Who Legitimized a Trump Presidency?

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Abstract

The election of Donald Trump has come as surprise to a lot of people. Perhaps rightly so, since this is man who tweets out mean insults to respected individuals in the middle of the night — thought temperamentally unfit to be President — and even rallied against by politicians from both sides of the aisle at some point or the other during the past year. Even surprising was the response of media outlets to his election, especially since, in their opinion, they had done what they could to stop Mr Trump. My intuition was that they were doing more harm than good — that their critiques were not strongly directed. If a news article voiced opposition to Donald Trump, it should have a *negative sentiment*. In case the opposition is not made blatantly clear, the overall *sentiment* of the article could indeed be *positive*. My approach is to create a corpus of articles about 2016 US Presidential Candidates. I intend to compare articles about the top 4 candidates for the 2016 US Presidential Election. A favorable outcome of this experiment would be an overall positive sentiment for all Trump articles, even though the author's intent may be to mock him. If the sentiment was really positive, we could say that him being the media's favorite legitimized his presidency.

1 Introduction

Over the past year, a plethora of theories have come up regarding the *rise* of Donald Trump. From political correctness and white male resentment to the DNC's lack of understanding of their own voter base – even so far as to suggest the Russian government's involvement in *rigging* the 2016 US Presidential Election. [1][2][3]

One consistent thread among the numerous cited reasons for the candidate's success has been that Trump loves the media, and the media loves Trump. Veteran of the hyper-world of reality television: Trump is definitely aware of the value of attention, and has tactfully used it to manipulate the news coverage for his own, and his opponents' campaigns. 'You have to brand people', he tells the crowd at a rally in Florida. [4]

'Lyin' Ted'—L-Y-I-N apostrophe. We can't say it the right way. We've got to go

Lyin'.

'Low-Energy Jeb.'

'Crooked Hillary.'

Even more intriguing is the fact that a majority of news outlets, and television programs have consistently tried to weaken Trump's support by voicing their opinions – often in the form of mockery – to try and expose the true nature of his campaign. An unwarranted corollary of which is more publicity for *The Donald* — the more he is despised by the mainstream news services and portrayed as a fascist outsider, the more followers he secures. President Obama alluded to the same thought during the 2016 White House Correspondent's Dinner. [5] Many critics still fail to get this point. There is a famous quote from Les Moonves, the head of CBS, "Donald Trump is horrible for America but he's amazing for this network." [6] It's not black and white, but I definitely think the media has been at the forefront of legitimizing Mr Trump's candidacy.

Another point of observation was the manner of presentation of facts against Donald Trump. The remarks and statements publicly made by Mr Trump were often so blatantly outrageous, that news outlets instead of thoroughly critiquing the gaffe and debating the issue in a nuanced manner, resorted to the lazy way of broadcasting his said remarks in

hope that the people would *see through* his façade. Which is all the more interesting since that only helps to spread out his message and aid the virality of his campaign. For example, consider a Tweet from May 8, 2013 by @realDonaldTrump:

> *"Sorry losers and haters, but my I.Q. is one of the highest -and you all know it! Please don't feel so stupid or insecure, it's not your fault."*

Provocative statements like this were galore in the 2016 campaign — a major chunk of which were much worse than the aforementioned example. Donald Trump managed to stay in the limelight consistently for abundant forgotten reasons, just liked he wanted — and news outlets took the bait every single time.

Publicity is still publicity – negative or positive, or so goes the saying. It is true that out of all the candidates, Trump garnered the most coverage.[7] However, the media's logic for giving him attention to warn people of his true nature, of spreading information about this demagogue so people know how bad he is. A question that arises from this strategy: what if the articles they draft opposing the President-elect, have a higher positive sentiment than negative — in a sense making the entire critique a positive message — which ultimately works in Trump's favor. As if, overall the people writing the articles intrinsically like Trump.

In this paper, I intend to compare articles about the top 4 candidates for the 2016 US Presidential Election. A favorable outcome of this experiment would be an overall positive sentiment for all Trump articles, even though the author's intent may be to mock him.

2. Corpus

A collection of articles from The Wall Street Journal, dated Feb 1, 2016 to Nov 7, 2016 were scraped. The articles were tagged with the following keywords: Trump, Cruz, Clinton, and Sanders — denoting the candidate who is the subject of said article.

2.1 Expectations and Limitations

The WSJ was chosen on the assumption that it would provide comparable coverage for each candidate out of all the news sources. A couple other assumptions were made before procuring the data:

1. Articles about Trump will be plenty, and will generally be more positive (P) than negative (N).

2. Articles about Hillary will be more or less neutral, represented by almost balanced P & N Scores.
   Perhaps, it could even be more N than P because that has been cited as a potential hurdle for Hillary — that the media doesn't like her very much. [8]

3. Articles about Sanders will be highly positive but not plentiful, as has been cited by his campaign about the establishment and the major news sources not giving him enough coverage. [9]

4. Relatively few articles are expected for Ted Cruz, mostly with a negative sentiment.

3 Method

To accumulate the corpus, a scraper function in python using the Beautiful Soup library was implemented. The function output a .csv file sorted by dates from Feb 1, 2016 to Nov 7, 2016 with the following columns: Article Title, Article Link, Article Text, and Article Date.

3.1 Input

The Beautiful Soup library in Python is used for scraping. Two prominent features make Beautiful Soup a suitable choice:

1. Beautiful Soup provides a few simple methods and Python-like idioms for navigating, searching, and modifying a parse tree: a toolkit for dissecting a document and extracting what you need. Not a lot of code is required to write the application.

2. Beautiful Soup automatically converts incoming documents to Unicode and outgoing documents to UTF-8. You don't have to think about encodings, especially useful in scraping.

Projects that would have taken hours take only minutes with Beautiful Soup.

3.2 Preprocessing

A total of 2,325 articles were scraped from WSJ out of which 1749 were obtained in the appropriate format, rest were discarded.

3.3 Annotation

I manually annotated the articles to their designated subject. Number of articles per candidate were as follows:

1. Trump: 718
2. Sanders: 551
3. Clinton: 414
4. Cruz: 66

article name	article	article text	article date
Clinton's Negative Majority	http://	Hillary Clinton won New York's	6/28/16
Election 2016: Clinton Pivots T	http://	JENKINTOWN, Pa. -- Hillary	6/29/16
Election 2016: Clinton Gets A I	http://	Hillary Clinton won the	7/1/16
Election 2016: Poll Finds Front	http://	Donald Trump and Hillary	7/1/16
Front-Runners March On --- Cl	http://	Hillary Clinton swept to four	7/5/16
Election 2016: Clinton Is Takin	http://	Hillary Clinton is now fighting a	7/6/16
Election 2016: Clinton Counts	http://	PHILADELPHIA -- With her	7/6/16
The Clinton Pivot Begins	http://	Want to know which way	7/6/16
How Comey's FBI Treats Non-C	http://	The FBI website features an	7/8/16
Clinton Casino Royale; She say	http://	Hillary Clinton on Wednesday	7/8/16
'Unforced Errors,' from Tennis	http://	If you've been following	7/9/16

Fig 1. snippet of clinton.csv

3.4 Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment analysis aims to determine the attitude of a speaker or a writer with respect to some topic or the overall contextual polarity of a document.

I used the Python package VADER, a lexicon and rule-based sentiment analysis tool that is specifically attuned to sentiments expressed in social media, and works well on texts from other domains.

3.4.1   VADER

VADER: Valence Aware Dictionary and sEntiment Reasoner — is a lexicon and rule-based sentiment analysis tool that is specifically attuned to sentiments expressed in *social media*. This sentiment lexicon is sensitive both the *polarity* and the *intensity* of sentiments – measuring the impact of each rule on the perceived intensity of sentiment in sentence-level text according to the grammatical and syntactical rules described in the paper by Hutto and Gilbert.[10]

More importantly, these heuristics go beyond what would normally be captured in a typical bag-of-words model. They incorporate *word-order sensitive relationships* between terms. For example, degree modifiers (also called intensifiers or booster words) impact a sentence's sentiment by either increasing or decreasing the intensity. Consider these examples:

a. "The service here is extremely good"
b. "The service here is good"
c. "The service here is marginally good"

From Table 3 in the Hutto paper, we see that for 95% of the data, using a degree modifier increases the positive sentiment intensity of example (a) by 0.227 to 0.36, with a mean difference of 0.293 on a rating scale from 1 to 4. Likewise, example (c) reduces the perceived sentiment intensity by 0.293, on average.

3.4.2 SentimentIntensityAnalyzer()

The SentimentIntensityAnalyzer() module returns the actual sentiment of a sentence. It can handle examples of typical use cases for sentiment analysis, including proper handling of sentences with:

- typical negations (e.g., "*not* good")
- conventional use of punctuation to signal increased sentiment intensity (e.g., "Good!!!")
- conventional use of word-shape to signal emphasis (e.g., using ALL CAPS for words/phrases)
- using degree modifiers to alter sentiment intensity (e.g., intensity *boosters* such as "very" and intensity *dampeners* such as "kind of")
- understanding many sentiment-laden slang words as modifiers such as 'uber' or 'friggin' or 'kinda'
- understanding many sentiment-laden emoticons such as :) and :D

```
script, in_file, out_file = argv
SIA = SentimentIntensityAnalyzer()

shortword = re.compile(r'\W*\b\w{25,100000}\b')

def articleToSentiment(file):
    article = shortword.sub('', file)
    sentiments = SIA.polarity_scores(article)
    return sentiments
```

Fig 2. Implementing SentimentIntensityAnalyzer

3.4.3 Polarity Score

SentimentIntensityAnalyzer on a test sentence outputs a couple of scores, known as the *Polarity Scores*. The `pos`, `neu`, and `neg` scores are ratios for proportions of text that fall in each category. For example:

```
Input:
"At least it isn't a horrible book"
^a negated-negative sentence with
contraction
Output:
{'neg': 0.0, 'neu': 0.637, 'pos':
0.363, 'compound': 0.431}
_____
Input:
"The plot was good, but the charac-
ters are uncompelling and the dia-
log is not great."
^ a mixed negation sentence
Output:
{'neg': 0.327, 'neu': 0.579, 'pos':
0.094, 'compound': -0.7042}
```

These are the most useful metrics if you want multidimensional measures of sentiment for a given sentence. My script, only makes use of the `pos` and `neg` scores.

```
$ python sentiment_csv.py csv/trump.csv trump_sentiment.csv
```

It takes in the pre-processed .csv file from the previous step and outputs a corresponding sentiment.csv file which only contains the Article Date, the positive rating (P Score) and the negative rating (N Score)

```
Article Date: 2/2/16

 P.Score: 0.081              N.Score: 0.105
 ------------------ ------------------ ------
Article Date: 2/3/16

 P.Score: 0.097              N.Score: 0.033
 ------------------ ------------------ ------
Article Date: 2/3/16

 P.Score: 0.136              N.Score: 0.045
 ------------------ ------------------ ------
```

Fig 3. Command Line output of the script

4 Evaluation

The data from the sentiment.csv file for each candidate was imported into Tableau. A stacked bar graph is thus obtained:

- **X-Axis:** Articles Sorted by Date from Feb 1, 2016 to Nov 7, 2016 aggregated by week (Weeks 6 to 45 of the year 2016)

- **Y-Axis:** Stacked Bar Graph of P Score vs N Score; the dark bars representing Positive Sentiment, and the light bars representing Negative Sentiment.

Note that data from week 18 (May 2 to 8, 2016) was not included in the graph since it includes articles surrounding the Indiana Primary — the point at which Ted Cruz & John Kasich dropped out of the race — leaving Trump to be the presumptive Republican Nominee. The data from this week shows a disproportionately positive sentiment for Trump, and skews the graphs due to the large number of articles written during the said week. Also note that the polarity chart for Ted Cruz is scaled by a factor of 5 along the Y-Axis to maintain visual symmetry with the other graphs.

The dark bars on the graph represents the aggregate P Score for each candidate, for every week of 2016. Similarly, the light bars represent the N Scores. In simple terms, this implies that the more dark bars you see on a graph for a particular candidate, the more that person was appreciated by the media, or the Wall Street Journal at least.

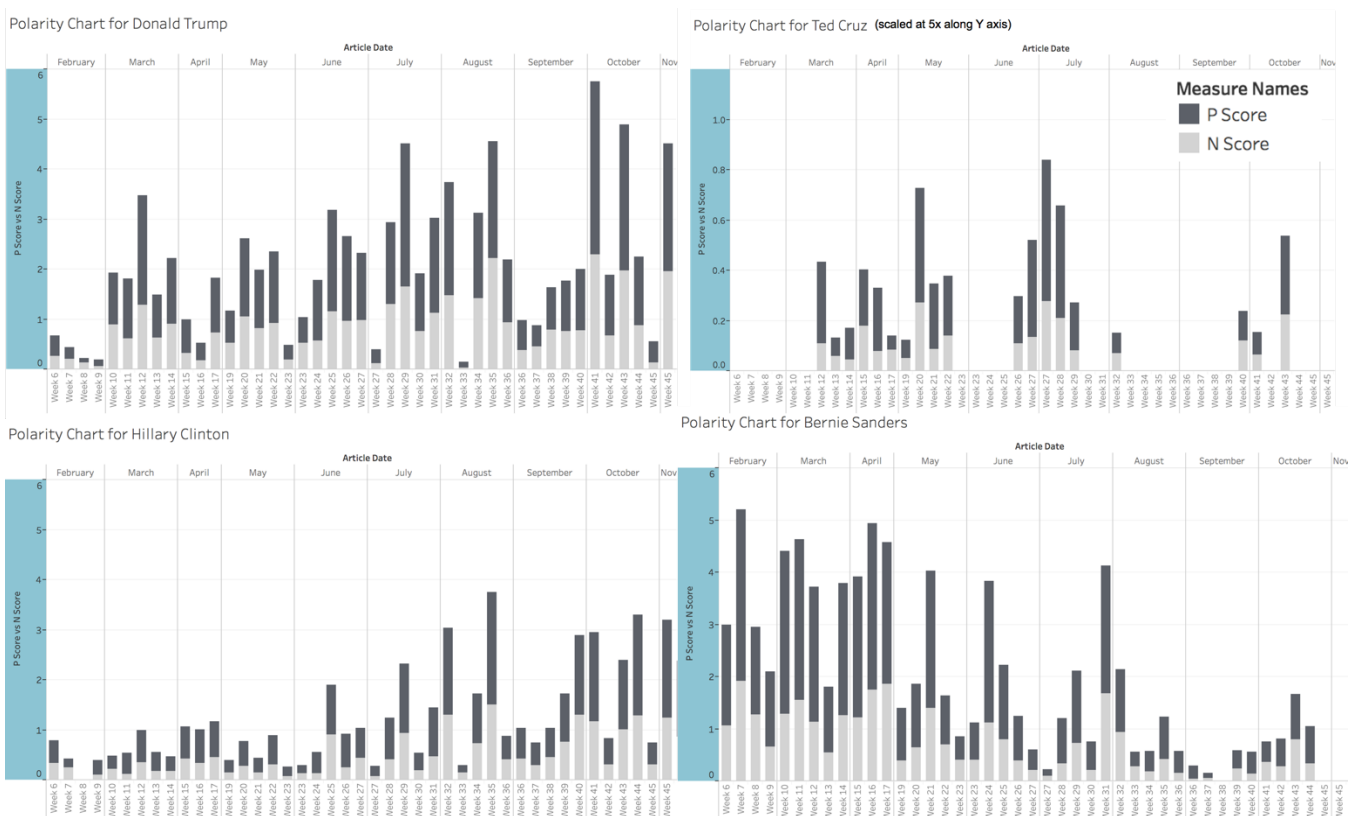On simply eyeballing the graph, a few things become apparent:

Fig 4. Polarity Chart for 2016 US Presidential Candidates

1. Articles about Trump have been consistently more positive than negative — as expected. This is apparent from the number of weeks where P Score > N Score.

2. The amount of coverage Clinton has received is scanty compared to Sanders and Trump. This is surprising, since Hillary Clinton was the apparent choice of the establishment.

   Not so surprising, however, is that a majority of coverage was more or less neutral — as seen by the number of weeks where P Score is almost equivalent to N Score.

3. It was initially expected that articles about Bernie Sanders will be highly positive in their sentiment, but it was interesting to observe that until the Democratic Convention, where Hillary Clinton was chosen as the party nominee — the number of articles about Senator Sanders were much greater in number, and in positive sentiment than any other candidate in either party. Perhaps he did have a better chance of winning than Hillary? It doesn't matter now.

5 Conclusion

Advanced calculations on data of this sort are beyond my expertise. Even so, it is well apparent that President-elect Donald Trump, who, at the inception of this study, was thought to be nothing more than a Ronald Reagan impostor — deftly manipulated the narrative surrounding his campaign. Of course, a lot of other factors played their part as well — absence of a strong Democratic opponent; as well as structural fractures in the RNC hierarchy. Commenting on socio-political issues is not the subject of this paper.

Whether it was opposition to #NeverTrump or just passionate support of #AlwaysTrump — the continuous feedback loop of his campaign across all media platforms contributed to the magnitude of influence he has since gained. The question of lending legitimacy to his campaign, in my opinion, holds beyond reasonable doubt. The media was certainly a contributing factor in legitimizing Donald Trump's presidential campaign.

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