In-Moment Emotion Polling for Politics and Policy

Bellwether Citizens Reponses and Shimmer Research conducted a biometric study to measure Irish citizen's emotional responses toward a wide range of world leaders discussing their respective stances on Brexit. Measuring a target audience's in-moment emotional responses allows for better understanding of the subtle, yet critical influences that precede voting behavior.

Many of us avoid talking about politics at work and in social situations because it is such an emotional topic, but understanding emotion is critical to understanding voter response. Conventional polling uses self-reported surveys and often dial-testing which only take a snapshot of conscious opinions but fail to capture the deeper emotional responses that drive decisions at the ballot-box. Recent high-profile failures of traditional poling, like those for Brexit or the Trump election, highlight the challenges of conventional methods to answer questions like: "How aligned are the emotional responses with the conscious rational responses?", "Which politicians are able to reach voters on an emotional level?", and, "What is the best way to frame issues?". Neuromarketing techniques are ideally suited to answer these questions.

Use of neuromarketing techniques has been previously limited because research has not been able to keep up with the fast-moving world of politics and the costs have often been prohibitive. In this recent study, we demonstrated the feasibility of using a new system that is easily layered into traditional research to minimize expense and provides real-time aggregate analysis of groups.

Approach

Shimmer's NeuroLynQ system was used to wirelessly monitor in-moment changes in galvanic skin response (GSR) and heart rate variability (HRV) of each audience member while viewing clips of prominent elected officials (e.g., Boris Johnson and Angela Merkel) discussing Brexit. Signals from GSR (a proxy for emotional arousal) and HRV (a proxy for mental effort) were combined to assess changes in audience engagement during each videoclip. (Figure 1 shows equipment used; Figure 2 shows the data collection process.) This approach afforded a ranking of each elected official by their aggregate response. Additionally, strongly engaging moments within a political communication were identified.

Conducted at Dublin City University, October 2019, 30 Irish audience members viewed 33 videos from 11 politicians talking about Brexit before completing a self-report survey, ranking elected officials on their favorability. Additionally, audience members completed a "Pictorial Implicit Association Task" referred to as EmOceanTM to qualitatively assess discrete emotional associations on Brexit.

Objectives

We assessed several questions, including:

1. Which politicians generated the highest emotional arousal response?
2. Does the level of emotional arousal response correlate with the politicians' favorability ranking?
3. What moments generated the highest level of emotional arousal response?
4. Did framing the discussion positively or negatively affect the strength amount of response?

Results

The audience's aggregate emotional arousal response to each official was ranked, with Donald Trump highest followed by Donald Tusk. Figure 3 shows the ranking of each of the 11 politicians. Little correlation exists between the nonconscious and conscious rankings. Trump had the lowest ranking, while Tusk had the highest. Looking at their emotional high points, Trump scored high on emotion when saying, "Brexit is going to be a wonderful thing for [the UK]."

While both Tusk and Trump aroused strong engagement, Tusk was ranked most favorable, fueled by high arousal to his quote: "There is a special place in hell for Brexit promoters without a plan!". Trump was ranked the least favorable, being an established Brexit supporter.

kloppen de onderschriften nog?

Figure 1: Biometric Equipment

Figure 2: Data Collection at DCU, Dublin Ireland

Figure 3: Overall Biometric Arousal of Audience by Elected Official

Figure 4: Elected Officials Presented During Study

Conversely, two local Irish politicians, Coveney and Foster, evoked the weakest engagement. While Coveney is ranked highly favorable compared to Foster, both failed to elicit a strong engagement response from the audience. This lack of engagement suggests a similar disability to emotionally persuade.

The Irish elected official Simon Coveney should be particularly concerned about his failure to connect with a Republic of Ireland audience on a strong affective level. At the time of this study, Brexit threatened the stability of the peace process with the prospect of erecting borders once again with Northern Ireland.

Using EmOceanTM the audience most strongly resonated with "confusion," "frustration," and "anguish" with Brexit, from 32 possible discrete emotions. Unsurprisingly, the Brexit issue cued strong negative associations, suggesting the audience most strongly resonated with messaging focused on the potential loss that would occur for the Irelands if borders are reinstated as an outcome.

Conclusions

Understanding voters' in-moment arousal to politicians is critical to unlocking the most effective political communication strategies for each politician. Emotional arousal surrounding the Brexit issue among this audience were confirmed to be strongly negative. This is an important context to provide perspective on the type of emotional arousal response that is generated by the largely anti-Brexit audience.

Beyond Brexit, the ability to measure emotional responses provides an important tool for politicians to build effective communications. A politician's ability to trigger persuasive emotional responses from an audience is a communication "framing challenge" that is not "one size fits all" across politicians. Further, identifying specific emotional associations toward politicians or political issues enables the most effective behavioral science "nudges" to be harnessed in persuasive communications.

Final thoughts

In the public realm of politics and public policy, emotion may be even more important as a driver of decisions steering behavior toward consumer goods.

According to Harriett Levin Balkind, founder of Honest Ads, "We feel before we think, which means it's actually not even possible to have a pure rational thought. People vote more on emotions than they do on the issues."

These new neuromarketing methods provide a highly granular understanding of in-moment emotional responses toward political messages.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Shimmer Research, Ireland
www.shimmersensing.com
Geoffrey Gill
ggill@shimmersensing.com

Bellwether Citizen Response, United States
www.bellwethercr.com
Dr. Kimberly Rose Clark
krclark@bellwethercr.com

Understanding Live Rugby League Stadium Experience and its Impact on Advertising

The Vodafone Warriors are one of New Zealand's most exciting professional sporting teams, competing in the Australasian NRL (Rugby League) competition. The club is backed by a loyal fan base that spans New Zealand, and boasts an extensive list of long-term sponsorship deals with brands such as Vodafone, Canterbury of New Zealand, Mazda and ANZsahi Beverages (Woodstock) - organizations that want to be part of the trials and tribulations of the team.

But what is it like to be a game-day supporter at the Vodafone Warriors' home ground - Mt Smart Stadium? And what does this mean for sponsors? To answer these questions, it is necessary to monitor people in the stadium through the experience. The Vodafone Warriors partnered with behavioral insights agency NeuroSpot using Shimmer Research's NeuroLynQ system to take a scientific lens to how fans felt watching the Round 24 match against the South Sydney Rabbitohs.

Approach

In this study, NeuroSpot made use of Shimmer Research's NeuroLynQ biometric measurement system to measure changes in galvanic skin response – subtle changes in the skin's response caused by changes in emotional response – throughout the game. By wearing two small sensors on their fingers, groups of fans can have physiological changes in excitement recorded – without them having to tell us how they're feeling. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1

As part of this study, 20 Vodafone Warriors fans were asked to watch the game from a media box at Mt Smart Stadium. Throughout the game, NeuroSpot was able to measure second-by-second fluctuations in fan emotion – and identify what caused it. Figure 2 shows the view from the media box. Prior to the game, the audience was shown a sports-talk TV show that talked about the team and the game to establish a baseline. They were also shown a series of advertisements from both non-sponsors and sponsors of stadium advertisements to create a baseline for advertising response.

Results

People talk about the excitement of watching a live sports match, and this came through clearly in people's emotional responses with a 38% uplift in heighted emotion vs baseline. The most exciting moment of the game was in the 37th minute, when Ken Maumalo scored the Vodafone Warriors' second try – with heightened emotion levels spiking 44% compared to baseline. This came off the back of the home side's first try, scored two minutes earlier by Adam Pompey, with a boost in heightened emotion of 20% compared to baseline.

Excitement levels continued to peak when the Rabbitohs scored their tries – with a 25% jump off the back of a breakaway try to Dane Gagai. What does this mean? The excitement from a live sports event doesn't just come from your team scoring – people respond

Figure 2

to the excitement from both teams competing, and the crowd response around them. A big question for sponsors such as Vodafone and Mazda is how does this partnership impact their brand? Are Vodafone Warriors fans taking that emotion across to sponsor brands, and potentially changing long-term brand associations? To find out, fans were shown a series of sponsors adverts before the game started, and during the half-time break to see how responses differed.

The key finding was that emotional responses to the same adverts increased 21% at half-time vs before the game – an emotional uplift that can be associated with sponsor brands. What's interesting is that we've seen this uplift from a sponsor advert, but with the sponsor logos being highly visible throughout the stadium and on player uniforms, there are multiple opportunities to embed these associations, (See Figure 3 below).

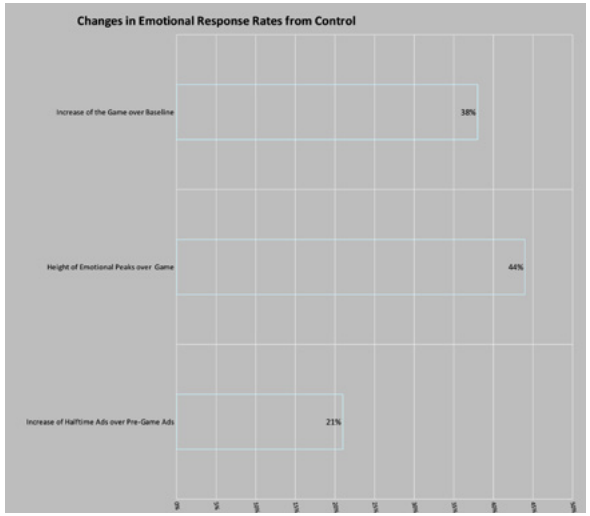

Figure 3:
Increase of Halftime Ads over Pre-Game Ads 21%
Height of Emotional Peaks over Game 44%
Increase of the Game over Baseline 38%

Conclusions

Attending a live Vodafone Warriors game at their home ground of Mt Smart Stadium (Auckland, NZ) results in high levels of emotional response amongst fans – on average 38% greater compared to baseline. Emotional peaks occurred at multiple times during the game, both when the home-side scored (up to 44% higher vs baseline), but also when the opposition scored.

Importantly for team sponsors, this emotional uplift carried through to sponsor advertising, with a 21% greater emotional response to adverts shown at halftime vs the same adverts shown pre-game. This illustrates the value to sponsors of being associated with such events.

Final thoughts

Our belief is that more and more neuromarketing work will need to be performed in real-world environments with passive data collection to capture the true response of participants. Biometrics, particularly GSR and heart rate, are well suited to real world data collection. It is not that there are no challenges with these measures, but there are fewer challenges than with other technologies. In fact, hundreds of millions of people are having these metrics monitored today with consumer fitness trackers and smart-watches. This study is one of many demonstrating the ability of these measures to capture interesting and meaningful data in a real-world environment.

CONTACT INFORMATION

NeuroSpot
www.neurospot.co.nz
Cole Armstrong
cole@neurospot.co.nz

Vodafone Warriors
www.warriors.kiwi
Aaron Lawton
aaron@warriors.kiwi

Shimmer Research
www.shimmersensing.com
Geoffrey Gill
ggill@shimmersensing.com