

## **Rationale**

For this Written Task based on IB Language part 2 I decided to write a news article for The New York Times. I wrote an article from the perspective of an unknown journalist about an article written by John Sides. In doing this I covered the following learning outcome: Show an awareness of the potential for educational, political or ideological influence of the media.

The article was written for an educated audience and tries to summarise the article of John Sides. Thus explaining how large news organisations, driven by their lust for money, can lay a more prominent focus on subjects which are deemed more interesting or entertaining by the general public. For even though news media should appeal to their target audience, they should not paint a crooked picture of reality.

To also put a focus on the use of language, something which is not particularly discussed in the first part of the news article, I wanted to end the article by proving the use of sensationalism based on linguistic features. I did this by talking about an imaginary blog post by an imaginary linguist.

Writing this article from the perspective of a journalist was difficult in some ways since, in the article, the writer heavily criticizes the media establishment hes also part of.

"This is obviously  
real."

# The New York Times

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## News media influenced current presidential race

By ROBIN WACANNO

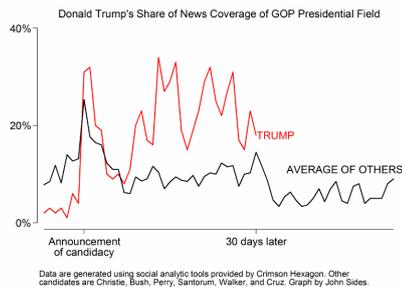
**WASHINGTON - With the presidential elections drawing ever closer the question of who will be the next president of the United States becomes more and more difficult to answer. Early on in the primary season a debate has been sparked about whether the media are responsible for the way things have turned out. To be more specific, a large number of people began to wonder if the amount of news coverage a candidate receives could influence their poll results. Furthermore they questioned whether candidates would have fared so well without the media attention they received.**

The origins of this debate can be traced back to late July last year when an article was posted on the website of The Washington Post. The article titled: "Why is Trump surging? Blame the media." was written by John Sides and tries to explain the sudden rise in popularity of Donald Trump as a presidential candidate. Sides does this by describing the strong correlation he has discovered between the number of times Trump has been covered in the news or any other media outlet and his poll results.

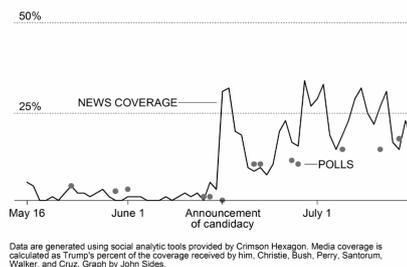
Sides, who is currently an Associate Professor of Political Science at

George Washington University, has been running and writing for a political blog called The Monkey Cage together with a few other professors of political science. The blog ran from 2007 until 2012 when all writing activities were moved to the website of The Washington Post.

The article John Sides published on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July 2015 starts off by giving a clear statement: stop speculating about the reasons for Trump's success, the media is to blame. He immediately supports this statement by showing two important things using the following graph he constructed with a UCLA political scientist.



The graph shows clearly that Trump's announcement of candidacy received quite a lot more news coverage compared to the announcements of other Republican candidates. These facts would be useless however if there wasn't shown a clear and consistent correlation between those numbers and Trump's poll results. In a graph inserted further on in the article, however, this correlation was shown by plotting both the amount of news coverage Trump received and his poll results in percentages.



While this graph is an excellent argument in favour of Sides' theory there is one big and inevitable problem: couldn't this correlation be also explained the other way around, meaning that Trump's high rankings could lead to him getting

more attention in the news media.

It is true and has been proven that the reverse effect occurs, this doesn't disprove Sides' theory. Moreover the effect of the correlation Sides describes would be enhanced, creating a positive feedback loop. In short this could be described as follows: *A new person announces his or her candidacy after which the news covers this event. Due to the added exposure the candidate receives they will fair better in the polls. This sudden increase in the poll results will be noticed and covered by various news outlets thus giving them more publicity. This completes the cycle which starts all over again.*

Still one might wonder: why is it only Trump that seems to benefit from this phenomenon? The answer to this question has, as is often the case in the United States, to do with money. For even news channels on television and newspapers like ours or any other's have to find a way to make money. In doing this they rely heavily on advertisement even though one still has to pay for something like a newspaper. By relying on advertisement however they have to make sure that as much people as possible view their program or read their articles thus exposing the featured advertisements to a large audience.

A lot news outlets, to increase their advertisement earnings, try to expand their audience. Sensationalism is a technique used very often to accomplish this. Sensationalist stories are often, but not always, over-dramatized and misleading. There is one case however when these sensationalist stories are entirely, or at

least mostly based on facts. The subject in this case is, as one might expect, Donald J. Trump.

Can this sensationalism be identified based on linguistic features? This is what Stanislaus Budwilowitz, a Polish linguist has been trying to find out. He published an article on the topic a few days ago on his personal blog. In this article he talks about an article from USA Today published earlier this year called: "Trump, Clinton both wrong for America."

He starts off by talking about the strong title of the article and the way its used to lure in readers. The title contains no nuance and conveys the clear opinion of the author. Budwilowitz believes such characteristics are subconsciously picked up by the readers and will entice him or her to continue reading the article.

Budwilowitz also looked at the choice of words in certain phrases. He notes however that its rather difficult to comment on the vocabulary used in this particular article since it is not always clear whether a candidate like Trump is paraphrased or whether its the wording of the author.

In the end we will never be able to find out if the current presidential race has been significantly influenced by the media and if it could have turned out differently. There are however a large number of suspicions based on theories which can not be ignored. It would therefore be wise for the news media to change their practices somewhat. It is clear though that such a paradigm shift will not happen in the near future. For it requires a great deal of cooperation.

## Sources

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*DISCLAIMER: Nothing about or connected to the character Stanislaus Budwilowitz is real. He and his blog have been created for the narrative of this text.*