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Onesixtyfourth, brandrepublic.com, 14 February 2012, 08:30AM

Brands can take a leading role in helping shape society, according to new insight from Onesixtyfourth.



Fifty two percent of British respondents believe the economy will worsen in 2012

Leadership: during this period of sustained economic uncertainty, when people are feeling a significant tension between security and risk, the absence of it is apparent.

Interviews for CultureQ, Onesixtyfourth's ongoing monitor of sentiment, have indicated this to some degree, and the internet study we fielded among 763 Millennials and Baby Boomers in the UK and US over the Christmas and New Year period confirmed it.

With faith in government very low, people are looking to brands to inspire progress in society.

People's attitudes overall are clearly being shaped by their economic outlook

In Britain last year, people vented insecurities about the economy in many ways, and much of the looming frustration appears to be morphing into a sense of despair.

Fifty two percent of British respondents believe the economic picture in the country will worsen in 2012, 26% state it will remain the same and just 22% feel it will improve.

And following on from last year's riots, some people tell us they expect further civil unrest as frustration grows with the economy and government.

"There were more jobs available in 2006 and much has changed since then and so I believe that nothing will be the same as the years go on; it will get worse and worse."

In the US, Millennials' and Boomers' frustration about their inability to exert control over their lives is giving rise to what may be simmering tensions and discord.

We can't help but wonder what's under the surface. Will non-violent protests become more aggressive if the economy does not show absolute signs of improvement soon?

"I worry that the Occupy movement will get out of hand, and people will get crazier than they are now. It's OK to protest, but it just seems everywhere."

US respondents are characteristically positive about prospects for economic recovery. Perhaps for some this will be a way to dispel the uncertainty.

Forty percent of US respondents state the US economy will improve, 32% believe it will remain the same and 28% feel it will get worse.

Q: Do you think your country's economic situation will...remain the same, improve or worsen in 2012 (Total base: 763)

| | UK | | US | | | |
|-------------------|---------|-----------------|--------|---------|-----------------|--------|
| | Improve | Remain the same | Worsen | Improve | Remain the same | Worsen |
| All | 21.9% | 25.9% | 52.2% | 40.0% | 32.2% | 27.8% |
| Millenials | 29.0% | 30.1% | 40.9% | 37.5% | 35.8% | 26.6% |

Baby Boomers 15.0% 22.0% 63.0% 43.7% 26.8% 29.5%

Source: *Onesixtyfourth*

In both countries, people are frustrated with "[government] not spending money wisely" and "corporations and companies [being] profit, shareholder and bonus driven".

When asked to name bad corporate citizens (companies that act irresponsibly with respect to society, people and the environment), neither GenYers nor Boomers necessarily distinguish the public from the private sector.

Britons cite government fourth, tied with BT, behind McDonald's, BP and Shell as examples of bad corporate citizens.

In the US the government is fifth, behind BP, Walmart, Exxon-Mobil and Bank of America, and ahead of McDonald's.

Furthermore, people describe government in almost the same manner they speak of banks and oil and gas companies: "Whatever government is in, they will be out of touch with what people want... lack of morals and values and money seem more important than a caring helpful government."

There's a desire for inspiring, human brand leaders, not demigods

The concept of brand leadership is intangible and elusive for many. As with many things during the past 25 years, size and visibility of an organisation have become surrogates for influence and vision.

Many of the brands named as leaders by Millennials and Baby Boomers in Britain and America appear to correlate more with presence than prescience.

Q. Which two or three brands do you think will exhibit leadership – whether it be leadership through category innovation, social responsibility, ways of working, environmental consciousness, etc, in 2012 (Total base: 763)

| UK | US |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Apple 17.1% | Apple 22.0% |
| Google 7.5% | Google 7.7% |
| Tesco 6.0% | Microsoft 6.1% |
| Microsoft 5.5% | Facebook 3.7% |
| Virgin 4.5% | Coca Cola 3.4% |
| Nike 4.0% | Walmart 3.2% |
| IOC/2012 Olympics 3.5% | Ford 3.2% |

Source: *Onesixtyfourth*

Although many marketers continue to have Apple-fatigue, people do not. Apple tops the charts.

The other brands named lag significantly behind Apple. Tesco, Virgin, Nike and the 2012 Olympics follow in the UK, with Google, Microsoft, Facebook, Coca-Cola, and Walmart featuring in the US.

What is it about Apple that leads it to continually stand out?

Certainly, its marketing and visibility help, but it's more than that. Apple embodies inspiration.

For many, Apple inspires an otherwise dreary daily life in small ways.

It is fully consumerist, even arrogant, yet because it is frank in what it is, and what it is not about as a business, it's allowed to be so.

Also, Apple is becoming more fluid and transparent in its practices, something that it perhaps has to be since it lost its iconic leader.

Consider Apple's once closely guarded list of global suppliers. The title of the report – **Supplier Responsibility Progress** – carefully lays out expectations.

It doesn't lead you to think all is rosy. It simply indicates that things are moving forward.

So, what is brand leadership really? It can come from market position but when it's acquired that way it's not necessarily accompanied by respect.

When leadership stems from vision and mission, however, people are inspired to follow.

And, in the absence of prophets, people are seeking leadership through connecting with people with similar interests and concerns.

When coming from a sincere and transparent place, brands can readily unite people in a way that the

government is no longer doing.

When built on a sense of purpose, they can encourage us to bring out the best in ourselves and progress society.

Respondents named the Co-op, John Lewis/Waitrose, Greenpeace, Lush, Cancer UK, Innocent Drinks, Jamie Oliver and The Princes Trust as leaders.

Each of these brands in its own way embraces responsible citizenship.

Importantly, comments from respondents in CultureQ indicate they will only allow brands to lead and shape society when they take on the ethos of the man on the street.

Because of social media, the wall between producer and consumer has crumbled. With the fall has come the calling for brands – especially large corporate ones – to behave more like people, rather than demigods.

Moving forward, successful brands need to reflect the paradoxes of human nature.

If we return to Apple, it's innovative, progressive and uncompromising. It's cocky in a sense, but that cockiness is somehow justified.

More than ever, brands must represent our human potential – they can turn principles and ethics into results (products, services and social initiatives) and when these results take on a persona they become a cultural expression.

Brands shouldn't feel compelled to convince us they are perfect. After all, humans are inherently imperfect – maximising our potential represents an attainable form of perfection.

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