
Majorities of Americans Lay at Least Some Blame for Economic Crisis on Media and Advertising Agencies for Causing People to Buy What They Couldn't Afford

Majority believe friends and family do not have any responsibility

ROCHESTER, N.Y. – April 15, 2009 – Many groups have been at the center of the “blame game” over who has responsibility for the current economic crisis. Could the media, advertising agencies and/or friends and family deserve at least some of the responsibility for causing people to purchase things they couldn't afford? According to the American public, the answer is yes.

These are some of the findings of *The Harris Poll*, a new nationwide survey of 2,220 U.S. adults surveyed online between March 31 and April 1, 2009 by Harris Interactive.

More specifically:

- Two-thirds of Americans (66%) believe advertising agencies have at least some responsibility for the current economic crisis because they caused people to buy things they couldn't afford. In fact, one-third (33%) believe they have complete or a great deal of responsibility;
- Print media, such as newspapers and magazines, are deemed to have at least some responsibility by almost three in five Americans (59%) while 56% of Americans say news and other information websites bear at least some responsibility for the economic crisis;
- Just over half of Americans say talk shows on TV or radio (55%), cable news programs (54%) and network and local news programs (53%) all have at least some responsibility for the current economic crisis because they caused people to buy things they couldn't afford; and,
- Friends and family come out a little better – just over half (54%) say they do not have that much responsibility or no responsibility at all for causing Americans to buy things they couldn't afford.

There is also an age divide over who is to blame for the economic crisis. People aged 55 and older are more likely to blame the five media categories and the advertising agencies. On the flip side, those aged 18-34 are less likely to say these six groups have at least some responsibility. For example, three-quarters of the older age group (75%) say advertising agencies have at least some responsibility compared to three in five (60%) 18-34 year olds. When it comes to print media, two-thirds of those aged 55 and older (67%) say they have at least some responsibility while just half of the younger age group (51%) say print media has at least some responsibility.

So What?

Americans are angry and upset about the state of the economy and need someone or some group to blame. The media is always a perfect scapegoat when it comes to taking the blame, whether it's a political slogan such as 1992's "Annoy the media, re-elect President Bush" or causing the recent economic crisis. Advertising agencies, however, are normally under the radar screen. Now, thanks to television shows like *Mad Men* and *Trust Me*, they are slightly more visible and they are an easy scapegoat.

**TABLE 1
RESPONSIBILITY FOR CURRENT ECONOMIC CRISIS**

"How much responsibility, if any, should the following groups take for the current economic crisis because they caused people to buy things they couldn't afford?"

Base: All U.S. adults

| | At Least Some Responsibility (NET) | Complete Responsibility | A great deal of Responsibility | Some Responsibility | No responsibility (NET) | Not that much Responsibility | No Responsibility at all |
|--|---|-------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Advertising Agencies | 66 | 7 | 26 | 33 | 34 | 16 | 18 |
| Print media (e.g. newspapers, magazines) | 59 | 4 | 18 | 37 | 41 | 21 | 19 |
| News and other information websites | 56 | 4 | 16 | 37 | 44 | 24 | 19 |
| Talk shows on TV or radio | 55 | 3 | 16 | 35 | 45 | 24 | 22 |
| Cable news programs | 54 | 3 | 17 | 34 | 46 | 25 | 21 |
| Network and local news programs | 53 | 4 | 14 | 35 | 47 | 26 | 21 |
| Friends and family | 46 | 2 | 8 | 35 | 54 | 29 | 25 |

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

TABLE 2
RESPONSIBILITY FOR CURRENT ECONOMIC CRISIS – BY AGE

“How much responsibility, if any, should the following groups take for the current economic crisis because they caused people to buy things they couldn’t afford?”
Percentage saying “Complete/A Great Deal/Some Responsibility”

Base: All U.S. Adults

| | Total | Age | | | |
|--|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| | | 18-34 | 35-44 | 45-54 | 55+ |
| | % | % | % | % | % |
| Advertising Agencies | 66 | 60 | 59 | 65 | 75 |
| Print media (e.g. newspapers, magazines) | 59 | 51 | 57 | 61 | 67 |
| News and other information websites | 56 | 51 | 55 | 54 | 62 |
| Talk shows on TV or radio | 55 | 48 | 56 | 53 | 59 |
| Cable news programs | 54 | 51 | 52 | 54 | 58 |
| Network and local news programs | 53 | 48 | 53 | 52 | 59 |
| Friends and family | 46 | 47 | 50 | 46 | 42 |

Methodology

This *Harris Poll* was conducted online within the United States March 31 and April 1, 2009 among 2,220 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents’ propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive is a global leader in custom market research. With a long and rich history in multimodal research, powered by our science and technology, we assist clients in achieving business results. Harris Interactive serves clients globally through our North American, European and Asian offices and a network of independent market research firms. For more information, please visit www.harrisinteractive.com.

Press Contact:

Harris Interactive
Corporate Communications
585-272-8400
press@harrisinteractive.net

Harris Interactive Inc. 4/09