
Thoughts and Feelings About the U.S. Economy

America's Economic Gulag



Highlights of a ZMET study by

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America is unraveling

It's a jungle out here – and I'm the prey



“It’s a blood sucking shark, and a lot of times I feel **that’s what I’m up against.**

It’s the way the economy is. I’m doing everything but selling my blood. The economy is **taking bites** out of every single dollar that we bring into the house. There’s **no getting ahead**...It feels like I’m being attacked. **It feels personal.** I planned and planned because they told me to plan and plan, and then **they pulled the rug out from under me.”**

Karen

Full Report: http://olsonzaltman.com/media/ZMET_EconomyReport2012.pdf

America is unraveling

We are a nation in decline



“All the consumers and all the little businesses and all the government workers and everybody that’s going along in **gaming the system** or playing it short or ignoring their responsibilities. If they’re doing those things enough, then you can **topple a giant**. We’re not toppled, but it feels that way sometimes.”

Jay

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Trapped inside America's Economic Gulag

It seems there is no way out



“I feel like the fish represent **me looking out into the world that I can't have anymore.** The outer world is actually people with money and the fish bowl is the rest of us **being herded up** and we're looking from the inside out. **It makes me want to escape** into that world. It makes me angry at greedy people. They're throwing us into that tank. That tank is **the barrier of what I cannot do anymore.**”

Bart

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My Life in the Gulag

I am not in control of my life



“More people are **going to discount stores** to save money. I used to go to Grocery Outlet once or twice every six months. Now I’m going every two weeks. It’s **a loss of control, a loss of power**. It’s not pleasant, you feel **constricted** [Like] a man in a **straightjacket** just because no matter how much they fight they’re always going to be in the same situation. You are pretty much **at somebody else’s mercy.**”

Heidi

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The emotional toll of the Gulag

I am afraid of what might happen next



“We are **so worried that is going to be us.** I think we feel a lot closer to the edge now. What is over the edge? Just pitch black. Infinity. It’s horrifying if **you can’t see the light at the end of the tunnel.** It’s just ambiguity and not knowing about the future. All that stuff is **very scary** for me. There’s just way too much that could happen.”

Becca

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The emotional toll of the Gulag

I am afraid of what might happen next



“This is a golfer with an alligator coming up behind him. **It’s scary not knowing** what’s lurking there behind you. [The alligator represents] death or bills or something catastrophic. **Things happen.** They always do.”

Heidi

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The Passive Victims

My life is in shambles



“That is how I feel about the US economy, **hopeless**, like being in a box and **feeling trapped and weighed down**. My feelings of hopelessness have **made me question my faith** and I have to keep moving forward with that because I could have it way worse and I know that. My feelings of hopelessness are **affecting my relationships** with my friends, my family, my attitude toward everything. **I have to pull myself out of a funk on a daily basis.**”

Liz

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The Resourceful Fighters

I'm not going to take this lying down



“She’s got boxing gloves on and it’s what she’s using to **get by and be successful**. She can go that extra mile in order to survive. The choices aren’t out there like they used to be; **you’re on your own**. Since I’m successful, I feel very good about myself. But I feel for the people that aren’t as strong. **I’m going to fight for my rights and do what I have to do** to get what I’m worth.”

Colleen



“You have to be a very [good] negotiator nowadays, very creative—almost **like a fighter**. At 43, I realize **I have to change myself**, to do things where I can really make money. You don’t live the way that people used to live years ago. How I can finish these houses as soon as possible, before the end of the year when the snowbirds come? **I’m fighting to stay alive.**”

Lucio

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Implications for Marketers

Appeals to Americana



People are questioning the reality of the traditional American Dream. Thus stereotypical appeals to Americana (“Baseball, hot dogs, apple pie, and Chevrolet”) may be perceived as unrealistic or phony. To be an American today requires struggle, hard work, and resilience.



This may explain the positive impact of **Levi’s “Go Forth” campaign**, or **Chrysler’s “Imported from Detroit” campaign**.

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Implications for Marketers

Everyone loves an underdog



Disney
THE MUPPETS



The Underdog is an archetype that resonates at deep, often unconscious levels. Literature, fairy tales, and cinema are replete with examples of characters who succeed against all odds.

Particularly in these challenging times, marketers should consider **tying their products and brands to underdogs** who have succeeded against all odds. Alternatively, brands can **tell stories that dramatize their own struggles** and their laborious but successful efforts to “get things right.”

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Implications for Marketers

Redefining luxury



Simple luxuries are particularly

important today. Luxury doesn't just mean a high-priced car or a high-end kitchen.

These everyday luxuries are **the difference between living and merely existing.** It is the absence of many of these smaller luxuries that contributes to people feeling trapped, like they have lost their identity and humanity.

A number of brands and products are seen as **“small, personalized luxuries”** in a world where traditional high-end luxury may be out of reach.

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Implications for Marketers

The downside of low prices



Logically, we appreciate low prices because we can save money. Emotionally, however, **low prices can be embarrassing** if consumers feel like they are slumming.

In communications, retailers who offer discounts or low prices should communicate about consumer benefits that go deeper than just “You can save money.”

Low prices are less likely to carry a stigma if consumers feel **smart, empowered, or cool** for finding a bargain.

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Implications for Marketers

Empowering consumers who feel vulnerable



For all the Bravehearts and beautiful souls that keep the M.A.C AIDS Fund flowing, we say, **'Tis Noble to Give...** and with every purchase of this gorgeous, grandiloquent world-clan collectible, you are helping to keep the coffers confident – because every cent from every M.A.C VIVA GLAM purchase always goes directly to the women, men and kids affected by HIV/AIDS everywhere. It's our heritage, our proud moment...and yours too. Keep the VIVA GLAM clan alive and thriving!



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Helping others is a way to feel like a good provider and to re-establish a sense of control.

When marketers put a company's charitable efforts front and center, they may provide consumers a rationale for spending on these items – particularly when **charitable giving has a direct one-to-one correlation with the purchase.**

A participant's digital image

Title: "When You're Down and Out, Don't Give Up"

"The lion representing a predator, and they have their claws dug into us, the predators, but we're not dead yet. If we form a group together we could beat the predators."

"The bear with the fish representing a bad Wall Street, and them having their food and being stable in the water and hard to be knocked off their peaks while the rest of us get washed down the river."

"The gun representing crime. If we don't cut welfare and of different programs, I believe that there is going to be a crime wave in this country."



"The firemen representing the economy today is a terrible disaster. But these guys are willing to go step by step. They're going to be exhausted but there is hope at the end of the tunnel."

"The doves and the hearts and the American flag. [at the bottom right] represent hope. We're not going to fix this overnight. It's going to take a little time."

"The fish in the tank representing us looking out into what this 1 or 2% of the population has with their greed and us wanting more. Maybe by working a little harder or not being as apathetic we could build up enough steam to jump out of this fish tank and get to these things."

"A hurricane where we have the first part of the storm, then the eye which represents the calmness and then the end of the storm which is also pretty bad. But there is some light at the end of the tunnel."

A participant's digital image

Title: "Strapped for Cash"

"Family Night Out and there's a red circle with a line through it represents **no more luxury family nights out**, no more trips to the movie for \$50, but rather staying in, renting a moving for a dollar and having popcorn at home. Getting rid of some of those luxuries that we had before. **That could be scary to some families.**"

"A family with a belt around them. **Very strapped for cash.** The belt is tight, so **cash is tight right now.** Their faces are sad, almost like **they don't know what will happen next.**"



"A gentleman pulling out his pants pockets and they're empty. **He's broke.** We can't see his face but he could also be **scared about what's coming next.**"

"A female with a clown nose She represents my thought of, **what type of clowns do we have running our government?** We don't know that and **it's causing everyone to be scared and frightened.** She's representing the people that are causing the people to have no cash or to be broke."

"The lady is biting her fingernails and she has a **scared, frightened look** on her face and it's a big picture because I think her feelings represent what the other pictures do. She's **scared about what will happen next.**"