COVID-19 CONSUMER SENTIMENT SNAPSHOT #13

OCTOBER 19, 2020: PICKING A POTUS

By Lara Koslow, Jean Lee, and Greg McRoskey

IT'S A US PRESIDENTIAL campaign season like no other. The nominating conventions for both parties were held virtually. Photos of crowded political rallies, donors shaking hands, and candidates intimately mingling with voters in everyday settings have been, for the most part, noticeably absent. Nevertheless, Americans have had no shortage of headlines to peruse in the run-up to election day, from the passing of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and the announcement of her potential replacement on the US Supreme Court to President Trump's contracting COVID-19, the cancellation of his planned second debate with former Vice President Biden, and a protracted impasse over funding the coronavirus stimulus package.

A COVID Campaign

COVID-19 has become a focus of both candidates' campaigns. Coronavirus-related messages figure prominently in their advertisements and at their events, likely because a significant—and increasing—percentage of Americans say it will influence their presidential vote. (See Exhibit 1.) Assessed by party affiliation, larger percentages of Democrats (50%) and Independents (43%) than Republicans (23%) state that the COVID-19 outbreak will influence their vote.

The presidential campaigns have continued against the backdrop of an increasing number of new COVID-19 cases per day in recent weeks. The numbers remain lower than they were at their peak in July but have resurged somewhat since their most recent low point in late August. (See Exhibit 2.) More than seven months after the pandemic was declared a national emergency, however, Americans seem to have accepted that the current level of threat may represent a new normal, as consumer sentiment is no longer moving in tandem with daily new case counts. Instead, concerns about COVID-19 have continued to level off. (See Exhibit 3.)

Worry and Frustration

That said, consumers acknowledge that they are worried and frustrated—but the primary cause of these emotions differs by political party. (See Exhibit 4.) Republicans tend to attribute their worry and frustration to the news and media, whereas Democrats and Independents are more inclined to assign responsibility for these feelings to the government. The third-most-common emotion cited by Republicans and Independents is sadness; but for Republicans the most frequently identified cause of this emotion is "people in [their] country," whereas for Independents the primary

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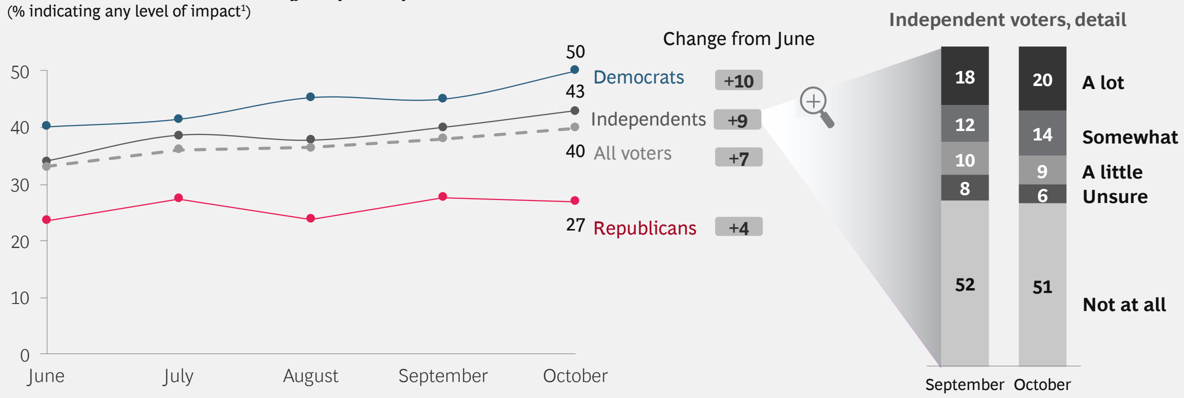
EXHIBIT 1 | As the 2020 US Presidential Election Draws Near, Consumers in All Parties Are Increasingly Likely to Say That COVID-19 Is Influencing Their Presidential Vote

Since June, the percentage of consumers who say that the coronavirus has affected their Presidential vote has risen by 7 percentage points

"How much has the coronavirus outbreak affected your vote for the 2020 Presidential election?"
(% indicating any level of impact[1])



Sources: BCG COVID-19 Consumer Sentiment Survey, June–October, 2020 (N = 3,000–3,400), unweighted, representative within ±3% of census or national demographics.
Note: Excludes the response "Not applicable." Party affiliation was self-identified within the survey.
[1] "Any level of impact" includes these answers: "A lot," "Somewhat," and "A little."

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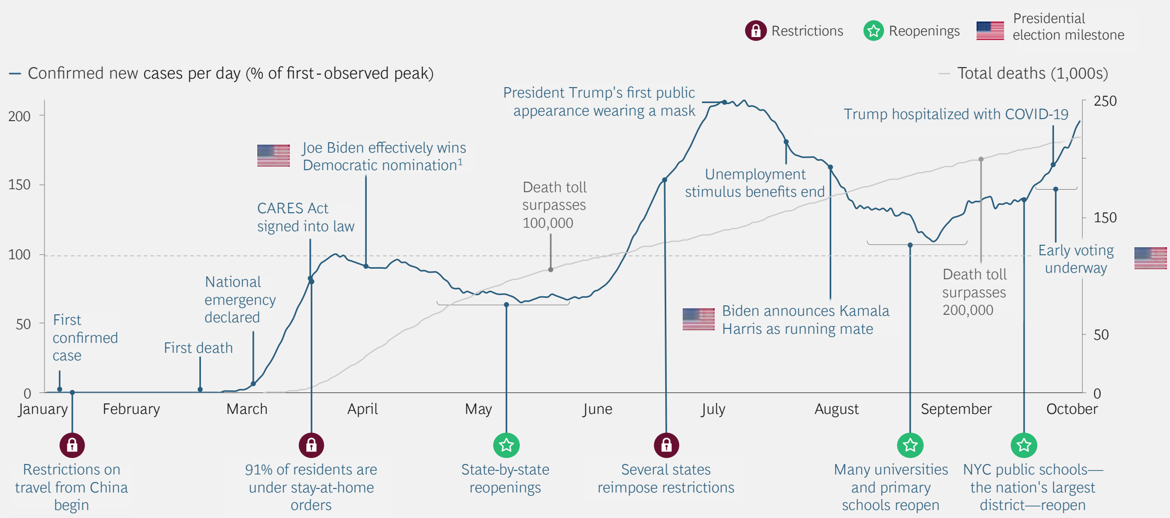
EXHIBIT 2 | Presidential Campaigning Continues Against the Backdrop of a Resurgence in COVID-19 Cases



Source: New York Times data via Tableau.
Note: Graph starts on January 23, 2020. The February 13 data point for China (15,141) was removed as an outlier. Graph reports seven-day rolling averages, using the midpoint date, normalized to the first-observed peak in new daily cases nationwide, which occurred on April 7 in the US (approximately 31,700 cases). Brazil has second-highest death toll, at 151,000+.
[1]Assumed nominee after the withdrawal of Bernie Sanders from the race.

cause is "humanity." Democrats, in contrast, cite fear as their third-most-common emotion—and again say that its primary source is the government.

That fear may reflect significant differences in consumer sentiment between Democrats and Republicans. For example, more Democrats (72%) than Republicans (36%) believe that the worst impacts of the coronavirus still lie ahead, and more than twice as many Democrats as Republicans think there won't be a vaccine within the next six months. (See Exhibit 5.)

Although fear of the virus itself appears to be relatively consistent across age groups for Republicans, it increases with age fairly

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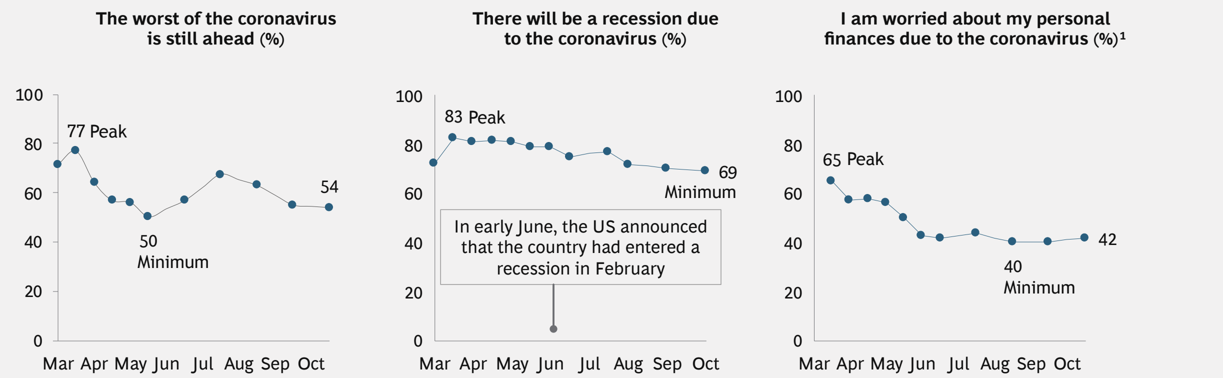
Exhibit 3 | However, Consumer Sentiment Related to the Coronavirus Continues to Level Off and No Longer Reflects Changes in New Case Counts



Source: BCG COVID-19 Consumer Sentiment Survey, March–October, 2020 (N = 1,800–3,500), unweighted, representative within ±3% of census or national demographics.
Note: Question text: "How much do you agree with each of the following statements about the coronavirus?"
[1] Data available beginning March 14.

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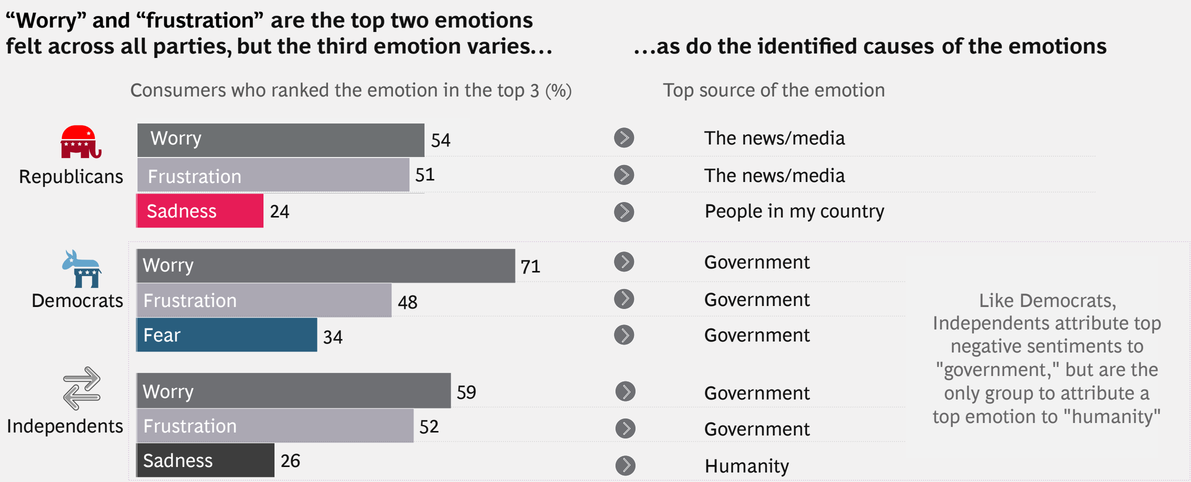
Exhibit 4 | Consumers Are Worried and Frustrated, with Republicans Attributing Those Emotions to Media, and Democrats and Independents to Government



Source: BCG COVID-19 Consumer Sentiment Survey, October 9–12, 2020 (N = 3,200), unweighted, representative within ±3% of census demographics.
Note: Question text: "What emotions come to mind when you think about the coronavirus?" and "Who causes you to feel [emotion] when you think about the coronavirus?" Party affiliation was self-identified within the survey.

significantly for both Independents and Democrats (See Exhibit 6.)

Venturing Out

Despite the recent increases in the daily new case count, our most recent consumer sentiment survey indicates that consumers' concerns about catching the virus as a result of engaging in particular activities are continuing to decline gradually. As of mid-October, the prevalence of worry had dropped to levels we had not seen since May. (See Exhibit 7.)

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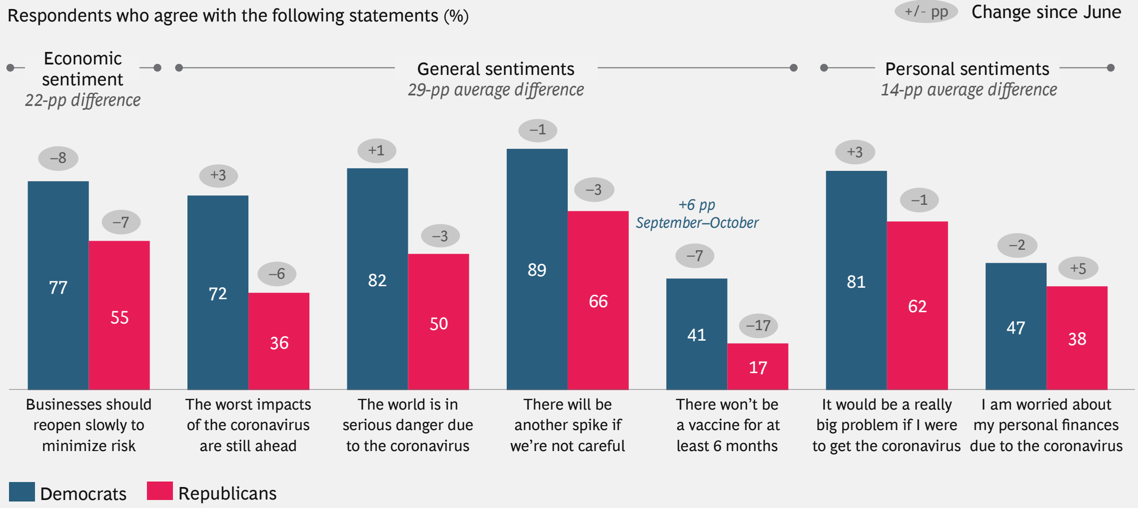
EXHIBIT 5 | Sentiments Vary by Political Party



Sources: BCG COVID-19 Consumer Sentiment Survey, June–October, 2020 (N = 3,000–3,400), unweighted, representative within ±3% of census demographics.
Note: Question text: "How much do you agree with each of the following statements about the coronavirus?" Party affiliation was self-identified within the survey. pp = percentage points.

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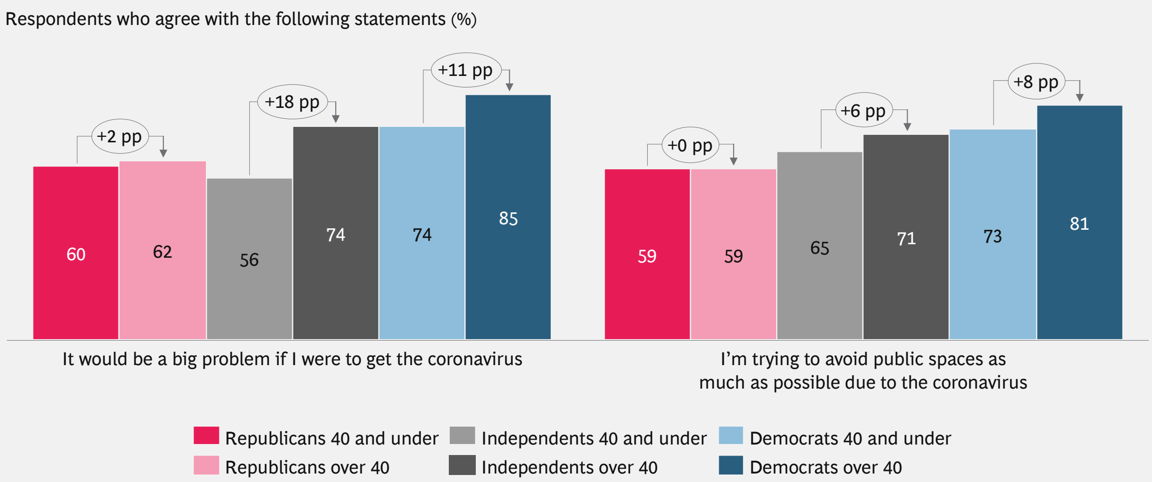
EXHIBIT 6 | Among Republicans, Fear of the Virus Is Largely Consistent Across Age Groups; Among Independents and Democrats, Concerns Increase with Age



Source: BCG COVID-19 Consumer Sentiment Survey, October 9–12, 2020 (N = 3,200), unweighted, representative within ±3% of census demographics.
Note: Question text: "How much do you agree with each of the following statements about the coronavirus?" Party affiliation was self-identified within the survey. pp = percentage points.

Both Democrats and Republicans say they continue to participate in fewer out-of-home activities and more at-home activities in response to COVID-19. (See Exhibit 8.) That said, more Republicans than Democrats are returning to out-of-home activities, perhaps due to their lower levels of fear over the coronavirus and their greater confidence that its worst impacts are behind us.

Stay-at-Home Spending

With most Americans staying at home more of the time, overall spending has de-

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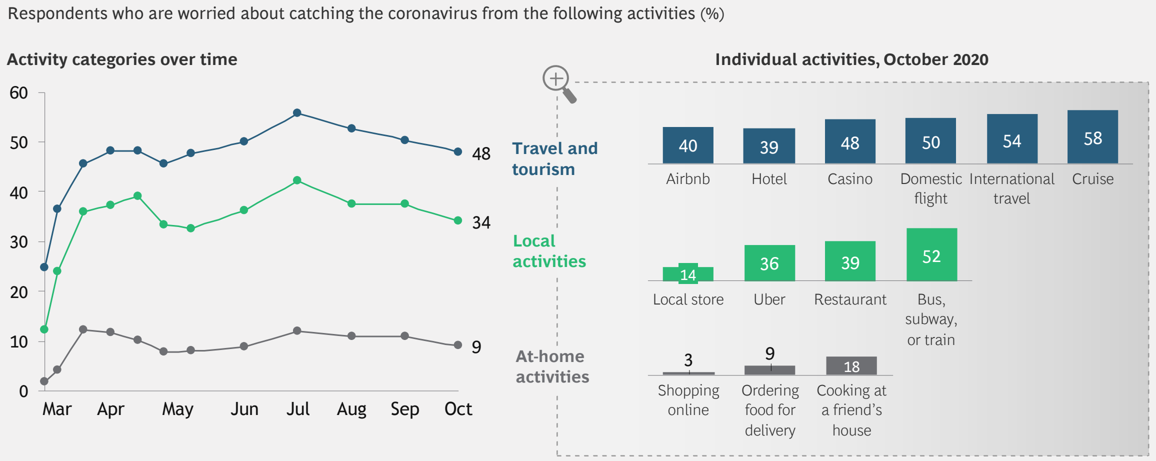
Exhibit 7 | Despite a Recent Rise in Case Counts, Concerns About Catching the Virus from Various Activities Continue to Decline Gradually



Sources: BCG COVID-19 Consumer Sentiment Survey, March–October, 2020 (N = 2,400–3,500), unweighted, representative within ±3% of census demographics.
Note: Question text: "You mentioned you would be concerned about [activity]. What part of the experience concerns you? Select all that apply."

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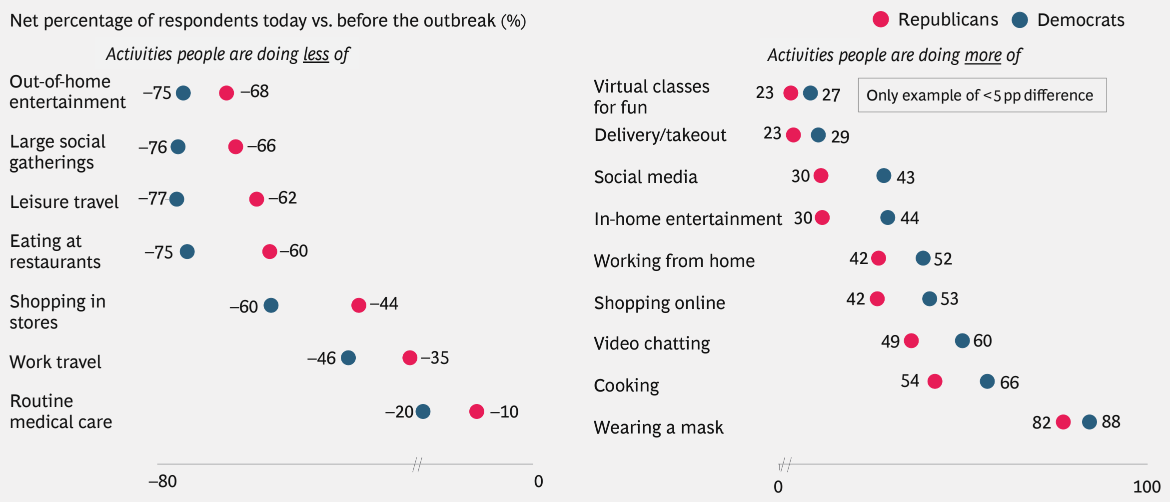
Exhibit 8 | Republicans Are More Likely to Have Returned to Out-of-Home Activities, While Democrats Are More Likely to Be Continuing to Do Things at Home



Source: BCG COVID-19 Consumer Sentiment Survey, October 9–12, 2020 (N = 3,200), unweighted, representative within ±3% of census demographics.
Note: Question text: "Which of the following best describes how your behavior across the following activities has changed due to the coronavirus?" Party affiliation was self-identified within the survey. pp = percentage points.

clined, and a significant amount of in-store spending has shifted online. (See Exhibit 9.)

Predictably, given that Democrats say they are more inclined to stay at home, we see a greater shift from in-store to online spending with Democrats than with Republicans and Independents.

The common factors that influence brand choice—such as price, convenience/location, and selection— remain, despite the

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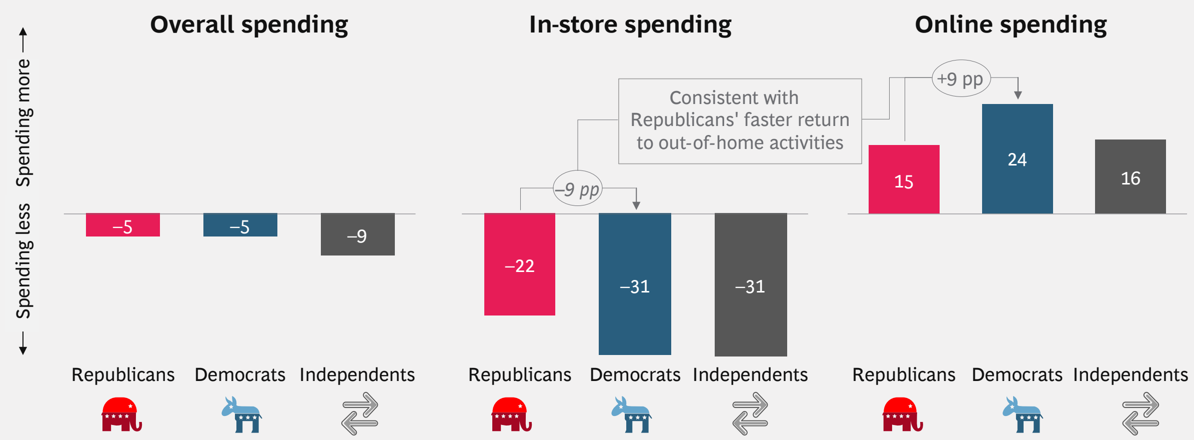
EXHIBIT 9 | Democrats and Republicans Have Cut Their Overall Spending Equally, but Democrats Show the Greatest Shift Toward Online Shopping

Net percentage of respondents spending more in the next month relative to pre-outbreak spending (%)



Source: BCG COVID-19 Consumer Sentiment Survey, October 9–12, 2020 (N = 3,200), unweighted, representative within ±3% of census demographics.
Note: Question text: "In the next month, what do you expect your spend to be, relative to before the coronavirus outbreak?" Party affiliation was self-identified within the survey. pp = percentage points.

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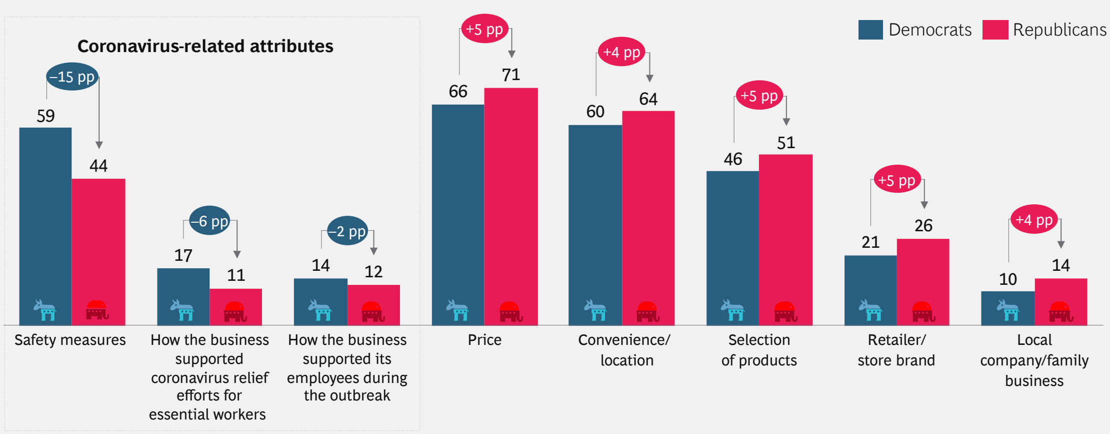
EXHIBIT 10 | Augmenting Traditional Influencers, Several COVID-19-Related Factors Now Impact Brand Choice—and May Differ by Party

Respondents rating each attribute as a top 3 decision driver for selecting brand/product (%)
Data shown is for retail brands but is representative of the trend seen in CPG and travel brand data



Sources: BCG COVID-19 Consumer Sentiment Survey, October 9–12, 2020 (N = 3,200), unweighted, representative within ±3% of census demographics.
Note: Question text: "Next time you shop, what will be the top things that you look for when deciding where to shop? Please rank top 3 criteria." Party affiliation was self-identified within the survey. pp = percentage points.

shift toward spending online. (See Exhibit 10.) However, we also see new COVID-19-related factors impacting brand choice. For instance, safety has become an important factor, with Democrats prioritizing safety in brand choice more often than Republicans. When selecting brands, some Americans are also looking at how businesses supported coronavirus relief efforts for essential workers and employees during the outbreak.

Looking Ahead

As presidential election day draws ever closer, COVID-19 is likely to remain a focus for both candidates—and a significant part of every American's daily life in the weeks ahead.

Look for our next set of Snapshot Key Charts in November, as well as a look back at 2020 in January.

About the Snapshot Series and Research

Our Snapshot series began in March and includes 12 core weekly articles, 2 special feature articles, as well as key charts delivered on a monthly basis starting in June. The series tracks sentiment and spending changes due to COVID-19.

BCG's COVID-19 Consumer Sentiment Snapshot series is based on data drawn from an online survey of consumers that has been conducted regularly since early March 2020 across multiple countries worldwide. Each Snapshot highlights a selection of insights from a comprehensive ongoing study that BCG provides to clients. The survey is produced by the authors, who are members of BCG's Center for Customer Insight (CCI), in partnership with coding and sampling provider Dynata, the world's largest first-party data and insights platform. The goal of the research is to provide our clients and businesses around the world with periodic barometer readings of COVID-19-related consumer sentiment and actual and anticipated consumer behavior and spending to inform critical crisis triage activities, as well as rebound planning and decision making. A team composed of BCG consultants and experts from CCI completes the survey analytics.

Legal Context

The situation surrounding COVID-19 is dynamic and rapidly evolving, on a daily basis. This COVID-19 research is not intended to: (i) constitute medical or safety advice, nor be a substitute for the same; nor (ii) be seen as a formal endorsement or recommendation of a particular response. As such you are advised to make your own assessment as to the appropriate course of action to take.

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About BCG's Center for Customer Insight (CCI)

The Boston Consulting Group's Center for Customer Insight (CCI) applies a unique, integrated approach that combines quantitative and qualitative consumer research with a deep understanding of business strategy and competitive dynamics. The center works closely with BCG's various practices to translate its insights into actionable strategies that lead to tangible economic impact for our clients. In the course of its work, the center has amassed a rich set of proprietary data on consumers from around the world, in both emerging and developed markets. The CCI is sponsored by BCG's Marketing, Sales & Pricing and Global Advantage practices. For more information, please visit Center for Customer Insight (https://www.bcg.com/capabilities/marketing-sales/center-customer-insight).

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To succeed, organizations must blend digital and human capabilities. Our diverse, global teams bring deep industry and functional expertise and a range of perspectives to spark change. BCG delivers solutions through leading-edge management consulting along with technology and design, corporate and digital ventures—and business purpose. We work in a uniquely collaborative model across the firm and throughout all levels of the client organization, generating results that allow our clients to thrive.

About Dynata

Dynata is the world's largest first-party data and insights platform. With a reach that encompasses 62 million consumers and business professionals globally, and an extensive library of individual profile attributes collected through surveys, Dynata is the cornerstone for precise, trustworthy quality data. The company has built innovative data services and solutions around its robust first-party data offering to bring the voice of the customer to the entire marketing continuum—from strategy, innovation, and branding to advertising, measurement, and optimization. Dynata serves nearly 6,000 market research, media and advertising agencies, publishers, consulting and investment firms, and corporate customers in North America, South America, Europe, and Asia-Pacific. Learn more at www.dynata.com.