

# HOPE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

People are making plans  
to celebrate, but they'll  
pivot fast if need be

An Ipsos Point of View

By Wendy Wallner and Lisa Yu



GAME CHANGERS







## KEY FINDINGS

- Most Americans are committed to making holidays special but will adapt their specific “get together” plans if needed.
- Holiday spending is expected to be strong this year, but most are not planning bigger celebrations. This year is about keeping it small but meaningful.
- We expect to see new traditions emerge, with a renewed focus on food, baking and more personalized gifts.

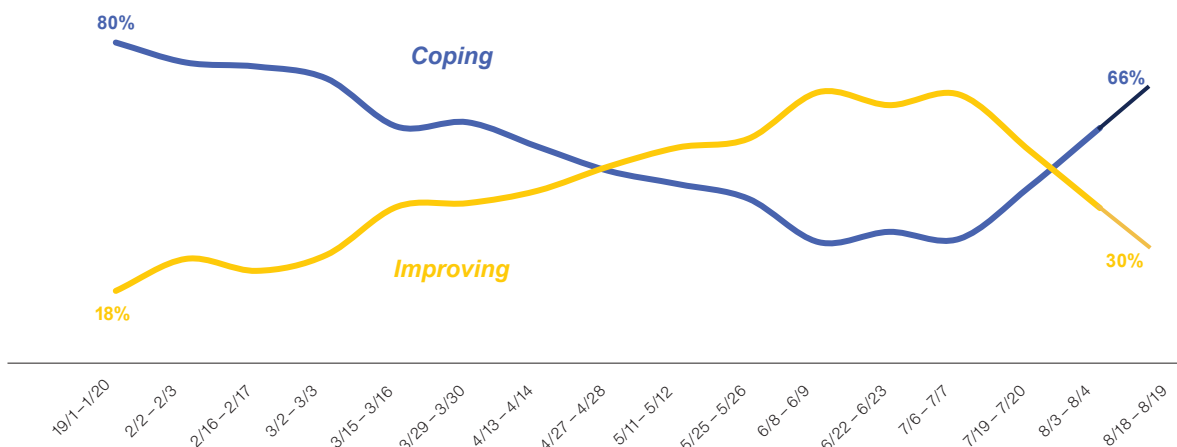
As winter holidays approach, businesses are wondering what is going to happen as the COVID Delta variant continues to hit hard—and how they should adapt. Retailers and other businesses need to set their plans now to strike the right tone and support the types of celebrations consumers want. Recent Ipsos research helps determine the right way forward.

## What is the Holiday Mindset?

Early this summer, Americans felt that the COVID situation was improving, but that feeling has reversed course. A majority are back to figuring out how to deal with life as the Delta variant surges.

### American consumers return to a coping mindset

The Ipsos Pandemic Adaptation Continuum overtime broken out by whether consumers' mental states are improving or coping



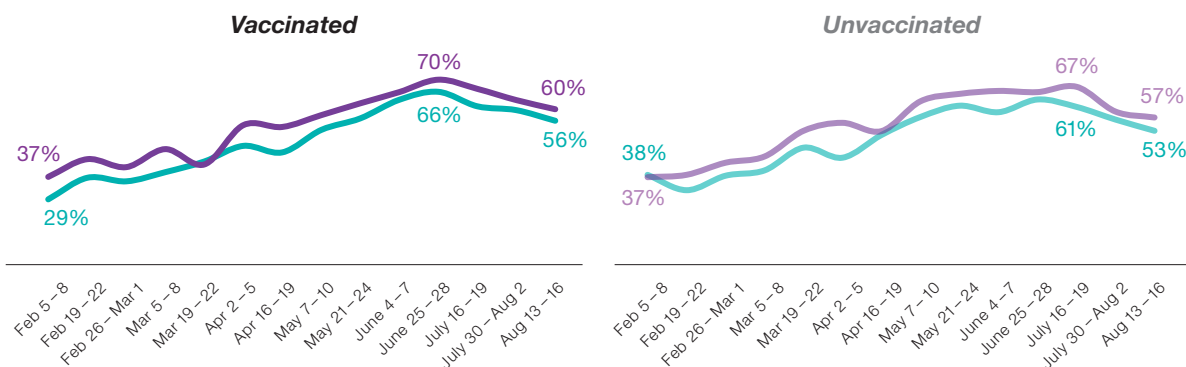
Ipsos data shows that people are spending less time outside of the home and are increasingly reluctant to dine out, visit friends, visit crowded places.

### Out of home behavior tapers as Delta surges

How out of home behavior between vaccinated and unvaccinated Americans changed between February 2021 and August 2021

Percentage of Americans who have \_\_\_\_\_ in the last week

■ Gone out to eat ■ Visited friends or relatives



Source: Axios-Ipsos Coronavirus Index; CDC vaccination rate among the population 18+



## Tis the Season for Cautious Optimism and Adaptation

While COVID concerns are again high, Americans remain hopeful about the upcoming holidays. It is the season of cautious optimism. There is a tug of war between wanting to do it big but also wanting to be safe. In a recent online community study, two-thirds of respondents said they expect to entertain the same amount for the holidays this year as last year, although some feel comfortable hosting larger gatherings because of vaccinations.

### Thinking about the 2021 holiday season, will you entertain more, the same, or less than last year?



Source: Ipsos U.S. Syndicated Online Community, September 2021, n=427



*I am hopeful that we'll be gathered with family this year after being separated last year. Most of us have been vaccinated so the risk is less. I am really looking forward to getting together with family and enjoying good foods with them."*

—Ipsos Online Community Member

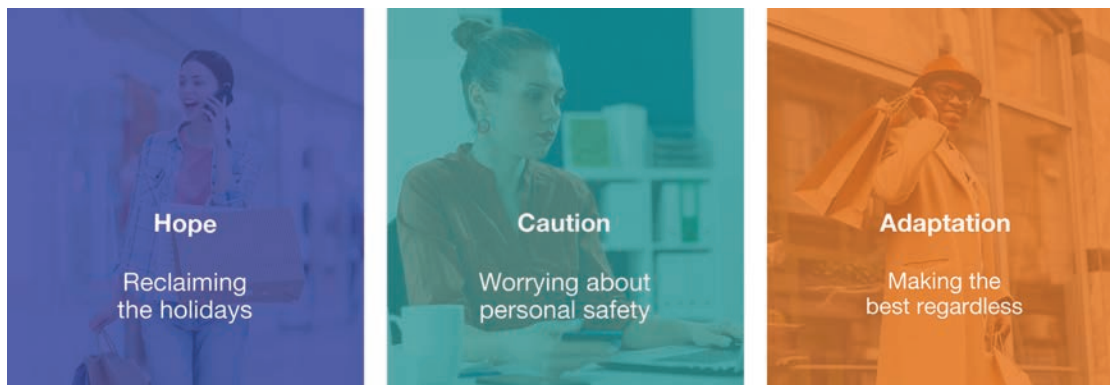
Source: Ipsos U.S. Syndicated Online Community, September 2021, n=785



As a result, most people are adopting a 2-pronged approach:

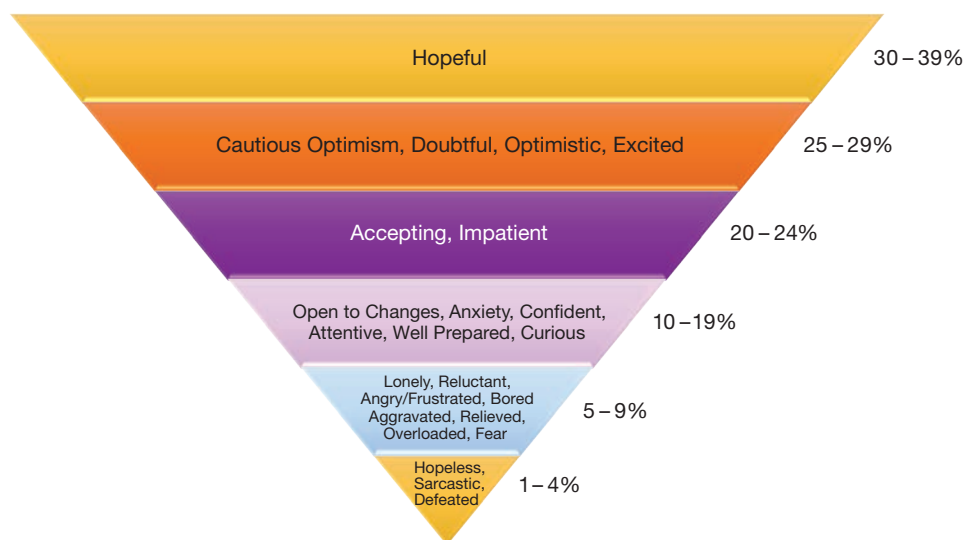
- 1) being prepared: staying ready and willing to adapt as the situation evolves and
- 2) maintaining connection: making it special no matter what for the people they care about.

## Cautious optimism is the theme for this year's holiday shopping season



## What words best describe how you're feeling right now about the upcoming Winter holiday season? (Select all)

General U.S. Population



Source: Ipsos Omnibus survey n=1,000 U.S. gen pop, conducted August 20 – 22, 2021.

## What types of holiday experiences are you looking forward to this year?



*I am thinking forward to have the holidays be a good distraction to everything we are facing. I want to immerse myself in the magic of the holidays and just enjoy it."*

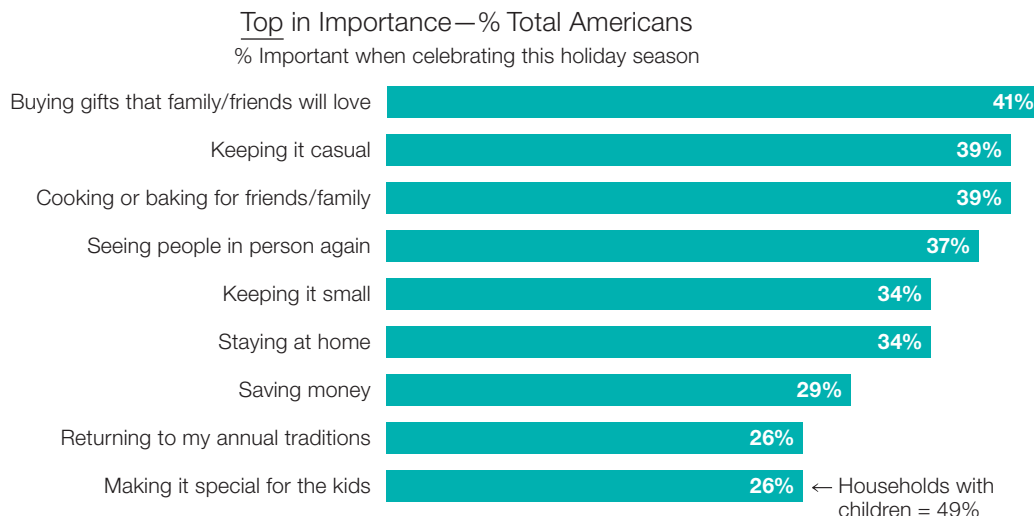
—Ipsos Online Community Member

Source: Ipsos U.S. Syndicated Online Community, August 2021, n=1128

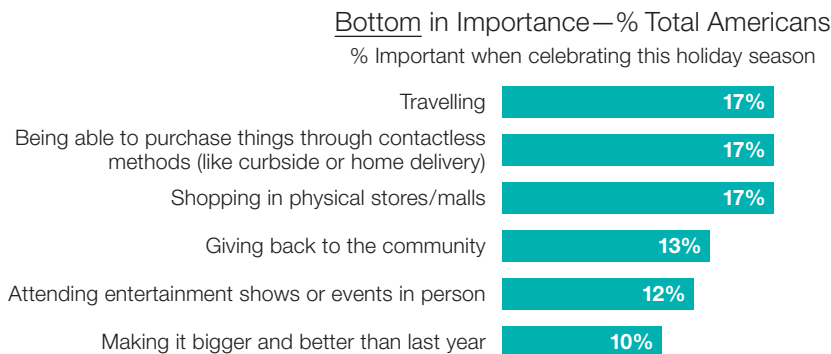
## How Big Will Celebrations Be?

[Recent Ipsos data](#) indicates that many people are expecting to spend more money this holiday season than last year. But bigger spending does not necessarily mean bigger celebrations. The theme this year is about friends and family. The hope is to reconnect in person, but most want to keep it personal, small, casual, and intimate. Only 10% of people want to “make it bigger and better than last year.”

### Americans are interested in making this holiday about people



### Americans are not very interested in making this holiday bigger than last year



Q: What is important to you in celebrating this upcoming winter holiday season? (Select All)

Source: Ipsos Omnibus survey n=1,000 U.S. gen pop, conducted August 20–22, 2021.



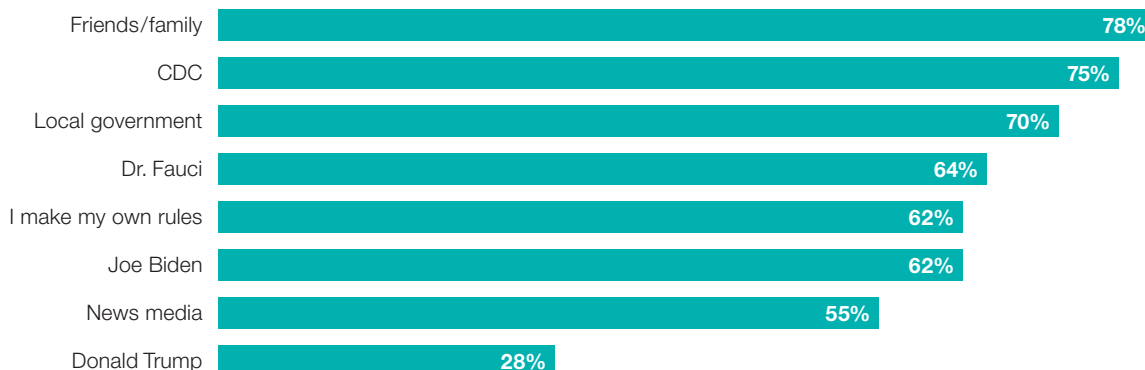


Ipsos has been tracking behaviors and attitudes throughout the pandemic and looking for signals of potential shifts as the holidays approach. One clear early indicator is CDC guidance. When asked, “how likely are you to follow health and safety advice about in person gatherings during the Holidays for each of these sources?” the vast majority of Americans said they would listen to the CDC, second only to friends and family.

However, most also indicated they’d take in the advice but then make their own rules, so may find some reason to deviate from official guidance. Still, as businesses try to predict the future, the CDC is worth watching.

### Americans are likely to follow advice from family/friends and CDC about holiday gatherings, although the majority then make their own rules

Likely to follow advice about holiday in person gatherings—% Total Americans



Q: How likely are you to follow health and safety advice about in person gatherings during the Holidays for each of these sources?

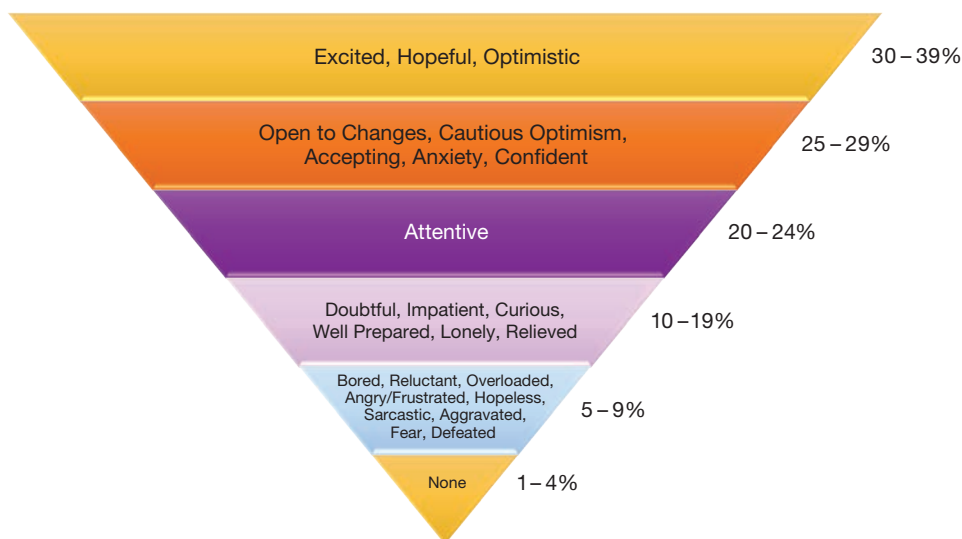
Source: Ipsos Omnibus survey n=1,000 U.S. gen pop, conducted August 20–22, 2021.



Younger consumers, ages 18–34, are especially positive about the upcoming holidays. They are more excited than the general population. And they expect to be very active in holiday activities, although still fewer than 20% want to “make it bigger and better than last year.” For many, it’s about making it special for the kids and seeing older relatives again this year.

### What words best describe how you’re feeling right now about the upcoming Winter holiday season? (Select all)

Ages 18 – 34



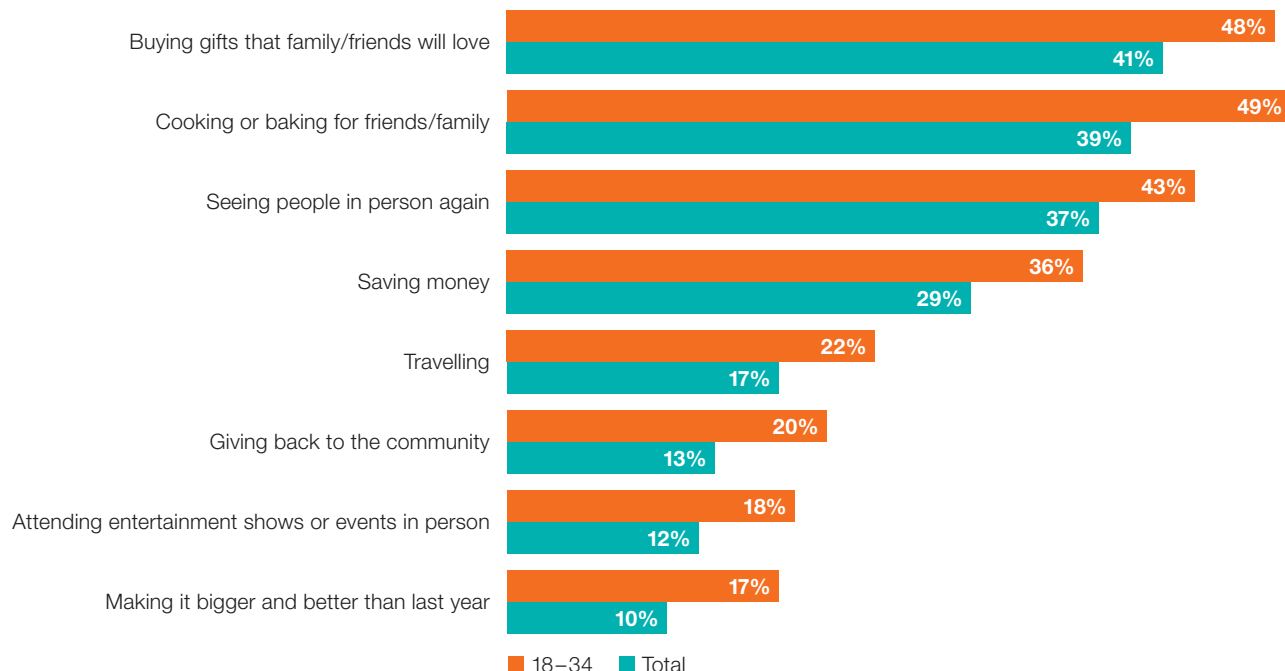
Source: Ipsos Omnibus survey n=1,000 U.S. gen pop, conducted August 20 – 22, 2021.





## Ages 18–34 plan to be more active in celebrating the holidays, although also are more interested in saving money

Ages 18–34 Versus Total Americans  
% Important when celebrating this holiday season

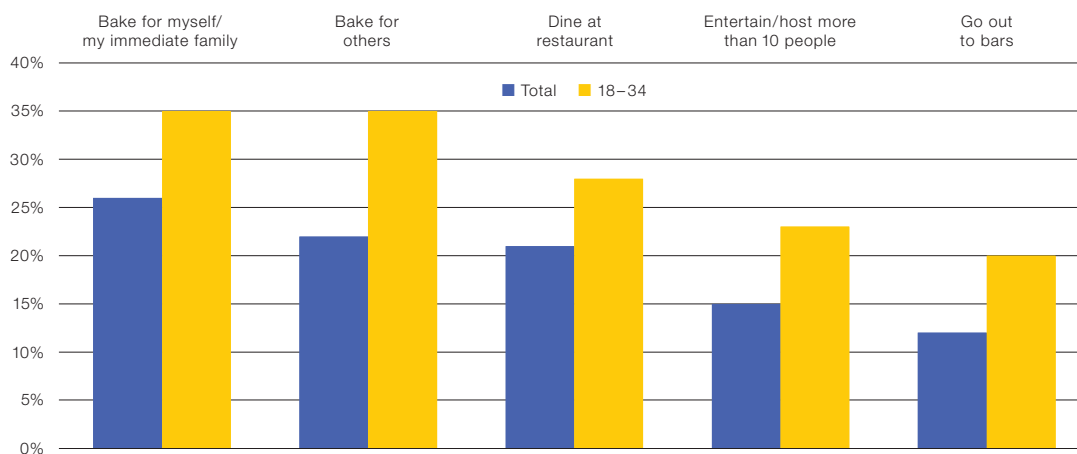


Q: What is important to you in celebrating this upcoming winter holiday season? (Select All)

Source: Ipsos Omnibus survey n=1,000 U.S. gen pop, conducted August 20–22, 2021.

## Younger ages are more interested in baking, dining, entertaining this year than the general population

% Think will do More this holiday compared to last year—Ages 18–34 versus Total Americans



Q: For each holiday activity, please tell us how you think this holiday season will compare to last year's holiday season?

Source: Ipsos Omnibus survey n=1,000 U.S. gen pop, conducted August 25–26, 2021.

## Stories from Ipsos senior research analysts



**How do you expect to celebrate the holidays this year?**



**Jenna Biskupski**

**Innovation, Marketing Strategy & Understanding**

Everyone's been so disconnected. I feel like it's important to connect again. I think this year's holiday celebrations for my family will be a bit bigger than last year. The vaccine and booster has made my family feel more comfortable to see each other again.



**Will Edwards**

**Creative Excellence**

I think this year we'll go back to getting together like we did before the pandemic. Last year I was at home with my parents, but I think we'll return to traditions which means we'll travel and see more people this year.



**Jonathan Newton**

**Corporate Reputation**

My grandfather used to host a mini family reunion every Thanksgiving. We still need to be careful around him so we can't do that this year. I have to decide whether to see him or be with my immediate family this year. We won't be able to intermingle.

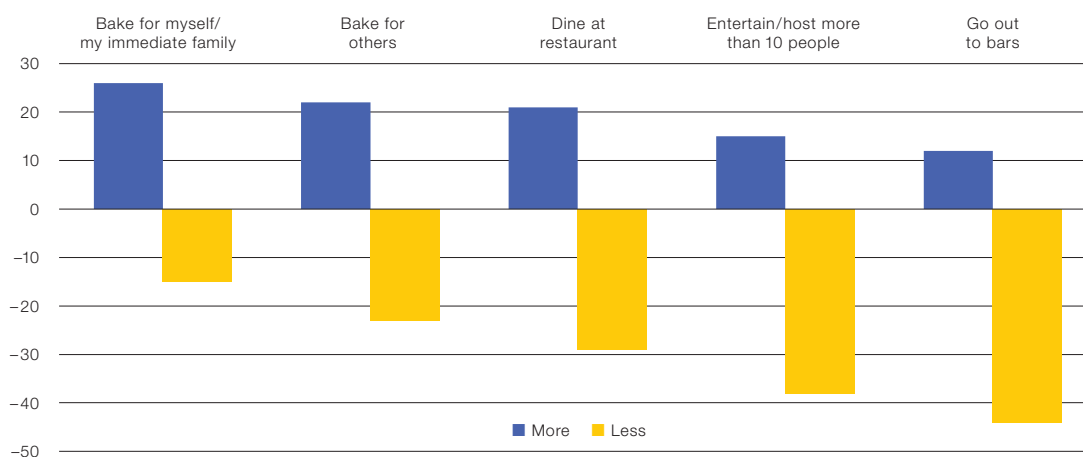
## Baking is Back; Gifting is Personal

The pandemic has been a catalyst for some people to create new traditions.

Entertaining large groups, dining in restaurants and patronizing bars might be even lower than last year, but baking is back in vogue. This is especially true when it comes to baking for the immediate family. One-quarter of consumers expect to do more of it than last year.

### Baking is expected to be even more popular this year than last year, while dining and entertaining may be scaled back

% Think will do More/Less this holiday compared to last year — Total Americans



Q: For each holiday activity, please tell us how you think this holiday season will compare to last year's holiday season?

Source: Ipsos Omnibus survey n=1,000 U.S. gen pop, conducted August 25–26, 2021.



As a staple holiday activity, baking is seen as a way to conjure up the holiday spirit, especially as COVID safety concerns remain high and people opt for smaller gatherings with friends and family. Compared to last year, when the vaccine was not yet available, some people feel they have more opportunities to bake for loved ones who will be physically present this year. For those who are still distant, baking is seen as a way to express and maintain connections from afar.

## What do you think holiday baking will look like for you this year compared to last year?



*I'll definitely be baking more for the holiday season based on the fact that I might be able to prepare some and send to my loved ones across the country if they're not able to visit during holiday time."*

—Ipsos Online Community Member

Source: Ipsos U.S. Syndicated Online Community, September 2021, n=785

## Gifting is Personal

In addition to gifting baked goods and other homemade foods for the holidays, people are also making an effort to personalize gifts in other creative ways and focus on meaningful experiences beyond the tangible. There is a general desire to reclaim holiday sharing and togetherness in the midst of ongoing COVID-related challenges. And because supply chain issues are likely to create inventory challenges this year for physical goods, that approach to gifting may be a good strategy.

## What types of holiday experiences are you looking forward to this year?



*I will make lots of extra food and take some to my elderly neighbors without family. I love sharing, really puts me in the holiday spirit."*

—Ipsos Online Community Member



*I am hoping to give happy experiences to those who normally cannot. For instance, I'm hoping to take two of my workaholic friends out for a road trip to a big shopping mall...and/or warehouse club so that they can go check things out."*

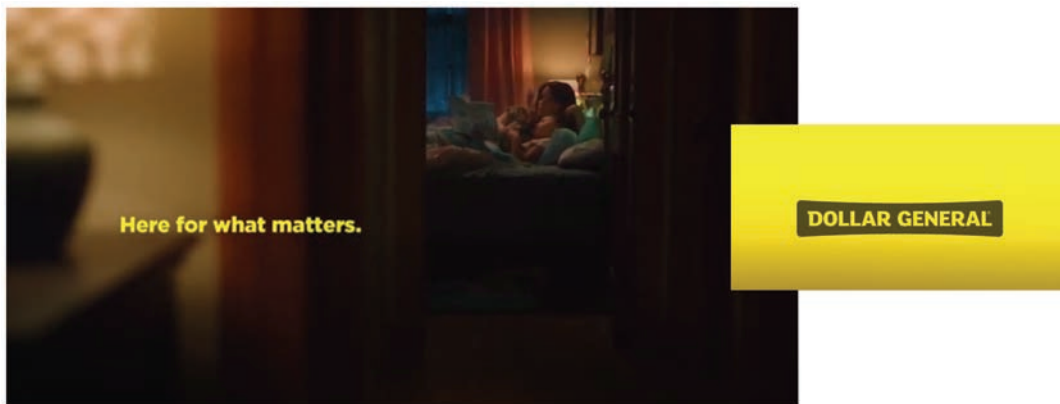
—Ipsos Online Community Member

Source: Ipsos U.S. Syndicated Online Community, August 2021, n=1128



For advertisers searching for the right tone, it makes sense to match America's mood with messages of optimism and adaptability, togetherness and connections. Help all of us to make it special in small but meaningful ways. A new ad from Dollar General seems to tap into this perfectly. While not about the holidays, "[Here For What Matters](#)" reminds us that "what's important has a way of raising us up."

### Here For What Matters | Dollar General—YouTube







## WHAT'S NEXT

- CDC guidance can serve as an indicator of how holiday get-togethers will look since most Americans agree they will listen to their advice.
- To set the right tone, advertisers should tap into Americans' desire to make it special in small but meaningful ways along with feelings of optimism and adaptability.
- Enable connection and togetherness by offering the ability to personalize gifts.
- Younger consumers (ages 18–34) are a great target for businesses this season, since they are more enthusiastic about the holidays than the general population.

## About the Authors

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## About Ipsos

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