

Shopping Fatigue Crowds in on Confidence

Just in time for the Christmas break, Americans look to be getting shopped out. Public assessments of the buying climate fell this week for the third week straight, pushing consumer confidence farther below the record high it tied late last month.

Not to worry: Confidence remains remarkably strong, and 1998 is sure to be its best year by far since the weekly ABC News/Money magazine consumer survey began in late 1985.

This week 71 percent of Americans rate the economy positively, nearly double the 13-year average. Sixty-six percent say their personal finances are good, 11 points more than usual. And 49 percent call it a good time to buy things, 13 points more than usual, albeit down by seven points from the record it set Nov. 29.

		Positive Ratings		
	Today	Record high	Record low	13-yr. avg.
National Economy	71%	76	7	36
Personal Finances	66	70	42	55
Buying Climate	49	56	20	36

INDEX - The ABC/Money Consumer Comfort Index, based on these gauges, slipped by one point this week to +24 on its scale of -100 to +100. The index has lost seven points since its record-tying +31 three weeks ago. Still, it's averaged a remarkable +24 this year, compared to a previous best year of +5 and a lifetime average of -15.

	ABC/Money Index	
Today	+24	
Three weeks ago	+31	Tied record set 8/30
1998 average (to date)	+24	
1997 average	+5	Best full year
1992 average	-44	Worst full year
Feb. 9, 1992	-50	Record low
Average since 12/85	-15	

Call the ABC News Polling Unit, ext. 2621, for a chart tracking the ABC/Money index over time.

GROUPS - Confidence remains much higher in economically advantaged groups. The index is +31 among men compared to +16 among women;

+62 in the highest-income households compared to -30 in the lowest; +26 among whites but +9 among blacks; and +44 among people who've been to college, but -18 among high school dropouts.

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

NATIONAL ECONOMY- The poll asks: Would you describe the state of the nation's economy these days as excellent, good, not so good or poor? Seventy-one percent say excellent or good, up one point from last week. The best was 76 percent Feb. 22; the worst, seven percent in late 1991 and early 1992.

	Pos. NET	Excel.	Good	Neg. NET	Not good	Poor
This week	71%	9	62	29	23	6
Avg. since 12/85	36	2	33	64	42	22

PERSONAL FINANCES - The poll asks: Would you describe the state of your own personal finances these days as excellent, good, not so good or poor? Sixty-six percent say excellent or good, up one point from last week. The record was 70 percent Aug. 30; the worst, 42 percent March 14, 1993.

	Pos. NET	Excel.	Good	Neg. NET	Not good	Poor
This week	66%	7	59	34	26	8
Avg. since 12/85	55	4	51	45	32	13

BUYING CLIMATE - The poll asks: Considering the cost of things today and your own personal finances, would you say now is an excellent time, a good time, a not so good time or a poor time to buy the things you want and need? Forty-nine percent say excellent or good, down three points from last week. The record was 56 percent Nov. 29; the worst rating, 20 percent, was set in fall 1990.

	Pos. NET	Excel.	Good	Neg. net	Not good	Poor
This week	49%	3	46	51	36	15
Avg. since 12/85	36	2	34	64	42	22

METHODOLOGY - The ABC News/Money magazine Consumer Comfort Index represents a rolling average based on telephone interviews with about 1,000 adults nationwide each month. This week's results are based on 1,027 interviews in the month ending Dec. 20 and have an error margin of plus or minus three percentage points. Field work by ICR Survey Research of Media, Pa.

The ABC/Money index is derived as follows: The negative response to each index question is subtracted from the positive response to that question. The three resulting numbers are then added and divided by three.

The index can range from +100 (everyone positive on all three measures) to -100 (all negative on all three measures). The survey began in December 1985.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNews.com on the Internet, and are available to news and research organizations via e-mail. To join the e-mail list send a request to Ben.Fitzpatrick@ABC.com

12/20/98	This Week	Last Week	4 Wks Ago	3 Mo. Ago	1 Yr. Ago	12 Mo High	12 Mo Low	12 Mo Avg

Group	-----							
GENERAL POPULATION:								
Overall Index	24	25	28	25	12	31	9	23
State of Economy	42	40	42	42	24	52	20	39
Personal Finances	32	30	34	34	22	40	16	30
Buying Climate	-2	4	8	0	-10	12	-10	1

OVERALL INDEX BY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS								
Sex:								
Men	31	34	40	30	28	42	18	33
Women	16	16	16	20	-4	21	-4	14
Age:								
18 - 34	20	22	23	19	11	29	2	18
35 - 44	24	28	30	27	11	37	9	25
45 - 54	32	29	29	37	14	38	12	25
55 - 64	30	21	23	21	18	47	12	28
65 +	17	25	36	25	6	36	-2	24
Income:								
Under \$15K	-30	-22	-16	-18	-27	-6	-42	-25
\$15K To \$24.9K	-10	3	6	8	-9	18	-27	0
\$25K To \$39.9K	23	17	21	5	9	25	5	17
\$40K To \$49.9K	35	28	35	46	24	60	19	40
Over \$50K	62	64	61	62	45	66	45	58
Region:								
Northeast	20	16	25	20	13	37	4	21
Midwest	35	39	36	36	19	41	16	30
South	24	21	16	21	4	29	3	20
West	13	23	39	23	14	40	2	22
Race:								
White	26	27	33	29	16	33	13	27
Black	9	5	-9	0	-19	15	-21	-3
Politics:								
Republican	34	34	38	42	24	46	17	35
Democrat	25	25	26	26	7	35	7	23
Independent	18	20	28	14	13	30	9	18
Education:								
< High School	-18	-22	-1	-13	-26	14	-29	-10
High Sch. Grad.	14	14	17	16	11	27	1	15
College +	44	48	46	45	24	49	24	40
Home:								
Own	31	31	35	32	18	39	17	31
Rent	3	7	6	7	-3	15	-11	4
Marital Status:								
Single	18	22	21	15	8	34	-2	20
Married	30	32	35	34	19	37	15	29
Sep/Wid/Div	1	-2	-1	4	-13	18	-14	3
Employ. Status:								
Full-Time	35	38	39	34	24	44	20	31
Part-Time	18	15	7	23	-5	31	-5	15
Not Employed	6	7	18	10	-2	25	-6	13