a mention of his views on immigration. In addition, Trump’s stand on immigration bled into stories that were relatively far from the traditional politics ‘beat’, including stories on golf events being cancelled on Trump properties, a network dropping a Trump-backed beauty pageant after his remarks about Mexicans, and even a school that wanted to move its prom out of a Trump property due to the controversy.¹⁴ Thus, Trump’s comments on immigration not only dominated the traditional coverage of a Presidential primary in the three newspapers; it is also made its way into other sectors of the news. As a brand element, this was very effective. There was almost no coverage

¹⁴ See Protestors call to remove Trump, or at least his name, from project, *The Washington Post*, July 10, 2015, B1; Trump Gets Earful in Spanish as Latino Outlets Air Disdain, *The New York Times*, August 27, 2015, p. A1; Trump’s Remarks on Mexican Immigrants Prompt Call to Move a Prom, *The New York Times*, August 20, 2015, p. A18.

of Clinton that was not found in traditional political stories that followed the events of the primary (debates, policy speeches, ongoing political scandals such as Clinton's Email controversy, etc.).

We did find significant evidence that other issues were discussed as well. In our list of stories that mentioned either or both candidates, economics was mentioned in 119 out of 475 stories (25 percent), Iran in 46 (9.7 percent) and healthcare in 47 (9.9 percent). The search for stories with our personality terms (see Coding Appendix) yielded almost as much as these three issues combined – personality aspects were found in 139 (41 percent) of the stories.¹⁵ It was most common to encounter a story that focused on just one of the issues under review. There were 273 articles that mentioned one category, 86 that mentioned two, 40 that mentioned three, 10 that mentioned four, and two stories that mentioned all five categories (economics, healthcare, immigration, Iran, or personality terms). There were 64 stories (13 percent of the articles) that mentioned one or both candidates that had no mention of either the four issue areas or personality trait key words. For example, our set of articles included stories that mentioned Clinton's plans for student debt (which we did not include in general economics) or stories that profiled other Republican candidates and mentioned Trump as a strong contender, etc.

Conclusions

We launched this project in an attempt to apply social media theory, particularly social media intelligence (Moe and Schweidel), to political communication. At the same time, we were interested in whether we could augment theories and understanding of business brands via a consideration of the study of political social media analytics in political campaigns. We encountered problems in attempting to establish political candidate brands in the 2016 U.S. Presidential primary campaign in that Republican contenders did not use their websites to broadcast stands on issues to establish measurable elements of their political brands. As a result, we turned to the candidates' official Twitter accounts in an attempt to measure how candidates were communicating about the key issues of economics, healthcare, immigration, and the Iranian nuclear controversy in the early primary from July 1 to September 24, 2015. We also used key words for personality to look at how candidates projected their own characteristics. We examined how citizens were tweeting about these same issues and personality characteristics (as defined by our key words) in Twitter, as well as how these issues and personality characteristics were covered by three national newspapers during the same time period. Thus, while we were not able to include a broad range of social media platforms (as Moe and Schweidel suggest in their model), we were able to examine the coverage of issues and personality within a media ecosystem that embraced both social media and the mainstream media.

What the idea of looking at 'brands' highlights is that Trump (and Bush) were particularly poor at establishing a political 'brand' on their websites in 2015 as their websites didn't even list policies in the summer of 2015. This raises the question of what we mean by political 'brand'. It would be logical to assume that a political brand means a set of policies or at least a recognizable ideology. The Democrats demonstrated this while

¹⁵ Totals add up to more than 100 because some stories had more than 1 issue and/or a personality trait mentioned.

the Republicans did not in the early primary period. You can interpret this either as 1) the Republican Party is in disarray; 2) the Republican candidates were playing out a strategy of non-specific appeal to survive the primary period; and/or 3) political ‘brand’ is no longer about policies or even ideology in the U.S. context and has more in common with cults of personality. In this case, the ‘cult of personality’ candidate (Trump) won the primary and will face a ‘traditional’ political candidate (Clinton) in November 2016.

We found both social and traditional media dominated by Trump’s remarks about Mexicans as well as his unrealistic policy of ‘building a wall’ along the Mexican border, to the point that discussion about other candidates and issues was drowned out by the media furor. Thus, any attempts to carefully build political ‘brands’ by other Republicans or Democrats were overwhelmed by the attention Trump and the media directed to a single issue. We found that both Trump and immigration were dominating the news cycle. Either Trump did this by his nature, which could be described as reflexively aggressive, or he did it as part of carefully concerted campaign to disrupt ‘politics as usual’ by suggesting ideas that were (apparently in almost equal measure) either deeply attractive or deeply offensive to almost everyone in the country. Whether accidental or deliberate, the Trump anti-immigrant narrative was firmly established (and one could argue that the brand had credibility, given the candidate’s widely covered disparaging remarks on many individuals and groups over the course of the campaign). Trump was the bad boy of American politics, breaking the rules, but winning the game, in the primary election.

This brings us to the idea of the “oxygen of publicity,” a phrase made famous by former British Prime Minister Thatcher, who used it to describe how terrorists could use the media to gain legitimacy.¹⁶ Her government was concerned about how British media coverage could give popularity and political credibility to groups they considered allied with terrorists in Northern Ireland. The historical parallel is interesting with the coverage of Trump and his views on immigration that sit well outside the accepted political norms of the U.S. media. On the one hand, Trump would be unable to propagate these views without the heavy coverage by the media (often expressing outrage through the framing of the story or by one-sided quotes, although finding people willing to openly support anti-immigration views is perhaps a bit challenging). In this way, his remarks came to dominate both the traditional and social media. U.S. media are facing the same challenge as the British media in covering Northern Ireland: How do you cover a divided country? How do you write ‘news’ about something that could be considered provocation or even hate speech – although not by all of the audience? The response in *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* was to provide a lot of attention, although ironically attempts to illuminate how far out of step Trump’s immigration views were with one part of the audience may have given these views greater attention and legitimacy with another part of the media audience.

¹⁶ She used the phrase in a speech to the American Bar Association in July 1985, the text of the speech is here: <http://www.margarethatcher.org/document/106096> (last accessed August 24, 2016).

This emphasis on Trump's remarks on immigration had a range of effects on the campaign. In terms of this study, it demonstrates how anti-immigration became a key element of the Trump brand, giving him a significant advantage in a crowded Republican primary field. It even dominated over news coverage of the Democratic front-runner in the primaries. It allowed one 'noisy' issue to overshadow a range of policy issues, ones in which arguably Trump would have had a harder time using sound bites and outrage to establish a dominant position. In their rush to cover Trump's extreme rhetoric, the traditional media gave visibility and, arguably, credence to these remarks. It also shows how while it wasn't the only thing that people were talking about the early primary campaign, it became the touchstone around which this part of the campaign was structured. Our analysis of Twitter shows that social media discussion tended to follow main events and issues of the campaign, again demonstrating that the traditional nature of the campaign was intact: politicians led, media covered, and the public followed.

Looking back through our study of political brands in the 2016 U.S. primary, our insights for business brands are to consider more carefully the way in which brands travel through a media ecology. In particular, elements of a brand that can disrupt normal media coverage or attention would appear to have a corresponding depth of attention on social media and can attract an irrationally large amount of attention. This goes beyond the idea of a single social media post going viral or a particular ad campaign. This suggests that an understanding of how and why a brand holds a particular place in a media ecology is a useful evolution in thinking about the relationship among brands, traditional media, new media, and citizens.

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Method Appendix

We used the following search terms on Brandwatch to download Tweets from twitter.com relating to our five categories.

Time period: 1 July to 24 September 2015

Author: @realDonaldTrump

Author: @HillaryClinton (We note that the Clinton campaign also used @VoteHillary2016, but we used only one Twitter account in order to remain parallel; we acknowledge that the candidate tweet volume would have been greater if we had used both accounts but as we did not use an extra account for Trump we performed the analysis on only one ‘official’ Twitter account.)

site: twitter.com

Category: Economy

Words/word stems used: econom* OR jobs OR wage* OR tax* OR trade OR outsource* OR unemploy* OR prices

Category: Iran

Words/word stems used: Iran OR nuclear OR Assad OR Tehran

Category: Immigration

Words/word stems used: immigration OR immigrants OR mexic* OR border OR citizen* OR deport* OR visa OR amnesty

Category: Healthcare

Words/word stems used: Healthcare OR health* OR medical OR obamacare OR medicare OR insurance OR socialized OR doctors OR malpractice

Category: Personality

Words/word stems used: strong OR leader OR woman OR women OR boring OR powerful OR dishonest OR honest OR liar OR conservative OR idiot OR tough OR smart OR corrupt OR liberal OR "big mouth" OR "Bill Clinton" OR businessman OR competitive OR trust* OR distrust

For the traditional mass media, we used the terms to search for articles in the same time period on LexisNexis Academic in *The New York Times*, *the Washington Post*, and *USA Today*. We added the candidate names (with variations, such as Hillary Rodham Clinton) to find articles linked to each candidate (we did not want to use just “Trump” or “Clinton” to avoid false positives such as “Trump Towers” etc.)

From LexisNexis Academic, we downloaded 756 items from the *Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *USA Today* that were published between 1 July 2015 and 24 September 2015. Any story identified as an editorial, a letter to the editor, or clear

opinion rather than news was excluded from the study. After filtering out these in addition to irrelevant text such as articles that were listed twice, etc., we identified 475 relevant articles (277 from the *Washington Post*, 229 from *The New York Times*, and 46 from *USA Today*).

We created the following categories:

- A. Item number
- B. Number of item in NexisLexis file
- C. Name of NexisLexis download file
- D. Name of paper in which article appeared
- E. Date of article
- F. Include article?: 1 if yes
- G. Notes to indicate why article excluded (i.e. editorial, letter to editor, an announcement rather than news, etc.)
- H. Trump mentioned: 1 if yes
- I. Clinton mentioned: 1 if yes
- J. Main focus: 1 if Trump, 2 if Clinton, 0 if neither (i.e. both are mentioned equally or they are mentioned in a range of competitors, such as a round-up after a debate, etc.)
- K. Economy mentioned: 1 if yes
- L. Healthcare mentioned: 1 if yes
- M. Immigration mentioned: 1 if yes
- N. Iran mentioned: 1 if yes
- O. Personality mentioned: 1 if yes
- P. Notes/description of article: Free text
- Q. Coder initials

Challenges: At times, it could have been difficult to detect what the “focus” of coverage of a story might be. If a candidate is mentioned in passing as a list of challengers, then the focus is not on that candidate. But if a candidate is mentioned as the leader in the contest, as the ‘one to beat’ etc. then even an ‘overview’ article is really focused on a single candidate. It turned out that the two coders for the project (Oates and Justin Hudson, a PhD student at the University of Maryland) happened to agree well on focus/non-focus, but it is acknowledged that more calibration and training on this would be necessary for a larger group of coders or coders who did not share a similar outlook (Oates and Hudson are both former U.S. journalists and both have studied newspapers, which meant we shared general norms and ideals of news). We also acknowledge that distinguishing editorials (opinion) from news might be more difficult for people without good familiarity with U.S. newspapers, so that might need more calibration for other coders. We noted that telling editorials from news sometimes was not immediately obvious, but we used the final paragraph (in general) to distinguish as editorial pieces generally were most strongly written as opinion in the final segment of a piece. We also were aware of the names of famous columnists and could screen them out.

In addition, it would have been better to have listed the actual headlines as well. This would have made it easier to eliminate duplicates (we used the description, but

sometimes the description varied enough that we had to check in the original LexisNexis files to make sure we weren't coding the same story twice).