

COVID-19 CONSUMER RESEARCH WAVE 159 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AUGUST 25-27, 2023

Stagwell 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 Stagwell Family

Global Chief Marketing Officer, EVP



Wave 159

WAVE 159 INTRODUCTION

The following research was conducted between **August 25-27, 2023** by The Harris Poll. Fielded among a nationally representative sample of **2,117** U.S. adults, the newest research demonstrates how consumers' perceptions are rapidly shifting as new developments emerge.

Section:

01

Topic:

AMERICANS OVERWHELMINGLY SUPPORT CORPORATE DIVERSITY: BLACK ECONOMIC ALLIANCE/HARRIS POLL

Introduction:

In our new study with the [Black Economic Alliance](#) (BEA) and referenced in President Biden's Washington Post Op-Ed and the New York Times' [DealBook Newsletter](#), Americans believe diversity is essential to corporate performance, culture, innovation, and profitability.

- **Americans want a diverse workforce:** Eight in ten (81%) agree that **corporate America should reflect the diversity** of the American population (Black: 90%, Gen Z: 84%).
- And over three-quarters of Americans (78%) support businesses **taking active steps to ensure companies reflect the diversity** of the American population (Black: 88%, Gen Z/Millennials: 83%).

- When thinking about the effects of racial diversity on business, Americans overwhelmingly agree there would be **positive impacts** on the ability to **understand a broader set of customers** (87%), **to innovate** (84%), **profitability** (79%), and **employee retention** (79%) to name a few.
- **Americans overestimate the amount of Fortune 500 Black CEOs:** On average, **Americans think (19%) of the 500 largest companies** have a Black CEO. Yet, when provided with the actual representation (approx. 2%), a substantial majority (71%) said **this number needed to be increased**.

Implication:

"This poll's message is clear: Americans of all races, political ideologies, and generations agree that racial diversity is good for business," says BEA CEO Samantha Tweedy. "Americans overwhelmingly agree that diversity initiatives in the workplace make companies more profitable and innovative. At this moment, business leaders should double down on efforts to make sure their companies reflect the racial diversity of the American population." See the full results [here](#), and please share them with other corporate leaders.

Section:

02

Topic:

AMERICANS SHARE EXCITEMENT, WORRIES ABOUT NEW TECH: HUMAN FLOURISHING LAB- HARRIS POLL

Introduction:

It's the old-age stereotype that older generations are out of touch with technology, and younger ones are both dependent and naive about its potential risks. According to research with Human Flourishing Lab and my co-CEO Will Johnson's Op-Ed in Fortune, Americans across generations have much in common regarding their technological hopes and fears.

- **Americans of all ages share a curious, open-minded, and trusting attitude toward new technologies:** Most respondents (78%) are interested in learning **how new technologies such as AI, robotics, and virtual reality work**. A similar number of people are interested in trying out such new tech (Gen Z: 88%, Millennials: 89%, Gen X: 78%, Boomers+: 69%).
- Additionally, over (80%) of each generation agrees that it is **essential to keep an open mind about new technologies**.

- **However, there is a longing for quieter times:** Two-thirds (67%) said that they wish they could **go back to a time before everyone was "plugged in,"** with Millennials and Gen X most wistful (74%, 73% v. Gen Z: 60%, Boomers+: 61%).
- **And a wariness about tech's downsides:** A narrow majority of Americans (52%) claim that new technologies are **more likely to drive people apart** than bring them together, and (85%) worry that young people are **too technology-dependent**.

Implication:

"Although Americans appreciate technological invention and innovation, they are mindful of ways it could undermine human agency and psychological well-being. But the best way to approach technology is largely how we are: with interest, optimism, skepticism, and a healthy dose of nostalgia," says Johnson and Clay Routledge, the VP of Research and Director of Human Flourishing at the Archbridge Institute.

Section:

03

Topic:

COLLEGE APPLICANT ANXIETY RISING: NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR COLLEGE ADMISSION COUNSELING- HARRIS POLL

Introduction:

A new Harris study with The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) in [Higher Ed Dive](#) sheds light on college applications' anxiety.

- The poll conducted among students aged 16 to 22 found that more than three-quarters (76%) of students said that completing college **applications felt like "such a decisive moment" in their lives** – and for more than half (52%), the **most stressful academic experience to date**.
- The majority also felt pressured to apply to many colleges (52%) and specific colleges they weren't interested in (48%).

- **But, admissions don't always feel fair:** (42%) of students consider college admissions **to be rigged** (v. fair: 58%), and (74%) believe the admission process is **significantly biased**.

Implication:

NACAC's survey also illuminates student opinion about campus diversity and fairness of college admissions, topics that have taken on new importance following the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling this summer deeming race-conscious admissions unconstitutional – finding that nearly 3 in 5 (58%) support race-conscious admission practices, with three-quarters (76%) believing student body diversity is essential for colleges.

Section:

04

Topic:

BETTING ON AI: INSIDER-HARRIS POLL

Introduction:

In a recent interview [with Business Insider](#), our Harris Poll Chairman (and Stagwell Chairman/CEO) Mark Penn advises why he's betting on artificial intelligence and how brands should handle thorny social issues.

- **Don't fear AI:** While our America This Week tracker found that Americans familiar with ChatGPT believe the tool **is likely to replace jobs** such as content creation and PR (75%, 72%), Penn instead believes **that AI tools will make creative jobs more efficient** and accessible such as to those who couldn't afford a copywriter before.
- **Imbalance leads to public backlash on social issues:** Penn details that many companies have excellent communications and marketing teams but **only sometimes have teams skilled on topics and a balanced group of professionals** from both sides of social issues.
- **Consumers can see through virtue signaling:** (68%) believe that when a company **speaks out today on social issues, it's a marketing ploy** rather than an authentic opinion (32%) – which explains why (78%) of Americans **wish their preferred brands to stay out of politics.**

Implication:

"There is no cookie-cutter answer to these questions," says Penn. "It depends on your mix of stakeholders, your values as a company, and what you do and do not stand for."

Questions?

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