

Undecided Voters May Not Be So Undecided After All

Center for Emotional Marketing Delves Inside the Undecided Voter's Mind and Finds National Security Driving Choice

ARMONK, N.Y., Oct. 4, 2016 /PRNewswire/ -- On the surface, undecided voters appear to be perplexed over who to vote for due to negative perceptions of both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump; however, their subconscious tells a different story.

According to a new study by the Center for Emotional Marketing (www.centerforemotionalmarketing.com), a pioneering brand strategy and innovation firm, Trump has far more negative associations in the mind of the undecided voter than Clinton has. Moreover, national security is emerging as a lynchpin of the campaign pushing undecided voters into Clinton's camp.

Twenty years of brand projects has revealed vast networks of positive and negative associations in the brain that exert the dominant influence on people's choices without their awareness. Using its proprietary research techniques to tap into the subconscious mind, the Center for Emotional Marketing conducted in-depth projective exercises with dozens of undecided voters in Columbus, Ohio and Tampa, Florida last week following the first presidential debate. The Center for Emotional Marketing found that while voters do not trust Clinton, they associate more negative character traits – volatility, unpredictability, bombastic personality-- with Trump and these negatives are subconsciously undermining his image as the stronger national security candidate.

Surprisingly, in spite of Trump's strong emphasis on destroying ISIS and building a wall, voters' visualizations of the future reveal that safety and world peace are actually now more associated with Clinton. This represents a change from historical party positions in recent presidential races.

"Clinton's lack of trustworthiness and Trump's volatility prevents voters from forging an emotional connection with them. Like an array of caution signs and flashing lights, these negative associations alienate voters, signaling to them: 'stay away,'" said Leslie Zane, founder and president, Center for Emotional Marketing. "Voters ultimately make their decision based on character traits and value alignment, not on accomplishments. Trump's greater number of negative character traits alienate undecided voters even more than Clinton's perceived deceitfulness.

By analyzing each candidate's network of associations, using the same in-depth, projective research techniques it has used for Fortune 100 brands for over 20 years, the Center for Emotional Marketing has assessed the viability of each candidate's personal brands, the keys to alleviating their negative perceptions and the strategy for winning over undecided voters.

The Wall Has Backfired for Trump

The Center for Emotional Marketing's immersion in the mind of the undecided voter discovered that Trump's promise to build a wall to keep Mexican immigrants out of the U.S. has become a major negative symbol of his campaign. While Trump may believe the wall sends a message of enhanced security, in fact, undecided voters view it as racist, anti-American and childish.

"It is the exclusionary and impulsive nature of a wall that has made it a negative symbol," said Tom Gosline, vice president, Center for Emotional Marketing. "Voters are very concerned about security, but they long for a doorway with enhanced vetting procedures rather than a solid wall."

While undecided voters maintained that they haven't yet made up their mind, the Center for Emotional Marketing's projective techniques revealed their true affinity. Specifically, voters imagined two different countries led by Clinton versus Trump. For the Trump world, they envisioned abundant jobs with everyone, from rich to poor, thriving and advancing. In Clinton's world, where healthcare and education were free, there was an unmistakable aura of peace and tranquility not present in the Trump world. Undecided voters revealed that Trump's financial success was alluring, but they felt that Clinton's world would be safer for their children and the country.

Addressing Clinton's "Untrustworthy" Associations

Clinton's experience—her years as a Senator and Secretary of State—is her greatest positive association according to the Center for Emotional Marketing's research. Although voters could not identify any specific accomplishments, they have a generalized sense that she knows the system and will deal with foreign leaders diplomatically. However, Clinton's perceived deceitfulness casts a vast negative halo over her years of hard work. This web of mistrust in voters' subconscious has been years in the making — comprised of multiple negative memories from scandals in Arkansas and Benghazi to deleted emails and most recently her health. Projective exercises revealed that Clinton's character was often expressed with imagery of duplicity – snakes, masks and two-faced creatures. According to Zane, "the remedy that emerged for alleviating Clinton's negative associations was astonishingly simple: take off the veil."

Clinton Must Present Herself as a Unifier; Trump as a Composed CEO and Leader

"Because the human brain is always making new associations, both candidates can still change perceptions but they must create new positive associations and take down the barriers between themselves and voters," said Zane. One of the most effective ways to do this is to match voters' positive memories of the candidates from the past. "Much like consumer brands, the key to winning over undecided voters is often to return to their roots and tap into subconscious associations that are highly positive but currently dormant."

For Clinton, this means reclaiming her heritage as a builder of communities and unifying force, articulated clearly 20 years ago in "It Takes a Village." For Trump, this means returning to his image as a level headed CEO who is passionate about helping both his company and his people succeed.

By projecting herself as a unifier, Clinton would provide a sharp contrast with Trump's divisiveness. According to Zane, "Clinton has a remarkable opportunity to play a unifying role on three levels—1- pulling Republicans and Democrats together, 2- creating harmony between minorities and law enforcement and 3- forging closer relationships among the nations of the world. True to Clinton's own background, this positioning would not only address voters' strong desire for bipartisanship and peace, it would be authentic."

As for Trump, he must resume the more balanced, even-tempered persona he presented years ago prior to his overexposure in the Presidential campaign. A poised and measured CEO would be a good model. Changing his rhetoric from "I" to "we", Trump must explain how he will share his business acumen with all the American people. Importantly, like any good CEO, Trump must present comprehensive plans that are thoughtful and implementable. These plans should include details on how he will cut the federal budget, renegotiate trade agreements and bring back manufacturing jobs. Undecided voters are still open to Trump but only if they receive new information that addresses their concerns.

Polls Not Predictive; Subconscious Associations Drive Choice

Unlike traditional polling that only captures what people say they're going to do, the Center for Emotional Marketing's approach uncovers the network of subconscious associations that drive what they're more likely to do in the voting booth. Its proprietary process revealed that while undecided voters say that they're still deciding, Trump's abundance of negative associations are more concerning and are pushing these voters towards Clinton.

Background on The Center for Emotional Marketing's Framework

The Center for Emotional Marketing's breakthrough study delved into the subconscious minds of undecided voters. An extension of the work it has conducted for Fortune 100 brands over the past 20 years, the Center for Emotional Marketing discovered the vast web of subconscious associations that exert the dominant influence on voters' decisions.

The Center for Emotional Marketing's Brand Network framework, with roots in behavioral economics, neuroscience and psychology, reveals a brand's positive and negative associations in consumers' minds. Its proprietary Brand Triggers® process assists in building more positive networks in the brain by introducing new cues, or Triggers, that spark positive recognition and ultimately change brand preference.

About The Center for Emotional Marketing

Founded in 1995, the Center for Emotional Marketing (www.centerforemotionalmarketing.com) is a pioneering strategy and innovation firm with the only proven framework for managing and elevating brand perceptions in consumers' minds. It enjoys a 20-year track record of helping Fortune 100 companies achieve unprecedented growth and increased ROI. From Snickers and Pepsi to Ragu and Sabra, CEM has delivered over a billion dollars in incremental growth for its client over the past 20 years.

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Editor's Note: Center for Emotional Marketing's visual representation of Clinton and Trump's verbal and visual associations in undecided voters' minds is available in [animated b-roll video](#) or high resolution images upon request.

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