

## Staying ahead of the curve has never been more challenging—or more important.

COVID-19. Racial injustice. Political upheaval and spiraling unemployment. To say 2020 has brought unimaginable changes to consumers' lives is, perhaps, the understatement of our time. And yet, even as these crises continue to unfold, it is apparent that new behaviors and emotions are forming rapidly as people navigate, adapt, and heal.

**ML:Next is MullenLowe's new proprietary research that arms brands with the insights they need to plan for the weeks and months ahead.** The consumer study delves into the macro- and microshifts that occur every day by leveraging robust data analysis and modeling to understand how they will shape future actions.

Twice a month, ML:Next asks Americans (aged 18+, U.S. Census matched) critical questions about their well-being and overall life satisfaction. In addition, we ask behavioral questions regarding daily activities, brand interactions, shopping habits, media preferences, and more. Understanding how consumers are feeling, what they are doing, and why, keeps us ahead of what's next, even when everything goes sideways.

## Overall Quality of Life, Eight Dimensions of Wellness

### 1 Despite feeling "meh" about life, consumers are hopeful and optimistic for the future.

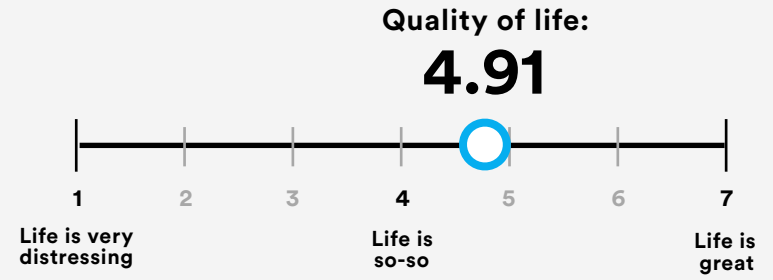
As events of 2020 arrived at a rapid pace, the need to understand and track Americans' quality of life became clear. To do this, ML:Next utilizes the Kemp Quality of Life Scale to keep a pulse on the changing consumer mindset. On a seven-point scale, quality of life averaged 4.91, a bit better than "so-so." Even in the wake of COVID-19 and the racial justice movement, only 5% reported life as "very distressing," with over 63% viewing life as better than "so-so."

Many Americans are feeling hopeful (38%) and optimistic (24%), a possible demonstration of the best form of self-preservation in tough times. Some, most notably women, reported feelings of uncertainty (24%) and anxiety (22%). Since the current environment remains unsettling, consumers are proceeding with caution despite being ready for and wanting to feel more joy.

To identify whether specific factors of life have an impact on the quality of life rating, we utilized a regression model. When analyzing the most significant drivers of overall satisfaction, social life is most important (28%), followed by life achievements (27%), family life (24%), and financial situation (22%). We'll continue to monitor current events to see how they impact these drivers moving forward.

#### QUALITY OF LIFE SCORE

Q: Taking all aspects of your life into account, please rate your overall quality of life on the following scale.



#### CURRENT FEELINGS

Q: From the list below, what are the top phrases that best describe how you are feeling right now? Select up to three.



### 2 Today's consumer gathers strength from within.

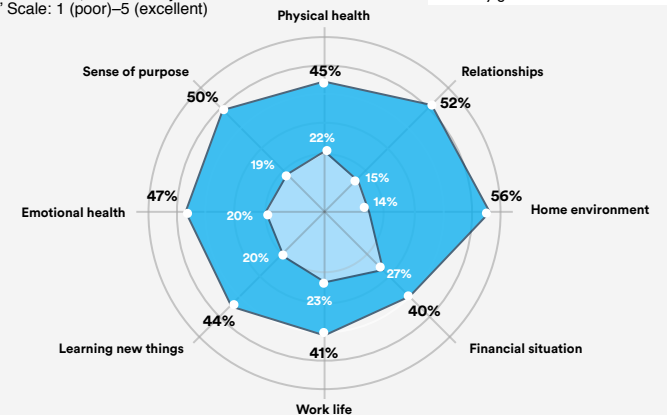
To further interrogate people's quality of life rating, we utilized the well-established Eight Dimensions of Wellness theory that evaluates the intricate aspects of well-being. Our interpretation of these dimensions was physical health, relationships, home environment, financial health, work life, learning new things, emotional health, and sense of purpose.

With the unpredictability caused by the pandemic and the shutdown, Americans have looked inward, with relationships and home environments prospering most (56% and 52%, respectively). Americans feel worst about areas that have been hardest hit and that they have less control over: financial situation (27%) and work life (23%).

While consumers have adjusted to their new home life, they're missing the intellectual engagement (20%) that comes with outside interactions. COVID-19 has cut much of that off as we find ourselves having to find new, old ways of improving intellectual stimulation such as the news (41%). Consumers are eager for opportunities to learn new things, something brands can use to their advantage.

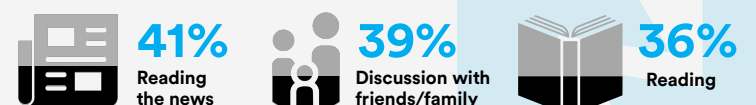
#### CURRENT EIGHT DIMENSIONS OF WELL-BEING

Q: "At this current time, how would you rate your...?" Scale: 1 (poor)–5 (excellent)



#### ACTIONS TAKEN TO LEARNING NEW THINGS

Q: "Over the past two weeks, how have you tried to improve your engagement with learning new things? Select all that apply."



## Spotlights: Brand Trust, Brand Acts in Times of Change

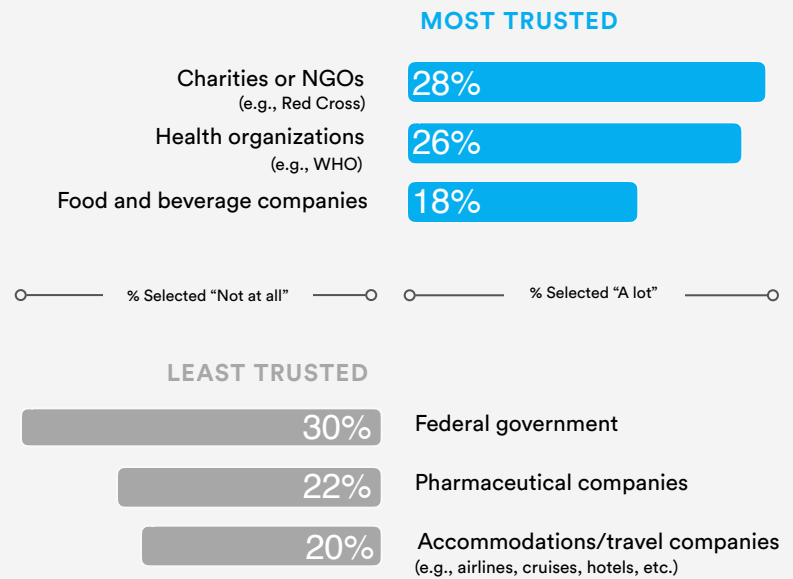
### Consumers are not easily fooled—developing trust demands intentionality.

The importance of brand trust cannot be overstated. Research has found that trust is often a major driver of brand favorability. During these times of unrest, consumers have sent the message loud and clear: trust is difficult to gain, and easy to lose. They are constantly evaluating what is and who is trustworthy. Americans do not feel that the federal government is looking out for the greater good. Nearly a third believe that the national level of government is unwilling to put Americans' interests above their own.

Low trust in some institutions presents an opportunity for brands. Consumers want to hear from them right now—only 28% think brands should stop advertising until society returns to “normal.” Brands should consider how they can improve consumer trust via actions, connections, leadership, and transparency. One framework they can leverage is the Eight Dimensions of Wellness to better understand which acts and interactions are likely to have a meaningful impact on the consumer, then focus on those efforts to earn their trust.

### WHO AMERICANS TRUST

Q: How much do you trust that the following entities will put the interests of the general public before their own?



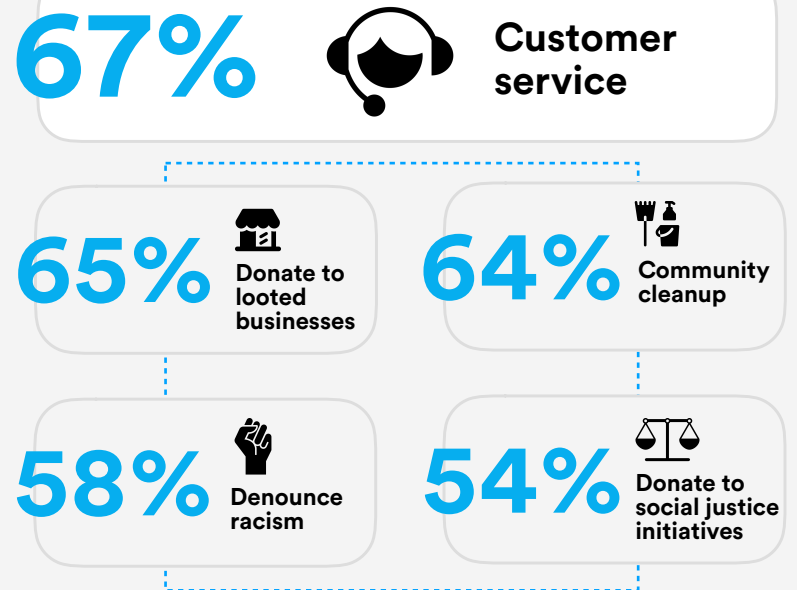
### During times of societal change, brand acts matter (but don't forget the basics).

To date, 2020 has been defined by transformational moments in the world and in consumers' minds. Brands will play a fundamental role in these times but will also be scrutinized as to whether their words are supported by real action. In the case of racial injustice, most consumers report increased favorability toward brands that take action, including donating to looted businesses (65%) and community cleanup (64%).

While these acts are critical, excellence in everyday brand experiences, such as positive and equal customer service, should not be considered table stakes. Brands need to strike a balance between acknowledging the impact of recent events on all Americans while uplifting consumers with lighter moments. One way is to remind them of the unique ways the brand has always treated their customers right.

### FAVORABILITY TOWARD BRAND ACTIONS

Q: Following the peaceful protests and demonstrations supporting the Black Lives Matter movement, how would your perception of a brand change based on the following actions?



### Coming up Next

## The impact of school closures on families, the American workforce, and implications for brands.

School closures will change the family in a big way. This dramatic shift in daily lives impacts not only how families function, putting the burden on parents to find ways to simultaneously work and educate their children, but may also have lasting effects on the progress women have made in the workplace.