George Washington University's Graduate School of Political Management and Zignal Labs
Latest PEORIA Project Highlights "The Year in Echoes" in Campaign Conversations
As presidential primaries approach, will quantity or quality of campaign conversations matter more?
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WASHINGTON – George Washington University's Graduate School of Political Management (GSPM) and Zignal Labs released the fifth Public Echoes of Rhetoric in America (PEORIA) Project report "The Year in Echoes" highlighting the winners and losers of the "Semi-Visible Primary" Friday. The report, which uses Zignal Labs' realtime cross media story tracking platform, shows which candidates are getting the most mainstream and social media mentions as well as the campaigns that are most effectively using their media opportunities to advance their key messages and energize their supporters.

It shouldn't come as a surprise that businessman Donald Trump won the "volume" contest. His total media mentions more than double the second place finisher, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

"Immigration policy and border control are the defining issues in this election today and that is due in large part to Trump's domination of the media conversation, as our data documents. Anyone who hopes to defeat him will have to change the subject," said Project Director and Associate Professor Michael Cornfield.

However, to look at volume alone does not tell the full story of the 2016 presidential campaign. "Since Howard Dean's presidential campaign in 2004, candidates have been working tirelessly to find ways to engage supporters online and increase their social media presence," said Associate Professor Lara Brown. "Both Senator Ted Cruz and Senator Bernie Sanders have found receptive, if polar opposite, online audiences and have bested their main competitors (Trump and Clinton), who have received far more mainstream media attention."

Turning words to action, which we calculate through our "Echo Conversion Rate," (ECR) the total number of website shares divided by the total number of social media mentions, shows how engaged partisans are with a particular candidate. By this metric, Texas Senator Ted Cruz tops the charts with a 5.0 percent ECR with over 500,000 website shares. Interestingly, Kentucky Senator Rand Paul, currently polling in the low single digits, has the second highest ECR at 3.7 percent. Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders leads the Democratic field with a 2.2 percent ECR score. Trump fared poorly under this metric with an ECR of 0.1 percent and just 61,000 website shares.

Another metric PEORIA uses to determine the "Semi-Visible Primary" winner, Net Sentiment, determines how positive or negative the chatter surrounding any one candidate is. Here Dr. Ben Carson, an early frontrunner who has seen his poll numbers drop, is the winner.

Summing up the candidates' placing in the key PEORIA metrics, we have determined the top finishers in the Democratic and Republican fields. On the Republican side, Cruz comes out on top with an overall score of 22 with Trump, and Florida Senator Marco Rubio rounding out the top three. On the Democratic side, Sanders is the winner with an overall score of 19, followed by Clinton and former Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley, who received the worst overall

score of 72. Of note, the two top finishers in each party scored highest in the "engagement" category while each side's second place finisher placed highest in the "volume" category.

So will actions end up speaking louder than words? The answer to that question will start to present itself next month at the ballot box and through our next iteration of this study, the PEORIA Project 2.0.

For additional information, including analysis from Professors Brown and Cornfield, please visit our PEORIA Project page.

About Graduate School of Political Management:

Founded in 1987 and located in the heart of Washington, DC, GW's Graduate School of Political Management is the first and foremost school of applied politics and advocacy offering master's degrees in the following disciplines: Advocacy in the Global Environment, Legislative Affairs, Political Management, Strategic Public Relations, and Communicación Política y Gobernanza.

About Zignal Labs:

Zignal Labs is a realtime, cross media story-tracking platform. We enable clients to quickly spot trends, see relevant stories unfold, and take action.

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