

COVID-19 CONSUMER RESEARCH WAVE 67 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

July 9 - 11, 2021

MDC and **The Harris Poll** have partnered to conduct research to monitor the pulse of the American Consumer.

The executive summaries on the pages that follow provide insight into current consumer attitudes and behavior and can be used to help navigate the changing industry landscape. We hope this information proves useful to you and your team as you address these changes in real time and strategize for your next moves.

As always, we are here to help. Please don't hesitate to contact us with any questions you may have.

Positively,

Ryan Linder + The MDC Family
Global Chief Marketing Officer, EVP



WAVE 67

WAVE 67 INTRODUCTION

The following research was conducted between **July 9 - 11, 2021** by The Harris Poll. Fielded among a nationally representative sample of **2,003** U.S. adults, the newest research demonstrates how consumers' perceptions are rapidly shifting as new developments emerge.

Section:

01

Topic:

DELTA VARIANT BRINGS 2020 FEAR DÉJÀ VU AND NEW QUESTIONS ABOUT VACCINES

Introduction:

Given the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus [now comprises over half of infections in the U.S.](#), it's no surprise we found (76%) of Americans have heard at least a little about the variant. Here is what else we uncovered about how the highly contagious variant is impacting the mindset of Americans:

- As the Delta variant spreads, American **fear is back on the rise**: Over seven in ten are fearful of more hospitalizations (71%), healthcare shortages (70%), and a rise in deaths (73%).
- What about the kids? Many are concerned about the **threat posed to children** (71%) and **schools not being able to re-open in the fall** as planned (62%).
- **Jeopardizing herd immunity**: 65% say the news about the Pfizer vaccine not being as effective against the Delta variant is going to slow down vaccination rates in the U.S. even more and 70% are fearful the variant will prolong herd immunity in the U.S.
- **Seeding vaccine doubt**: 62% of unvaccinated people say “The Delta variant makes me **second guess whether I should even get vaccinated**,” and half (51%) of vaccinated people are **questioning the efficacy** of the vaccine they received.

- **But some are unfazed**: Roughly half (47%) say “The Delta variant isn't any more dangerous than the other strains of COVID we have dealt with” and that “People are **overreacting** about the Delta variant” (46%).
- Across the pond: [The Wall Street Journal looks at](#) how many fear the Delta variant could put Europe's summer reopening at risk.

Implication:

Though [booster shots are not deemed necessary right now](#), many of those vaccinated are watching with caution. The rate at which this variant spreads, especially among communities with low vaccination rates, along with a combination of new restrictions and fear, could impact consumer sentiment as hot spots arise across parts of the country.

Section:

02

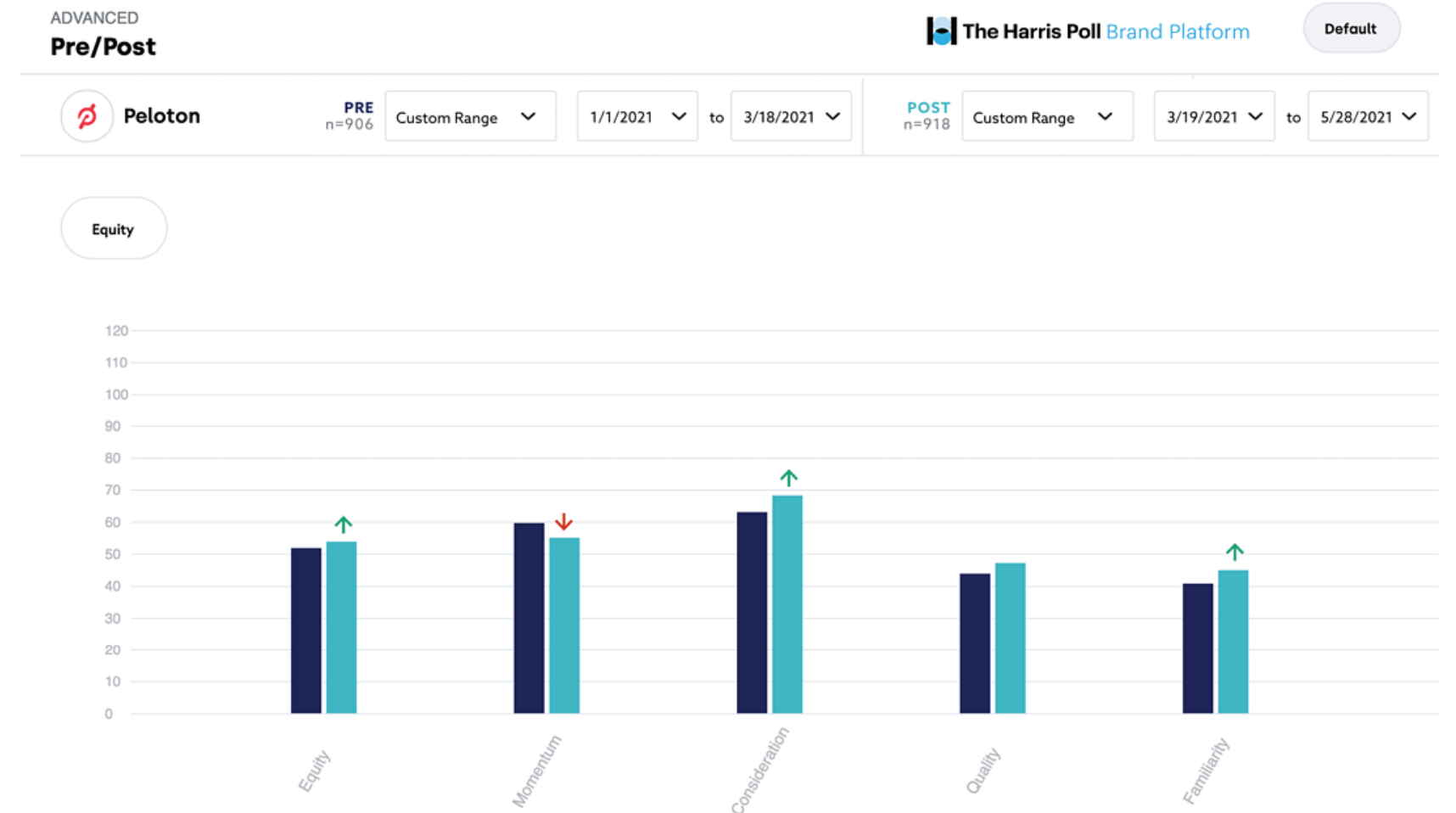
Topic:

WEATHERING THE STORM: HOW PELOTON'S BRAND WITHSTOOD A CRISIS

Introduction:

In March 2021, Peloton faced its first major crisis as a fledgling brand following a [high-profile accident](#) involving its treadmill that left a child dead. In a [new brand tracking case study](#), we look at [data from our Harris Brand Platform](#) to see the real-time impact on Peloton's brand in the eyes of consumers, during and after the crisis.

- Brand equity for Peloton increased overall following this incident, due to an increase in consideration and familiarity (two of the four components comprising brand equity).
- Although more consumers say they are thinking about purchasing from Peloton than before (consideration has increased by 8%), they also **feel less confident in the direction of the brand** (momentum has fallen by 7%).



- Digging deeper, we can measure consumers' emotional responses and find that they see the brand as **less trustworthy than they did pre-crisis**.
- Similar adjustments to emotional perception indicate a deeper, tectonic shift in how consumers perceive the brand: **Peloton's perception among consumers as a 'fun' brand has dropped off while its perception as 'corporate' rose.**

Implication:

While Peloton appears to have emerged unscathed at first glance from its high-profile safety scandal, [a deeper analysis](#) shows there have been underlying - and unintentional - changes to how consumers think about the brand.

[Read more](#)

Section:

03

Topic:

NEARLY ONE QUARTER OF AMERICANS HAVE USED A VR OR AR HEADSET: MORNING BREW-HARRIS POLL

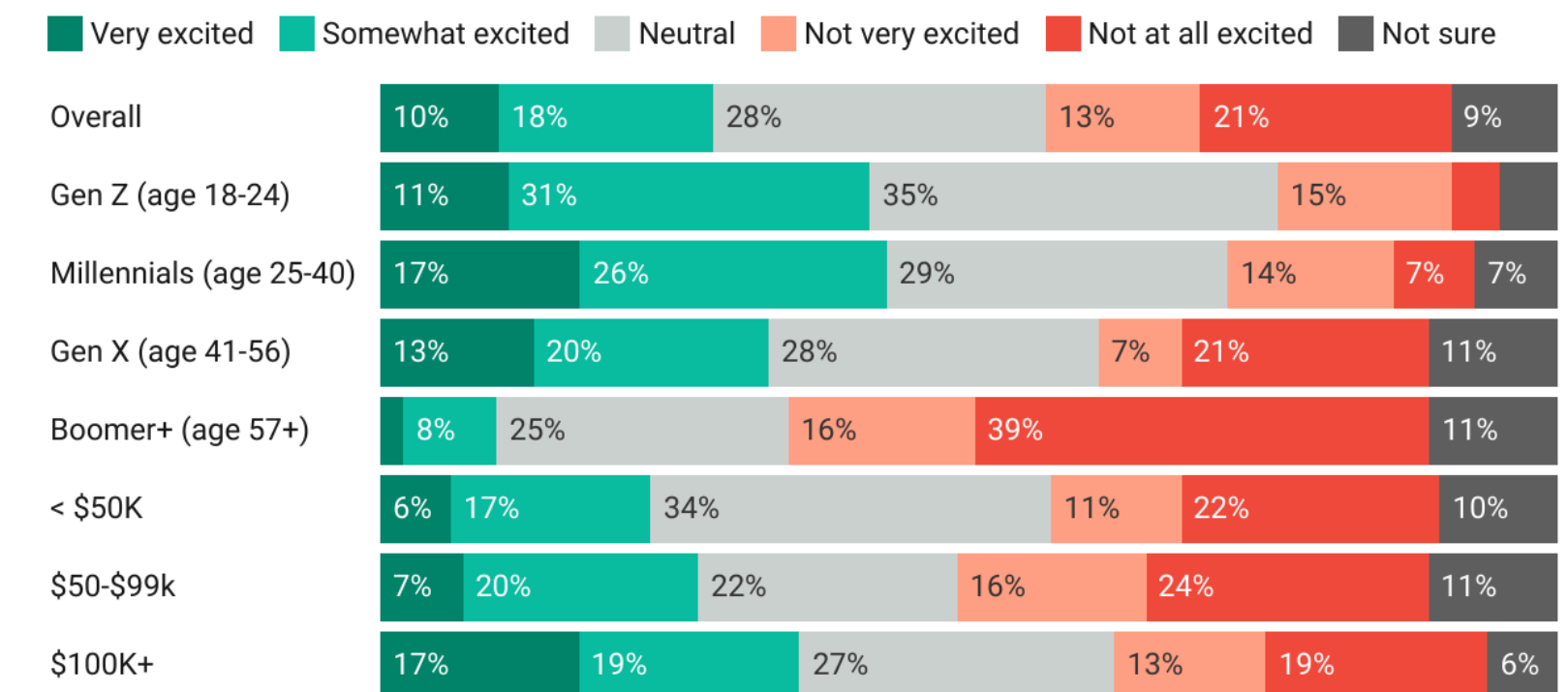
Introduction:

[In a recent poll in partnership with Morning Brew](#), we found a surprisingly high stat: nearly a quarter (23%) of Americans have used a VR or AR headset. But how excited are consumers about the future of these technologies?

- Among those who have used VR or AR, 31% own a headset, 24% have used a family member's gear, and 13% have tried hardware provided by a retailer. Nearly all (90%) of those who have tried a headset say they're likely to use one again.
- **Millennials are the most prolific users**, with 42% having tried the tech. Gen Z was the next highest demo at 29%.
- Compared with those who have tried a VR/AR device, **the general public isn't as enthusiastic about embracing the technology**. Under 3 in 10 (28%) of all respondents say they're excited about VR/AR, 28% say they're neutral, and 34% are not excited.

- **Four in 10 (41%) would be willing to buy a headset**; and one quarter (25%) of them would be willing to pay \$500 or more. For reference, the Oculus Quest 2 sells for \$299.
- **What's your go-to brand?** 35% named Apple as their first-choice company to buy a device from, while only 5% named Facebook.

How excited are you about virtual and augmented reality?



Source: Morning Brew-Harris Poll, June 2021, n=2010 US adults • Created with Datawrapper

Implication:

Big Tech and many other metaverse aspirants are spending heavily to develop technologies that are far from must-haves for most consumers. But to paraphrase Steve Jobs, sometimes customers don't know what they want until you show it to them.

Section:

04

Topic:

HOW TO CONNECT WITH POST-PANDEMIC CONSUMERS AMID SUMMER SPENDING SPREE: ADAGE-HARRIS POLL

Introduction:

A new consumer landscape of emboldened spenders resulting from pandemic habits is emerging and marketers need to understand the lasting impact of the last year: which groups are increasing spending and who is still cautious, according to [Harris Poll CEO Will Johnson in AdAge](#).

- **The virtualization of American life is unlikely to diminish:** a majority of consumers plan to buy groceries (53%) as well as other items (70%) online and two-thirds plan to get take-out from restaurants as often or more than they did during the pandemic.
- The first consumer group leading summer spending are the coupon-clipping **bargain hunters**, who plan to spend more on things like electronics and in-home entertainment.

- **Stir-crazy parents**, anxious to get out of the house, are the second group who plan to increase spending, especially on activities such as concerts and movies (40% of parents with children <18 plan to spend more, as compared to only 23% of those without kids).
- The third group of spenders are **those mid-career (aged 35-44)**: They have pent-up income and are anxious to dispose of it after a year in lock-down. How do marketers reach them? More than anything else in advertising, they want the concrete facts about products: tell them where they can find it, how it works, and how durable it is.
- **Gen X leads these lingering COVID-cautious consumers:** A larger share of this generation plans to spend less, signaling ongoing financial insecurity. Take eating out: 27% of Gen X plans to spend less (as opposed to 20% of the general public).

Implication:

Just as temperatures are heating up, so are pocketbooks: not all consumers will be splurging this summer, but marketers will need to know which segments of the public are splurging - and on what.

Section:

05

Topic:

MILLENNIALS FACE YET ANOTHER WORKPLACE CHALLENGE - AGEISM: FAST COMPANY-HARRIS POLL

Introduction:

Nearly one-third (31%) of working adults have experienced ageism in the workplace, according to [our new poll conducted exclusively for Fast Company](#). Here is how assumptions in the workplace can impact how we see our coworkers:

- Among Younger Millennials (25-32) and Gen Z, more than one-third (36%) say they have experienced ageism - likely **due to a perceived lack of experience as 44% of this group agree that people their age are viewed as inexperienced** (compared to 28% of Older Millennials 33-40 and Gen Xers).
- **On the flip side:** 37% of all working adults say that people their age are viewed as out of touch at work and that grows to 39% for workers over age 41.
- But it's not just older workers who feel they are viewed as out of touch: 38% of Gen Z and Younger Millennials do too, as well as 30% of Older Millennials.

Implication:

The disconnect is as old as time: the older cohorts consider the younger ones lazy and the younger ones wonder why the older ones can't keep up, especially when it comes to technology. This pigeonholing can taint the working environment - and potentially, businesses' bottom lines.

Questions?

RYAN LINDER

Global Chief Marketing Officer, EVP, MDC Partners

rjlinder@mdc-partners.com

JOHN GERZEMA

CEO, The Harris Poll

jgerzema@harrisinsights.com



KNOWLEDGE IS POWER
