



Analysis of political parties during UK election

Introduction

The UK elections conducted in 2010 gave rise to a number of firsts: the first UK televised debates between party leaders; the first election result in recent memory to give a hung parliament; and the first election to be conducted under the gaze of ubiquitous social media.

Brand Aura conducted analysis throughout the UK elections using various social media as data sources. We used not only twitter as a data source, but also sites such as the BBC's Have Your Say, where many thousands of comments were made after each live TV debate and also on hot topics which would focus on key policy areas.

We also looked to use the forums and comments made on national print media sites such as The Guardian and The Telegraph in order to look at the full spectrum of political views. For even further insight, we looked at extracting data from football fans forums (which are often highly politicised) and even NetMums which had a large userbase from a specifically female demographic.

Analysis

In this article we will showcase only a few small areas that were covered during the entire election campaign. To see the full breadth of analysis that was conducted please refer to the website election trends which shows all of the analysis in full.

One area of interest during the campaign, particularly after it was clear that Nick Clegg had done exceptionally well in the initial live TV debate, was the depth of coverage of Liberal Democrat policies. This analysis can be seen in Figure 1, where data was taken from the Daily Telegraph from all blogs in the month of April.

This analysis reveals a number of important conclusions on the public's opinion on the political parties:

- The coverage in terms of policy areas for Liberal Democrats is poor when compared to the Conservatives and Labour. The analysis clearly shows that there is limited discussion of the Liberal Democrats policies, perhaps highlighting the fact that the public did not know much about them despite Nick Clegg's popularity.
- Some items show more discussion in context with Labour than with the Conservatives and vice versa. For example, immigration is discussed with Labour much more than with the other parties. Conversely, defence is discussed with the Conservatives much more than other parties.
- This type of analysis can highlight strengths (or weaknesses) in each parties political ideology.

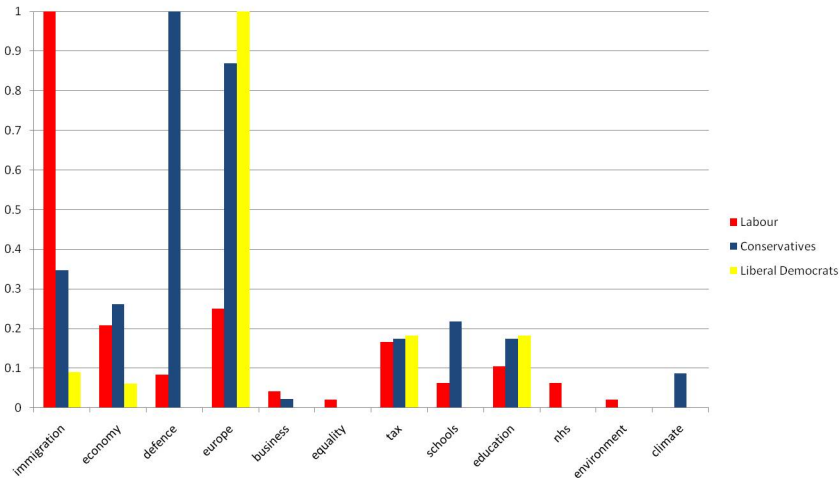


Figure 1: Policy areas against political party in Daily Telegraph blog comments in April 2010

It should be noted that this data comes from the Daily Telegraph, and therefore the comments are likely to be bias in terms of right leaning political views. However similar analysis undertaken using the BBC Have your say data as a source showed a similar picture, in that the Liberal Democrats had a small amount of coverage when compared to the other parties. In addition, the spread of conversations for each topic was broadly the same as well, showing that there was roughly the same amount of discussion on the various topics regardless of the political leaning of the demographic.

This is interesting in itself, and this analysis can be extended still further by applying sentiment analysis on top of this analysis, in order to discover whether the comments being made are favourable or otherwise for any particular political party.

An example of this type of contextual analysis can be seen in Figure 2 where the words that are in context with David Cameron can be seen. The word Cameron is in the centre of the word cloud, and the closer words are to the centre, then the closer these words are in context with Cameron for this particular dataset.

The data was taken from MumsNet following the first TV debate, and clearly shows a negative sentiment against David Cameron. It was widely recognised that his performance after this first TV debate was poor, and we can see a number of words that directly reflect his performance coming through in the analysis, such as: toadying, orange, slimy, nervous, disdain, insincere.



Figure 2: Contextual analysis of David Cameron following first TV debate



Conclusions

The analysis shown in more detail at the website election trends confirms the power of the use of contextual analysis for tracking brands, whether they be actually people, or political parties.

Our analysis was followed by a number of MPs including Nick Clegg, and was showcased on an online semantic web magazine. This article followed hot on the heels of a previous article highlighting the problems in using sentiment analysis techniques.

However, the use of our contextual analysis tools have shown that great insight can be gained by the analysis of any number of social media data sources, and that these can be integrated together or analysed separately.

We were able to give an indication of public sentiment of the party leaders after each of the 3 TV debates before any other polling agency, and for example published our results online 39 minutes before the IPSOS Mori Poll. However our results were in line with their analysis of public opinion, showing the trend towards David Cameron over the three TV debates, and the initial great performance by Nick Clegg in the first TV debate.

We conducted analysis on the day of the election, and although the majority of exit polls seemed to suggest a small majority in favour of the Conservatives, our analysis seemed to indicate a hung parliament, which is in fact what actually occurred.

We also studied the public's opinion on the potential make up of the government, with a clear majority wanting a coalition between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats.

All of this analysis was published on our website as predictions based on public opinion, and subsequently was shown to be accurate in terms of reflecting the true opinion of the public. This again highlights the effectiveness of including true contextual analysis in the decision making process and determining the underlying sentiment of the general public.