



Weekly Focus – Think About It

“Good judgment comes from experience, and a lot of that comes from bad judgment.”

—Will Rogers, actor

THE MARKETS

CONSUMER SENTIMENT IS A LAGGING INDICATOR. IT’S ALSO A CONTRARIAN INDICATOR

After rising sharply in June and July, consumer sentiment leveled off this month. The preliminary August reading for the *University of Michigan Consumer Sentiment Index* was 71.2. That’s slightly below July’s reading, although it’s up 22.3 percent year-over-year, and up 42 percent from its all-time low of 50 (June 2022). The historic average for the Index is 86.

“In general, consumers perceived few material differences in the economic environment from last month, but they saw substantial improvements relative to just three months ago. Year-ahead inflation expectations edged down from 3.4% last month to 3.3% this month, showing remarkable stability for three consecutive months,” wrote Surveys of Consumers Director Joanne Hsu.

The University of Michigan Consumer Sentiment survey provides information related to:

- **Current economic conditions** by asking consumers about the current state of their personal finances, as well as business and buying conditions. In early August, this component of the survey was up 32.1 percent, year-over-year.
- **Expectations for future conditions** by asking consumers about expectations for their personal finances, as well as business and buying conditions. In early August, this component was up 16.0 percent, year-over-year.

Consumer sentiment is a lagging indicator because it can take several months for changes in economic activity to be felt by consumers. This type of sentiment also is considered a contrarian indicator. John Rekenthaler of Morningstar explained, “When people are deeply unhappy, stocks are likely to thrive, because the economic damage that bothers them has already occurred. A contented populace, on the other hand, is the investment equivalent of red sky at morning. Equity shareholders, take warning.”

Mixed inflation data caused markets to stumble last week. The Standard & Poor’s 500 and Nasdaq Composite indices finished lower, while the Dow Jones Industrial Average moved slightly higher, reported *Barron’s*. Yields on U.S. Treasury notes and bonds rose.

Data as of 8/11/2023	1-Week	Y-T-D	1-Year	3-Year	5-Year	10-Year
Standard & Poor's 500 (Domestic Stocks)	-0.3%	16.3%	6.1%	10.2%	9.6%	10.2%
Dow Jones Global ex-U.S.	-0.9	7.9	4.2	2.3	1.4	1.9
10-year Treasury Note (Yield Only)	4.2	N/A	2.9	0.7	2.9	2.6
Gold (per ounce)	-1.4	5.7	6.6	-0.4	9.8	3.6
Bloomberg Commodity Index	-0.3	-6.4	-14.6	14.8	4.8	-1.7

S&P 500, Dow Jones Global ex-U.S., Gold, Bloomberg Commodity Index returns exclude reinvested dividends (gold does not pay a dividend) and the three-, five-, and 10-year returns are annualized; the DJ Equity All REIT Total Return Index does include reinvested dividends and the three-, five-, and 10-year returns are annualized; and the 10-year Treasury Note is simply the yield at the close of the day on each of the historical time periods.
Sources: Yahoo! Finance, Barron's, djindexes.com, London Bullion Market Association. Past performance is no guarantee of future results. Indices are unmanaged and cannot be invested into directly. N/A means not applicable.

IS IT A SCAM? OR ISN'T IT?

You may receive a request asking for contributions to a fund that helps families who've been devastated by Hawaiian wildfires, storms and flooding in New York, wind and tornadoes in Oklahoma, or another disaster. Before you send money, make sure it's not a scam. In 2022, consumers in the United States lost almost \$8.8 billion to fraud, according to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC).

Scammers often target people through email, text messages and phone calls. See what you know about protecting yourself from scams by taking this brief quiz.

- An email arrives with the logo of the U.S. Postal Service. It says your package could not be delivered because of an incomplete address. The email includes a link that you can click on to confirm your address. Which of the following actions can help you determine whether this is a scam? (Choose all that apply.)
 - Look at the email address of the sender to see if matches the company name.
 - Find the company's phone number online, then call and ask about the package.
 - Get excited about the unexpected gift, click on the link, and see where it takes you.
 - Check the message for misspelled words and grammatical errors.
- Ding! It's a text from an unknown number that reads, "Can you please get us in today? Muffers is really sick! She's been laying on her side panting for four hours." What do you do?

- a. Don't respond.
 - b. Respond by texting, "I think you have the wrong number."
 - c. Respond by texting, "This isn't the veterinarian's office."
 - d. Block the number.
3. You're looking online for off-campus student housing, but you know rental scams are common. What should you do if a listing is just what you're hoping to find, but seems almost too good to be true?
- a. Look up the management company's phone number/email online and call/send a message to confirm the availability of the listing, the listing agent's name, and the rental address.
 - b. Schedule an in-person walk-through (or have a trusted friend walk through for you).
 - c. Offer to pay the deposit or application fee with a credit card. If the listing agent insists you wire money or pay with cryptocurrency, refuse to do it.
 - d. All of the above

Fraud comes in all shapes and sizes – from adoption fraud to elder fraud, business fraud to consumer fraud, and imposter fraud to unemployment fraud. You can learn more about scams and ways to avoid them on the [FTC.gov](https://www.ftc.gov) and [USA.gov](https://www.usa.gov) websites.

Answers:

- 1) A, B, and D. "...the biggest tell for most people is that they aren't expecting any package at all. These scams prey on the rush that getting an unexpected delivery brings. Maybe it's a gift! (It's never a gift.)," reported Heather Kelly of *The Washington Post*.
- 2) A or D are acceptable answers. This is known as a "wrong number scam". It creates an opportunity for cybercriminals to build a relationship with, gather personal information from, and attempt to defraud a victim. Patrick J. Kiger in *AARP Magazine* reported, "...what seems like an innocent mistake by the sender actually is the first move in a long con...Once the scammer gets a person to respond, more messages usually follow."
- 3) D. "Some scammers hijack real rental listings — changing the contact information and reposting them on different rental sites. Then they charge you for fees, deposits, or even rent for homes that aren't actually up for rent," reported Royal Rose on the *FTC* website.

Best regards,

Andrew Zittell
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Sources:

Securities offered through "Your B/D Name Here", Member FINRA/SIPC.

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- * All indexes referenced are unmanaged. The volatility of indexes could be materially different from that of a client's portfolio. Unmanaged index returns do not reflect fees, expenses, or sales charges. Index performance is not indicative of the performance of any investment. You cannot invest directly in an index.
- * The Dow Jones Global ex-U.S. Index covers approximately 95% of the market capitalization of the 45 developed and emerging countries included in the Index.
- * The 10-year Treasury Note represents debt owed by the United States Treasury to the public. Since the U.S. Government is seen as a risk-free borrower, investors use the 10-year Treasury Note as a benchmark for the long-term bond market.
- * Gold represents the 3:00 p.m. (London time) gold price as reported by the London Bullion Market Association and is expressed in U.S. Dollars per fine troy ounce. The source for gold data is Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (FRED), <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/GOLDPMGBD228NLBM>.
- * The Bloomberg Commodity Index is designed to be a highly liquid and diversified benchmark for the commodity futures market. The Index is composed of futures contracts on 19 physical commodities and was launched on July 14, 1998.
- * The DJ Equity All REIT Total Return Index measures the total return performance of the equity subcategory of the Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) industry as calculated by Dow Jones.
- * The Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA), commonly known as "The Dow," is an index representing 30 stock of companies maintained and reviewed by the editors of The Wall Street Journal.
- * The NASDAQ Composite is an unmanaged index of securities traded on the NASDAQ system.
- * International investing involves special risks such as currency fluctuation and political instability and may not be suitable for all investors. These risks are often heightened for investments in emerging markets.
- * Yahoo! Finance is the source for any reference to the performance of an index between two specific periods.
- * The risk of loss in trading commodities and futures can be substantial. You should therefore carefully consider whether such trading is suitable for you in light of your financial condition. The high degree of leverage is often obtainable in commodity trading and can work against you as well as for you. The use of leverage can lead to large losses as well as gains.
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