The Emotion *Map*

24 emotions behind buying decisions, what each one needs to hear, and where the line is

Vocabulary from Brené Brown's Atlas of the Heart. Evidence from the IPA Databank, the B2B Institute, CEB, Gartner and peer-reviewed psychology.

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How to use this map

Use the map in three steps. Find the situation your buyer is in (section 2). Read the entries for the emotions that situation carries (section 3), including the neighbor that looks similar and needs a different message. Then run the three tests in section 5 before anything ships.

It is for anyone who writes or approves marketing in a Saudi company of 50 to 250 people: the founder, the head of marketing, the agency brief-writer.

The emotion names draw on Brené Brown's Atlas of the Heart (Random House, 2021), which maps 87 emotions and experiences. The definitions here are BMD's own plain-language wording, not quotations. BMD is not affiliated with Brené Brown or her publisher. Her full list of 87 names is free at brenebrown.com.

VERDICT Cross out "pain point" in the brief and write in one of these 24 names.

Pain is not one feeling

Pain tells a writer how big a feeling is and nothing about which feeling it is. Most marketing briefs still describe the buyer's state with that one word.

A frustrated buyer and a resigned buyer are both in pain. The frustrated buyer still wants to get past the wall and needs to see which part of it moves. The resigned buyer has stopped trying and needs cheap proof that trying again is worth it. Send the frustrated buyer's message to the resigned buyer and it reads as noise.

Brené Brown reports that across surveys of more than 7,000 workshop participants over five years, people asked to list the emotions they could recognize and name as they felt them listed three on average: happy, sad and angry. Those were workshop surveys, not a representative study. Anyone who has read a customer persona will recognize the pattern.

VERDICT You can't write to a feeling you haven't named.

PART 01

What the evidence says, and what it does not

Emotion works over years. Reason works this quarter.

In the IPA Effectiveness Databank, emotional and rational campaigns win on different timescales. Les Binet and Peter Field analysed it in The Long and the Short of It (IPA, 2013). The numbers below are shares of award-entry case studies whose authors reported a "very large" effect. They describe how often campaigns reported big results, not the size of the results.

SHARE OF IPA CAMPAIGNS REPORTING A VERY LARGE EFFECT, BY MESSAGE STYLE

EFFECT	RATIONAL	COMBINED	EMOTIONAL
Profit growth, all timescales	16%	25%	29%
Profit growth, campaigns of 1 to 2 years	13%	27%	21%
Profit growth, campaigns of 3+ years	23%	23%	43%
Short-term direct effects	38%	36%	26%

Binet and Field, The Long and the Short of It, IPA 2013, Figs 53, 54, 56. Communications-model data exist for up to 511 of 996 cases; group sizes not published.

Read the table as a division of labor. Emotional campaigns pull ahead over three years or more, and rational ones win the short-term response. Campaigns that combine the two lead over one to two years, which matters if that is the window your company judges marketing on.

VERDICT Give every piece of work one job. Emotion builds. Reason sells.

B2B buyers feel it too, about themselves

The B2B evidence points the same way, and much of it concerns the buyer personally. It is also thinner, so each finding comes with its limits attached.

- **Emotional B2B campaigns reported more business effects.** In Binet and Field's 2019 analysis for LinkedIn's B2B Institute, emotional B2B campaigns averaged

1.4 very large business effects against 0.2 for rational ones, as rated by the case authors. Fewer than 50 award-entry cases; Binet and Field call the findings tentative.

- **Personal value tracked purchase intent.** In a 2013 CEB survey of 3,000 B2B buyers with Google and Motista, 71.0% of buyers who saw personal value in a brand said they would purchase, against 22.6% who did not; 68.8% against 8.5% said they would pay a higher price. Self-reported, one survey, no proof of cause.
- **Many buyers don't speak up.** In CEB's 2013 B2B Buyer Survey (n=590), 48% said they had wanted to buy a new solution but had not spoken up. CEB links this to personal risk, but that evidence comes from a separate survey.
- **Confidence tracked bigger purchases with less regret.** Gartner (nearly 1,000 B2B customers, late 2020) found buyers with high decision confidence were 10 times more likely to make a high-quality, low-regret purchase, which Gartner defines as buying the larger, broader, higher-priced solution with little or no regret.
- **Most B2B ads score at the bottom.** System1 rated 1,700 B2B ads for the B2B Institute (2021): 76.7% scored one star, the lowest, on a scale built from consumer panels' emotional response and brand recall.

VERDICT The B2B buyer is protecting a position while buying a product.

Do not repeat these

DO NOT REPEAT	WHAT IT ACTUALLY IS
"Emotional ads are twice as profitable."	It misreads a hit rate: 29% of emotional against 16% of rational campaigns reported very large profit growth. That is how often, not how much.
"95% of purchase decisions are subconscious."	A 2003 estimate by Gerald Zaltman about thinking in general. Only the teaser of the article that reported it turned it into a claim about buying. No measured study.
"People buy on emotion and justify with logic."	A sales saying. No measured study behind it was found.
"Emotional B2B ads are 7 times more effective."	The report's text never says it. Its chart shows 1.4 against 0.2 very large business effects, rated by the case authors, from fewer than 50 cases.
"Fear appeals backfire."	A meta-analysis of 248 samples found a positive average effect and no condition where they backfired. The effect was roughly twice as large when the message said people could take the recommended action or that it would work.

PART 02

Six situations, and the emotions they carry

Start with the situation, not the persona

A persona describes who the buyer is. A situation describes what just happened to them. These six situations are common in Saudi companies of 50 to 250 people.

SITUATION	THE BUYER FEELS	WHAT TO WRITE
The head of marketing just left, and the budget is still there	**Anxiety, and the pull to postpone**	Make the next 90 days visible: who decides, what gets measured, what happens first.
A growth number the company will miss, in public	**Dread**	A dated action that lands before the review, with a step the buyer can take this week.
Paying agencies or running ads, and measuring nothing	**Frustration, or Resignation if it has been years**	Frustration: the mechanism and the part that moves. Resignation: a small, bounded test.
The founder is the marketing department	**Overwhelm**	One first step. Subtract before you add.
A first launch, a new market or a new product line	**Anxiety and Excitement**	Arguments before feelings in a new market, then a visible plan for what is unknown.
A raise, an IPO or a family succession exposes the growth story	**Vulnerability, and the risk of Shame**	Put the problem on the structure, and give the internal champion a case they can defend.

VERDICT The situation sets the feeling. The feeling sets the message.

PART 03

The map

How to read an entry

Each entry has five parts. **What it is** is a plain-language definition. **Where it shows up** is the buying moment. **Sounds like** is an illustrative phrasing, not a quotation. **Say** is the message move. **Avoid** is the mistake that turns the emotion against you.

Moment 1. Earning attention

Boredom

WHAT IT IS	A restless flatness when nothing holds your attention, even though you're itching for something that would.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	A buyer scrolling past category ads that all say the same thing.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"Every agency deck looks the same."*
SAY	**Something specific enough to be checked: a number, a named situation, a claim a competitor would not make.**
AVOID	More polish on the same message. In System1's tests, the average US B2B TV ad drew 54% "neutral" responses, where viewers reported feeling no emotion, against 47% for all US TV ads (vendor whitepaper, 2024).

Interest

WHAT IT IS	Light, open attention toward something that draws you in. Less intense and less committed than curiosity.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	A reader who saves a post but is not ready to talk.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"Send me something to read."*
SAY	**A useful thing with no strings attached: a benchmark, a checklist, a diagnostic.**
AVOID	Treating interest as intent. Asking for a meeting here spends trust you have not earned yet.

Curiosity

WHAT IT IS	Interest that grows into a need to know. It pulls in feelings too, which makes it riskier.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	A leader who has noticed a gap in their own numbers and wants to close it.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"How do companies our size measure this?"*
SAY	**Name the gap precisely and close part of it. Leave the rest for the conversation.**
AVOID	A tease that withholds the answer. Senior buyers read it as a trick.

Moment 2. When the problem arrives

Stress

WHAT IT IS	The demands feel bigger than you can handle, but you are still keeping things moving.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	A marketing lead running campaigns, reports and agencies at once, still coping.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"We're stretched, but it's working."*
SAY	**Lighten the load: what can be handed off, automated or stopped without losing control.**
AVOID	Selling a transformation. A buyer who is still coping hears "big change" as more load.

Overwhelm

WHAT IT IS	Stress piled so high you freeze up and can't think or get much done.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	A founder who is personally the marketing department and has stopped deciding.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"I don't even know where to start."*
SAY	**One first step, small and specific. Subtract before you add.**
AVOID	A menu. Three packages are three reasons to postpone.

Anxiety

WHAT IT IS	Tense, unsettled feelings about an uncertain future, with no single clear threat.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	A first launch, a new market, a first real marketing hire.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"We don't know what we don't know."*
SAY	**Make the unknown visible: what will be measured, when, and what happens if it fails.**
AVOID	Reassurance without detail. "Don't worry" leaves the uncertainty where it was.

Dread

WHAT IT IS	Heavy anticipation of something bad you expect is coming. It often grows as it gets closer.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	A growth target the company will miss, with the board meeting already in the calendar.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"Next quarter's review is going to be a hard conversation."*
SAY	**A concrete action with a date before the thing they dread. Fear appeals had roughly twice the effect when the message said people could take the recommended action or that it would work (Tannenbaum and colleagues 2015, 248 samples).**
AVOID	Amplifying the threat without the step. Fear appeals that left out that assurance had about half the effect.

Frustration

WHAT IT IS	Hitting a wall you can't move while still wanting what's past it. Blocked, but not out of hope.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	Monthly agency fees or ad spend, and nothing anyone can measure.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"We spend every month and can't say what it brings in."*
SAY	**The mechanism: why the wall is there and which part of it moves. The buyer still has energy, so give it a direction.**
AVOID	Sympathy without a route. Agreeing that it is hard wastes the energy they arrived with.

Disappointment

WHAT IT IS	The letdown when things turn out worse than you'd counted on. It stings more the more you'd pinned on it.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	After an agency, a hire or a campaign that was supposed to fix things.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"We were promised leads."*
SAY	**Reset the expectation before you make a promise: what will change, what will not, and how both will be checked.**
AVOID	A bigger promise than the last supplier made. It schedules the next disappointment.

Resignation

WHAT IT IS	Discouragement hardened into giving up. You believe effort won't matter, so you stop trying.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	A company that tried marketing twice and concluded it does not work in its sector.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"Marketing doesn't work in our industry."*
SAY	**Evidence that effort can matter here, at low cost: a small test with a set budget, a set end date and a number agreed in advance.**
AVOID	The energetic pitch that suits a frustrated buyer. To a resigned buyer it sounds like nobody is listening.

Moment 3. While they compare

Comparison

WHAT IT IS	Ranking yourself against others, pulled between matching everyone and beating them.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	"What are our competitors doing?" in every brief.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"Our competitor is everywhere on Instagram."*
SAY	**Move the comparison from the activity that is visible to the metric that matters to them.**
AVOID	Copying the competitor's activity. Visible is not the same as working.

Envy

WHAT IT IS	Wishing someone else's advantage were yours. Unlike jealousy, nothing of yours is at risk.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	A rival's launch, funding round or big contract.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"How did they get that contract?"*
SAY	**Show the system behind the rival's result, which the buyer can build. That turns envy into admiration.**
AVOID	Feeding it. Marketing that feeds envy sells imitation.

Admiration

WHAT IT IS	Looking up to someone for what they do or who they are, in a way that makes you want to grow, not take what they have.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	Reading a case study about a company one step ahead.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"That's how we want to run marketing."*
SAY	**The case with its steps and its numbers, so the reader can see themselves doing it.**
AVOID	Case studies that show only the result. Admiration without a path slides back into envy.

Confusion

WHAT IT IS	Not knowing what to make of something. Uncomfortable, but often the first step to learning.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	Comparing proposals that price different things in different units.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"I can't compare these three offers."*
SAY	**A plain comparison frame the buyer can apply to every supplier, including you.**
AVOID	Jargon that makes you look expert. A confused buyer picks the cheapest option or does nothing.

Cognitive Dissonance

WHAT IT IS	Discomfort when beliefs clash with actions or new facts. People resolve it by growing, or by dismissing the evidence.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	A company that sees itself as data-driven and cannot name last year's total marketing spend.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"We're a very numbers-focused company."*
SAY	**A way to close the gap that lets them stay who they believe they are.**
AVOID	Rubbing it in. Pushed hard, people dismiss the evidence, and you with it.

Moment 4. At the decision

Vulnerability

WHAT IT IS	Putting your real self out there with no promise of how it lands. It feels like weakness, but it takes nerve.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	The person who champions the purchase inside the company and carries it if it fails.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"If I take this to the CEO, it's on me."*
SAY	**What the champion needs to be safe: the business case, the risks named, the exit terms.**
AVOID	Selling to the company and forgetting the person. In CEB's 2013 B2B Buyer Survey (n=590), 48% had wanted to buy a new solution but had not spoken up.

Fear

WHAT IT IS	A gut lurch when danger feels right here. It flares hard and fades fast, while anxiety lingers.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	A sudden event: a key client leaving, a regulator's notice, a competitor's price cut.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"We need something now."*
SAY	**A fast, bounded response with one clear owner, then move the conversation to the structure.**
AVOID	Urgency pricing on the spike. The voluntary ICC Code (2024) says marketing should not play on fear without a justifiable reason.

Trust

WHAT IT IS	Letting someone hold something that matters to you, knowing they could drop it. Small, reliable moments over time earn it.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	Every stage, decided in small things: a report on time, a number that holds up.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"Let's start small and see."*
SAY	**Accept the small start and make it reliable. Deliver when you said you would.**
AVOID	Asking for the big commitment before the small ones are kept.

Regret

WHAT IT IS	Wishing you'd acted differently, knowing the choice was yours. Before a decision it shows up as fear of choosing wrong.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	A buyer who has bought badly before. In a Gartner survey of 1,120 technology buyers (late 2021), 56% said their organization had a high degree of regret over its largest technology purchase of the past two years.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"What if we pick the wrong one again?"*
SAY	**Lower the cost of being wrong: phases, checkpoints, reversible steps. Gartner found buyers with high decision confidence were 10 times more likely to make a high-quality, low-regret purchase.**
AVOID	Pressure to decide fast. It raises the regret you are trying to lower.

Moment 5. After the purchase

Relief

WHAT IT IS	The release when a feared outcome passes or a hard stretch ends.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	The first report that makes sense, the first month the numbers reconcile.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"Finally, I know where the money goes."*
SAY	**Name the relief in onboarding and renewal messages. It is what the client bought.**
AVOID	Promising relief in acquisition copy. Relief the buyer has not felt yet is only a claim.

Pride

WHAT IT IS	The glow of having earned something through your own effort. It's about the work, not being better than anyone.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	When the client's own team hits a number it worked toward.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"Our team did this."*
SAY	**Give the credit to the client's team, and make the case study about them.**
AVOID	Taking the credit. A win the supplier claims stops feeling like the client's win.

Betrayal

WHAT IT IS	Broken trust, whether through a dramatic lie or the quieter act of someone slowly ceasing to care.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	The previous agency that stopped paying attention once the contract was signed.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"They cared until we signed."*
SAY	**Acknowledge the pattern without attacking the old supplier, and put in writing how attention is kept after signing.**
AVOID	Criticizing competitors. It sounds like the same story from a new teller.

The line. Two emotions to handle with care

Shame

WHAT IT IS	A gut sense that you are the problem, not your actions. It makes you dread rejection.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	Copy that implies the buyer is behind, careless or out of date.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"Still doing marketing like it's 2015?"*
SAY	**Move the problem from the person to the structure. Marketing departments are built to underperform, and a structure can be fixed.**
AVOID	Shame appeals. Across 90 samples, shame was linked to more constructive action when the failure was more repairable, and to less when it was less repairable (Leach and Cidam 2015).

Guilt

WHAT IT IS	The pang of "I did something wrong," not "I am wrong." It points at the act and pushes you to repair it.
WHERE IT SHOWS UP	A leader who knows a delay has cost the company.
SOUNDS LIKE	*"We should have fixed this last year."*
SAY	**Moderate and specific: the cost of the delay, and the repair still available.**
AVOID	Heavy guilt. Moderate guilt appeals produced more felt guilt than low or high ones, and stronger appeals worsened attitudes toward the ad and the brand, driven in particular by anger (Coulter and Pinto 1995, n=60).

PART 04

Five pairs that need opposite messages

The neighbor is where the message changes

IF THE BUYER FEELS	SAY	IF THEY FEEL	SAY
Stress	Lighten the load: what to hand off, automate or stop.	**Overwhelm**	One first step. No menu.
Frustration	The mechanism, and the part of the wall that moves.	**Resignation**	A small, bounded test with a number agreed in advance.
Anxiety	Make the unknown visible. In a new market, arguments first.	**Dread**	A dated action before the dreaded event, with a doable step.
Envy	Don't feed it. Show the system behind the rival's result.	**Admiration**	The steps and the numbers, so the reader sees a path.
Shame	Never use it. Move the problem to the structure.	**Guilt**	Moderate, specific, and repairable.

VERDICT If you can't say which neighbor your buyer is not, you haven't named the emotion yet.

PART 05

Where the line is

Three tests before anything ships

01 **Does every fear message come with a step the buyer can actually take?**

A meta-analysis of 248 samples, mostly from health messaging (Tannenbaum and colleagues, Psychological Bulletin, 2015), found fear appeals had a positive average effect on attitudes, intentions and behaviors (d = 0.29), and a larger one when the message said people could carry out the recommended action or that it would work (d = 0.43 against 0.21).

02 **Is the guilt moderate, specific and repairable?**

Moderate guilt appeals produced more felt guilt than low or high ones, and as appeals got stronger, attitudes toward the ad and the brand got worse, driven in particular by anger (Coulter and Pinto, Journal of Applied Psychology, 1995, n=60 working mothers).

03 **Is the problem on a structure, never on the person reading?**

Across 90 samples (N = 12,364), shame was linked to more constructive action when failure was more repairable (g = 0.47) and to less constructive action when it was less repairable (g = -0.34) (Leach and Cidam, JPSP, 2015).

The law is the floor, not the standard

Saudi Arabia's E-Commerce Law (2019) sets the floor. It prohibits electronic advertising that contains a false claim or wording that could directly or indirectly mislead the consumer (Article 11), and allows fines of up to SAR 1,000,000 for violations (Article 18). The law has no provision on fear appeals as such.

The voluntary ICC Advertising and Marketing Communications Code (2024) sets a higher standard: marketing should not play on fear without a justifiable reason (Article 2), and should not use high-pressure tactics that hamper the consumer's choice (Article 4).

One more test: if a buyer would feel manipulated on learning how the message was designed, redesign it.

VERDICT Use emotion to help the buyer decide, never to stop them thinking.

PART 06

Worksheet

Find the emotion in an afternoon

1. **Collect the words.** The last 10 sales calls, lost-deal reasons, WhatsApp inquiries and reviews. Their language, not your summary.
2. **Mark the feelings and the situations.** Most feeling words will be vague: "stuck", "tired", "we tried everything".
3. **Name the closest emotion, then test its neighbor.** Frustrated or resigned? Stressed or overwhelmed? Use section 4.
4. **Give each asset one emotion.** One landing page, one emotion, one message move from section 3.
5. **Run the three tests.** Section 5. Anything that fails a test does not ship.

Your brief, in one paragraph

SITUATION
What just happened to the buyer

EMOTION
The name from this map, and the neighbor it is not

SOUNDS LIKE
The buyer's own words, from your notes

SAY
The message move

PROOF
The number, case or described situation that backs it

NEXT STEP
One action the buyer can take, with a date

SOURCES

Sources

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Every figure was checked in September 2026 against its primary source, or its published abstract where the full text is paywalled. Survey and award-entry data are self-reported, and several samples are small; the text says so where it matters. Definitions are BMD's own wording. BMD is not affiliated with Brené Brown or her publisher.

About BMD

Most companies don't have a marketing problem. They have a marketing department that was built to underperform. BMD is a boutique consultancy based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, that builds structured, measurable marketing departments inside mid-market companies across the GCC. Its founder, Redha Alayesh, is a marketing consultant who has worked with 40+ marketing departments.

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