Americans Cutting Back On Everyday Expenses To Save Money

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Over two thirds are purchasing more generic brands; two in five brown-bag lunch and re-use water bottles

Americans say they expect the economy to get worse in the next year, and their recent behavior shows a buckling-down and cutting-back mentality, possibly in preparation for hard times ahead.

Over two thirds of Americans have begun purchasing more generic brands to save money (67%), up from six in ten who said they did this in February (61%) and the highest number reporting doing so since the question was first asked two years ago.

These are some of the results of The Harris Poll of 2,163 adults surveyed online between June 13 and 20, 2011 by Harris Interactive.

And, it's not just labels that Americans are cutting back on. The recent poll, which has been asked 7 times since June 2009, shows that now Americans are doing each item listed as a way to save money more than they did in February of this year, and either slightly more than or equal to the levels these things were done one year ago, in June 2010.

Other findings include:
Slightly more people today are brown-bagging their lunch as a way to save money (46%) than did so in either February or October (45% in both) and the number of people using refillable water bottles rather than purchasing bottles of water is the highest it's been since June 2009 (39%);
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Currently more than two in five Americans are going to the hairstylist or barber less often (43%) as a way to save money. The only other time this number has been greater than two in five was 20 months ago, in October 2009 (43%);
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In terms of Americans' media consumption, three in ten have cancelled one or more magazine subscriptions to save money (31%), up from 30% in February and 27% in October. One in five U.S. adults have cut back on cable TV service (22%) and slightly fewer say they have cancelled a newspaper subscription (18%);
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Now a quarter of Americans say they have cut back on dry cleaning as a way to save money (24%) which is up from the 21% who said they did this in both February and October;
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One in five have stopped purchasing coffee in the morning (21%), a number which has more or less stayed constant since October 2009; and,
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While some Americans have cancelled their landline telephone service, changed or cancelled their cell phone service or begun carpooling or using mass transit as ways to save money, these don't seem to be the top priorities as fewer than one in five say they have done each of these things every time the questions were asked.

So What?
While there are some differences in the changes older and younger Americans are making to save money-for example, older Americans who may no longer work are less likely to report beginning to brown bag their lunch, carpool or use mass transit, or purchase coffee in the morning-what is clear is that most Americans are making some changes in order to cut back on expenses.

While making more careful spending decisions may be good for a household budget, continual cutting back doesn't do much to help the overall economy grow. It seems a balance will need to be reached to make Americans feel secure in their own household's finances as well as comfortable enough spending to allow the country's economy to grow once again.

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding

Methodology
This Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States between June 13 to 20, 2011 among 2,163 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where

necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading.

All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population.

Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

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