

They May Not Be Able to Vote, But Youth Grasp Value of Campaign Messages

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Affinity to candidate brands may provide marketers with an important glimpse into today's youth

While they may not be of voting age yet, today's youth are engaged with the 2008 Presidential election. Seven in ten (70%) 8-17 year olds say they are very or somewhat closely following news coverage on the upcoming presidential election and just over eight in ten (82%) of 8-17 year olds say they will vote when they are old enough.

These are some of the results from a Harris Interactive Youth Center of Excellence YouthQuery survey conducted online in the United States among 1,064 youth ages 8-17 between September 17-22, 2008.

Obama's Change-Oriented Brand is Resonating

Barack Obama's campaign has succeeded in relaying his message of change to youth. Two-thirds (68%) of youth who support Obama believe he will bring a great deal of positive change to the U.S. if elected. By contrast, John McCain's campaign has been decidedly less successful in differentiating the Arizona Senator from the current Republican administration. Just under two in five (38%) youth who are McCain supporters say he will bring a great deal of positive change, revealing a yawning "enthusiasm gap" among the young supporters of each candidate.

"For today's teens and tweens, Obama's brand image of change clearly resonates", stated Peter Shafer, Vice President for the Youth Center of Excellence. "Along with voting age Millennials (those aged 18-31) this presidential campaign appears to have had a formative impact on engaging young people. The signs are definitely pointing to Millennials potentially voting in higher numbers than ever before. Coupled with the strong voting intention in today's youth, this may indicate to presidential candidates in the future that they should no longer dismiss the young people as "non-voters" and instead, speak to the issues that are important to them as a generation."

Brand Anchored in Compelling Issues

Youth who support Barack Obama believe that America needs change and that Obama is the candidate who can address these needs. Two thirds (68%) of Obama's youth supporters are likely to say the state of the U.S. today is only fair or poor, versus fewer than half of McCain's youth supporters (47%).

Looking more specifically at the issues that are driving the campaign, the top three issues that Obama supporters believe need the next president's attention once he enters office are: the economy (54%), the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (50%), and gas or energy prices (48%). Young supporters of John McCain, however, rank gas prices ahead of all other things (60%). This is closely followed by the economy (54%) and then, much farther behind, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (34%). Youth who support Obama are more likely than McCain supporters to say health care and the environment are important issues (25% versus 12% and 19% versus 10%, respectively). Overall, McCain supporters find fewer issues that they say need the next president's attention once he enters office.

Peter Shafer adds, "It is exciting to see how kids and teens are interested and connecting to the candidates in this historical presidential election. It seems clear that the campaign messages are resonating with kids at both a rational and emotional level, which are the keys to developing a loyal following. The candidates are taking a page out of the corporate marketing handbook and using persuasive marketing tactics and messages to even win over kids today."

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