



518

IN THE DARK

2022 STATE OF THE YAYA

A black and white photograph of a textured wall next to a window with a grid pattern.

WHAT IS 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?

Coined by MOJO Ad, the term “YAYA” refers to all 18- to 24-year-olds, or the youth and young adult market. These consumers are at a pivotal life stage, 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 try new ones. If marketers fail to reach them, they might never catch up.

WHAT IS 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 companies connect with them. 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 as people, providing a deeper look at attitudes and behaviors toward the state of things.

INTRODUCTION

Horror movies are somewhat of a cultural phenomenon. Moviemakers are constantly trying to create new villains or scenarios that will intrigue and terrify viewers. Characters range from the outlandish, like Michael Myers and Freddy Krueger, to the more realistic, like Billy Loomis from *Scream* or *Dexter*. No matter how crazy the stories are, people turn to horror movies to escape from the monotony of their own lives. They imagine that if they were in these stories, they would make all the right decisions in order to escape and survive. At least that’s what people think until they’re really faced with true terror.

In these last two years, everyone has faced a deadly, long-lasting pandemic. The world changed. People saw work and school moved fully online. The only gatherings people could attend were either virtual or with those they lived with. While some quickly adapted to the new normal, the existence of the average youth and young adult became like a horror movie. Plagued by the state of things, those in the YAYA demographic find themselves trapped in a living nightmare.

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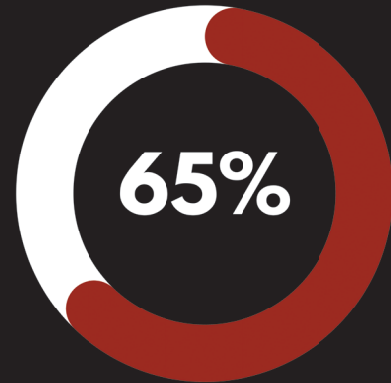
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ALWAYS WATCHING

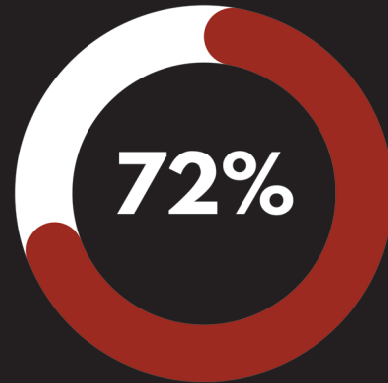
Our story begins with a frightening vision. YAYA consumers grew up in a post-9/11 world, constantly surrounded by war and recessions leading to an overall pessimistic outlook on life. They find the state of the United States and the government worrisome; 65% of respondents stated that they are not proud of the government's actions. Despite their lack of faith in the government, 72% believe it is the government's responsibility to advocate for change and hold corporations (86%) and people (81%) accountable for their actions.

The YAYA audience is frustratingly contradictory, not trusting the people in power to fix problems such as climate change, but at the same time expecting them to fix these problems. Eighty percent believe it is the government's responsibility to handle social and community issues, while only 75% say climate change is the government's responsibility to solve. This characteristic continues into their voting habits. Seventy percent of respondents claim that they are likely to research political candidates using websites and blogs (52%), social media (45%), TV and cable (38%), newspapers (36%) or rely on friends and families (28%). Even though they research candidates, only 69% said they are only somewhat likely to vote in the next presidential election, 66% are somewhat likely to vote in the next Congressional election and 67% are somewhat likely to vote in the next local elections.

THEY FIND THE STATE OF THE GOVERNMENT WORRISOME



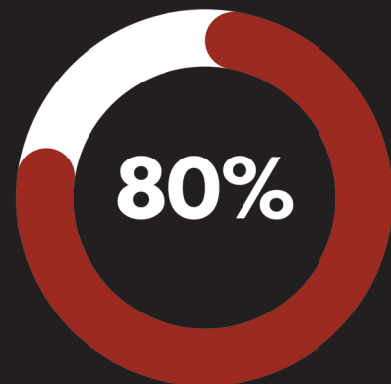
stated that they are not proud of the government's actions



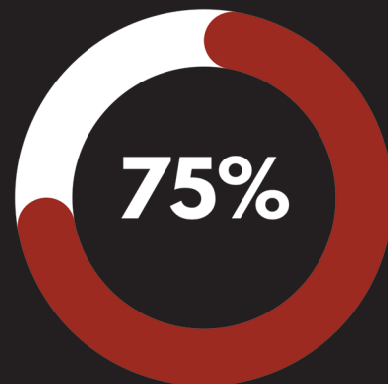
believe it is the government's responsibility to advocate for change

YAYA individuals believe the government should hold **corporations (86%)** and **people (81%)** accountable for their actions.

YET THEY RELY ON THE GOVERNMENT TO INITIATE CHANGE



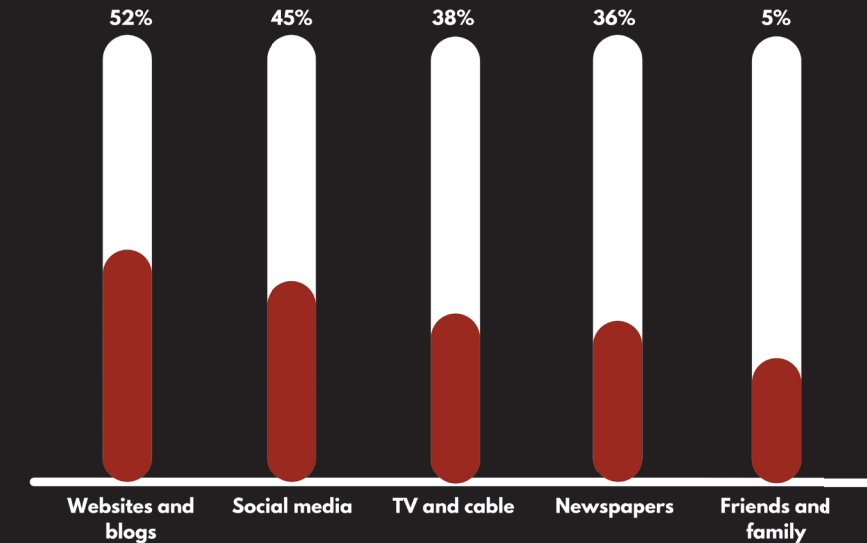
believe it is the government's responsibility to handle social and community issues



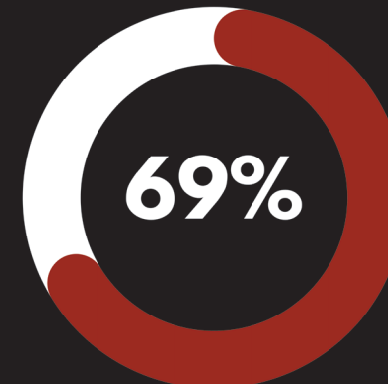
say climate change is the government's responsibility to solve

VOTING HABITS

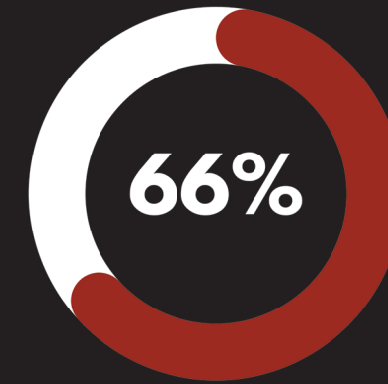
Seventy percent of respondents claim that they are likely to research political candidates using:



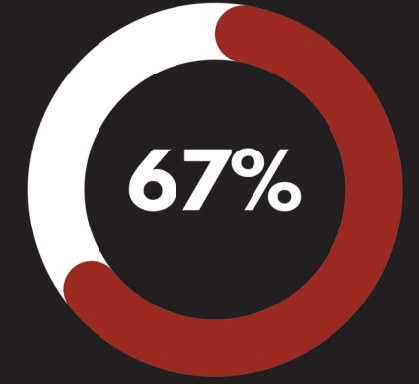
YAYA individuals are somewhat likely to vote in:



next presidential election



next congressional election



next local elections

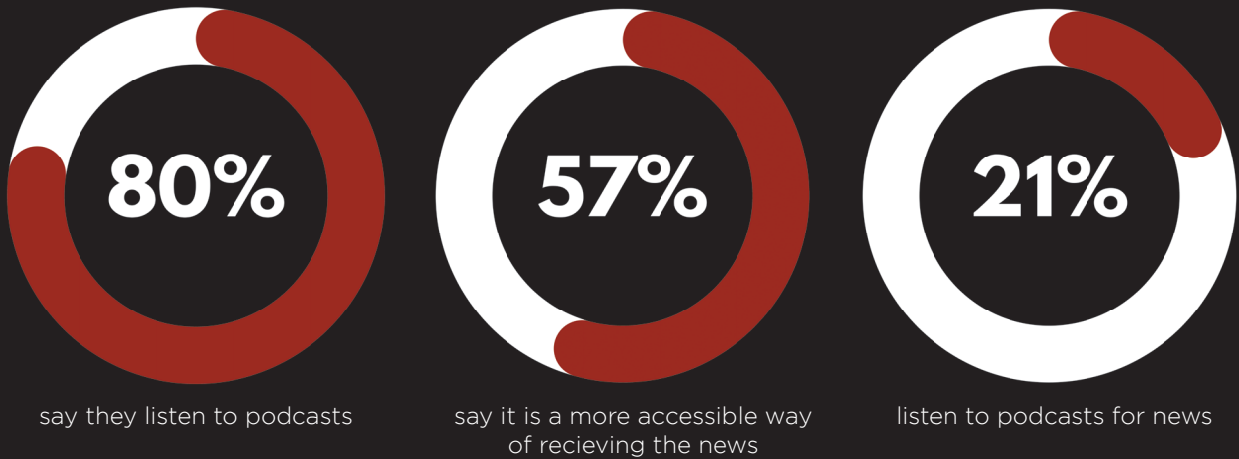
Another way YAYA individuals stay up to date on the state of things is through podcasts. Eighty percent of respondents state that they listen to podcasts, with over half (57%) saying it is a more accessible way of receiving the news. Though the most popular genres are comedy (37%) and true crime (30%), 21% listen to podcasts for news. The reason for the high listenership of podcasts is that they trust the podcaster (52%), trust the news organization (34%), find it more entertaining than traditional news (51%), prefer to listen to the news (38%) or like to have somebody explain what is going on in the world (34%).

YAYA consumers are glued to their phone, the addiction going so far that 67% of respondents said they need to have their phones next to them while they sleep. The majority (68%) use the platforms to express themselves and share their opinions. When it comes to social media, however, when they do share their opinions 63% said they would prefer never to be able to see reactions to their posts.

Despite their constant need for their phone, they do acknowledge that the digital space is a terrifying place. Sixty-five percent believe brands such as Twitter, Spotify and Facebook should be responsible for stopping the mass spread of misinformation on their platforms, with only 50% believing what they read on social media is accurate.

18- to 24-year-olds have inherited a country they aren't proud of and do not trust anyone to fix it; instead, they are taking matters into their own hands, even if their words and actions are purely performative.

RELATIONSHIP WITH PODCASTS



Reasons for listening to podcasts:



IMPLICATIONS

The YAYA demographic, despite its contradictory nature, believes actions speak louder than words, which creates opportunities for meaningful connections with marketers and communicators.

Cite sources in a clear, accessible way, create engaging content on social platforms and ensure brand ambassadors' beliefs align with your beliefs. By publicly supporting efforts for change, donations and investing in eco-friendly practices, YAYA consumers will see marketers and communicators as allies in these dark times.



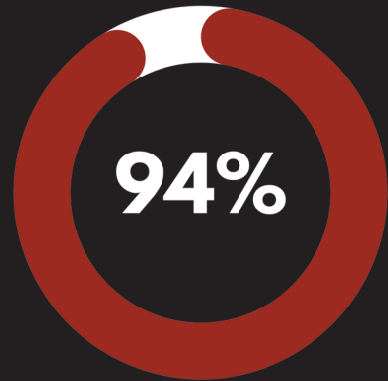
OUT OF REACH



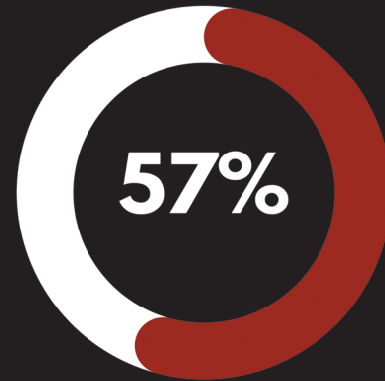
Given the circumstances in which they grew up, YAYA consumers have a different definition of success than their predecessors. Instead of dreaming of a significant other and children, they just want to survive. According to our research, 94% of survey respondents state that financial stability is important, while only 57% said marriage and having children is important. After witnessing a mass recession in 2008, the fear of crippling debt and unemployment follows them like a shadow. They never want to be in a position where they are forced to choose between living and surviving.

YAYA individuals are still trying to be good citizens in their journey to reach stability. Sixty-three percent of them consider keeping up with the news a civic duty. They know the power they hold and want to create positive change in society. That said, 74% believe they can tune out the news and current events if they want to.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT?

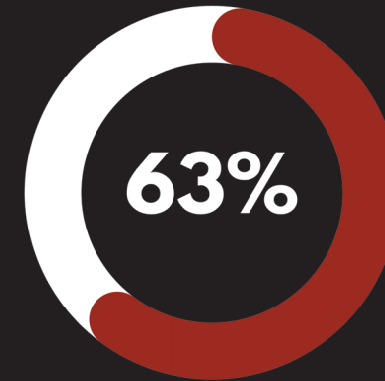


say financial stability is important

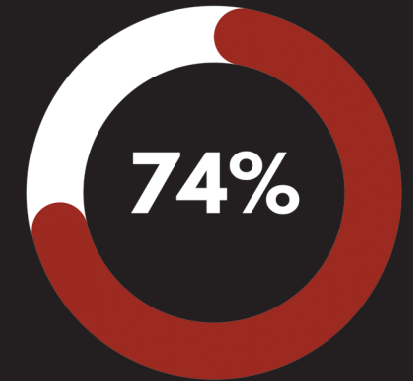


say marriage and having children is important

NEWS CONSUMPTION

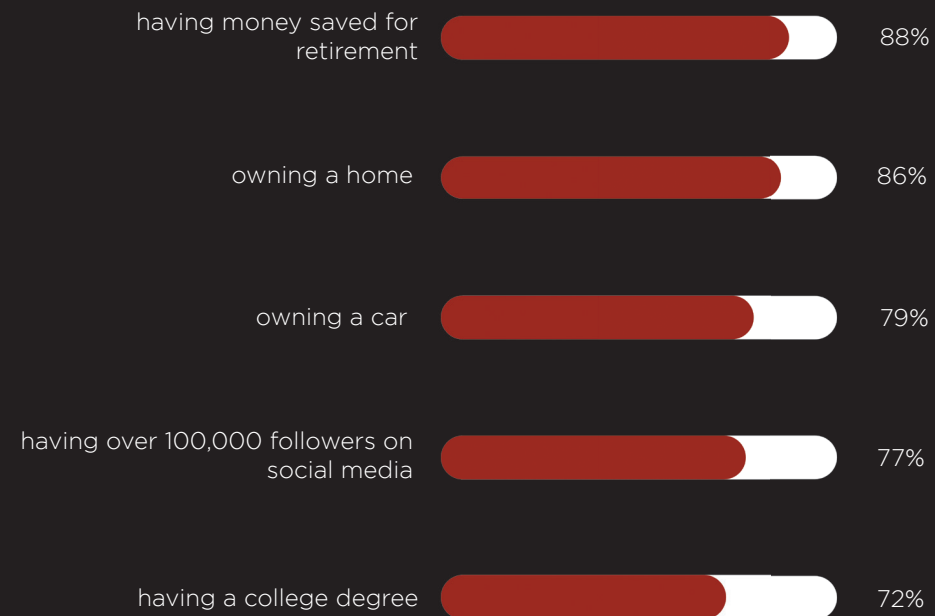


consider keeping up with the news a civic duty



believe they can tune out the news and current events if they want to

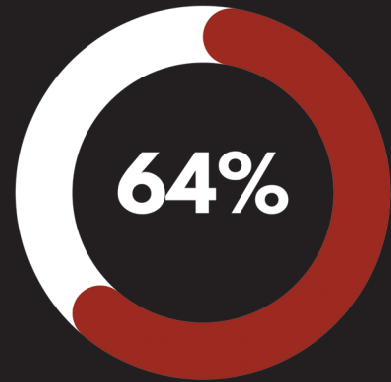
WHAT DEFINES SUCCESS?



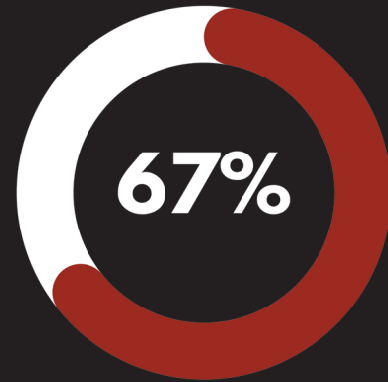
YAYA consumers define success by financial ability. Owning a home (86%), a car (79%), and having money saved up for retirement (88%) are indicators of success rather than having a college degree (72%) or having over 100,000 followers on social media (77%). However, the pandemic has set them back. They are uncertain about the future and often financially rely on their parents.

While YAYA consumers are generally pessimistic in their outlook on life, they harbor some hopeful beliefs. According to our research, 64% believe that “the one” exists and 67% believe the primary reason for getting into a relationship is to find a spouse. Fifty-eight percent want to get married in the next five years, but what is even more shocking is that 64% want to have children within the next 10 years. A possible reason for these hopes could be that over half (52%) feel pressured to get married in their 20s even though 33% of them have never been on a date.

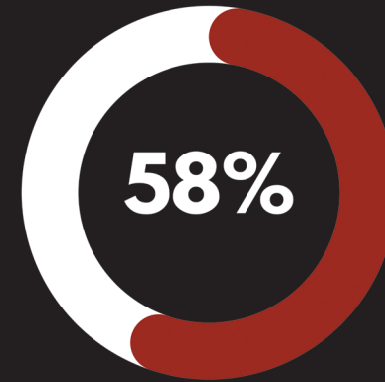
MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN



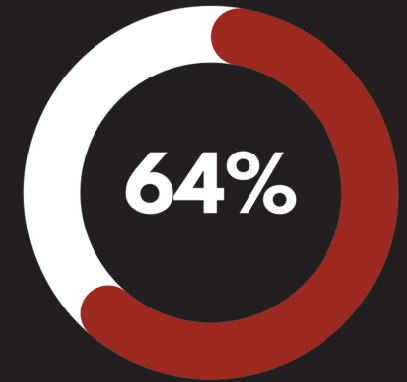
believe "the one" exists



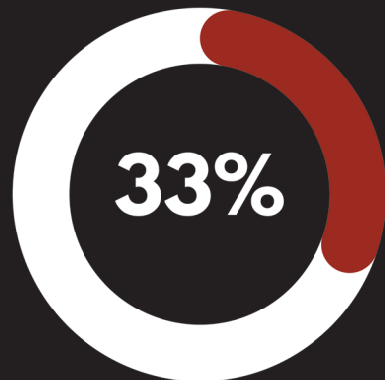
believe the primary reason to get into a relationship
is to find a spouse



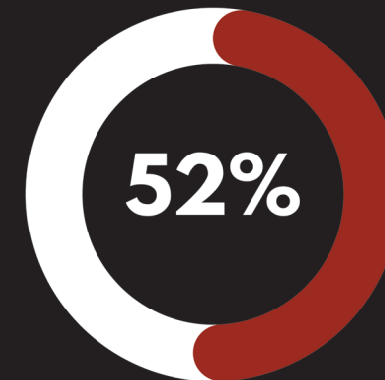
want to get married in the next five years



want to have children within the next 10 years



have never been on a date



feel pressured to get married in their 20s

IMPLICATIONS

To connect with the youth market, marketers and communicators need to offer feelings of consistency and comfort with branding and packaging, like Taco Bell's Cantina.

Taco Bell took everyone's favorite midnight snack and made it more adult appropriate; in select locations, Taco Bell put in a bar called The Cantina where their favorite food could be combined with alcoholic drinks. This experience nurtures childhood nostalgia while introducing a uniquely adult ingredient. Stimulate youth and young adult ambitions by developing experiences and products that reflect "grown-up" versions of YAYA childhood favorites. Also, provide exclusive deals for young adults under 25 and teach them how to use their finances wisely. If those in the YAYA demographic feel like the brand cares about them and wants them to succeed, they will stay loyal.



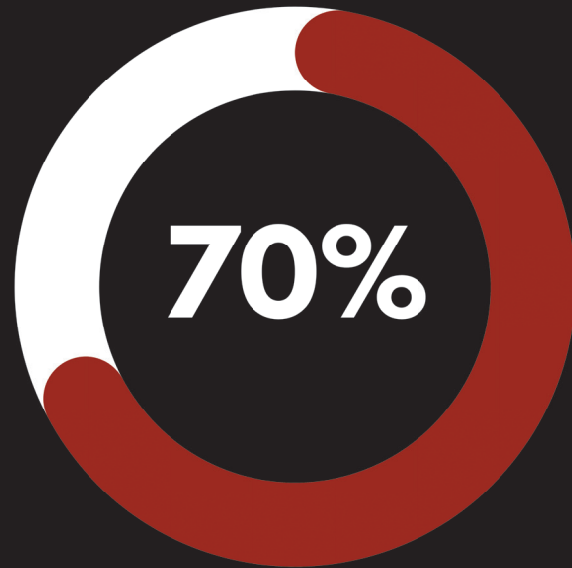
ANXIETY FOLLOWS THEM

Everywhere YAYA individuals go, a shadow lurks behind them, causing them constant anxiety and uncertainty. They put up a strong front, trying to change the world and educate themselves on world issues, but inside they are terrified. According to our research, 70% of respondents agree that the state of the world affects their mental health and they are constantly stressed. They are at the age where every choice affects their future. What college to attend? What major to choose? What job to take? What city to move to? All of these decisions weigh heavily on their consciences, and their anxiety is a large component of their decision-making process.

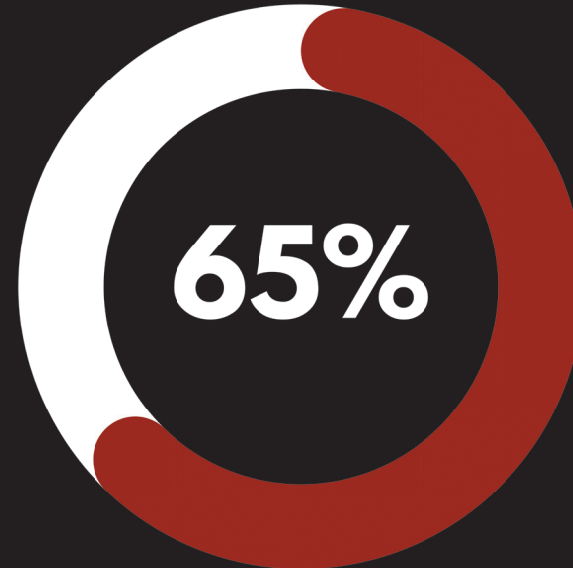
The pandemic has made things even worse, with 65% of respondents stating that COVID-19 only exasperated their current mental health issues. Over half of YAYA consumers wake up feeling anxious, which affects every part of their day. What affects them most is finding a job (77%) and politics (60%), while issues like gun control (48%) and immigration (40%) cause them less anxiety. They grew up in a time when money was a touchy subject. The 2008 recession was hard on families, and despite YAYA individuals not being in the workforce, they learned the importance of choosing a career that could support them financially. More recently, they saw families torn apart by politics, showing them that solving problems is more important than party leanings. This contributes to their feelings of loneliness and desire to delay marriage and children.

These YAYA consumers experience anxiety every day, all the time. The state of the world is overwhelming, and their uncertainty about their own lives complicates their perception of it. Whether it be in the voter's box or at the dinner table, anxiety is around every corner. The curse of constant stress is a shadow lurking behind them.

MENTAL HEALTH



agree the state of the world affects their mental health



say COVID-19 exasperated their current mental health issues

WHAT AFFECTS THEM MOST:

finding a job 77%

politics 60%

THEY ARE LESS ANXIOUS ABOUT:

gun control 48%

immigration 40%



IMPLICATIONS

Marketers and communicators can use the knowledge of the near-constant anxiety of the YAYA demographic by creating a safe space for them.

Normalize conversations surrounding mental health topics or host mindfulness workshops. Companies can also create mental health guides that discuss how to stay healthy during stressful situations such as financial hardship, isolation and anxiety, similar to what Boohoo, an international clothing brand, does. Mental health is a constant struggle for this demographic, and by acknowledging and investing in mental health, YAYA consumers will become and stay loyal to the brand.

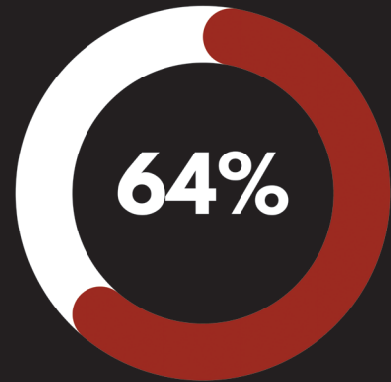
COLLECTIVE POWER

Even with their contradictory tendencies and deep mistrust of the government, the YAYA audience feels anything but helpless. They understand that there are a lot of issues in the United States, but know that the best weapon against misinformation is education, more specifically for voting rights (55%), racial injustice (46%) and climate change (44%).

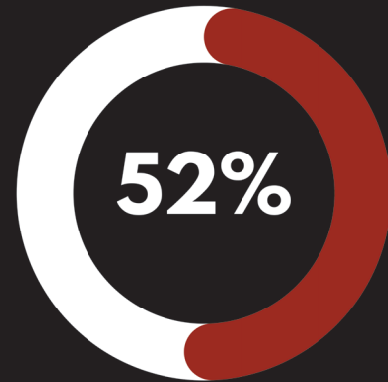
They are the most diverse generation the country has ever seen in both thought and opinion. They are open to unconventional forms of friendships with more than half (64%) stating that social media is a healthy, meaningful way to start a friendship. Fifty-two percent believe that they are as close with their online-only friends as they are with their in-person friends and about the same (53%) believe they are just as deep as in-person friendships. They are also open to having friends who share different perspectives on religion (73%), race and class (58%), gender equality (57%), sexuality (66%), vaccinations (74%), religion (83%) and personal values (64%). However, this thought process doesn't extend to all aspects of romantic relationships. Fifty-one percent of respondents say that it is necessary to have similar personal values, but they are willing to have a romantic relationship with someone who doesn't share their perspectives regarding politics (66%), race and class (54%), gender equality (53%), sexuality (57%), vaccinations (68%) and religion (71%).

Their differences give them a unique view of the world and with their education, they believe they can change the world. Sixty-seven percent of respondents believe their generation will make the world a better place and even more (84%) believe their actions can create positive change in society.

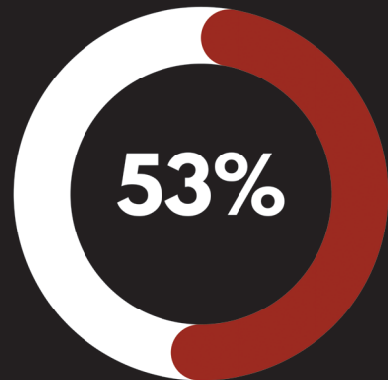
PERSPECTIVES ON FRIENDSHIPS



say social media is a meaningful way to start friendships

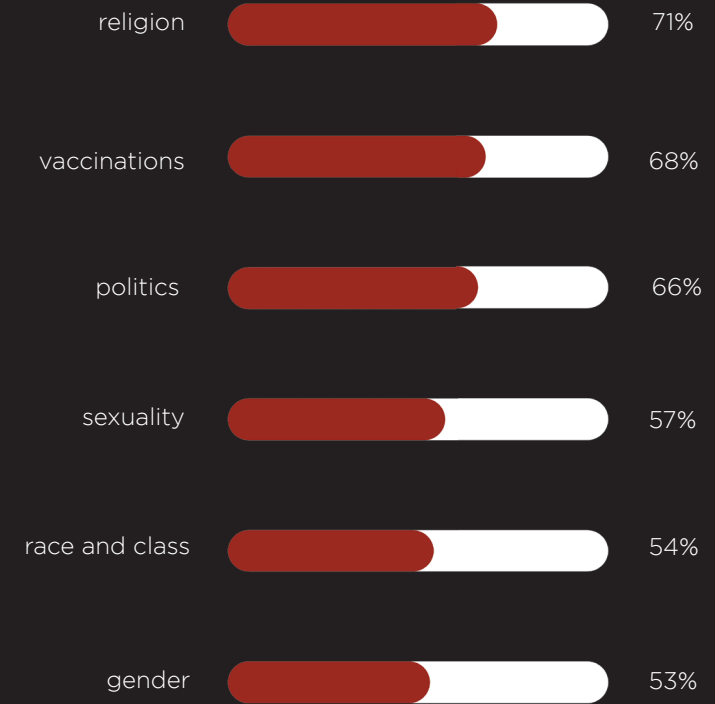


believe they are just as close with their online only friends as in-person friends



believe online-only friendships are just as deep as in-person friendships

OPEN TO DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS



IMPLICATIONS

To connect with the YAYA market, join them in their efforts to unite and better society.

Provide workshops to improve leadership and promote education and create spaces that welcome unique identities by implementing or redefining diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives in-house — similar to the Estée Lauder make-up company — and develop inclusive products across diverse body, hair and skin types. Fenty Beauty, which has an enormous range of beauty products and clothing sizes, does a good job with this through its representation in its branding and advertising. To escape from this dark reality, YAYA consumers and marketers must unite.

CONCLUSION

YAYA individuals find themselves in frightening times, having to make decisions that will impact the rest of their lives. They've had to quickly adapt to the pandemic lifestyle and postpone their dreams in order to survive. Despite the significant forces against them, YAYA consumers have endured and learned to thrive in these difficult days. They have been in the dark most of their lives and, as they grow older, they push to escape from darkness and go into the daylight.

MEET THE TEAM



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METHODOLOGY

Our 67 question survey was distributed nationwide through Qualtrics. This resulted 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 and Nielsen, plus past State of the YAYA reports, to gain a better insight into the evolving market.

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