

RETAIL

## 66pc of consumers believe economy will return to normal by winter

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*More consumers have returned to the office after working remotely. Image credit: Neiman Marcus*

By KATIE TAMOLA

While many consumers acknowledge vaccine progress and overall condition improvement in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, many still anticipate that it will take time to reach a sense of normalcy.

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According to the latest pandemic-era consumer sentiment report from **Resonate**, 33 percent of consumers believe that it will take more than one year to return to a state of normalcy post-pandemic. Although many consumers' attitudes seem to reflect some level of optimism, the report highlights post-pandemic concerns for the economy and the fact that different people will always have different comfort levels, calling for brands to meet them where they are.

This latest **Recent Events Connected Flash Study** was conducted between April 14 and May 5, 2021 prior to mask recommendations changing under federal guidance and was scaled to 200 million U.S. consumers. Participants were asked how their attitudes have changed since early April 2021.

Have feelings changed?

Many consumers recognize societal conditions improving with vaccination rollouts and re-openings while simultaneously recognizing that there is a long way to go.

About 22.7 percent of consumers report being concerned about health-related consequences of COVID-19 "to a moderate extent" compared to 23.3 percent noting the same sentiment from April 1-April 14. Those feeling concerned to an "extremely large extent" ranked at 16.9 percent for the most recent flash period, an increase from 16.7 percent in early April.



*About half of the adult population in the United States has received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Image credit: U.S. Center for Disease Control*

In regards to financial-related concerns, there was a 5 percent month-over-month increase in people who noted being concerned about the economic consequences of the pandemic "to a large-extremely large extent."

Two-thirds of respondents said they believe that the U.S. economy will "return to normal" as it was before the COVID-19 pandemic in the winter of November 2021 to February 2022 or later, up from 62.6 percent of consumers who identified that time frame when surveyed from April 1-April 14.

About a quarter of employees, 23 percent, who were working from home have returned to their offices either voluntarily or at the request of their employers.

There was a 4 percent increase month-over-month of those who noted being completely likely to get a COVID-19 vaccine after it becomes available. Conversely, there was an 8 percent increase month-over-month for people who stated they will not be getting the vaccine because they did not trust that it was safe.



*Consumers are returning to travel. Image courtesy of Viceroy L'Ermitage Beverly Hills*

More people seem to be feeling more comfortable with in-person experiences as the year progresses, with the report citing a 40 percent decrease from March-May in consumers who said they are not going to crowded activities until COVID-19 is under control.

There has also been a 20 percent month-over-month increase of consumers now dining in restaurants once a month or more.

Getting more comfortable

From January to May, the report cites an 8 percent decrease in the number of consumers who have decreased their likelihood to purchase luxury products. During the same time period there was also a 17 percent decrease in the number of consumers who have decreased their likelihood to make major purchases like a vehicle.

People are seemingly growing more comfortable with in-person shopping, as there was a 17 percent increase from March to May of consumers who do not require any precautions for in-store shopping.

From January to May, there was an 8 percent increase in consumers who indicated that browsing and buying in a physical store is an important shopping factor to them.

Brands are actively working to expand their offline offerings to provide excellent in-person experiences for

consumers.

Although ecommerce saw momentous growth throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the in-person shopping experience is arguably irreplaceable. According to a whitepaper from analytics platform Placer.ai, brands want to continue expanding offline offerings in an attempt to provide unique shopping experiences that will foster consumer loyalty and a mutually beneficial relationship ([see story](#)).

More consumers are considering resuming travel means that were previously restricted during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a 4 percent month-over-month decrease of consumers who are not traveling on airplanes or trains at all due to the pandemic.

The latest flash study also cites a 7 percent month-over-month decrease of consumers who are not staying at large hotel chains during the pandemic.

Some luxury travel and hospitality brands are noticing the building desire to return to travel and are crafting packages that check every box, while offering features that grew popular during the pandemic.

Two trends that will continue to permeate the luxury travel sector are private offerings and the desire for transparent sustainability practices from brands. Privatization offerings, such as private jets, have soared in popularity among affluents during the pandemic ([see story](#)).

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