

Johnny Depp vs. Amber Heard Defamation Trial

Statistics can Confirm: they don't like each other, and people should get off the internet

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Introduction

On April 11th 2019, a defamation case was filed by actor Johnny Depp against his ex-wife Amber Heard. Exactly two years later, the trial opens, becoming a highly publicized case in the nation, reaching headlines and generating mass media attention across social platforms. A major factor in the public's fixation on the trial was due to it being live streamed, making it possible to view footage everywhere and anywhere while presenting an opportunity for an abundance of social media commentary and wide discussion about the former couple's public images. Not to mention, analyzing the unwarranted opinions of people who pose no accountability on the internet during an incredibly sensitive case, lays down the moral battleground to ask the questions: how do people weigh ethics when they express "anonymous" opinions? How can we use data science to give context to law and justice using these public opinions?

Objectives:

- Defamation cases are incredibly difficult to win, as supporting evidence is often biased and cannot objectively showcase the detrimental effects an article or rumor can have on the career of an individual until after the fact.
- An objective source such as a robust analysis on the public as a result of such rumors can portray solid evidence against the opposition.
- A vast amount of opinion, as well as a jury that can likely be influenced by the media despite being chosen deliberately without bias, can alter the verdict.

- Ultimately, like any analysis utilizing data, this is an endeavor to provide an objective portrayal of the public's opinion-which just so happens to be highly relevant in a defamation trial.
- Additionally, we can use our data to question and propose more efficient methods to handle a defamation case in the future, based on the framework of the court system.

Sentiment Analysis: A Timeline of the Case with Context

To conduct the sentiment analysis, we scraped 700,000 tweets that mentioned Mr. Depp or Ms. Heard over the last six years from Twitter API keys.

Our resulting sentiment analysis graph (Figure 1) exhibits the ratio of positive tweets among the data sets for Amber Heard (Orange) against Johnny Depp (Green). To supplement this graph and provide further context to the analysis, we created a timeline of the tempestuous battle between the two parties from the day Amber Heard filed for divorce (August 16th 2016) to the day of the Jury verdict (June 1st 2022)

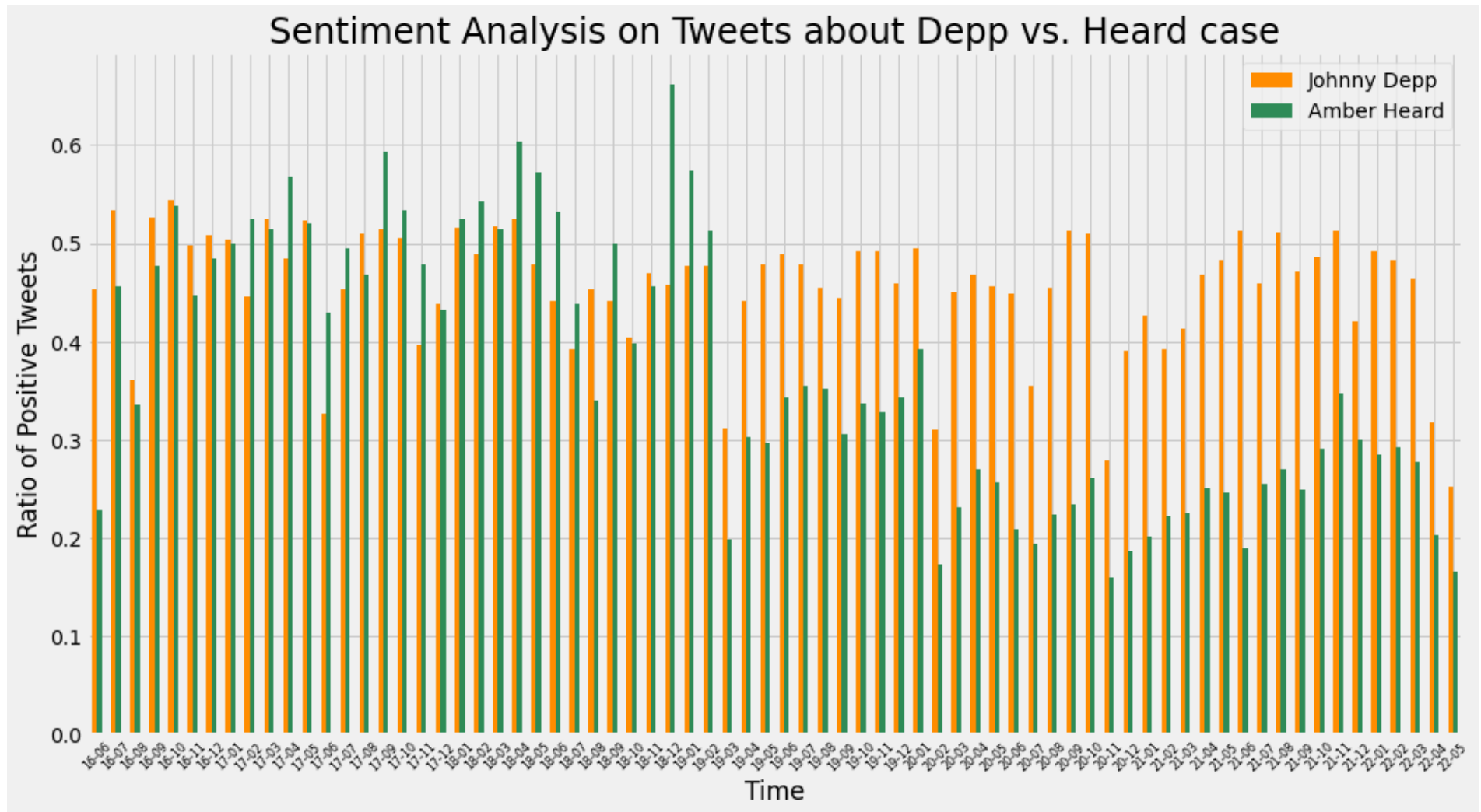


Figure 1: Sentiment Chart

Amber Heard vs. Johnny Depp: A Developmental Timeline (August 2016 - June 2022)

This litigation timeline supplements the sentiment analysis graph, providing further evidence on the model with context while incorporating public opinion and it's regard for the elongated conflict between the two parties.

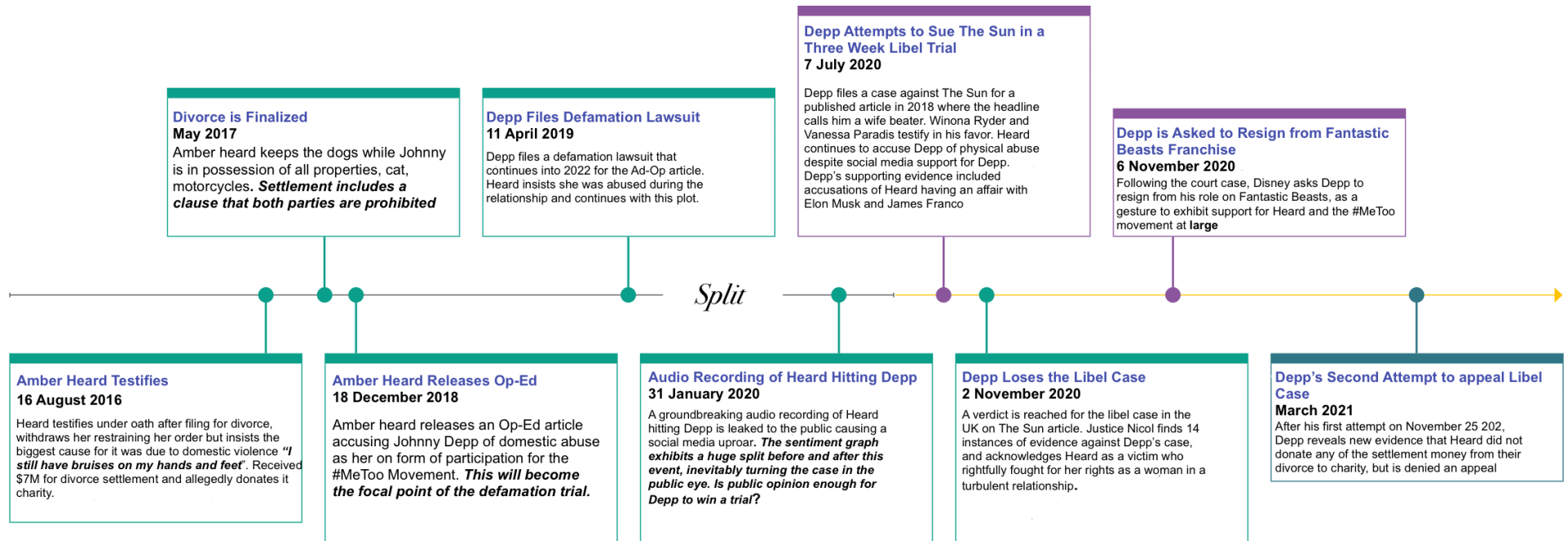


Figure 2: Timeline 1

Amber Heard vs. Johnny Depp: A Developmental Timeline (August 2016 - June 2022)

Washington Post Defamation Trial Begins

11 April 2022

All instances of the court case were live streamed to the public. All testimonies from the UK trial were reintroduced, as well as additional evidence on both parties. Heard loses a vast majority of support following her argument for covering her bruises (discussed since the divorce settlement) using a Milani color correcting palette, which was later revealed to have been released in 2017 (Heard's accusations during the divorce settlement regarding these bruises was in 2016)

Washington Post Defamation Trial Ends

1 June 2022

A seven panel jury rules Depp as innocent with \$10M for compensatory damages and \$5M for punitive damages. Heard was given \$2M for compensatory damages (note that Heard cannot compensate Depp for the current sum, she will likely have to pledge).

Figure 3: Timeline 2

Key highlights of the Timeline and Sentiment Analysis Graph:

- **Significant ratio of positive tweets for Amber Heard after posting her Op-Ed article to The Washington Post, which had become the grounds for the defamation lawsuit soon after by Depp:** *Despite Depp's insistence that Heard had manipulated the situation to be in her favor, it was ultimately ruled by the public at this time that Heard was telling the truth. In part, the reason for resounding support around Heard's article was her taking advantage of the momentum from the #MeToo movement.*
- **Enormous shift in ratio of positive tweets for Johnny Depp is in perfect tandem with the day an audio recording of Heard discussing her physical abuse against Depp was leaked to the press:** *On January 31st 2020, the recording circulated across social media, with Heard's line "I can't promise I won't get physical again" headlining hundreds of articles upon the recording's release. The social media uproar is immediately reflected in the sentiment graph, where the flip corresponds to the very next day the audio was leaked. The pipeline to become either a supporter of Depp or Heard naturally turned into an argument between gender and the implications of a woman lying about abuse, as well as the rarely discussed issue of male abuse victims.*
- **On July 7th 2020, Despite the huge uproar on social media, Depp files a libel case lasting three weeks against an article by The Sun in which he is accused of being a "wife beater":** *Depp Loses the Case and is asked to resign from his contract with Disney on his "Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them" role.*
- **The Defamation Trial becomes Depp's final attempt at justice:** *With brand new evidence from both parties, holding back nothing within their relationship (Down to defecation and former partners/accusations of cheating), Depp wins the case. With nearly \$15 million in settlement. Heard is also granted \$2 million in compensatory damages.*

Broader Implications of the Case:

The defamation trial and its mass media production trivialized what should have been an incredibly serious case, pulling from several areas of social justice and the need for change. Throughout the trial, any bystander consuming this media was taken aback by the behavior and reactions of many people who had turned the case into a drama production.

Though Depp won the case, many argue that there is no such thing as a completely innocent victim. The word cloud in figure 4 showcases the most common positive and negative words circulating twitter in relevance to Depp after Heard released her Op-Ed, while figure 5 exhibits the most common positive and negative words circulating twitter in relevance to Heard after the audio recording was released.

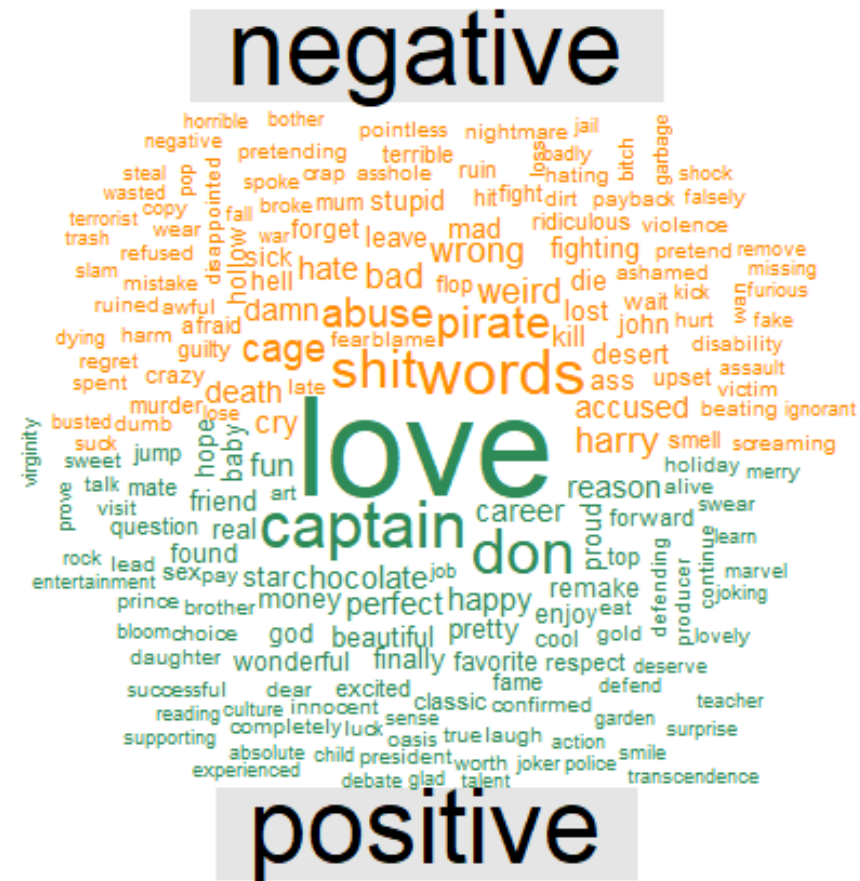


Figure 4: WordCloud about Depp during the trial

Further Discussion: Could the case be biased?

The typical process for selecting a jury, Voir dire, involves randomly selecting jurors to participate in the trial and vote on their judgment call.

The judge and respective lawyers ask each juror questions that are designed to bring out any possible biases before bringing these jurors into court. Additionally, jurors are **not allowed to consume or be exposed to media coverage or biased opinion on the case in question at least 2 months prior to the trial beginning.**

This is incredibly hard with a case as publicized as Heard vs. Depp. The caveat then becomes, was the jury biased? An analysis on the statistical significance between a libel trial and jury trial could aid in a prediction model pertaining to the greater field of law.

Additionally, a look-alike model on the demographics of “biased jurors” can be created to rule out anyone who would alter the verdict from the sample size of a designated panel.

With the help of machine learning, we could reduce the chances of choosing a biased jury for any court case, so long as the data mined is ethical and encompassing the person’s interests and perspectives in relevance to the case.

Conclusion:

The applicability of data science in the field of law stretches far beyond a defamation case, though this particular type of trial would especially benefit from a statistical perspective(as shown in this article using sentiment analysis). Data is often a portrayal of people’s opinions, thoughts, and ideas, in numerical form. The potential roadmap to incorporate such a valuable asset into the field of law is much more plausible than one would think. The power of information and objectivity has its home in any discipline, including law and justice.