

Americans Split on Attitudes towards Ads Which Mention the Recession and Economic Troubles

Two in five, however, do not have an opinion on these types of ads

New York, N.Y. – October 14, 2009 – As economic woes continue, advertisers have to decide how to deal with the issue of the recession. Some ignore it and find different ways to encourage people to buy in troubled economic times while others put the economic troubles front and center and mention the recession. What strategy actually works is a different issue altogether and the American consumer is mixed about that.

Just over one-quarter of Americans (27%) say advertisements which mention the economic troubles and the recession make the brand seem more manipulative while just under one-quarter (23%) say the advertisements make the brand seem more realistic. Just over one in ten (12%) say these types of advertisements are depressing and make them less likely to purchase the brand. Two in five Americans (39%), however, have no opinion about advertisements which mention the recession.

These are some of the findings of a new **Adweek Media/Harris Poll**, survey of 2,186 U.S. adults surveyed online between September 25 and 29, 2009 by Harris Interactive.

Different groups have different attitudes on these ads

Different groups have different opinions on advertisements which mention the recession and economic troubles. Men are more likely than women to say these ads make the brand seem more manipulative (29% versus 25%) while women are more likely to believe these ads make the brand more realistic (27% versus 18%).

There are also age differences on ads which use the recession. Those aged 18-34 are more likely than those aged 55 and older to say these types of ads make the brand more realistic (27% versus 18%).

Education and household income are other differentiators on the use of the recession in advertisements. Looking at education, those with a college degree are more likely than those with a high school or less education to have an opinion at all, both believing that the ads make the brand seem more manipulative (31% versus 24%) and make the brand seem more realistic (26% versus 17%). Those who have a household income of less than \$35,000 are more likely than those with an income of \$75,000 or more to say the ads are depressing and make them less likely to purchase the brand (16% versus 8%). Those with a household income between \$50,000 and \$74,999 a year are more likely to make a brand more manipulative (32%).

So What?

Advertisers have to walk a fine line with their ads when dealing with the economic issues Americans are currently facing. Do they discuss the recession or pretend it doesn't exist? We know there are certain tactics which work better than others for addressing the economy ([mostly value propositions and luxuries for less](#)), so when it comes to actually mentioning the recession, these tactics should be interwoven so advertisers do not seem to be manipulating the consumer or, even worse, depressing them and leading them to not purchase the brand.

TABLE 1
OPINION OF ADS THAT MENTION THE ECONOMY

“Many advertisements are mentioning the current recession and economic troubles. Which is closest to your opinion about these types of ads?”

Base: All U.S. adults

	Total	Gender		Age			
		Male	Female	18-34	35-44	45-54	55+
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
HAVE AN OPINION ON THESE TYPES OF ADS (NET)	61	59	64	65	58	62	60
They make the brand seem manipulative	27	29	25	27	27	25	29
They make the brand seem more realistic	23	18	27	27	22	27	18
They are depressing and make me less likely to purchase the brand	12	12	11	12	10	10	13
I DON'T HAVE AN OPINION ABOUT THESE TYPES OF ADS	39	41	36	35	42	38	40

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

TABLE 2
OPINION OF ADS THAT MENTION THE ECONOMY – by education and income

“Many advertisements are mentioning the current recession and economic troubles. Which is closest to your opinion about these types of ads?”

Base: All U.S. adults

	Total	Education			Household Income			
		HS or less	Some college	College grad	Less than \$35k	\$35k-\$49.9k	\$50k-\$74.9k	\$75k+
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
HAVE AN OPINION ON THESE TYPES OF ADS (NET)	61	54	67	66	59	62	68	64
They make the brand seem manipulative	27	24	29	31	25	24	32	31
They make the brand seem more realistic	23	17	28	26	18	26	26	25
They are depressing and make me less likely to purchase the brand	12	14	10	9	16	13	10	8
I DON'T HAVE AN OPINION ABOUT THESE TYPES OF ADS	39	46	33	34	41	38	32	36

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

Methodology

This **Adweek Media/Harris Poll** was conducted online within the United States September 25 and 29, 2009 among 2,186 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.

The Harris Poll® #113, October 14, 2009

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