

Feelings Over Facts

A toolkit for embracing an emotions-first narrative strategy



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Introduction

THE PROBLEM

Our messages are not
reaching or *moving*
people to act.

The information environment has changed, but our communications strategies have not. Too often, we lose the narrative battle by relying on outdated techniques that don't leverage the science of what *actually* moves us.

OUR MESSAGE



*Rational. Poll-tested.
Scrolled past.*

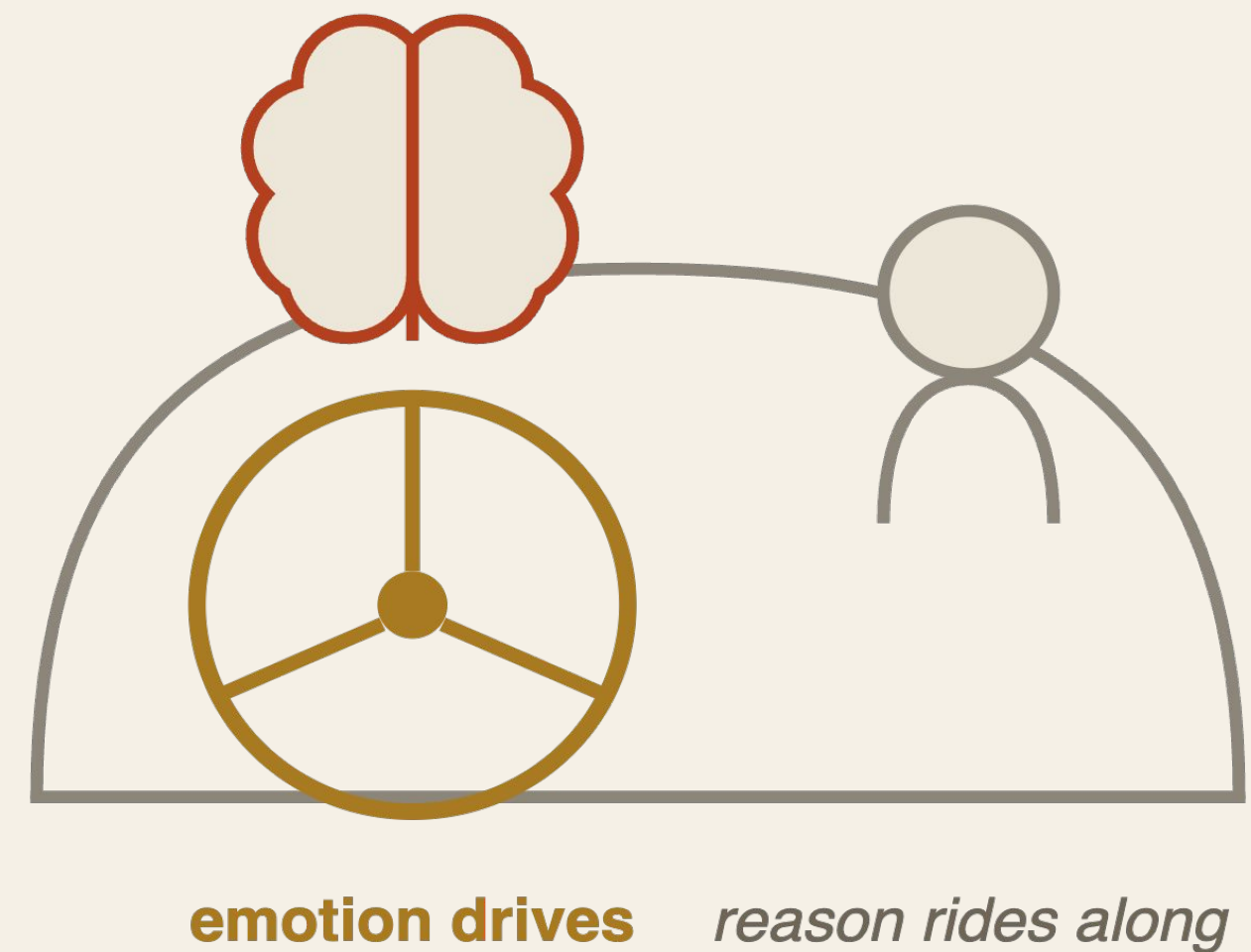


THE FEED · ENDLESS, EMOTIONAL

OUR PREMISE

The *emotional brain* is in the driver's seat.

For too long, communicators have relied on poll-tested fact-based arguments. Instead, we must tell **emotionally evocative stories** — because what people remember, believe, decide, do, and share is steered by feeling first. In this toolkit and our accompanying paper, we describe how to develop and deploy narrative that speaks to the emotional brain, and unpack the science behind this approach.



CORE IDEA

Humans remember, believe, decide, and act with the emotional brain *first*.

The evidence from neuroscience and social psychology points to four conclusions — and to storytelling as the vehicle that pulls all four levers at once.



Four conclusions from the evidence

MEMORY

- The brain keeps what makes it feel.
- **Emotional, novel, and visual** content is more effectively stored by the hippocampus and better remembered.
- Neutral facts are quickly forgotten.

BELIEF

- Fact sheets fight the brain's own defenses.
- **Motivated reasoning** shields existing beliefs, and **repetition** — not accuracy — is what makes a claim feel true.
- Beliefs shift when changing them feels emotionally safe, and when the message is repeated.

DECISIONS

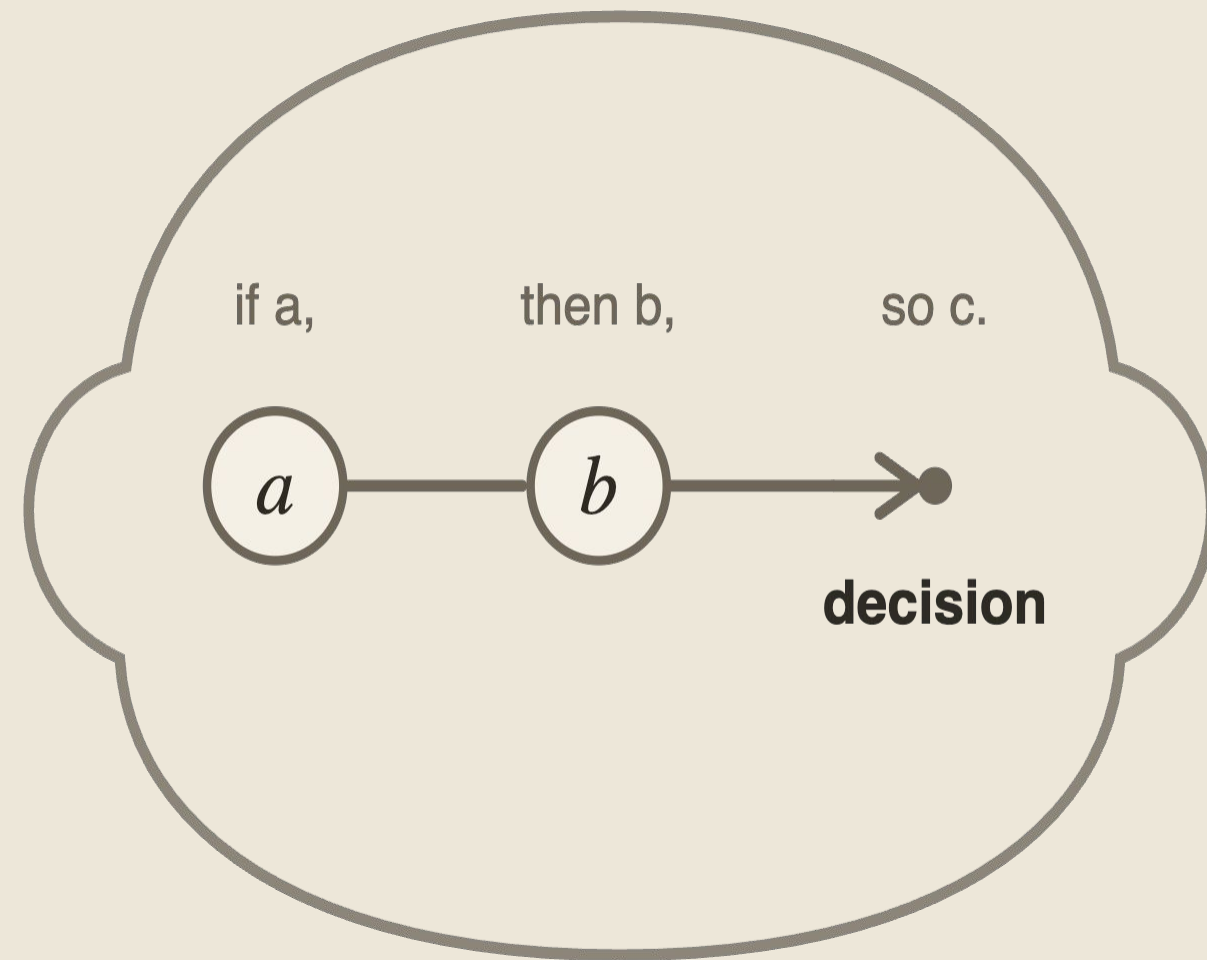
- Without something to feel, people struggle to choose.
- Fast **gut emotional signals guide decisions** before deliberate reasoning arrives.
- Facts alone leave the pull toward a choice weak.

ACTION

- **High-arousal, activating** emotions mobilize audiences to act when paired with a sense of **self-efficacy**.
- Messages land hardest when they are **values-framed** and reinforced by **identity** and **social proof**.

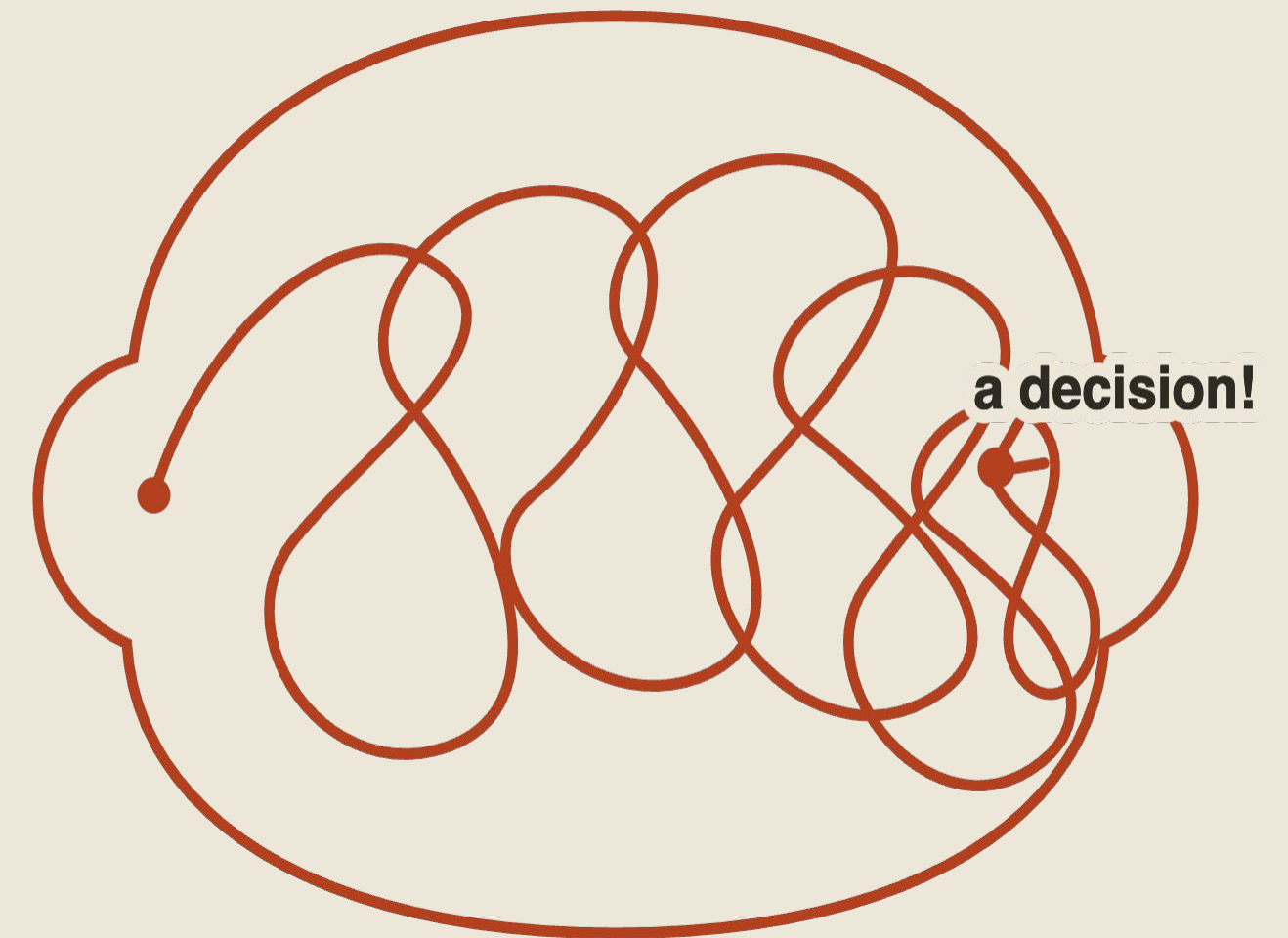
TL;DR:

HOW WE THINK THE BRAIN WORKS



Rational. Linear. Persuaded by the best argument.

HOW THE BRAIN ACTUALLY WORKS



Emotional. Associative. Persuaded by how it feels.

The algorithms reward the same things the brain does.

EMOTION

- High-arousal content (positive or negative) spreads further and faster online than low-arousal content

SURPRISE

- Content rated as novel or unexpected is more likely to be shared

BELONGING

- Content that signals shared identity measurably drives more engagement online
- People engage more with content they think is popular

REPETITION

- Messages are more likely to be forwarded after repeated exposure than after a single one

Content that is designed to appeal to the emotional brain will perform better online, giving our narratives a better chance of breaking through and changing hearts and minds.

Our process has six steps:

1 

Understand your audience: start with emotion

Map the emotional landscape of your narrative terrain

2 

Set narrative objectives, lower the psychological cost

Design for motivated reasoning, close psychological distance, and reframe using shared values

3 

Tell a story your audience can see themselves in

Build a full story arc, and focus on immersing your audience; make them the heroes of the story

4 

Don't just tell; show

Be mindful of all of the signals we send — not just the words. The visuals, sounds, and the visible behavior of others are powerful.

5 

Listen for what resonates organically

Practice social listening, and amplify the stories that are already landing and catching.

6 

Repeat, repeat, repeat

Repetition = processing fluency. Familiarity makes things feel true. Beware the illusory truth effect. Bring your core narrative to life over and over with fresh stories and content.

01

**Understand your audience:
start with emotion**

“

When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but creatures of emotion.”

— Dale Carnegie

How to Win Friends and Influence People (1936)

CORE IDEA

If the emotional brain drives decision making and action, then we must start with emotion, not reason.

Emotion precedes reasoning. So before we lift the pen, we must first map the emotional landscape and determine our narrative objectives — by answering four foundational questions:

1



How do they feel?

How does our audience feel and believe about the topic, candidate, or issue?

2



How do they explain it?

How do they rationalize holding those views and beliefs?

3



What must they feel?

What emotion meets their emotional needs and shifts their beliefs?

4



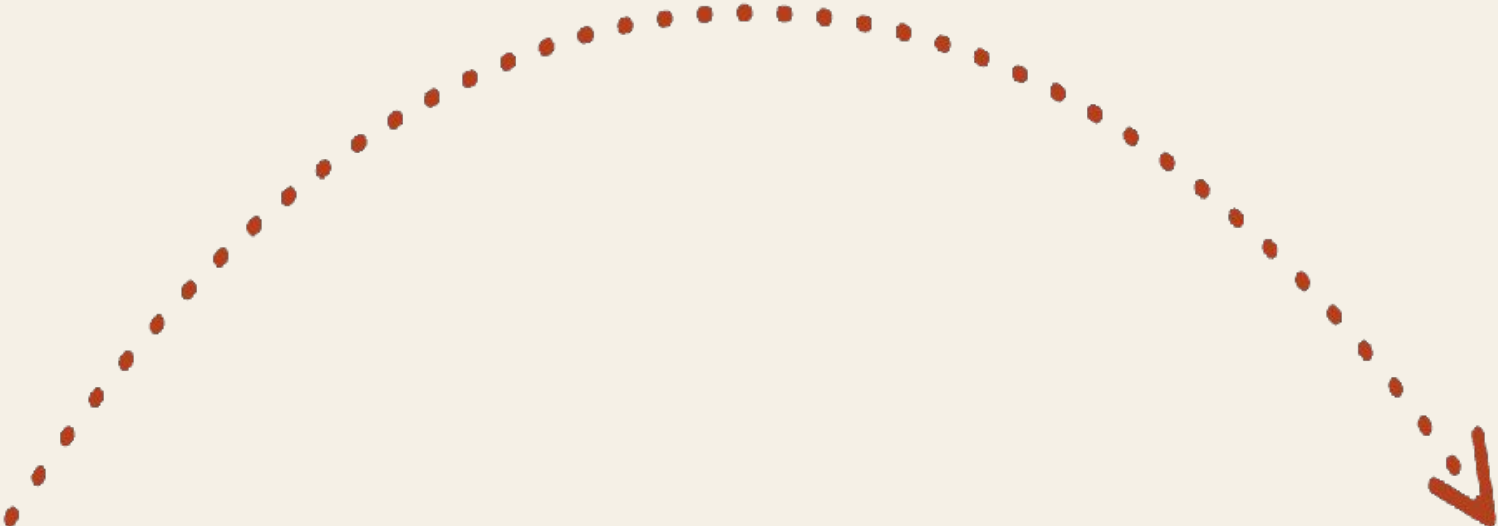
What's the journey?

What emotional journey gets them to that destination?

Our narrative objective is determined by the distance between two emotional states

THE WORK: MEET EMOTIONAL NEEDS

Safety to change their mind · **belonging** with people like them · **agency** to act



WHERE THEY ARE

- anxious
- resentful
- powerless

"Nothing I do will change anything."

Mapped through focus groups, open-ended surveys, and social listening

WHERE WE WANT THEM

- hopeful
- connected
- determined

"People like me can win this."

The desired feelings and new belief — the objective the narrative is built to reach

RESEARCH DESIGN

When testing messages, we need to ask *different questions* to evaluate efficacy. Emotions may tell us more than agreement.

THE STANDARD BATTERY

"Which message do you agree with most?"

"How convincing is this on a scale of 1–5?"

Measures polite agreement.

Says nothing about feeling, memory, action, or potential virality.

THE EMOTIONAL BATTERY

"What emotion best describes how this made you feel?"

"What do you remember most?"

"Why do you think you reacted that way?"

"How likely would you be to share this message?"

Measures emotional response.

Checks for retention and reasoning.

RECAP

01

Start with
emotion

1

Map the current emotional landscape

Understand the baseline emotions and beliefs of your audience. Identify their emotional needs: what do they need to feel safe changing their mind?

2

Determine the emotional destination, and the journey to get there

Set narrative objectives: what do you need your audience to *feel* in order to shift beliefs or spur action? The distance between where they are and where you want them is the work.

3

Test for emotional response, not just agreement

Historically, survey-based message testing examines agreement and convincingness. To gauge potential impact, ask different questions: examine emotion, rationalization, and impact on memory.

02

**Set narrative objectives, and lower
the psychological cost**

“

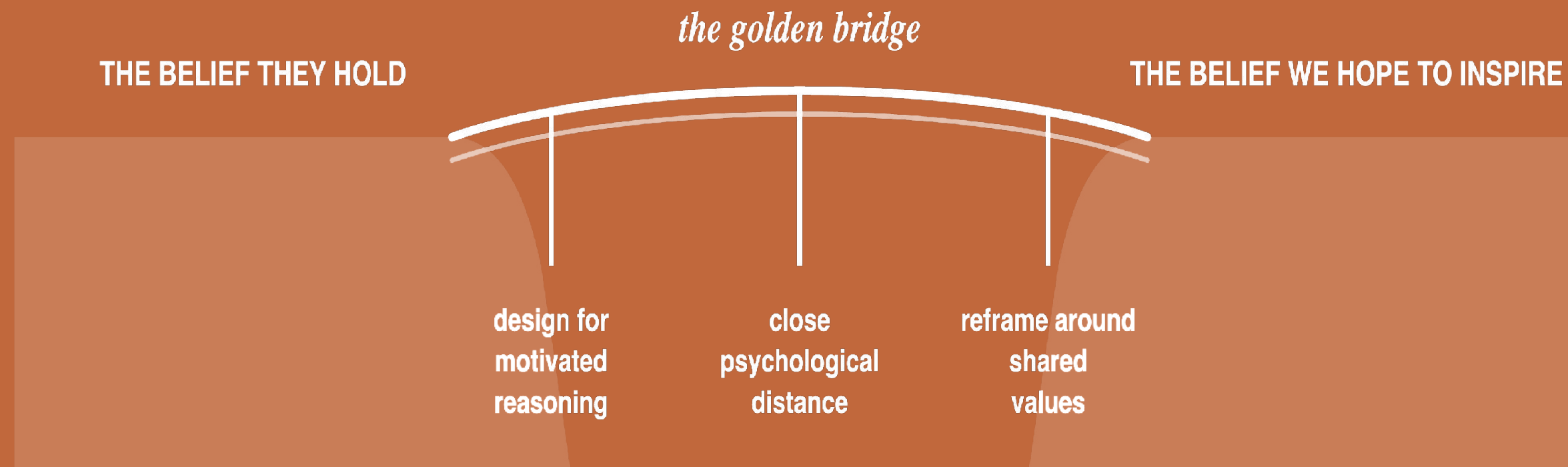
Build them a golden bridge.”

— **William Ury**

Getting Past No (1991)

CORE IDEA

To persuade, we must minimize friction and make it feel safe for people to change their minds.



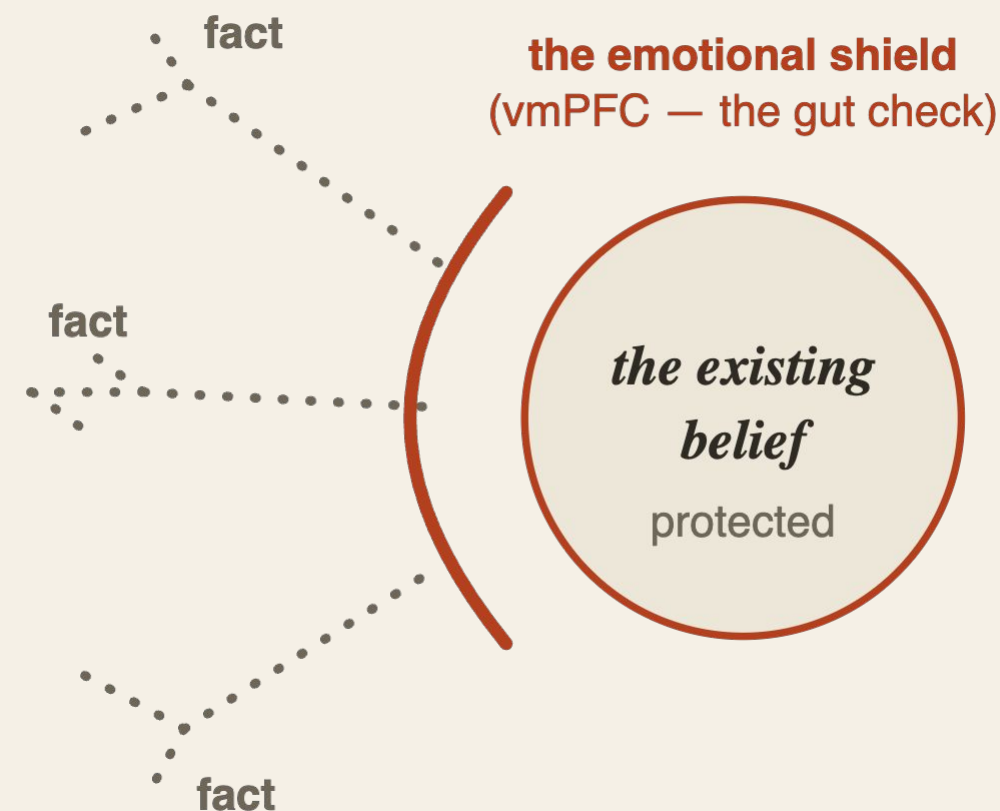
Motivated reasoning: the brain's shield against being wrong

When information counters a deeply held belief, the brain rejects it and works to protect the existing belief instead.

WHAT ARRIVES

A fact that contradicts a deeply held belief

The brain registers it as a **threat** — the same regions that process pain and discomfort light up (anterior cingulate, insula).



WHAT ACTUALLY RUNS

An emotional regulation circuit — not a logic circuit

The gut check (vmPFC) fires to shield us from the distress of being wrong. The fact bounces off; the belief survives.

Motivated reasoning in everyday life

The belief comes first; the reasoning is hired afterward to defend it. We tear apart what we don't want to believe, and wave through what we do.

THE SPORTS FAN

The ref calls a foul on the star player.

THEIR FAN

"Finally – an obvious call."

YOUR FAN

"The ref is blind. Terrible call."

Same play, opposite certainty — **loyalty does the reasoning**, not the replay.

THE COFFEE DRINKER

A new study lands about coffee and your health.

"COFFEE IS GOOD"

"See? Science confirms it."

"COFFEE IS BAD"

"One study proves nothing. Who funded it?"

Same person, same rigor available — **the scrutiny dial turns** with the desired conclusion.

Far away is an idea. Up close is a feeling.

The further away something feels, the more abstractly the brain construes it — and **abstraction is where emotion goes to die**. Distance comes in four dimensions; close all four.



Time

~~someday~~

**this year,
this rent check**



Space

~~somewhere in the country~~

**on your block,
at your school**



Social

~~a population, a statistic~~

**a neighbor,
a name,
a face**



Probability

~~could hypothetically~~

**is happening —
and will, to you too**

TAKEAWAY Abstract threats stay filed under "later." Make it **near, concrete, and personal** — and the emotional brain takes over.

Speak in shared values to decrease motivated reasoning

The golden bridge, operationalized: find the moral ground you already share with your audience and frame the message there — it lands as something they already believe, not someone else's argument.

THE DEFAULT: OUR VALUES ONLY

"We have a duty to protect the planet and prevent the harm climate change is doing to the most vulnerable."

Framed in **harm and fairness** — the language of the speaker's values. To an audience anchored in other values, it lands as someone else's argument.

THE REFRAME: SHARED VALUES

"Nobody wants their kids drinking contaminated water or breathing dirty air. Keep our air and water clean and pure — for all of our families and future generations."

Same position, framed in **purity and protection of family** — values both sides of the ideological spectrum share. Purity framing has been shown to largely erase the partisan gap in pro-environmental attitudes.

Evoked emotions that activate us and give them somewhere to go

Activating BALANCED / GROUNDED AROUSAL Core adaptive feelings that drive us toward healthy, protective action. joy anger (healthy) disgust excitement Impact: primes us for action, promotes processing and connection.	Agitating HYPER-AROUSAL (FIGHT OR FLIGHT) Secondary responses that create internal distress, often masking core feelings. anxiety panic frustration resentment jealousy fear Impact: leads to restlessness, looping thoughts, or defensive actions.	Inhibiting HYPO-AROUSAL (FREEZE OR COLLAPSE) Defensive states that freeze or shut down our emotional expression to protect us from overwhelm. sadness shame guilt contempt numbness helplessness Impact: causes withdrawal, procrastination, and emotional flattening.
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Efficacy	the belief that you are capable of doing something and that what you do <i>actually matters</i>
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TAKEAWAY: To mobilize or persuade, channel **activating** emotions — and pair them with efficacy and a credible path to action.

Fear and hope both mobilize — with a path to resolution

⚠️ Fear

Only works paired with efficacy and a credible way to resolve the threat. Existential threat drives people toward a strong leader. Activating **status threat** — fear of losing social standing — is especially powerful.

CASE STUDY · THE RIGHT'S FEAR MACHINE



Source: NPR 2026

"Great replacement" rhetoric frames demographic change as zero-sum loss — manufacturing the threat — while Trump is positioned as the only source of safety.

☀️ Hope

Both an emotion and a belief: a clear goal, a believable path, and a genuine sense of agency. Motivating when success feels attainable but not certain — otherwise people disengage or grow complacent.

CASE STUDY: MAMDANI 2025



Source: VOX Media 2025.

A hope-based affordability campaign: a concrete goal, a believable path, and joyful, shareable content that made volunteering feel like agency — not obligation.

RECAP

02

Set narrative objectives, and lower the psychological cost

1

Work backwards, and be mindful of motivated reasoning

Work backwards from your desired emotional outcomes. Beware motivated reasoning — don't fight the shield; make changing the belief cost less.

2

Channel activating emotions

Emotions fall into three categories: activating, agitating, and inhibiting. Avoid channeling emotions that inhibit or shut us down. Hope and fear can both be activating.

3

Give emotions somewhere concrete to go

Activating emotions only mobilize when paired with efficacy and a credible path to resolution — a clear goal and a believable way to get there. Far away is an idea; up close is a feeling. Make it now, here, people like you, and certain — not someday, somewhere, someone, maybe.

4

Reframe in shared values

Messaging in the language of shared values sidesteps the shield and taps into deeply held beliefs about personal identity.

03

**Tell a story your audience can see
themselves in**

“

We tell ourselves stories in order to live.”

Joan Didion

The White Album (1979)

CORE IDEA

Story is the brain's *native format* — immersion in a story can change beliefs.



Facts arrive as arguments...

...to **evaluate**. The audience sits as judge — weighing, doubting, counterarguing.

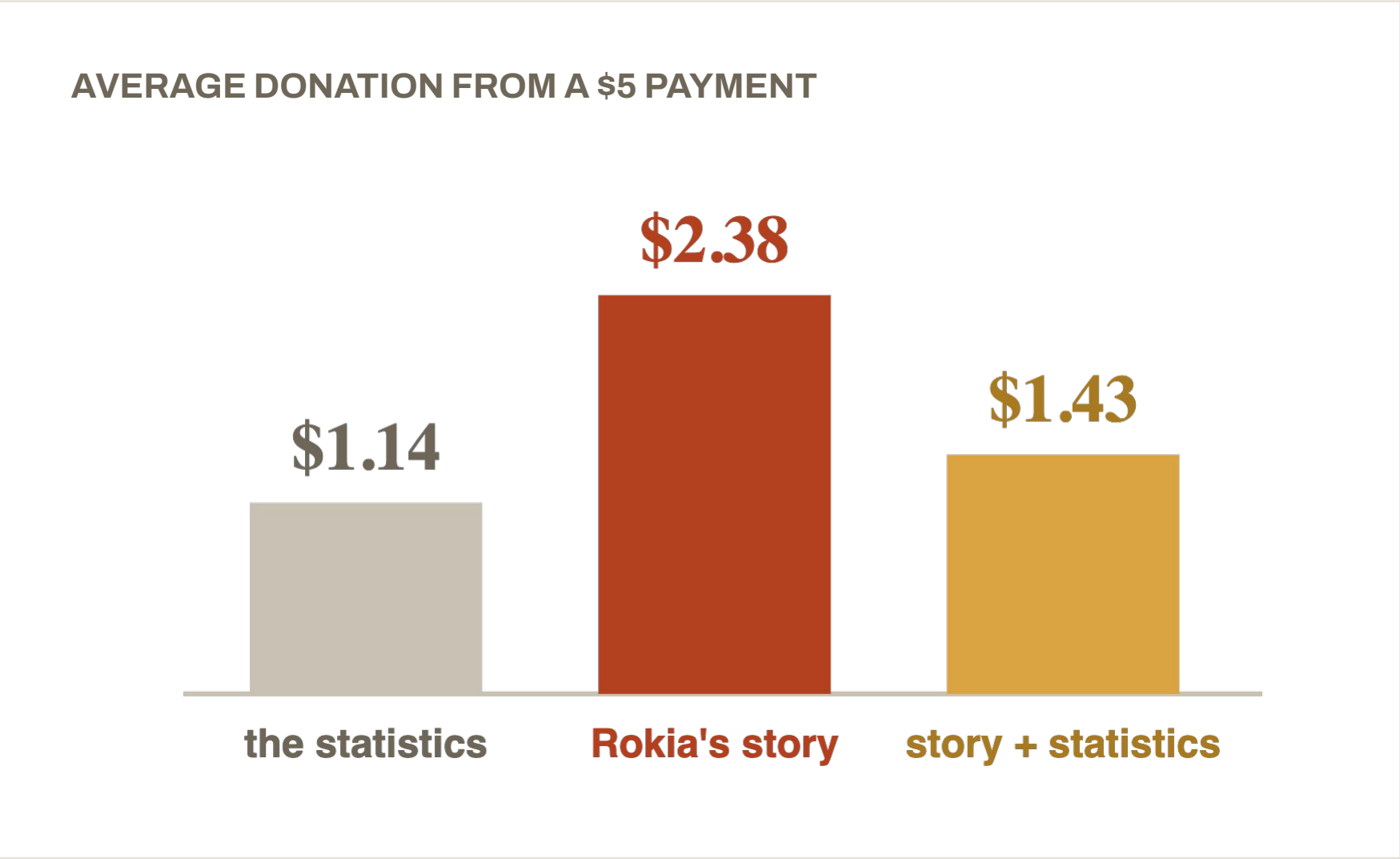


Stories arrive as experiences...

...to **live**. The audience becomes a participant — and the immersed brain stops counterarguing.

Humans respond to stories of people more than statistics

Take the “identifiable victim” experiment as an example...



One girl — Rokia, 7, from Mali — out-raised the statistics more than two to one.

The twist: adding the statistics back to her story *cut giving by 40%*. The numbers didn't strengthen the story — they smothered it.

Small, Loewenstein & Slovic (2007), "Sympathy and callousness," Journal of Risk and Uncertainty.

The hero's journey, component by component

 A core challenge Concrete and self-relevant — it evokes strong emotion and sticks in memory	 A villain, with motive and intent Turns fear and anxiety into anger at the perpetrator	 Heroes facing a high-stakes choice Identification with the hero is how stories change beliefs	 Shared values framing Builds belonging and reduces motivated reasoning	 A solution and positive vision of the future A credible, attainable pathway turns emotion into action
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CASE STUDY: THE RIGHT-WING HERO'S JOURNEY

Scapegoated villains, MAGA heroes, status threat, and an exclusive in-group: fear drummed up, turned into anger, and directed at a promised outcome.

Why a story you can see yourself in works

Belonging

We adopt the beliefs of groups we identify with — and it takes almost nothing to form a group.

In the "minimal group" experiments, strangers were sorted into two teams by a coin flip. They had no history, no shared values, and nothing to gain. Yet when asked to split rewards, they consistently favored their own side. A label alone was enough to produce us-versus-them.

A story that says "*people like us believe this*" recruits identity itself to the cause — and **identity is the belief the brain defends hardest.**

Tajfel & Turner (1979), social identity theory; Tajfel et al. (1971), minimal group paradigm.

Immersion

"Transportation" into a story **reduces counterarguing**: readers lost in a narrative generated fewer objections and shifted beliefs more. The immersed brain *experiences* rather than *evaluates*.

An argument invites the audience to be a *judge*. A story invites them to be a *participant* — and **participants don't cross-examine.**

Green & Brock (2000), "The role of transportation in the persuasiveness of public narratives," JPSP.

RECAP

03

Tell a story your
audience sees
themselves in

1

One person beats a million data points

The story of one girl out-raises the statistics — and experiments show that adding the statistics back can actually make the story weaker.

2

Create a full story arc centered around a core challenge

A concrete challenge. A villain with named motive and intent. Heroes facing a choice, presented in the language of shared values. A credible solution with a positive vision.

3

Cast the audience as the heroes in the story

Belonging recruits identity; immersion switches off counterarguing.

04

Don't just tell; *show*

“

*Don't tell me the moon is shining. Show me the glint
of light on broken glass.”*

Anton Chekhov

In a letter to his brother, Alexander (1886)

CORE IDEA

Demonstration beats declaration in every channel we have.

We must consider not only the words that we are using, but all of the countless signals we are sending in other ways:



Visuals

Footage over figures; images process ~10× faster



Sounds

Real voices and music; the body responds first



Words

Concrete, vivid, personal; the reader runs the scene



The behavior of others

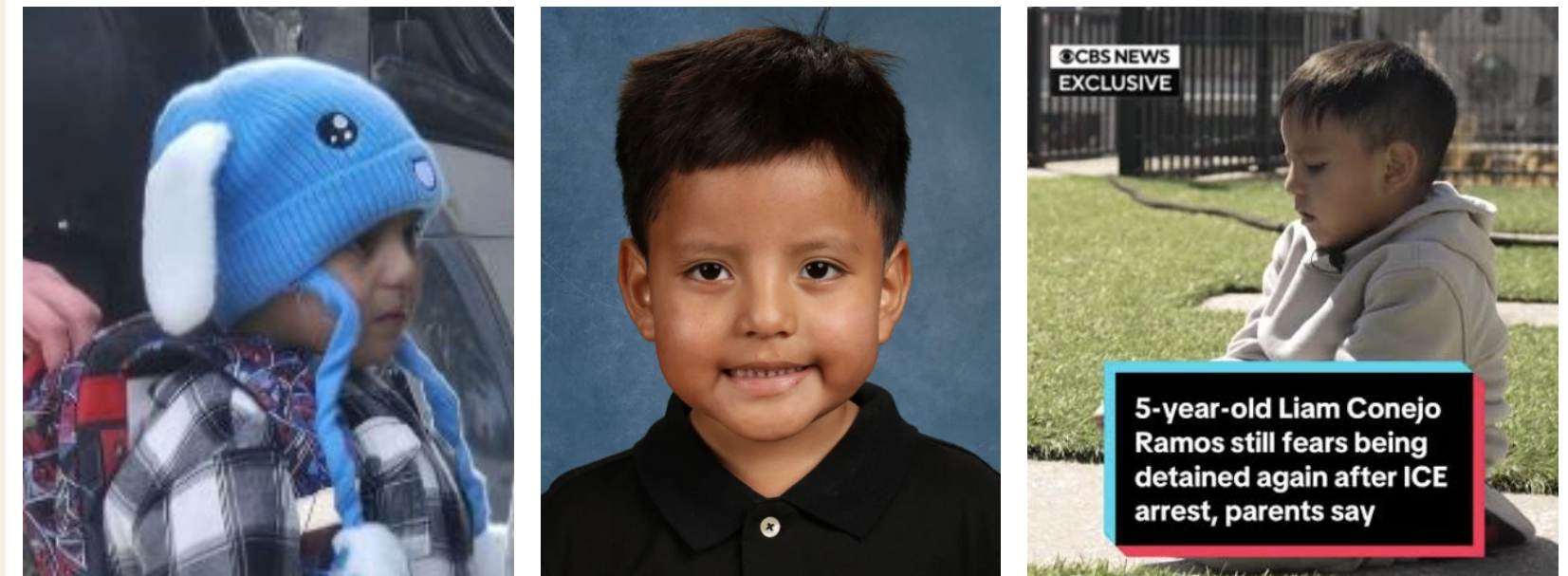
Social proof; show the crowd already acting

A statistic tells. Images make you feel.

T TELLING

"Deportations increased sharply this year, with detentions growing from 40,000 to ~75,000 in Trump's first year back in office."

♡ SHOWING



A preschooler was taken away by ICE, but officials say they had no choice. Here's what we know

THE WHY

Visuals process ~10× faster than words; flashed emotional images change behavior where emotional words do not; images beat text on memory.

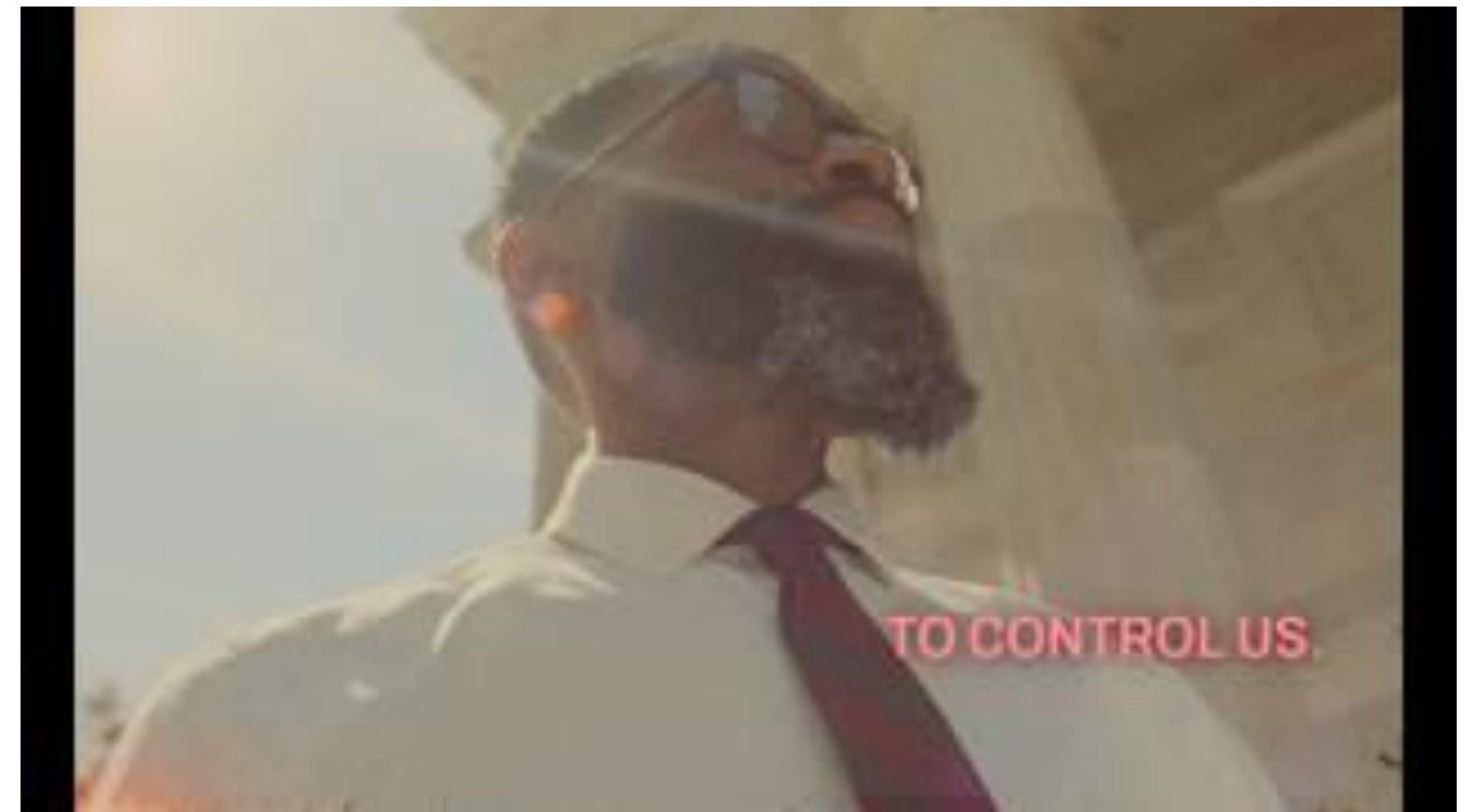
🔊) DON'T JUST TELL; *SHOW* · SOUND

Music moves us. Score the feeling, not the script

T TELLING



♡ SHOWING



THE WHY

Music measurably shifts brain activity, heart rate, and skin conductance — chills included; prosody and nonverbal sound carry emotion on their own channel.

T DON'T JUST TELL; *SHOW* · WORDS

Concrete, vivid, and personal

T TELLING



♡ SHOWING

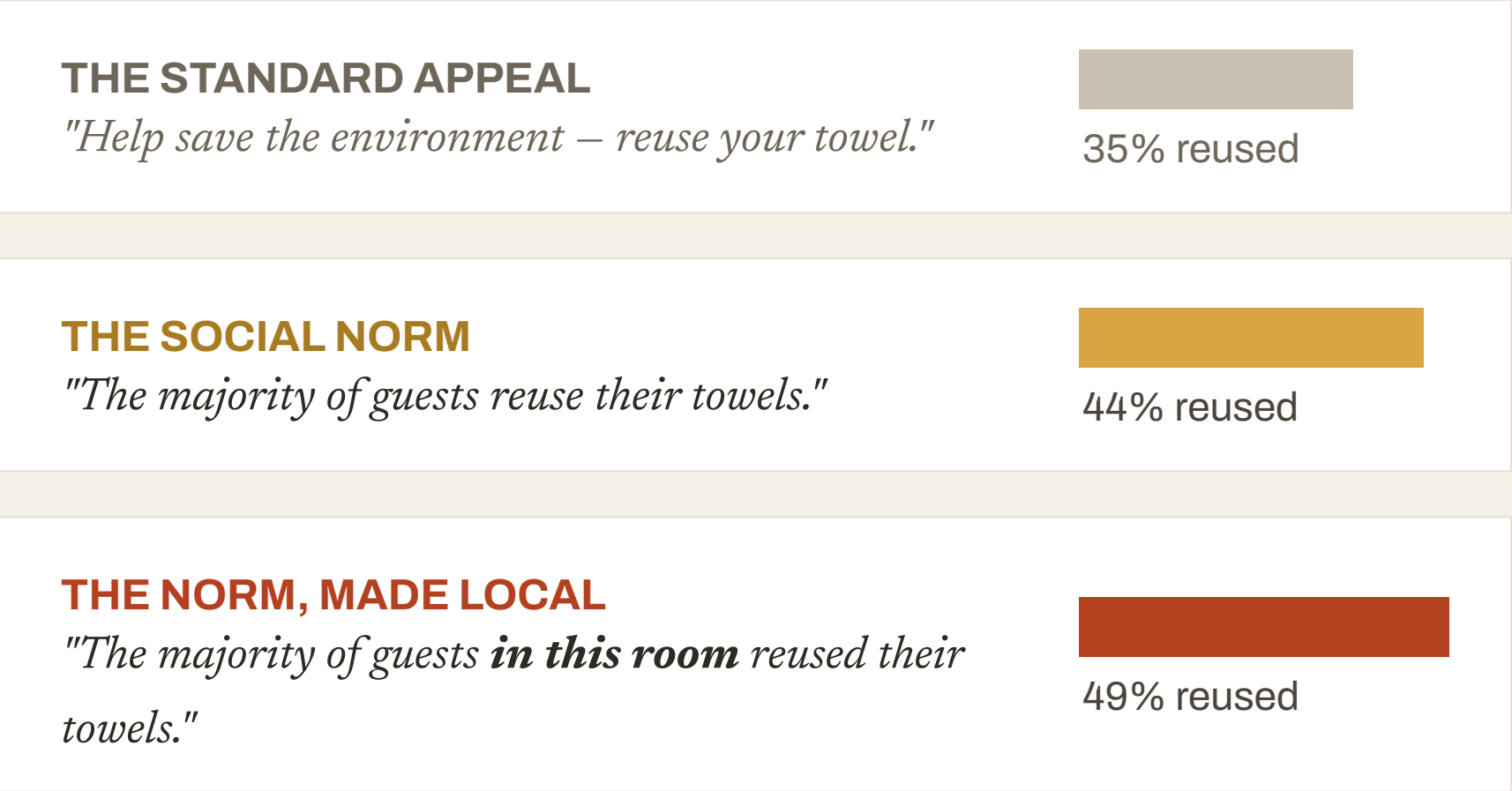


THE WHY

Emotional content gets privileged processing, concrete words are better recalled than abstract ones, and personal relevance amplifies attention and memory.

DON'T JUST TELL; SHOW · SOCIAL PROOF

When people feel unsure, they check what people *like them* are doing (social proof).



The “Room with a Viewpoint” Experiment

No new facts. No new incentives. The only thing that changed was **whose behavior was visible** — and the closer the crowd, the stronger the pull.

Don't just claim the cause is popular — **show people like your audience already acting**. Petition counts, packed rooms, neighbors' yard signs.

Goldstein, Cialdini & Griskevicius (2008), "A room with a viewpoint," Journal of Consumer Research. Percentages are the study's reported reuse rates.

DON'T JUST TELL; SHOW · SOCIAL NORMS

The norm you show is the norm you get

Careless messaging can backfire: lamenting how common a bad behavior is *advertises* the bad behavior as the norm.

THE BACKFIRE

PETRIFIED FOREST NATIONAL PARK

Many past visitors have removed petrified wood from the park, changing the state of the Petrified Forest.

Theft nearly tripled versus a no-sign control — the sign proved everyone was doing it.

THE FIX

PETRIFIED FOREST NATIONAL PARK

The vast majority of past visitors have left the petrified wood in the park, preserving the natural state of the Petrified Forest.

Frame the **desired behavior as what people like us do**, and the exception as rare and disapproved.

RECAP

04

Don't just tell;
show

1

Show with action, images, sound

Footage and real voices carry emotion on channels words alone can't reach. The body responds before the mind. Cliche but true: a picture is worth a thousand words.

2

Make it concrete, vivid, and personal

First and second person. Concrete nouns. Lived experiences. Abstract language is where emotion goes to die.

3

Make the crowd visible, and point to its growth

Social proof moves people when facts don't. Only ever show the norm you want repeated. Showing that the norm is increasing can be just as effective as pointing to its current size.

05

Listen for what resonates organically

“

The most basic of all human needs is the need to understand and be understood. The best way to understand people is to listen to them.”

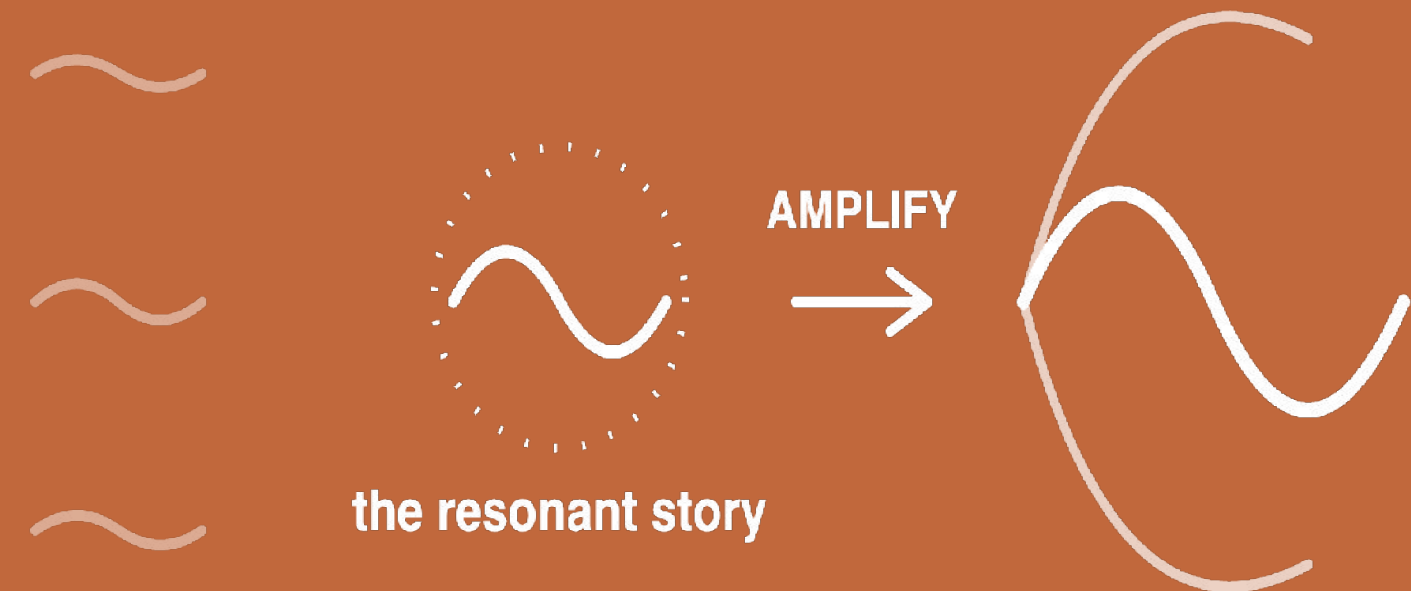
— **Ralph G. Nichols**

Listening researcher (1957)

CORE IDEA

Listen to what is *already* resonating emotionally, and amplify it.

Too often, practitioners rush to tell their audience how to feel and think — without joining the conversation they're already having. Find the simmering stories that are most evocative, and pour fuel on them.



Engagement is a proxy read of emotional resonance

The internet is a massive data set. What spreads tells you what people **feel** — because virality runs on the same arousal that drives action. Use social listening to read the feelings, not just the trends.

↗ More viral

awe

amusement

excitement

High-arousal **positive** emotion



millions of views

↗ Also more viral

anger

High-arousal **negative** emotion



millions of views

↘ Less viral

sadness

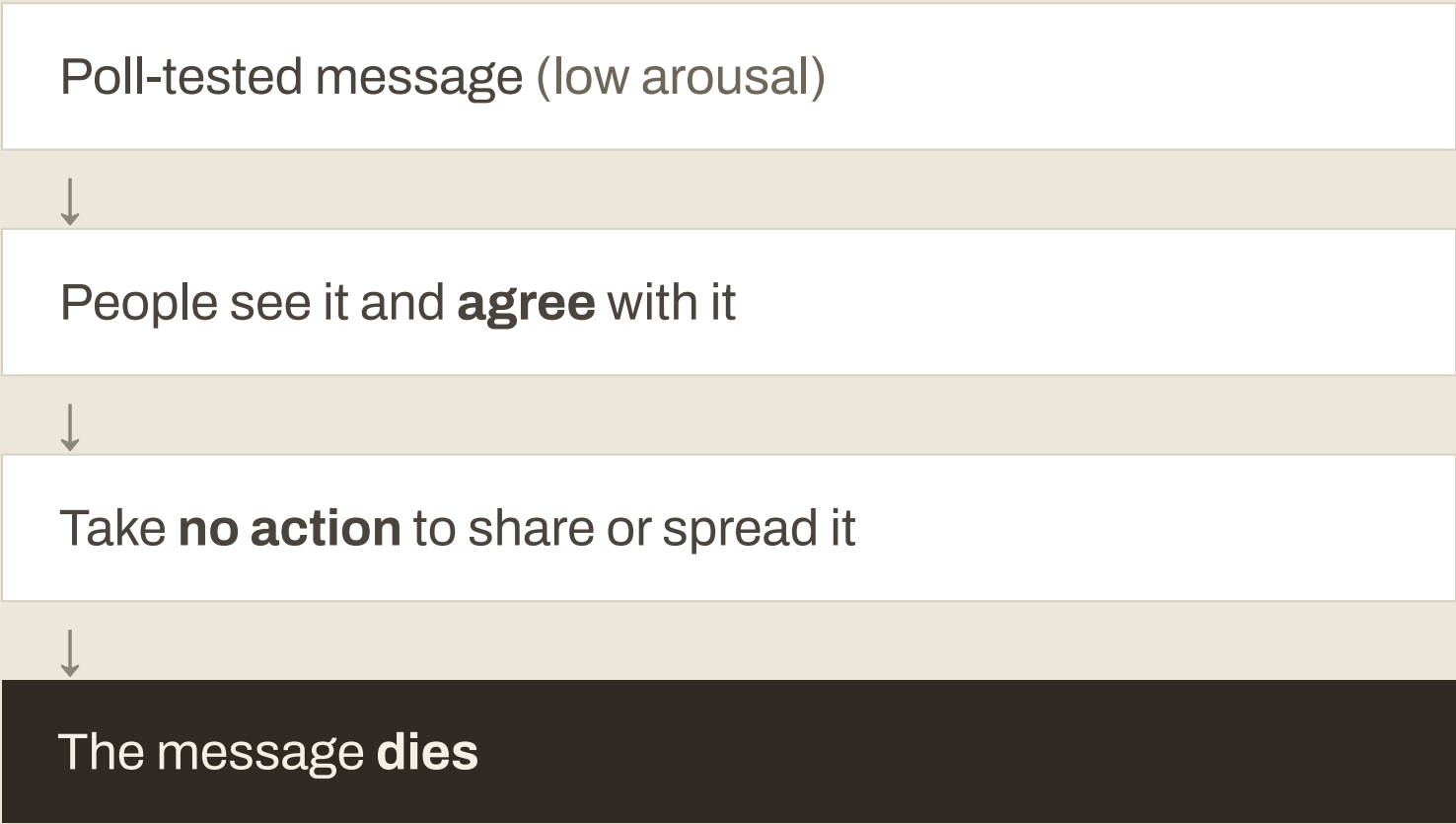
Low-arousal, **deactivating** emotion



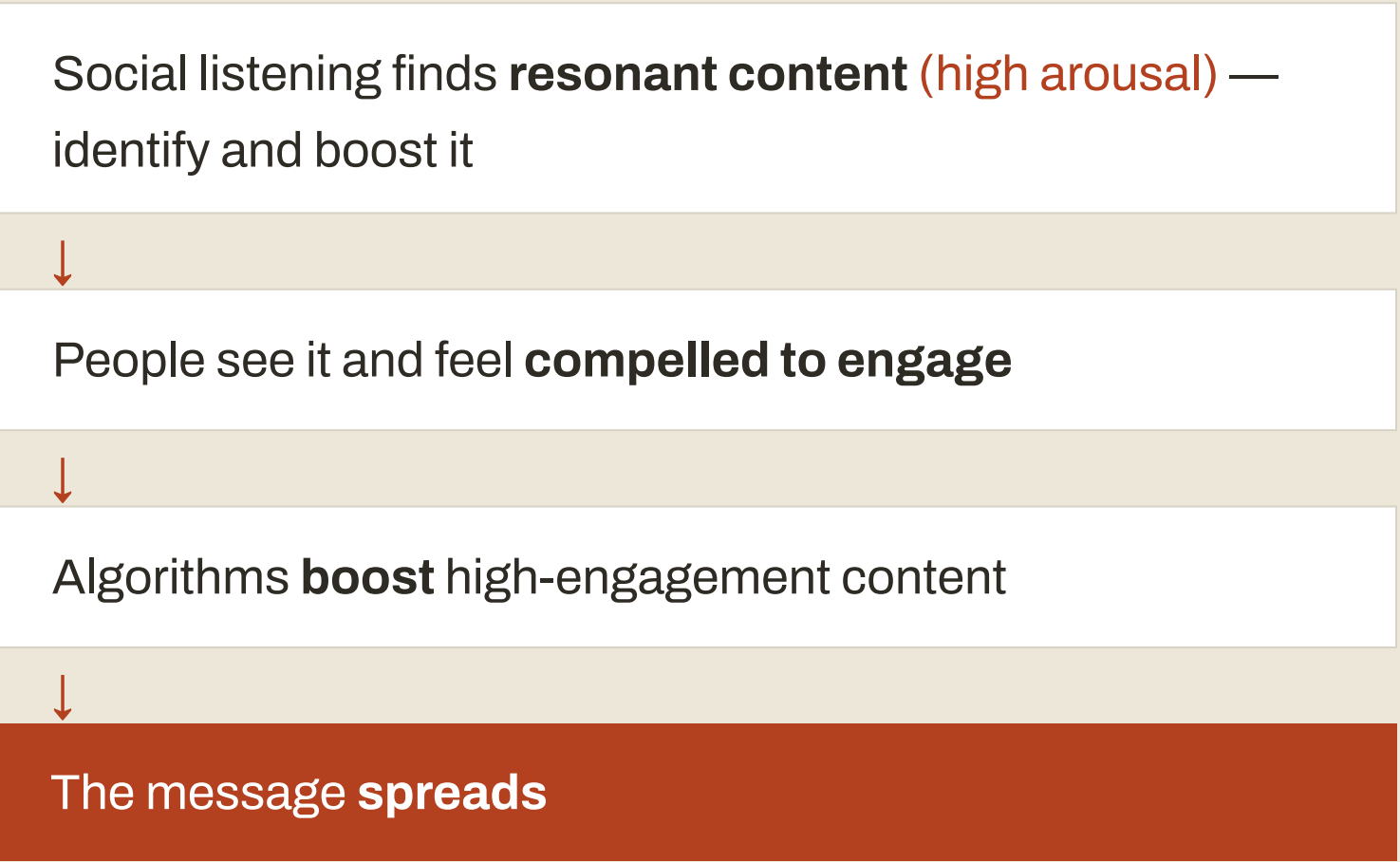
less than 3k views

Don't try to make fetch happen

THE TYPICAL PROCESS



WHAT WE SUGGEST



RECAP

05

**Listen for what
resonates
organically**

1 Join the conversation already happening

Don't rush to tell your audience how to feel and think. Find the simmering stories that fit your narrative that are most evocative, and pour fuel on them.

2 Read engagement as a proxy for emotional resonance

The internet is a massive data set. Virality runs on high-arousal emotion and surprise — sharing is an action, and arousal drives action. Boost what's already resonating instead of poll-testing from scratch.

3 Emotion leads to action, action leads to sharing, sharing leads to spread

Content that makes people feel something gets passed on, and every share puts the message in front of new eyes. Emotional resonance is what turns a message into a movement — so listen for it, then amplify it.

06

Repeat, repeat, repeat

“

Repetition makes reputation, and reputation makes customers.”

— Florence Nightingale Graham (AKA Elizabeth Arden)

Founder of a global cosmetics empire

CORE IDEA

If a narrative falls in the forest and no one hears (or sees) it, *nothing happens*.

The best-crafted story changes no beliefs and shapes no behavior if no one ever sees it. A press release sent into the ether is a tree falling in an empty forest.

Easy to process *feels* true

The brain reads its own ease as evidence: messages that are simple, familiar, and clear feel truer, safer, and more likable than messages that make it work. **Repetition = easier to process. Easy to process = feels true.**

DISFLUENT

"We possess the collective capacity to accomplish our objectives."

The same claim, twelve syllables heavier. Every extra word is a toll booth — the effort gets **misread as doubt**.

FLUENT



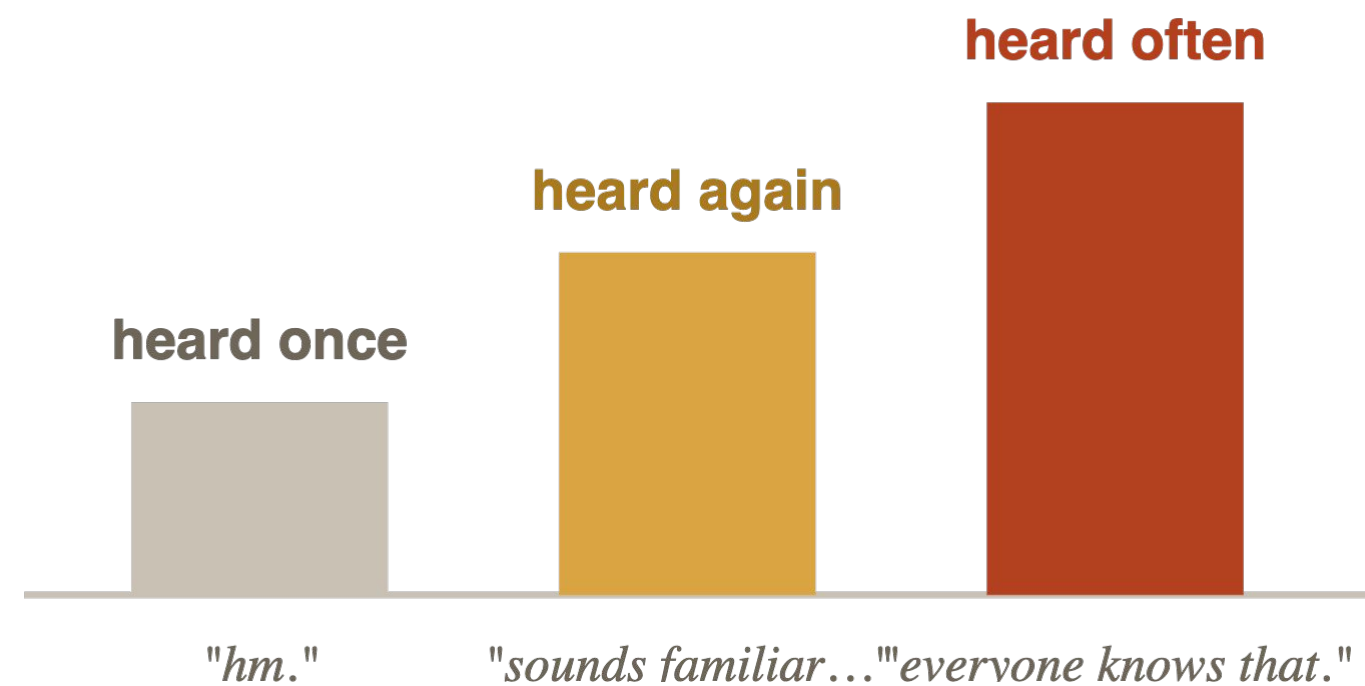
"Yes we can."

Three syllables, built for chanting (staying power).
Fluent phrases are literally judged more accurate than clunky ones saying the same thing. And they're easier to repeat!

THE SCIENCE

The Illusory Truth Effect: Repetition – *not* accuracy – makes a claim feel true

PERCEIVED TRUTH OF THE SAME STATEMENT



Each exposure makes a statement easier to process — and the brain reads that ease as **familiarity, then as truth.**

Repetition raised perceived truth **even when people knew the correct answer.** Knowledge doesn't immunize against familiarity.

This is why disciplined opponents repeat one line for a decade — and why rebutting a lie by quoting it strengthens the believability of the lie.

Familiarity alone breeds *liking*



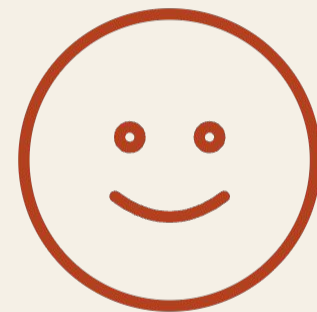
1st exposure

"who's this?"



5th exposure

"oh, them again."



20th exposure

"I kind of like them."

Repeated exposure to a face, a name, a phrase — with **no argument attached** — is enough on its own to increase liking. Familiar reads as safe; safe reads as good.

Presence is persuasion. The yard sign, the recurring creator, the phrase in every clip — they're working even when nobody clicks.

IN PRACTICE

Messengers with reach have already built psychological safety

A creator's audience shows up every day by choice. That familiarity is trust already banked.

More believed

The messenger is **familiar and liked**, and the audience's shield stays down. The same claim from a stranger triggers scrutiny, but from a trusted voice, it feels like something a friend told you.

The underrated half — everyone forgets this one.

More reach

The audience is **already assembled**.

The narrative arrives inside a feed people chose to follow, at the scale that feed already commands.

The half everyone already counts.

TAKEAWAY

Trusted messengers don't just carry the narrative further — **they make it more believable on arrival.**

IN PRACTICE

One narrative, many voices, *over and over*



One core narrative

Create the same emotional through-line and villain-hero-solution arc everywhere (the script does not need to be identical!)



Many messengers, many formats

Different voices repeating one narrative in different ways reads as consensus, as each messenger is social proof for the last.



Sustained over time

Spaced repetition is more effective than a burst. Budget for the tenth telling, not just the launch.

CASE STUDY

The CRT Panic: CRT was no one's priority, but it became a dominant political story anyway.

"Critical race theory" would have polled at the bottom of any priority list, but it became a dominant political narrative because it was built as a story, not a message.



It made people feel, and activated *status threat*

"Cancel culture" framed as **personally** coming for them and their kids — not an abstraction, a threat at their school board.



It had a clear villain and heroes

The villain, as always: people of color. The audience cast as **heroes** standing up for their values — free speech.



It was repeated relentlessly

Over and over and over — every channel, every messenger, until **familiarity did the persuading**.

TAKEAWAY

Polls tell you what people already prioritize. **Stories decide what they'll prioritize next.**

Ride the waves

Repetition is truth

The repeated narrative feels truer every time it lands.

FLOCK WANTS A CLOSELY SURVEILLED WORLD WITH NO EXIT

Flock contract cancellations grow among cities, other jurisdictions

Police officer arrested after tracking ex-girlfriend on Flock camera system over 2,000 times, authorities say

Why everyone seems to hate Flock cameras

Flock Safety offers voluntary buyouts as surveillance technology faces mounting criticism

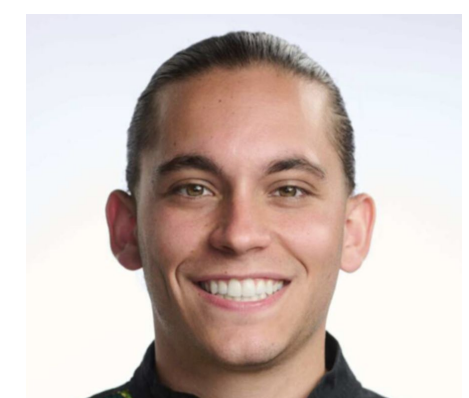
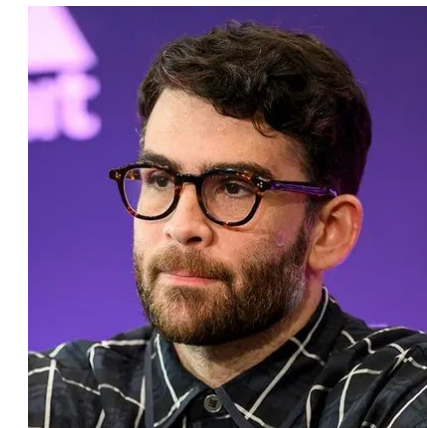
Novelty is memorable

The brain keeps what surprises it — fresh content gets stored.



Familiarity is safe

Trusted messengers keep the audience's shield down.



Tell the same underlying story – evoking the same feelings – with constantly evolving content, through messengers people trust, at scale.

RECAP

06

Repeat,
repeat,
repeat

1 What is familiar feels true

The brain reads ease of processing as truth. Simplify language, keep it accessible, and say it over and over — jargon taxes the brain, and therefore belief.

2 Repeat the truth, but never the lie

Be wary of the illusory truth effect: repeated claims feel true, even when they're false and go against pre-existing knowledge. Do not repeat the lie, even to debunk or fact-check! Flood the zone with the truth instead.

3 One narrative, many voices

Same emotional spine, fresh surfaces, sustained over time. Never amplify the frame you're fighting — to do so is to have the conversation on the opposition's terms. Always counter with *your* frame, *your* narrative.

TL;DR:

RECAP

1 

Understand your audience: start with emotion

Map the emotional landscape of your narrative terrain

2 

Set narrative objectives, lower the psychological cost

Design for motivated reasoning, close psychological distance, and reframe using shared values

3 

Tell a story your audience can see themselves in

Build a full story arc, and focus on immersing your audience; make them the heroes of the story

4 

Don't just tell; show

Be mindful of all of the signals we send — not just the words. The visuals, sounds, and the visible behavior of others are powerful.

5 

Listen for what resonates organically

Practice social listening, and amplify the stories that are already landing and catching.

6 

Repeat, repeat, repeat

Repetition = processing fluency. Familiarity makes things feel true. Beware the illusory truth effect.

APPENDIX

Glossary

The concepts, defined

Emotional arousal

The intensity of an emotional state, from grounded (activating) to fight-or-flight (agitating) to shutdown (inhibiting). High-arousal activating emotions are most likely to mobilize action.

Fear appeal / extended parallel process model

Fear messaging works only when paired with a credible, doable way to resolve the threat (Witte); without efficacy, audiences deny or disengage.

Motivated reasoning

The brain's tendency to reject information that contradicts a deeply held belief and defend the belief instead — an emotional regulation circuit, not a logic circuit (Westen et al.).

Moral reframing

Framing a position in the audience's own moral values rather than the speaker's — dramatically more persuasive, yet rarely practiced (Feinberg & Willer).

Self-efficacy

A person's belief that their action can produce the desired result (Bandura). Fear and hope both require it to mobilize rather than paralyze.

Status threat

Fear of losing social standing relative to other groups — a uniquely potent mobilizer, often framed as zero-sum loss (Major et al.; Norton & Sommers).

Psychological distance / construal level

The further away something feels — in time, space, social distance, or probability — the more abstract and less emotional it becomes (Trope & Liberman).

Identifiable victim effect

One named, concrete person evokes stronger emotion and more action than large-scale statistics — and adding statistics can weaken the story (Small, Loewenstein & Slovic).

The concepts, defined

Social identity theory

We derive part of our self-concept from group membership and adopt the beliefs of groups we identify with; even arbitrary "minimal groups" create instant in-group favoritism (Tajfel & Turner).

Identification / self-referencing

Seeing yourself in a story's hero is how stories change beliefs; self-relevant content gets privileged attention and memory (Symons & Johnson; De Graaf).

Descriptive vs. injunctive norms

What people actually do vs. what people approve of. Lamenting a common bad behavior advertises it as the norm and backfires (Cialdini et al.).

Illusory truth effect

Repeated statements feel truer than new ones — even when people know the correct answer (Hasher et al.; Fazio et al.).

Narrative transportation

Immersion in a story reduces counterarguing — the immersed brain experiences rather than evaluates, making narrative more persuasive than an argument (Green & Brock).

Social proof

When uncertain, people look to what others — especially similar others — are doing. The closer and more local the crowd, the stronger the pull (Goldstein, Cialdini & Griskevicius).

Processing fluency

The ease with which the brain processes a message. Easy-to-process messages feel truer, safer, and more likable — the brain misreads ease as truth (Alter & Oppenheimer).

Mere exposure effect

Repeated exposure to a stimulus increases liking on its own — no argument attached. Familiar reads as safe; safe reads as good (Zajonc).

APPENDIX

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