

What Happens Next.

Research Report

Foreword.

Jennifer DaSilva, President of Berlin Cameron

The word "unprecedented" has been used a lot to describe 2020. We've had to adapt in countless ways: as businesses, brands, consumers, and as humans. Although there have been challenges, there have been opportunities too.

While it's important to think about everything we've learned this year, perhaps it's even more important to look ahead, and to see how we can bring about cultural change. So Berlin Cameron partnered with Persky to get a snapshot of how consumers are feeling about 2021. The good news is: There's a lot of hope and optimism out there. People want to feel connected. They want to take care of themselves and their mental health. And they want brands to be the agents of positive impact.

We hope you find some helpful insights in here just as we have. Here's to 2021 being unprecedented as well — in a different, more positive, and more powerful way than 2020.

Nadia Masri, Founder & CEO of Persky

For as long as I can remember, I've ended almost every year with the same thought: "My goodness, hasn't this year just flown by?" I don't know about you, but this is the first year I haven't been able to express that sentiment. This year felt *exactly* as long as I would have expected a year to feel, and somehow, it was the most unexpected, tumultuous, and irresolute year of my life.

Though it may seem like each day in quarantine melded into the next, 2020 was a year of relentless change. Social disruption, political upheaval, and cultural adaptation were our constants; ceaseless evolution became our baseline. While none of us are strangers to change – some of us are even hungry for it – the weight of that much transformation is enough to make any of us beg for the familiar.

2021, we are hoping, will be different. In partnership with Berlin Cameron, Persky spoke to a wide variety of consumers who, like us, are dreaming of a new year (with hopefully a little less newness). They are yearning, we found, for normalcy. As consumers set their sights on the months to come, they are looking forward to stability, peace, and a return to robust social connections. In other words, they're craving a break from all that change.

We've brought forth these insights to help you center the voices of consumers in the coming year – a year that will be, we hope, calmer, saner and more united than the one that came before.

Methodology: This survey was fielded to 1,000 Persky panelists aged 13-54 (Gen Z, Millennials, and Gen X), nationally represented throughout the US and balanced to 50/50 Male/Female.

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A Hopeful 2021.

2021 will be the year of hope. 36% of people described the upcoming year as “hopeful”. In fact, 73% of consumers think 2021 will be a much better year than 2020. Only 9% of people feel like the next year will be worse than 2020. 

73% of consumers think 2021 will be a better year than 2020. 49% of consumers are most hopeful for a return to normal in 2021, more than any other potential change, including seeing more of loved ones (31%), political stability (27%), and economic prosperity (26%).

“...Americans could resume their interrupted routines and collectively propel the economy to a historic recovery that makes the beginning of the 2020s much more like the end of the 2010s than many people think possible. In other words, next year could feel astonishingly normal. But, like uncertainty, normal is a choice.”

—Derek Thompson, author of Hit Makers ¹



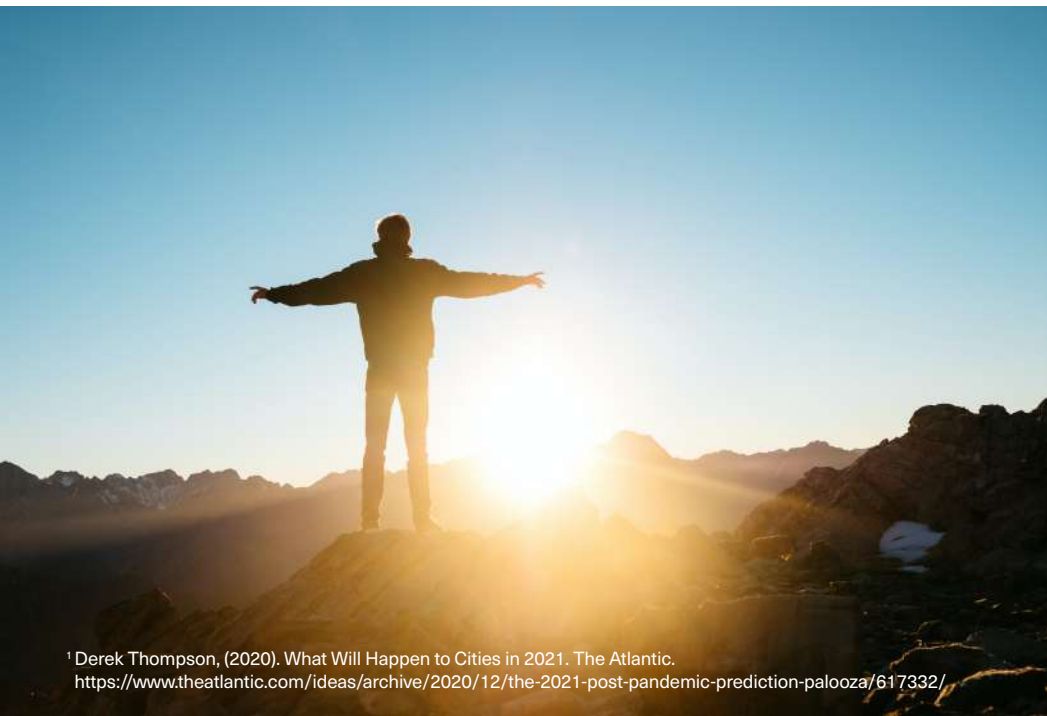
2021's Hot Item: Stability.

Consumers are starving for stability. **They're more excited about the upcoming presidential inauguration (28%) than the Superbowl (22%).**



People cite the new COVID vaccine as 2021's most exciting development yet, over sports, politics and everything else.

What it means for brands: Cautious optimism is the mood among consumers. All things considered, consumers have a pretty modest goal for the new year—getting back to a sense of normalcy. Hopefulness in 2021 means a return to old routines and regular schedules, while dodging the risks and anxieties that come with it. Effective messaging in 2021 is all about capturing this spirit, not through a bombastic or over the top explosion of energy (at least initially), but a calm return post-COVID.



¹ Derek Thompson, (2020). What Will Happen to Cities in 2021. The Atlantic. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/12/the-2021-post-pandemic-prediction-palooza/617332/>



3 Redefining Normal.



Not the “New Normal” normal anymore, **59% of consumers never want to hear the term “new normal” again.** “Quarantinis” and “coronababies” are okay though.

Cashless, touchless and contactless methods are the most sought-after features of 2021.



“We had to process so much, in so little time; we had to become experts about important differences: epidemic vs. pandemic, quarantine vs. isolation, and respirator vs. ventilators. The conversation continued with contagious vs. infectious and what antibodies do.”

–Dictionary.com ²

What it means for brands: While consumers are sick of talking about the pandemic and hearing about the pandemic, they aren't sick of new technologies that have emerged and gained popularity during the pandemic. Technologies that limit hand to hand contact in everyday shopping experiences are here to stay. The trick is continuing to build and promote new shopping experiences without messaging that focuses on the quarantine, “new normal” or COVID-19.

²Dictionary.com. (2020). New Words We Created Because Of Coronavirus. Dictionary.com. <https://www.dictionary.com/e/s/new-words-we-created-because-of-coronavirus/>

4 Comfort But Make it Fashion.



While a sizable minority of respondents want to optimize for comfort as much as possible in 2021 (47%), **53% want to at least start mixing dressy items with their comfy clothes.**

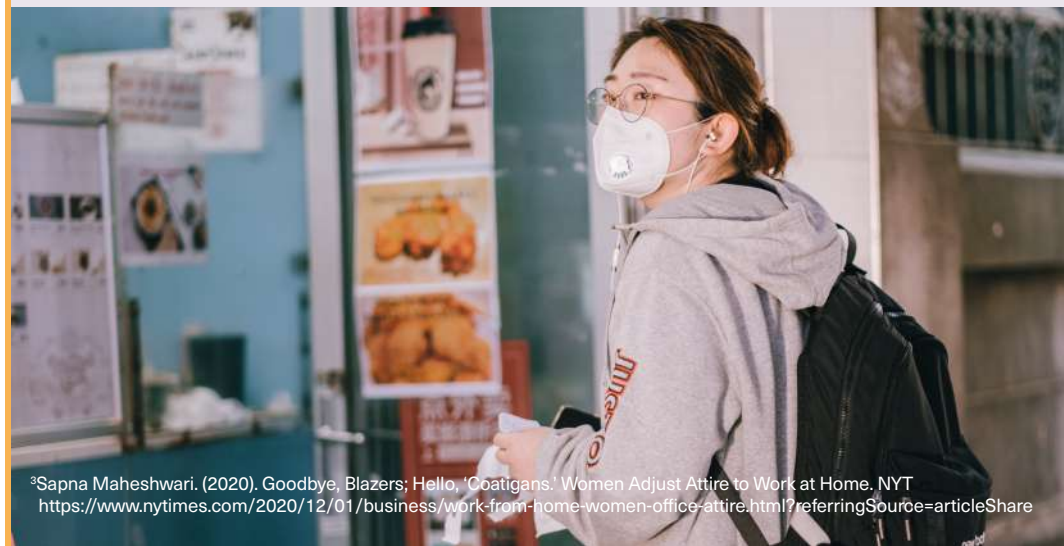
What's the new look for 2021? **56% of respondents want to put at least “somewhat” more effort into their appearance this upcoming year.**

However, 46% of Millennials plan on wearing casual comfy clothes as much as possible compared to 36% of Gen Z.

“After 100 days of being in sweatpants, I needed to feel like I was getting out of bed,” she said, adding that customers have gravitated to pants that look tailored but feel as comfortable as sweatpants.”

–Sarah LaFleur, Founder of M.M.LaFleur ³

What it means for brands: Though consumers are looking forward to paying more attention to their appearance in 2021, don't expect a full 180 degree turn into glamour. Many consumers have grown accustomed to a more relaxed, comfortable routine and aren't eager to give it up. Focus on balancing the competing desires of looking good with maintaining comfort.



³Sapna Maheshwari. (2020). Goodbye, Blazers; Hello, 'Coatigans.' Women Adjust Attire to Work at Home. NYT <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/01/business/work-from-home-women-office-attire.html?referringSource=articleShare>

Mindful Mentality.

Consumers' second top hope for 2021 is improving their mental health (36%).

Escapism techniques for next year will continue to be streaming for half of the respondents spending more time with loved ones.

34% say gaming will be their saving grace in 2021.



46% hope to spend more time outdoors, which makes sense as almost half of people say they will spend MORE time in their backyards/patio as opposed to the rest of their home.

Millennials and Gen Z overlap on the forms of escapism they will use in 2021, except for reading. 38% of Millennials will use reading as an escapism technique whereas only 26% of Gen Z claim the same.

“Books have become my primary source of non-work stimulation as both a respite from and replacement for doomscrolling. And, uh, without sounding totally lame, haven't they also sort of become a (temporary!) replacement for friends and travel as well?”

—Carey Polis, Content and Growth at Girls Night In ⁴

What it means for brands: The strain of the pandemic has affected consumers so profoundly that even after almost a year of social isolation, they are much more likely to hope for mental health than cultural events, nights out or parties with their friends. In 2021, consumers are looking for peace, ease and tranquility. Brands should be in service to consumer wellness in the new year—delivering friction-free experiences, eliminating hassle and stress, facilitating calm, anxiety-free moments.

Socially Stimulated.



Besides spending time with their family (46%), the top social goal for respondents is making new friends (42%).

Gen Z are the most likely generation to want to make new friends in the new year: 57% of Gen Z want new friends, compared to 40% of millennials and 30% of Gen Xers.

The top social concern for consumers in 2021 in the prospect of not meeting new people (40%).



Consumers are hoping to expand their social circle through joining new hobby-based groups (40%), career-related groups (33%), sports teams (33%) and local neighborhoods (31%).

Gen Z plans on using social media to connect with others (53%), fun (46%), and waste time/as a distraction (50%). Millennials plan on doing the same, but only 40% think they will use social media to waste time/as a distraction.



Yet 37% of people are looking for more alone time and space from others.

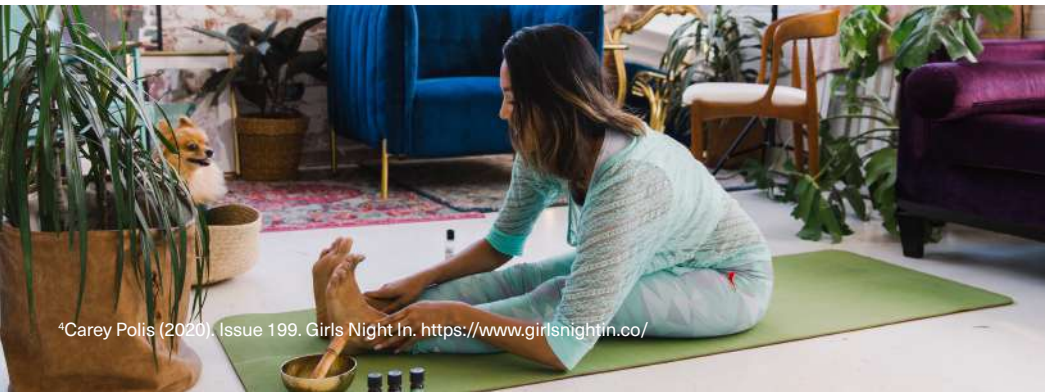
“First there was the Zoom boom, followed quickly by Zoom fatigue. Then everyone became a gamer, inviting visitors to their virtual islands and sending friends digital gifts. There were raves, meetings, meditations and movie nights, all of which took place on the internet.”

—Taylor Lorenz, New York Times ⁵

What it means for brands: Given effective vaccine distribution, 2021 will be the year of social expansion. While consumers have done a pretty good job of keeping up with close friends and family over the past year, what they are missing is what sociologist Mark Granovetter calls “weak ties,” or social connections with a large network of acquaintances and contacts. Consumers feel that their social lives have contracted in the past year to small circles of loved ones and want to broaden their horizons again. Brands have the opportunity to tap into the desire to grow community and meet new people, for those that want it.

⁴Carey Polis (2020). Issue 199. Girls Night In. <https://www.girlsnightin.co/>

⁵Taylor Lorenz, (2020). Oh, So We're Doing Random Video Chat Again? NYT. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/24/style/omegle-random-video-chat.html>





New Leaders.

Brands are more likely to create a positive impact next year, ranking higher than local and federal governments.

29% think brands will have a positive impact.

28% think local governments will have a positive impact.

26% think the federal government will have a positive impact.



When asked who or what can be a positive influence in the coming year, the majority say individual people, community and brands, above local and federal governments.

Heroes are made in tough times. 66% say individual people can make the most impact in 2021, followed by communities (52%).



“Governor Andrew M. Cuomo of New York will receive this year’s International Emmy® Founders Award, in recognition of his leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic and his masterful use of television to inform and calm people around the world.”

–International Academy ⁷

What it means for brands: After a year of political turmoil and mixed public messaging, consumers have had to rely on their personal instincts, favorite brands and community feedback to navigate through the rapidly changing world. 2021 is a great time to center community leaders and every day heroes who consumers are more likely to trust. To top that off people appreciate the role brands have played in helping, but also expect them to be more involved and make meaningful acts that align with their purpose.



Room for Improvement.



BASED on their experiences this year, **people think the top two industries that need to be improved in 2021 are government (48%) and healthcare (46%).**

The “Fauci Effect” is trickling down to those that seek to improve healthcare from within, the number of applicants is up 18% this year over last year, according to the Association of American Medical College. ⁶

What it means for brands: When it comes to changing the world in 2021, consumers are conflicted. Given their 2020 experiences, they know that the government and the healthcare industry need to be reformed, but they are also extremely tired of thinking about politics and disease. They want to make the world a better place, but they also want to move on and resume their everyday lives. Brands have an opportunity to step in where other sectors have failed, but should be careful not to dwell in a past that consumers are very eager to leave behind.


⁶ Jon Marcus, (2020). 'Fauci Effect' Drives Record Number Of Medical School Applications. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2020/12/07/942170588/fauci-effect-drives-record-number-of-medical-school-applications>

⁷ Colin Dwyer, (2020). Andrew Cuomo To Receive International Emmy For 'Masterful' COVID-19 Briefings. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/11/21/937445923/andrew-cuomo-to-receive-international-emmy-for-masterful-covid-19-briefings>

The Human Experience.

20% of people are most excited about events.

35% of people hope to attend more things like events.

61% of people hope to take a vacation next year. 

Across the board, Gen Z wants new relationships whether it's with a partner (40%) or a new friend (57%). Whereas 26% of Millennials are interested in making new friends (40%).



50% of Gen Z are concerned that they won't be able to meet new people in 2021 whereas Millennials are less concerned (37%).

Yet, Only 33% expect to spend less time on social media.

“ I doubt that someone is going to say in 10 years, 'oh my god I had the best experience of my life dancing in my living room to a stream.' or 'I met the love of my life in a chat room next to a stream. ”

–Honey Dijon, DJ and Club Legend ⁸

What it means for brands: Consumers are looking forward to physical interactions and when the time comes to do it safely, expect a boom for IRL experiences. In the meantime, brands should continue to dream up opportunities that bring community, interactivity and connectivity to people safely. Digital experiences that can incorporate IRL elements like ComplexLand, are highly valued.

*2021, we're
ready for you.*

CREDENTIALS

A Report By Berlin Cameron & Perksy

Research & Report

Elsa Gonzalez (Senior Strategy Director at Berlin Cameron)

Tina Yip (Director of Marketing & Culture at Berlin Cameron)

Cristian Zamarripa (Strategist at Berlin Cameron)

Chloe Cheimets (VP of Research at Perksy)

Michelle Signer (Senior Manager of Customer Experience at Perksy)

Nadia Genevieve Masri (Founder & CEO of Perksy)

Jennifer DaSilva (President of Berlin Cameron)

Design & Copy

Arjun Roy (Copywriter at Berlin Cameron)

Olivia LeRoy (Art Director at Berlin Cameron)

Kristy Heilenday (Senior Art Director at Berlin Cameron)

Megan Adamson-Jacks (Senior Copywriter)

About Berlin Cameron

Berlin Cameron is a full service, boutique creative agency. For over twenty years, we've mastered the art of finding the sweet spot where brands and culture connect. And as part of the WPP network, we combine global resources with start-up speed. With three unique divisions within our company, we always have what your brand needs to make its mark.

Contact: yip@berlincameron.com

About Perksy

Perksy is a consumer insights platform that powers real-time research with real consumers (and a specialty with Millennials & Gen-Z) through an interactive and gamified mobile app that rewards users for answering questions. Using our enterprise platform, we enable top brands and agencies to create bespoke quant and qual research campaigns with media-rich content, target precise audiences, and analyze response data in real-time. With a typical turnaround time of 24 hours, Perksy brings hypertargeted, hyperlocal, and contextual insights from real audiences at unprecedented scale to help organizations make better, faster decisions with more confidence.

Perksy works with some of the world's leading brands and agency networks, like Pepsi, Target, Mars, Clorox, Smuckers, Nickelodeon, IPG, and WPP. Perksy is backed by leading venture firms like Bain Capital and Founder Collective.

Contact: chloe@getperksy.com