

gallery of

now
now
now

2021 State
of the YAYA
the YAYA
collections



LOCATION

Online

TIME

May 4, 2021

Free Entry

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Who is main ad main ad mojo ad?

MOJO Ad is the premier student-staffed, full-service agency at the University of Missouri. We specialize in 18- to 24-year-olds, also known as the youth and young adult (YAYA) market. No one knows these consumers quite like we do. Why? Because we are them. As members of this elusive demographic, we serve as liaisons between the YAYA market and the professionals seeking to reach them.

What is a YAYA?

Originally coined by MOJO Ad, “YAYA” refers to 18-24-year-olds, or the youth and young adult market. These consumers are at a pivotal life stage in which they are figuring out who they are and what they like.

At 31 million strong in the United States and earning an aggregate income of \$463 billion, these consumers are choosing whether to stick with the brands they know or to try new ones. If marketers fail to reach them, they might never catch up.

What is the State of the YAYA?

The State of the YAYA is an annual report that provides marketers with an in-depth look at the trends and activities of the 18- to 24-year-old market. Created by MOJO Ad staff, the report presents exclusive data on the YAYA market to help marketers connect with them on a deeper level. The report, based on a national quantitative survey of over 700 18- to 24-year-olds, not only highlights who they are as consumers, but individuals as well, by providing a deeper look at attitudes and behaviors toward the state of things.

Introduction

The white walls and pedestals you think of when you hear the words “art gallery” were not what galleries used to be. The exclusivity and glamour of galleries like the Salon and Royal Academy in France sanctioned realist painters and luxe crowds, but turned away impressionists and commoners. What did this mean for the outcasts? Well, it meant that the task of finding a place to show their art was one they had to fulfill on their own.

Claude Monet and Edgar Degas were largely responsible for organizing the very first Impressionist exhibition — the Society of Anonymous Artists. The group of lesser-known painters, sculptors, and printmakers opened their exhibition in Paris on April 15, 1874. Because they didn’t conform, the Impressionists — a name bestowed as an insult, but owned with pride — moved on to create their own space. It wasn’t the name of the Salon or Royal Academy that the artists wanted so fiercely. It was the opportunity to create and show their own art.

In a way, the YAYA demographic are the Society of the Anonymous Artists of the 21st century. They’re not entirely understood and oftentimes discredited because they don’t fit into traditional molds. What this leads 18- to 24-year-olds to do is abandon the brands and traditions of their predecessors and artistically carve out their own reality. In essence, they are creating their own gallery: The Gallery of Now.



Click the image
to view this piece.

CONTENTS CONTENTS CONTENTS

Who is MOJO Ad? _____ 3

What is a YAYA? _____ 4

What is the State of the YAYA? _____ 4

Introduction _____ 5

Layered Identity _____ 10

Plugged In and Disconnected _____ 18

Betwixt and Between _____ 24

Anxiety Breeds Action _____ 30

Authenticity and Assurance _____ 38

Money Talks _____ 44

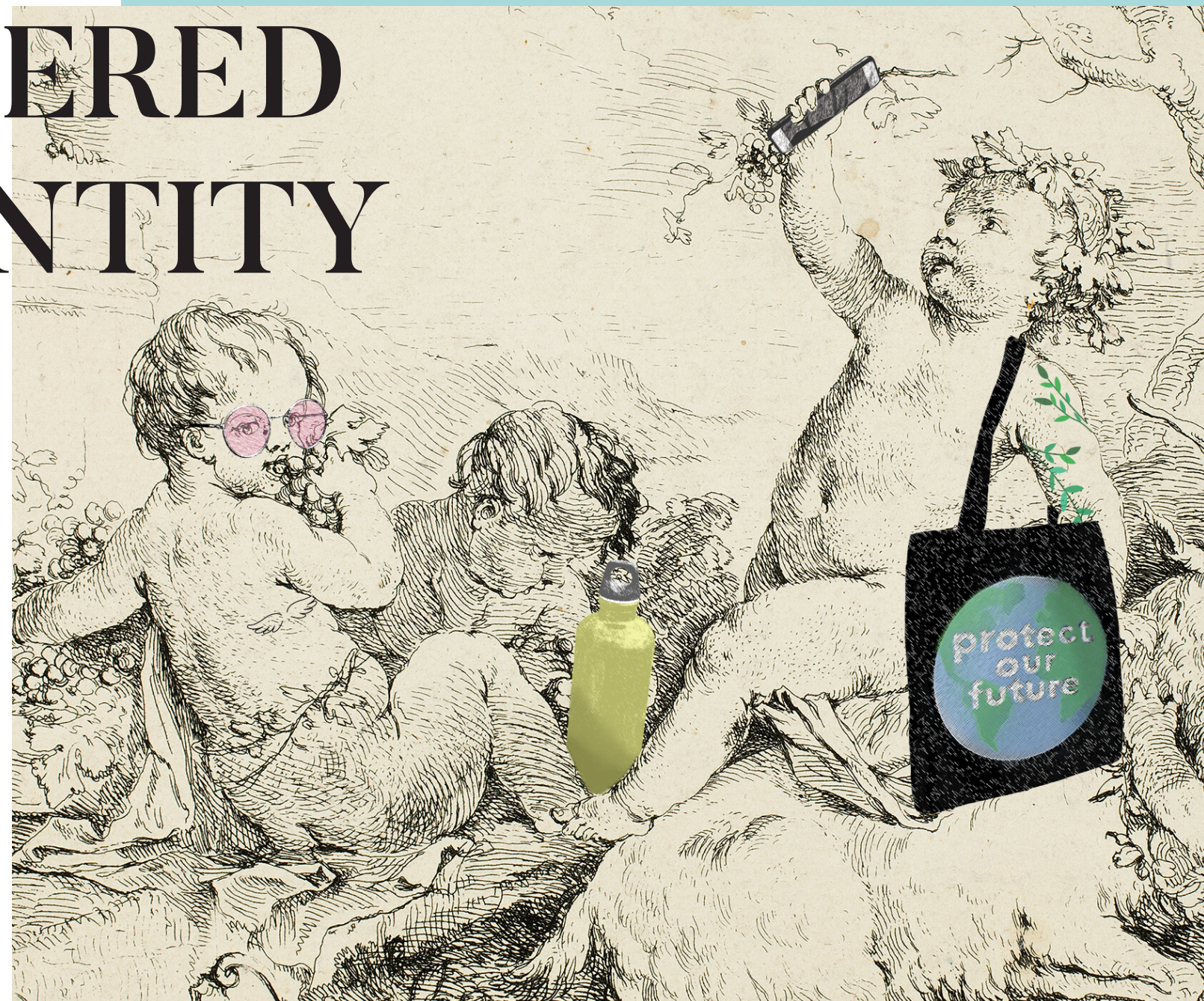
Conclusion _____ 51

Methodology _____ 52

MOJO Ad Staff _____ 53

Attributions _____ 54

LAYERED IDENTITY



Woke Cherubim'

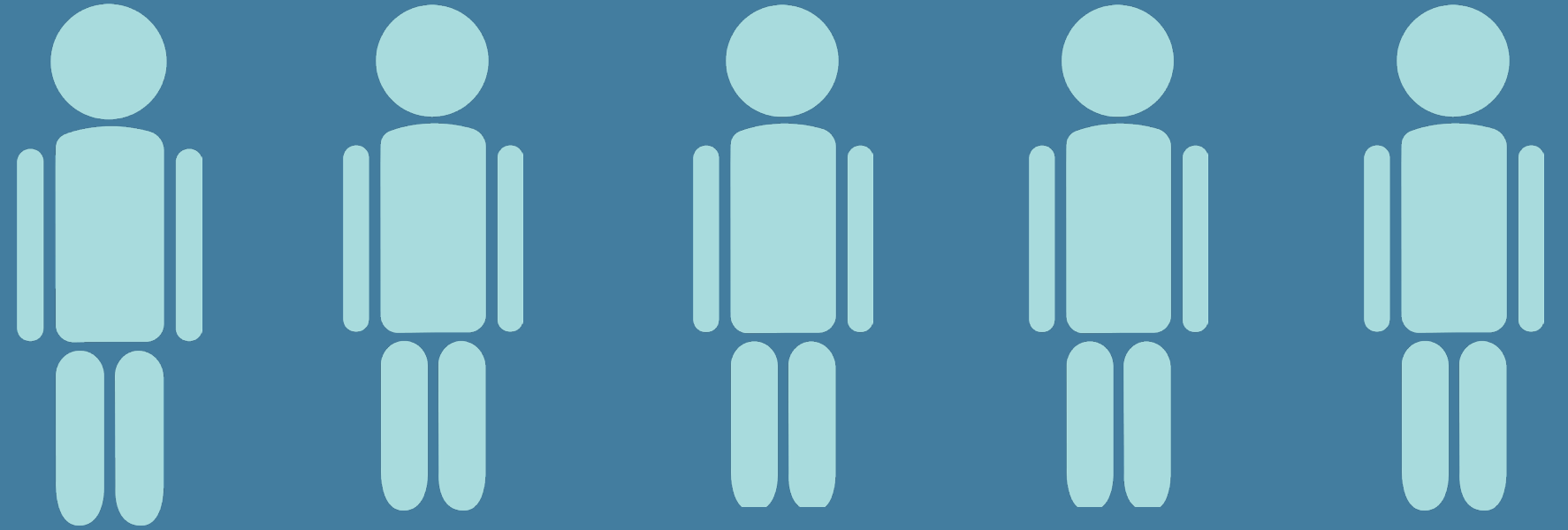
Collage on Paper

In ancient texts, Cherubim worked under a higher power protecting holy locations and relaying messages. But as time passed, so did the values of the cherubim. The tiny angels looked to the YAYA demographic for inspiration – taking after their politics, fashion sense and relationships. The cherubim are pictured together to show the importance of finding identity in groups. Research has shown that 18- to 24-year-olds find themselves when they mimic those around them such as family and friends – the same way that the cherubim follow their lead.

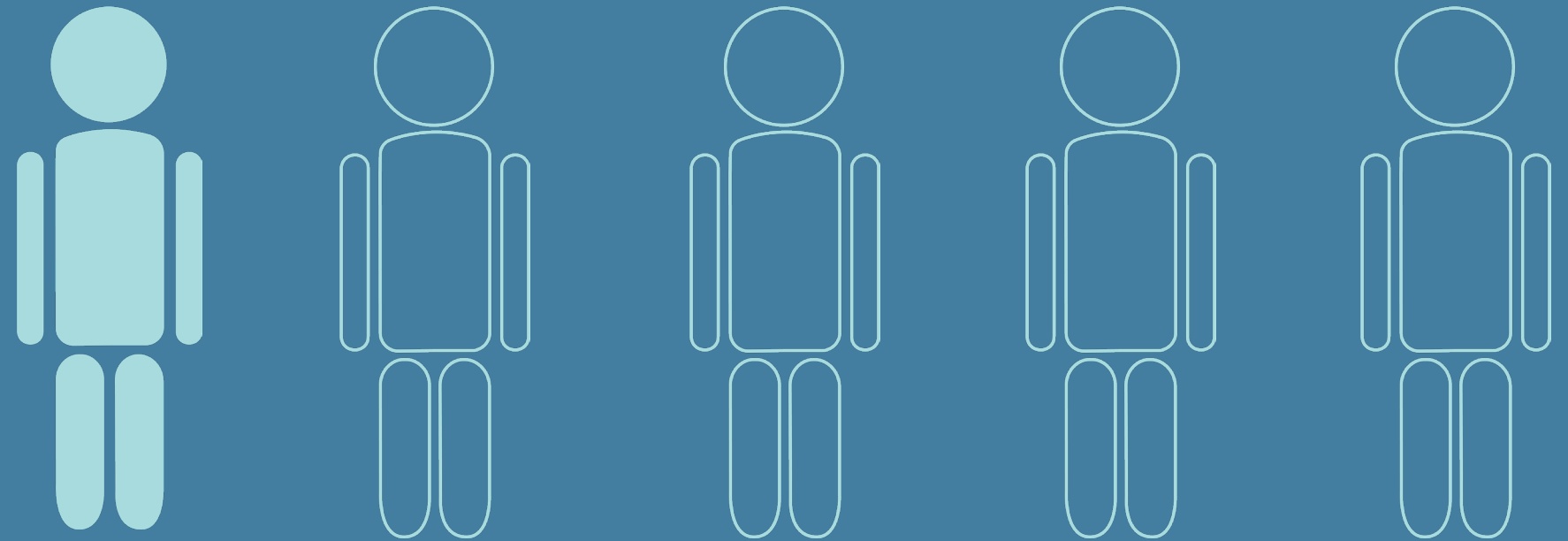
Like the ever-changing world of art, humans are constantly evolving. As we experience different life events, the way we see the world and the way we perceive ourselves change, sometimes dramatically. The youth and young adult demographic captures individuals at a very influential and variable time in their lives. They are transitioning into adulthood. Though every person's journey is distinct, all YAYA consumers have significant developmental experiences, which shape how they define themselves and their identities.

Our research shows that adults in this life stage base their identities on several factors. Perhaps most significantly, YAYA individuals' sense of identity is shaped by their online and offline communities. Half of survey respondents identified as part of an online community – be it a sports fan base, a gaming community or a television or movie fandom. Additionally, social media has created avenues for identities grounded in subculture. Take, for instance, the VSCO girl, dressed in an oversized T-shirt and armed with scrunchies, Pura Vida bracelets and a Hydro Flask.

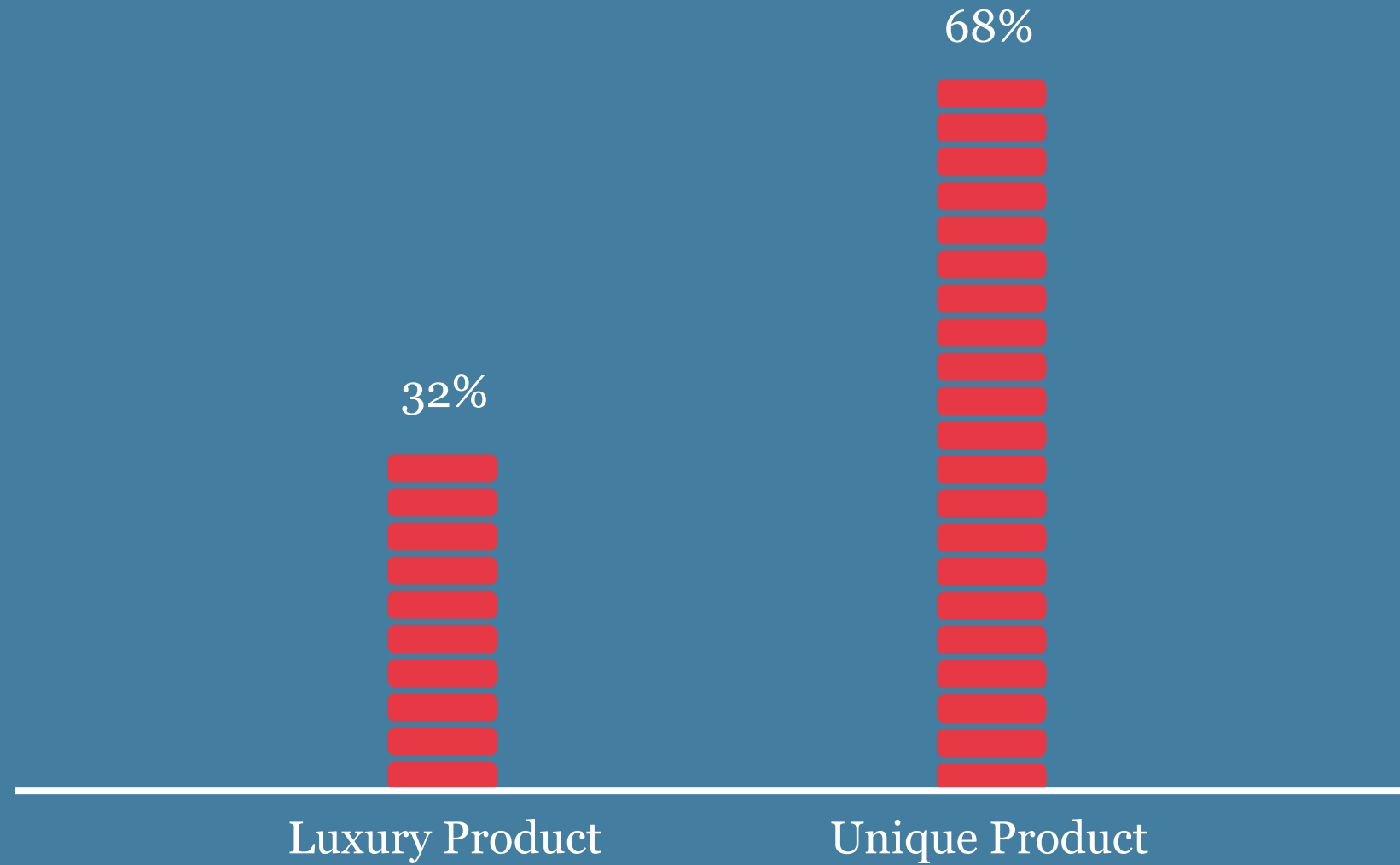
Members of the YAYA demographic are also closer with their friends and their families than other demographics. Survey results show that YAYA consumers are very likely to want to remain close to their families and consult their families when making a big decision.⁹ Sixty-five percent of respondents agree with the statement, “It is important for me to remain close to my family.” Additionally, 6 in 10 YAYA individuals find it important to have their family on board with them when they make a big decision. Furthermore, secondary research shows that over half of 18- to- 25 year-olds see their families at least once per week, according to Mintel.



6 in 10 YAYA individuals find it important to have their family on board with them when they make a big decision



When asked to choose between a luxury product or a product that was unique to them...



This trend extends to friends, as well. Roughly 4 in 10 people within the YAYA age group find it difficult to make a life decision different than their friends. Forty-five percent of respondents indicated that they do not feel comfortable moving to a place where they don't know anyone.

Political influences also affect the YAYA individual's identity. Nearly half of survey respondents identified themselves as a political activist. Additionally, 42% of respondents agree with the statement, "My political party is a significant part of my identity." However, there is also a significant portion of the YAYA demographic that does not want to be characterized by a political party. In fact, 1 in 5 respondents strongly disagreed with the idea of having a political party characterize who they are.⁹

Despite finding significant belonging and identity in community, YAYA individuals also seek personalization and uniqueness. When asked to choose between a luxury product or a product that was unique to them, 68% chose a unique product. Those in this age range were frequently exposed to a wide variety of options in online and in-person retailers, and became more likely to make purchasing decisions based on "aesthetic differentiation."¹²

Implications

These different sources of identity have significant implications for marketing success. Family is a huge source of comfort, stability and identity for YAYA individuals. They highly value connection and input from their family members. Therefore, it is key for marketers to prioritize this connection in their products and messaging. We foresee a growth in demand for items that provide connectivity and messaging services.

Similarly to feelings of national pride or patriotism, it is tricky to generalize messaging based on political affiliation to YAYA consumers. Though a large percentage of this demographic acknowledge that political parties are an important part of their identity, it is likely not worth the risk of isolating the 20% who strongly feel that political affiliation is not part of their identity.

Finally, it is crucial to balance messaging based on connection and community with the recognition that the YAYA market does not want to be seen as one thing. YAYA individuals pride themselves on their uniqueness and lack of conformity and uniformity. Avoid one-size fits-all messaging and generalization. Emphasize diversity and uniqueness.



The Ballot Urn

Ceramic

Both politics and democracy have existed for a long time — certainly longer than any of today's YAYA demographic. Based on the expediency with which 18- to-24-year olds pick up new trends and discard trends of yesterday, you would expect them to be over something as antiquated as voting. Alas, this is not the case. 'Ballot Urn' depicts figures from an ancient urn voting in a modern-day ballot box, making it known that although politics have been around for ages, taking action transcends time.

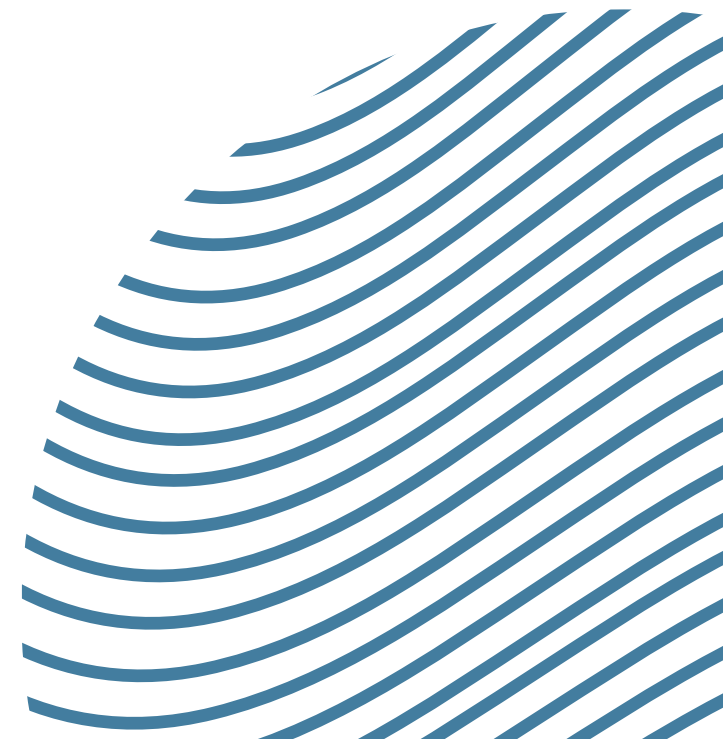


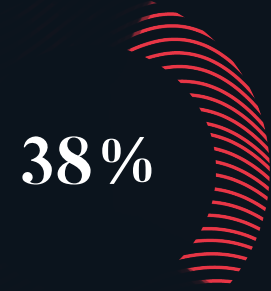
PLUGGED IN & DISCONNECTED

Missing my Motherboard

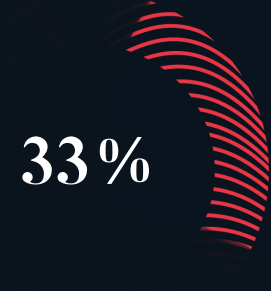
Statue of Marble and Circuit Boards

This past year has left YAYA consumers feeling disconnected and alone despite having the majority of the Earth's population at their fingertips. When you can't speak with someone face-to-face, you spend your time making eye contact with your phone. The media and news that 18- to 24-year-olds consume can leave them in despair. The circuitry in the statue represents the idea that YAYA consumers are always in touch with their devices and the internet. At first glance, you may miss the tear trailing down the statue's face. A large sector of the United States' youth and young adult is not feeling optimistic looking forward.



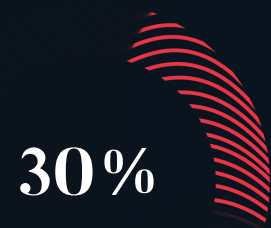


Instagram or YouTube

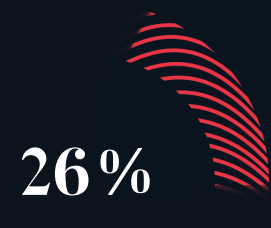


TikTok

Where YAYAs Get Their Daily News



Snapchat



Twitter

Just as art is influenced by politics, the events of 2020 have changed how YAYA individuals connect with their communities, for better or for worse. In a season of social and cultural upheaval, YAYA individuals’ attitudes toward their communities have been considerably affected. Overall, YAYA consumers have plugged into the news, but it seems that YAYA individuals feel more disconnected from their communities than they did before 2020. On the whole, YAYA consumers are overstimulated and struggling.

Over three-fourths of survey respondents indicated that they are more aware of the news and current events than they were before 2020. However, one thing has stayed relatively consistent – YAYA consumers are still getting their news online, and more and more, they are preferring to get their news from social media. The most popular platforms for news gathering are Instagram and YouTube. Thirty-eight percent of survey respondents got news from Instagram or YouTube at least once per day. Roughly one-third (33%) of the YAYA demographic gets news from TikTok at least once per day. Thirty percent of survey respondents get news from Snapchat at least once per day and 26% get news from Twitter at least once per day.⁹

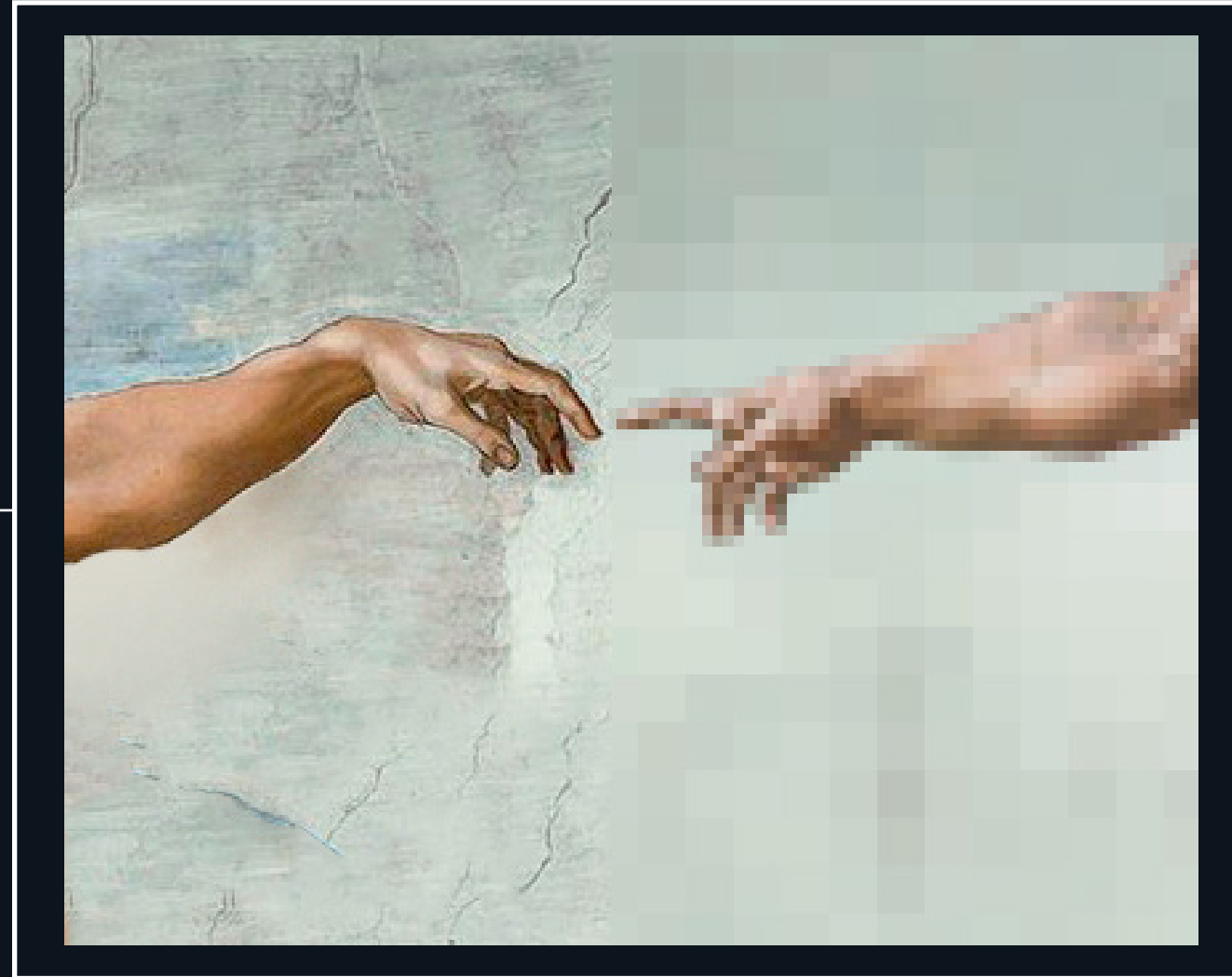
Moreover, despite feeling more aware of news and current events, watching or reading the news is not uplifting for 2 in 3 YAYA individuals. Sixty-six percent feel “less optimistic” after consuming the news. This number has gone down since 2019, when 71% of YAYA respondents reported feeling less optimistic after consuming the news.⁹

When asked how the events of 2020 have changed their perspective, 6 in 10 survey respondents said they feel less connected to their community, and nearly 1 in 4 feel much less connected to their community. Additionally, half of survey respondents felt less cared for by their community after 2020.

Over half (56%) of respondents feel less hopeful about the future. When it comes to feeling empowered, survey results were mixed. Fifty-four percent feel less empowered after the events of 2020. However, it is important to note that while Black respondents and white respondents indicated that they felt much less empowered at roughly the same rate – 14% and 17%, respectively – Black respondents were twice as likely to say they felt much more empowered than white respondents – 16% compared to 7%.

Implications

This disparate sense of connection can create opportunities for meaningful engagement with YAYA consumers. Marketers and communicators can be confident that YAYA individuals are aware of current events and news items, especially if they are trending on social media sites. Take advantage of this opportunity for connection, and look for opportunities to highlight good news and positive stories. Be wary of seeming pessimistic or creating content that seems to play off of anxiety. Look for innovative opportunities to highlight people showing up for one another.



The Creation of Disconnection

Pixels and Oil on Canvas

The two halves of this piece represent the man and digital man. Over the past year, thin sheets of glass have acted as wide barriers and forced people away from one another. By creating this work, the artist poses an existential question, “Are the hands inching closer together or being pulled ever farther apart?” Time will tell as we march forward into a new reality.



BETWIXT BETWEEN &

Duality of Man

Sculpture of Marble and Man

During this past year, 18- to 24-year-olds, like most of America, have been polarized. One of the most common places for polarization is politics. This statue represents the brokenness and the partisan identity of the YAYA demographic. Since over half of youth and young adults in America believe that the United States is the greatest country in the world, the artist chose to use an old marble bust to represent their traditional values. The man in the makeup shows the pursuit of something new.

53% agreed with the statement, “I think the United States is the greatest country in the world.”

58% of respondents resonated with the statement “10 years from now, the United States will be a better society than it is today.”

Betwixt and between (n.): not fully or properly either of two things. There is no clear direction for how YAYA consumers feel about the future of American society or the current state of American institutions. There are a lot of contradictory feelings within the YAYA market itself and no clear path forward. They could be destined for freefall or find a foothold – YAYA consumers are a group stuck at a crossroad.

Our data shows that respondents are evenly split on the United States’ place in the world; 53% agreed and 47% disagreed with the statement, “I think the United States is the greatest country in the world.” Men (61%) agreed with the statement more so than women (44%) and older respondents aged 22-to-24 (59%) were more likely to agree than 18-to-22-year-olds (48%). However, survey results suggested that political partisanship might play a role in YAYA consumers’ perceptions of the United States.

Respondents who indicated that they were strongly affiliated with either political party were more likely to have strong feelings about the United States’ status. Nearly half (48%) of those strongly identifying as Republicans strongly agreed that the United States is the greatest country in the world. Seventy-six percent of strong Republicans agreed to some extent. On the other side of the “political coin,” respondents who identified as strong Democrats were more evenly split on their perception of the United States, but were more likely than other segments to have a strong stance, with 23% strongly disagreeing and 19% strongly agreeing.

When YAYA consumers are uncertain of their country’s future, they find their anxious emotions bleeding into their own personal paths. Making large purchases or big life decisions can seem daunting without stable ground. Fifty-eight percent of respondents resonated with the statement “10 years from now, the United States will be a better society than it is today,” but a majority of responses felt lukewarm.

Thirty-four percent of YAYA respondents somewhat agree that America will be a better society 10 years from now than it is today, yet 21% somewhat disagreed. Overall, younger respondents are slightly more pessimistic regarding this topic. Within the overall YAYA market, younger respondents are slightly more pessimistic. Fifty-four percent of 18- to-22-year-old respondents believe that American society will progress within the next 10 years, whereas 63% of 22- to-24-year-olds echoed the sentiment. It is clear that YAYA individuals aren’t really sure what the United States will have to offer in the future.

Implications

Marketers should be wary of clearly defining “what’s next” because YAYA consumers don’t have that confidence. Their feelings are contradictory and can change on a dime during these formative years of early adulthood. Brands should carefully evaluate any decision to appeal to a sense of patriotism or national pride, which can be a major turn-off for younger consumers with a pessimistic outlook for the country’s future.



We the Planet

Collage on Paper

YAYA consumers are unsure what’s next. Borders are virtually fading while physically becoming more opaque. The population of the United States is dividing into two contradicting groups. Young people are struggling to put their trust in the political bodies. They want the national government to take responsibility while simultaneously believing that individuals are most responsible for the country. The minds of today’s youths are battlegrounds in need of a white flag.

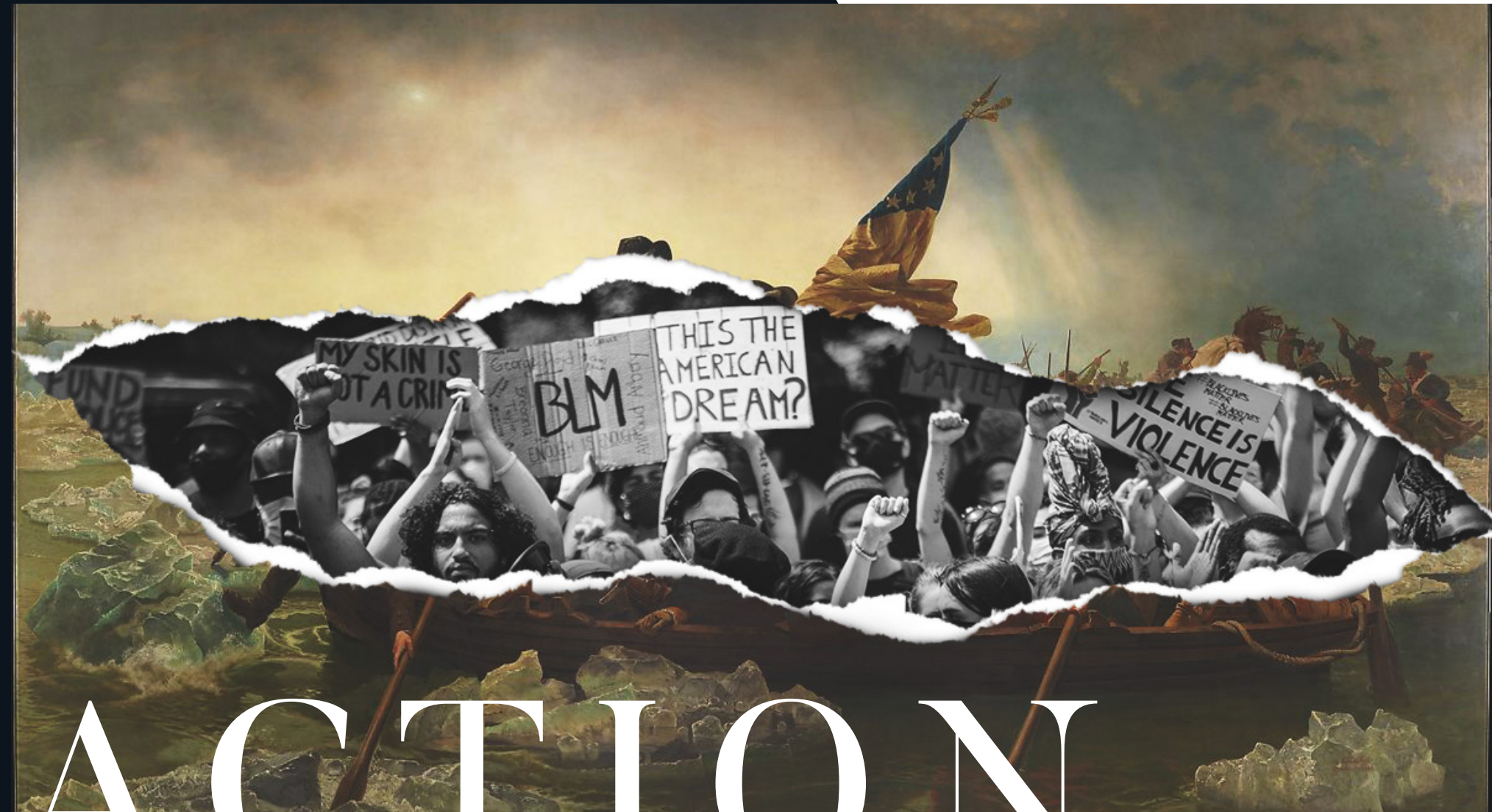
Every Day Is a Revolution

Oil on Canvas

In the same way that Washington Crossing the Delaware represents the United States' fight for freedom, so do photos of American citizens protesting in support of movements like climate change and Black Lives Matter. This piece represents the popular perception that the fight is never over and action will always be taken. Most often young people are on the front lines of these fights. That is especially true for the 18- to 24-year-olds of today.

ANXIETY BREEDS

ACTION

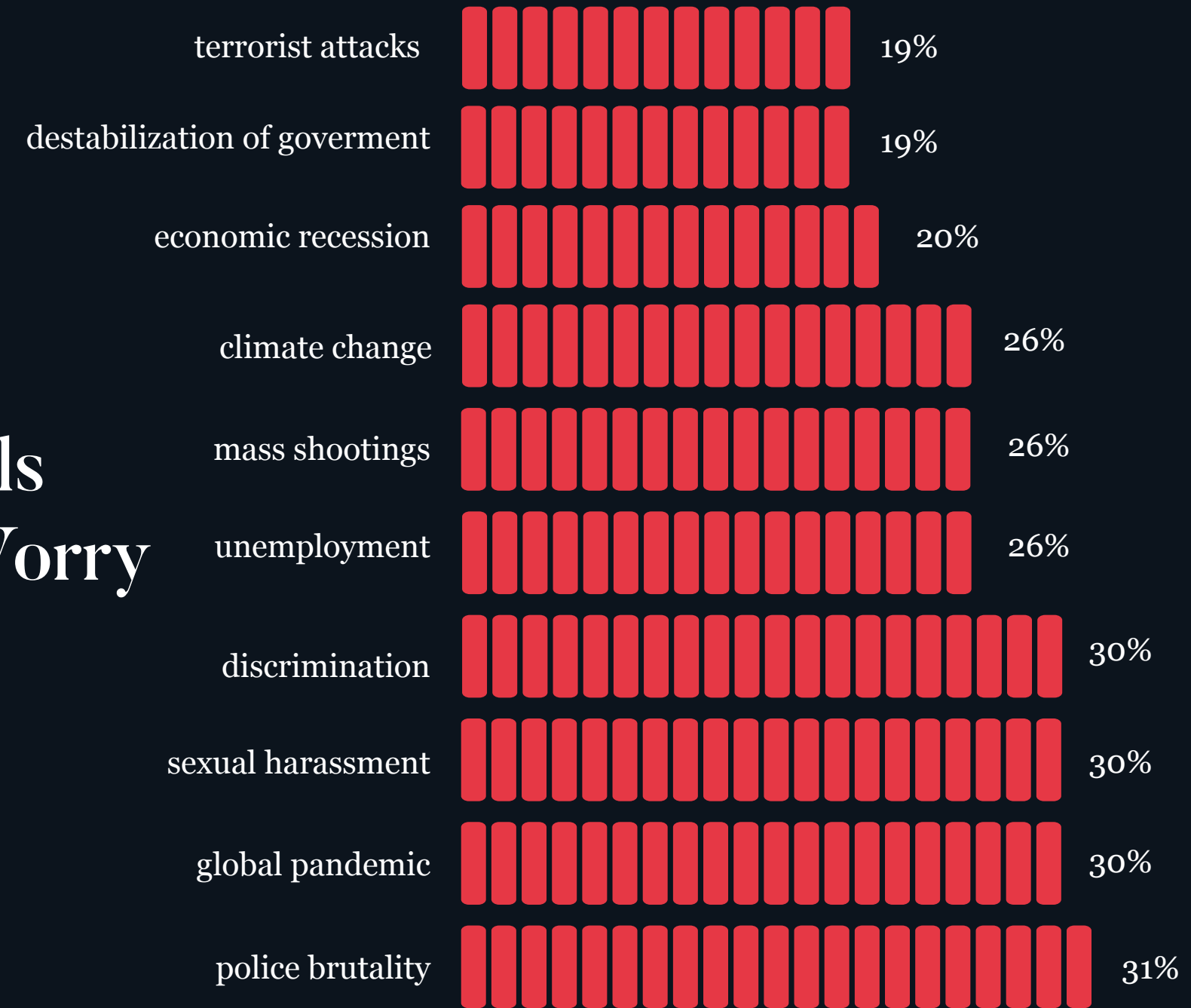


Individuals in the YAYA demographic may seem to worry a lot, but there is a lot to worry about. Mintel reports 83% of 18-25-year-olds say their day-to-day life is stressful, and Business Insider says the combination of financial stress and the pandemic has worsened this age group’s mental health. It has also increased stress, frustration, anxiety and loneliness.⁹ Beyond individual stressors, YAYA consumers are also worried about society as a whole.

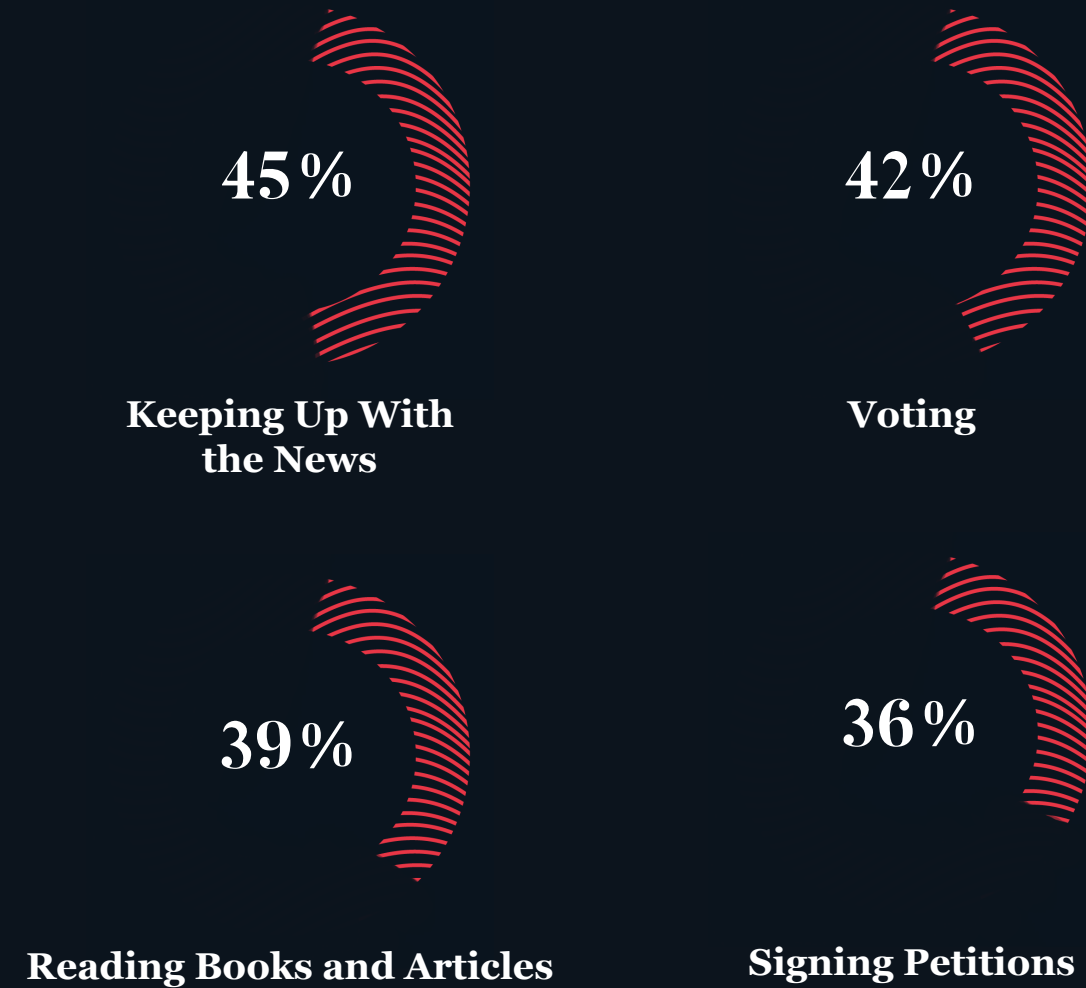
According to our survey data, 3 in 4 respondents identified that they feel anxious when thinking about the future of U.S. society. However, these feelings aren’t consistent across the board – anxiety can coexist with positive feelings as well. Fifty-two percent of YAYA individuals feel “happy” about the future of U.S. society and 53% feel “excited.” On average, 60% of respondents felt “hopeful.”

After being provided a list of current issues facing society, YAYA individuals were asked how frequently they worry about specific issues on a scale from always to never. Roughly 30% of respondents indicated they always worry about the issues of police brutality (31%), sexual harassment (30%), discrimination (30%) and a global pandemic (30%). Worries about police brutality was significantly higher among Black (41%) and Hispanic/Latino (39%) respondents than white respondents (24%). Additionally, 1 in 4 respondents always worry about the threats of mass shootings (26%), unemployment (26%) and climate change (26%). Finally, 1 in 5 respondents indicated they always worry about the threat of economic recession (20%), terrorist attacks (19%) and destabilization of the government (19%).

YAYA Individuals Always Worry About...



How Many YAYA Individuals Are Activists



YAYA individuals are concerned with what is happening in society and they are not waiting for someone else to come along and fix it. One in three YAYA respondents indicated that individuals are most responsible for solving social problems facing our country today. Seventy-four percent of survey respondents agree with the statement, “My actions can create a positive change in society.” Additionally, 64% of respondents agreed with the statement, “My generation will make the world a better place.”

However, Pew Research Center found that people in this age range believe the government should do more to solve problems.⁶ When asked who should be the most responsible for solving economic problems in our society, the most common answer among survey respondents was the president (18%), followed by national legislators (11%).

This activist mindset is reflected in our survey data when asked if they considered themselves an activist, which we defined as the “the practice of taking direct action to achieve political or social goals.” Nearly half (46%) of survey respondents agreed, and 84% engaged in an activity we defined as a form of activism in the past year. The most popular options were keeping up with the news (45%), voting (42%), reading books and articles (39%) and signing petitions (36%).

Implications

YAYA consumers want brand messaging that helps ease their anxiety and stress about the future, but they can see through a façade. Brands should take care to maintain honesty and transparency in their marketing efforts. Additionally, YAYA individuals seek out opportunities to do good in their communities. Marketers can capitalize on this by providing consumers with options to give back and emphasizing their own corporate social responsibility and charitable giving efforts.

The Tinker

Wires

Anxiety and stress impact young people at an alarming rate. These feelings have been compounded by the tumultuous events of this past year. YAYA consumers have a lot of free time to think about their lives and their country's future as of late. The name *The Tinker* is a play on its inspiration *The Thinker*, as well as the dictionary definition of the word itself. To tinker is to attempt to repair or improve something in a casual or desultory way, often to no useful effect. Many 18- to 24-year-olds today want to take action but feel like what they are doing has little to no effect. They need constant inspiration to keep their spirits high.



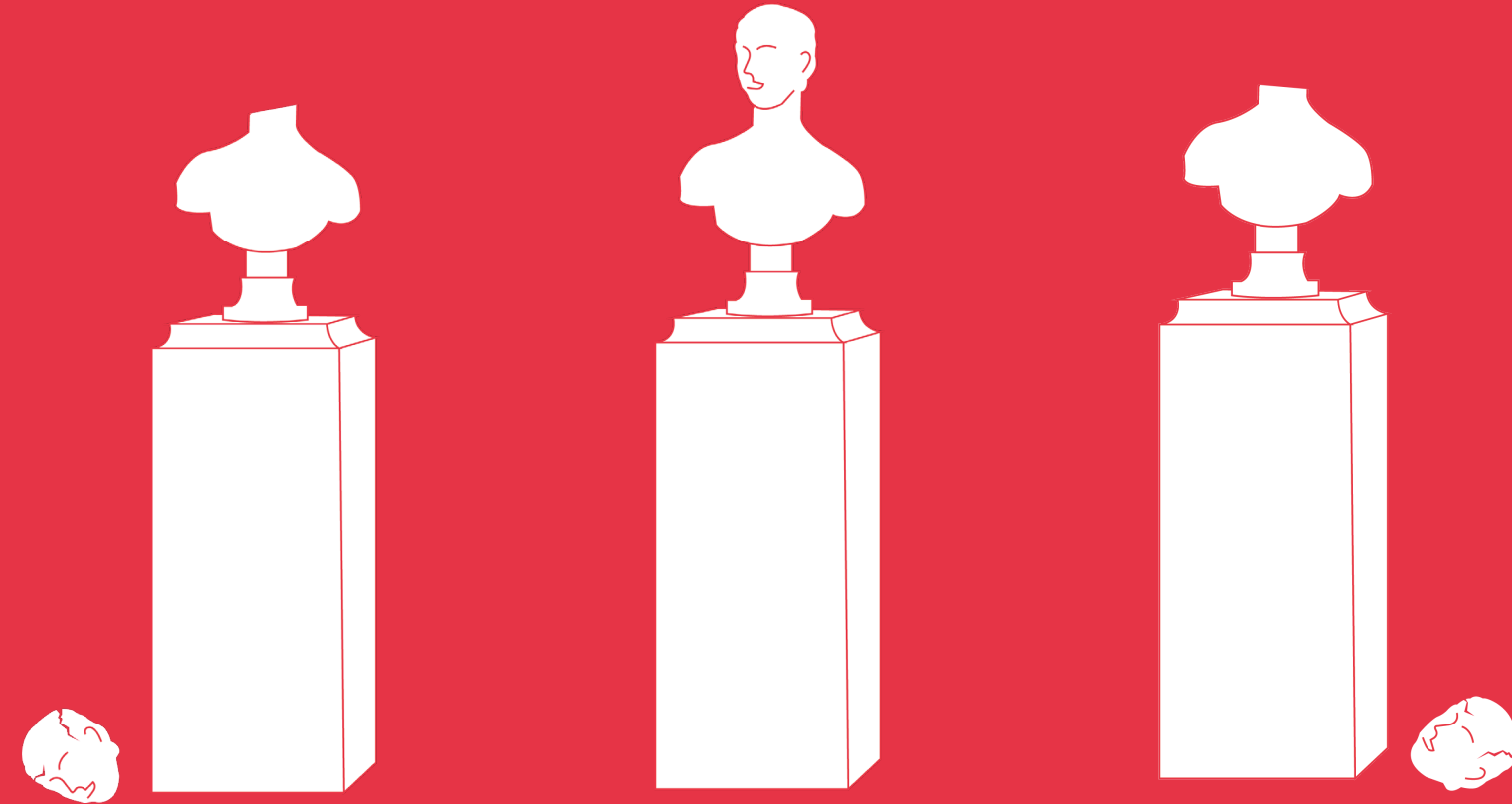
AUTHENTICITY & ASSURANCE

Use Your Voice

Stickers and Oil on Canvas

'Use Your Voice' represents how the YAYA demographic is leaving their mark on everything. No sector of American life is off-limits for today's 18- to 24-year-olds: human rights, the climate crisis, police brutality and more are all topics of conversation they have opinions on. Today's youth do not need permission to speak up or speak out. No brand or person should put something into the world onto which they do not want a YAYA tag stuck.





Two in three YAYA consumers agree they would **stop** buying from a company or brand that behaved in a way which does not align with their values.

Artists are often criticized for “selling out” and not being true to themselves. The same is true for corporations. YAYA consumers often hold brands in a high regard and expect authenticity. For marketers to be successful, they need to be both authentic and assuring in their messaging. It is crucial to show consumers exactly what steps your brand is taking to make a difference in the world.

Part of the YAYA demographic remains skeptical of brands taking action on social issues. Nearly three-fourths of respondents agree with the statement: “I’m skeptical of companies and brands that claim to support a social cause.” Additionally, 72% of respondents agree with the statement: “Companies will pretend to “do good” just so I will buy from them.” This data stresses how important it is for brands to assure consumers they are authentic.

While data shows some in this life stage deem brands inauthentic, it is important to note that taking a stand on social issues is still expected from brands. Roughly two-thirds of YAYA consumers agree they would stop buying from a company or brand that behaved in a way that doesn’t align with their values. Furthermore, 63% of YAYA consumers prefer to purchase from brands that have a point of view and stand for something. Forbes reports, “On average, 50% of millennials and Gen-Z will jump on a brand’s bandwagon if they demonstrate a knowledge of what they believe in and how they choose to live their lives.”⁷

Assurance will be key in winning over this age group. According to a Title report from 2020, “Younger members of the YAYA market are the most likely of any consumer group in the United States to engage in brand advocacy programs, with a 39% advantage over the average consumer. Additionally, they are 91% more likely to choose their products based on brand reputation.”¹⁰

This is encouraging data for brands that may have previously been wary of taking a stand on social issues. Data shows that it’s good for businesses to use their voice when speaking to YAYA consumers. According to a Crowd DNA survey, Gesenhues reported that 61% of respondents voiced that they would be willing to pay more for brands that enact social change and were produced more ethically.⁴ Marketers should aim to put philanthropy and social issues at the forefront of messaging. Make it easy for those in this demographic to see you are giving back, taking a stand and showing support for important issues. According to a research study done by BBMG and GloveScan, about 1 in 4 18-22-year-olds cannot name a single brand they consider to be purposeful.²

Implications

Today's brands have a unique opportunity to make a difference in a substantial way. Given the current state of things, there is tremendous opportunity to give back to society in a meaningful way. By making this commitment and practicing authenticity and assurance, brands have the chance to be top-of-mind in a valuable and durable way. This life group is very strong-willed when it comes to pushing brands to "do better."



No Blindspot

Oil on Canvas

18- to 24-year-olds consume in a direct way. They don't want to take a backseat when it comes to how a brand should act or what they should promote. They want sightlines to the inner workings of the companies to which they entrust their time and money. That is what this portrait represents. Companies need to pull back their blinds and invite YAYA consumers in and assure them that their business practices align with today's values.

MONEY TALKS

Charging Piggy Bank

Ceramics and Bitcoin

Despite 18- to-24-year-olds caring about social causes and corporate responsibility, at the end of the day, price drives YAYA consumers to make purchases. This piece shows to onlookers that young adults are saving their money rather than spending it the way that millennials did before them. The ceramic medium was chosen to represent the perceptions YAYA consumers have of the market. They saw its fragility when their parents suffered during the financial crisis in 2008.

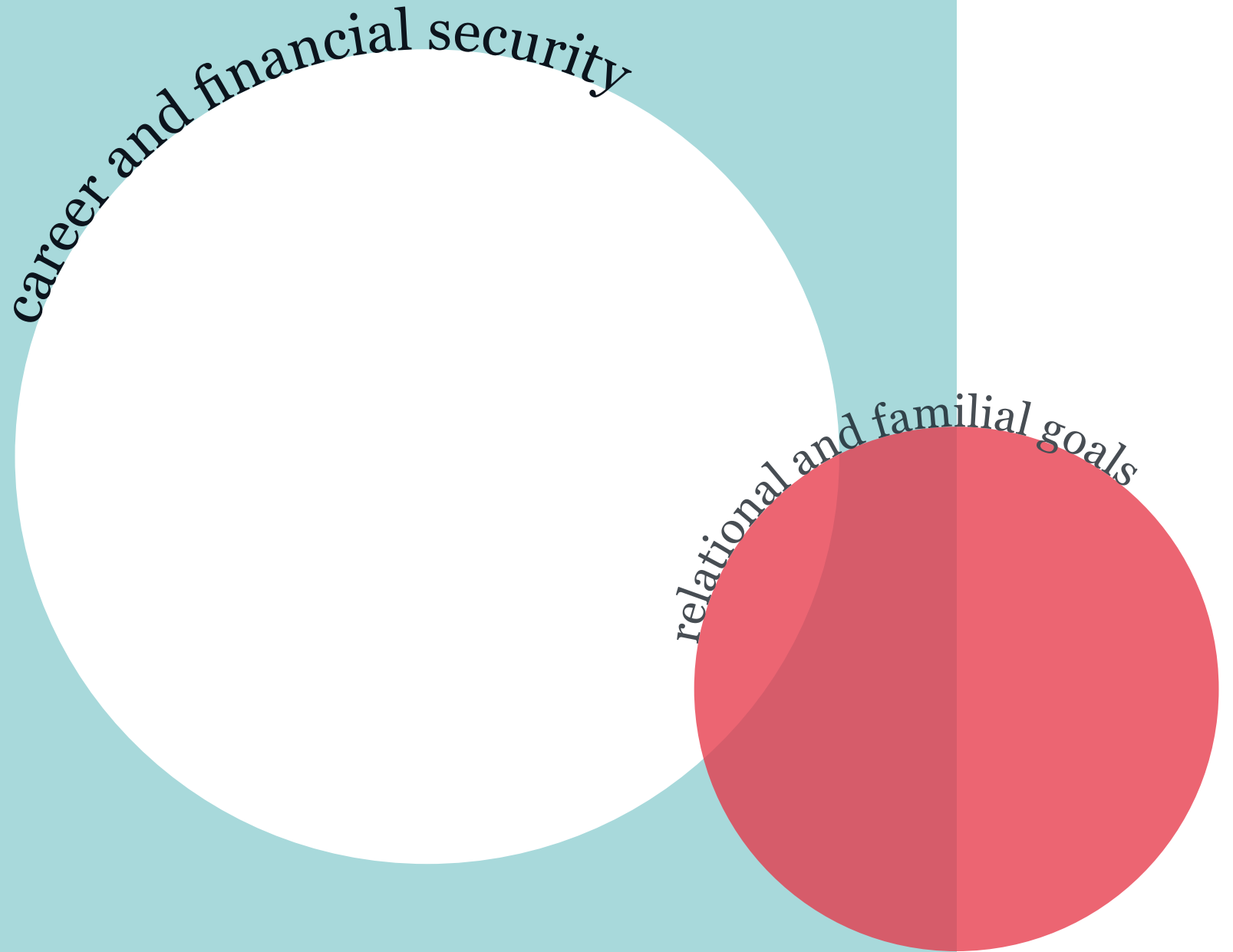


Just like priceless works of art, savings and investments increase in value over time. More than ever before, YAYA individuals are aware that wealth gives power and influence to those that possess it. Despite their high standards for products, they are still looking for the best bargain given their financial situations. As a result, YAYA consumers are being extra careful and deliberate with their spending. One in three respondents do not often spend money on non-essential items. This means that when they do spend money, they are looking for the best deals possible. Per a study by Medium, nearly half of all YAYA respondents shopped secondhand in 2019, showing that they still crave premium-brand products, just at a bargain price.³

The YAYA demographic is showing their priority for a secure future rather than one-time experiences now, with more than 70% of respondents stating they would rather invest \$5,000 than spend it on a vacation. With YAYA individuals witnessing the great recession and the resulting financial insecurities that millions of families faced as they were growing up, they gained a greater understanding of the value of investments and financial security.

Sixty-five percent of survey respondents also stated that they follow a budget or set financial goals, which shows their frugality and dedication to their own future. They understand not only do they want to enjoy life, but they want to make it enjoyable for as long as possible. Forbes credits them with being the “pragmatic generation,” who are ultimately motivated by having a secure life outside of work.

More than 70% of respondents stated they would rather invest \$5,000 than spend it on a vacation.



career and financial security

relational and familial goals

This is especially true for members of the YAYA demographic who have personally witnessed some form of financial insecurity. More than half of respondents who had experienced food or employment insecurity said that financial stability was extremely important. Fifty percent of those who had family that put off medical visits or delay bill payments listed it as extremely important.

The YAYA market is also motivated by career success more so than personal relationships. They ranked career and finance-related factors like owning a home or car and having a larger retirement account higher than things that were once considered traditional life goals, like graduating college, getting married and having children.⁸

Because of the increased strain on the YAYA consumers' wallets, they have to prioritize cost over social stances. In an IBM study, the most important qualities for a product to have when shopping are ease of access, location/mode of shopping and access to the best deals.¹¹ In addition to valuing the way that they spend their money, YAYA individuals also value the way they earn with 70% saying a paycheck is their biggest motivator.¹ HR Gazette also states they are willing to sacrifice nights and weekends if it means bringing home a larger paycheck.

Automated Telling Masterpiece

Bust of Marble and Money

YAYA consumers have mastered the art of being frugal. After seeing their parents struggle during the financial crisis of the mid-oughts, today's youth have taken it upon themselves to create an immortal reminder to practice frugality. Thus, the Automated Telling Masterpiece (ATM) was created. It serves as a reminder that they need to save money if they are to enjoy their lives in the long run. The stack of money near the heart represents that 18- to 24-year-olds will only make big purchases if they are certain that their investment was planned out and will pay off.



Implications

As for marketers, they need to actively show YAYA consumers why they should put their money toward something. YAYA individuals favor companies that offer a chance to buy things they need, yet donate a portion of the purchase to help others. But with their tight budgets, it is often a challenge. So YAYA consumers typically settle for the best deal available. With that being said, these individuals are not prone to impulse buying. They like to consider their purchases and do their research on products by taking careful consideration and reading reviews. This allows opportunities for finance companies (big banks, budgeting apps, etc.) to reach a brand new generation.

The YAYA market is a brushstroke of color on the dull canvas that is the status quo. As radical changes are taking place all over the world, today's youth and young adults are taking this opportunity to paint a portrait of the planet they want to inhabit.

During your stroll through the Gallery of Now, you will have noticed that there is no clear direction for how YAYA consumers feel about the current state of American institutions. That is because 18- to 24-year-olds are still outlining their country's place in the world.

YAYA consumers are complex, everchanging artists. In order to resonate with these artists, marketers must come from a place of sympathy and understanding. Often overstimulated with news, these individuals feel disconnected from their communities after the events of 2020.

Art is a representation of something deeper; it is hardly ever what it means to look like. As COVID-19 remolded the country's social, political and economic landscape, this generation strives to do the same – but on their terms. Keep this in mind and keep an eye out for today's Anonymous Artists.

Methodology Methodology Methodology

Our 63 question survey was distributed nationwide through Qualtrics, resulting in 724 completed responses from YAYA consumers. The sample was representative of the U.S. Census Bureau data for 18- to 24-year-olds related to race, ethnicity and gender.

In addition to our primary research, we utilized dozens of secondary resources, including Mintel, Pew Research Center, Forbes, Statista, Nielsen and past State of the YAYA reports, to gain a better insight into the evolving YAYA market.

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