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ABC NEWS/MONEY CONSUMER INDEX - 12/8/96
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CONFIDENCE IS HIGH;
WILL SPENDING FOLLOW?

The success of "Tickle Me Elmo" aside, booming consumer confidence has not persuaded many more Americans than usual to boost their holiday spending, an ABC News/Money magazine poll has found.

While holiday spending plans don't always translate into actual spending, the national public opinion survey points to a good season for retailers this year, but perhaps not a spectacular one.

Fourteen percent of Americans plan to spend more money on gifts than last year - up slightly from 11 percent in October, meaning some shoppers may be warming to the idea of spending more. But 35 percent plan to spend less.

Despite strong confidence in the economy, spending plans are still not as robust as they were in the second half of the 1980s, when anywhere from 17 to 25 percent a year said they'd increase their spending on holiday gifts.

	Today	Oct.	1990-96	1985-89
Plan to spend more on holiday gifts	14%	11	13	21

Retailers rely on the holiday season for up to half their annual sales, and results for November have fueled hopes for a solid showing this year. (The hottest toys are reported to include the "Tickle Me Elmo" doll, a 3-D Nintendo game and that perennial favorite, Holiday Barbie.)

CONFIDENCE - Retailers are hoping to benefit from growing consumer confidence, which rose last week to its best level since September 1988 in the weekly ABC/Money poll.

However, confidence has grown mainly on the strength of better ratings of the economy and personal finances. A third gauge that's more specific to shopping - whether this is a good or bad time to spend money - is lagging.

This week confidence is down slightly, though still strong. The ABC/Money Consumer Comfort Index, based on these three gauges, stands at -3 on its scale of +100 to -100, down from -1 last week. It's averaged -11 for the year, around its customary pre-recession level.

	ABC/Money Index
Today	-1
1996 average	-11
1995	-15
1994	-19
1990-93	-39
1987-89	-10

1986	-3
Full average	-20

INDICES - Today 49 percent of Americans say the national economy is in "excellent" or "good" shape, down from a record 52 percent last week. Fifty-eight percent rate their own finances positively, down from 59 percent. In the lagging measure, just 39 percent call this a good time to buy things.

Ratings of the economy have been powering consumer confidence; they are eight points better than their pre-recession average from 1986-90. Ratings of personal finances are one point better than their 1986-90 average, and ratings of the buying climate are the same. All are far better than their average from 1990-93, when recession crippled public faith in the economy.

Positive ratings for...	Today	1990-93	1986-90
National economy	49	15	41
Buying climate	39	26	39
Personal finances	58	49	57

ELECTION - Confidence continues to carry some effects of the November election. Normally it's stronger among Republicans, who tend to be better off financially; but since the election it's been stronger among Democrats.

	ABC/Money Index	
	Today	12-month avg.
Democrats	+9	-13
Republicans	+2	+1

GROUPS - Confidence lags in economically vulnerable groups, including women, blacks, the poor and the less-educated. The index is +7 among men but -11 among women; +2 among whites but -24 among blacks; +30 in higher-income households but -43 in the lowest; and +11 among people who have attended college but -29 among high school dropouts.

Here's a closer look at the three components of the ABC/Money index:

NATIONAL ECONOMY- Fifty-one percent rate the economy negatively, up three points this week. It's averaged 61 percent this year, compared to 85 percent from 1990-93 and 59 percent from 1986-1990. The best, 52 percent positive, was set Dec. 1, 1996. The worst, 93 percent, was in late 1991 and early 1992. The average for the life of the index is 69 percent negative.

PERSONAL FINANCES - Fifty-eight percent rate their finances positively, down one point this week. It's averaged 57 percent this year, compared to 49 percent in the 1990-93 slump and 57 percent before the recession. The worst was 58 percent negative March 14, 1993; the best, 62 percent positive Dec. 20, 1987. The full average is 54 percent positive.

BUYING CLIMATE - Sixty-one percent call this a bad time to buy things, down one point from last week. It's averaged 63 percent this year, compared to 74 percent during the 1990-93 slump and 61 percent before the recession. The worst is 80 percent negative Nov. 2 and Oct. 28, 1990; the best, 52 percent positive May 11, 1986. The full average is 66 percent negative.

18 - 34	-5	-1	-9	-6	-6	-1	-23	-10
35 - 44	0	0	-21	-20	-19	0	-23	-14
45 - 54	4	1	-11	-6	-12	12	-36	-12
55 - 64	4	5	12	-30	-2	12	-40	-12
65 +	-8	-4	-6	-3	-34	9	-34	-10
Income:								
Under \$15K	-43	-32	-39	-50	-49	-32	-61	-49
\$15K To \$24.9K	-22	-21	-34	-32	-46	-12	-48	-31
\$25K To \$39.9K	1	1	-8	-9	-12	1	-26	-12
\$40K To \$49.9K	5	15	14	11	3	26	-31	4
Over \$50K	30	27	12	21	31	35	12	23
Region:								
Northeast	-10	-8	-11	-15	-20	-7	-34	-18
Midwest	0	7	7	4	-9	10	-15	-1
South	1	1	-14	-14	-9	1	-24	-13
West	-4	-5	-17	-21	-19	6	-23	-13
Race:								
White	2	4	-9	-7	-8	4	-15	-7
Black	-24	-23	-13	-44	-48	-10	-56	-37
Politics:								
Republican	2	1	-12	-4	2	11	-12	1
Democrat	9	10	0	-17	-17	10	-28	-13
Independent	-13	-9	-12	-11	-18	-8	-26	-16
Education:								
< High School	-29	-20	-42	-44	-41	-20	-49	-39
High Sch. Grad.	-7	-4	-8	-20	-22	-4	-30	-18
College +	11	9	2	6	3	11	-6	4
Home:								
Own	3	5	-3	-4	-5	5	-15	-4
Rent	-15	-13	-24	-32	-37	-13	-37	-28
Marital Status:								
Single	-9	-2	-8	-7	-2	0	-26	-13
Married	4	3	-7	-8	-9	4	-18	-6
Sep/Wid/Div	-18	-12	-18	-28	-43	-9	-43	-29
Employ. Status:								
Full-Time	11	10	-5	-5	-1	11	-14	-3
Part-Time	-17	-13	-24	-19	-22	-8	-35	-19
Not Employed	-15	-11	-10	-19	-28	-5	-33	-21