

# THE SPECTACLE



PARENTAL  
ADVISORY  
EXPLICIT CONTENT



# RELUDE

**MOJO AD** is a full-service agency at the University of Missouri that **not only specializes in all things young but is also staffed entirely by young adults**. Specializing in the 18-to 24-year-old market, also known as the youth and young adult (YAYA) market, we are certified experts because we are them. Our unique position in this sought-after demographic grants us the ability to act as a liaison between the YAYA and the professionals seeking to reach them.


**YAYA?** Originally coined by MOJO Ad, “YAYA” refers to 18- to 24- year-olds. These consumers are at a pivotal life stage in which they are developing their identities and embracing their reality. At 31 million strong in the United States with \$9.8 trillion in spending power, 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.**

**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 demographic to help marketers connect with them on a deeper level**. The report not only highlights who they are as consumers, but individuals as well, by providing an extensive look at their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors.

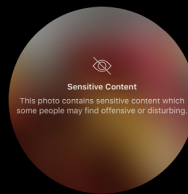
**METHODOLOGY** To best understand the YAYA market, we crafted a **66-question survey** that was distributed nationwide. This resulted in 807 completed responses from YAYA consumers. The sample was representative of the U.S. Census Bureau data for 18- to 24-year-olds related to race, ethnicity and gender. Our qualitative research consisted of **seven focus groups, six paired-depth interviews and 16 in-depth interviews with a total of 61 participants across the United States**. In addition to our extensive primary research, we utilized a variety of secondary sources, including Forbes, Mintel, Yahoo Finance, NBC News and UCLA, as well as previous State of the YAYA reports to get a complete understanding of the ever-evolving YAYA market.



# WHAT IS TABOO



With the social landscape of the world constantly evolving, YAYAs aren't just pushing boundaries— they're redrawing them entirely. What was once whispered behind closed doors is now reposted and put out for the world to see. In a world where your identity is determined no longer by faith but instead by your latest niche interest and social media craze, one thing has become clear: **the YAYA market isn't afraid to start questioning things.**



With our research, Team Oracle wanted to dive headfirst into all things taboo: **religion, sex, drugs, gambling** and all the lines in between. We sought out to discover where YAYAs draw their moral lines or if they have any left to draw at all. Our research revealed an audience that is navigating life at an intersection of **control** and **chaos**. We are rebranding old to new, pushing boundaries and deciding once and for all what is still taboo.

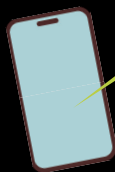
# IN THE BEGINNING...

One nation under God. Or is it? The world is surrounded by the ideals of religion and previously has been a central part of what YAYAs' moral compass was based on, with **67%** of the market thinking that Christianity decides what is deemed appropriate in society. While YAYAs agree that religion is deeply ingrained in their everyday lives, they proportionately **(68%)** agree that societal norms about what is acceptable are outdated, while **60%** agree that societal norms cause more harm than good. Yet, the YAYA market is redefining exactly what their moral compass is, and it is becoming increasingly less and less revolved around organized religion. This can stem from the **76%** agreeing that religions could do more to take a stand on issues affecting their generation. Yet, the need to pray, confess and honor is still prevalent in their lives, **so where are they worshipping now?**



# CYBER SCRIPTURE

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Influencers or gods? Viral posts or scriptures? YAYAs are becoming increasingly less religious, so where do they turn? To what they were raised on - the internet. YAYAs are no longer boxing themselves into one singular religion. Instead, they find their own personalized community online and can learn even more in the process. Ninety-three percent of respondents agree that social media has increased exposure to different perspectives and **82%** agree that the increased exposure to new ideas on the internet has made them more accepting. This new form of religion allows YAYAs to form moral codes of their own that reach outside of the scope of traditional religions. For example, **78%** of the YAYA market agrees that whether something is right or wrong depends on how much it helps or harms others.

These new morals don't stop at religion though. Our YAYA market is expanding ideas and forming them into an entirely new lens.

## THEY ARE FORMING A SPECTACLE.

91%

online communities  
support new value systems  
outside traditional norms

74%

chose the internet as  
a source that most  
effectively informed them



# THE SPECTACULAR



# THE GREAT REBRAND

Drugs? More like the new mental health cures.  
Need some extra cash? Hop on OnlyFans and pay your rent. Feeling like  
you want to put your Economics 101 class skills to the test?  
Download FanDuel and place a parlay.



This is the new spectacle in which YAYAs look through, as they rebrand their vices into positive things so they can treat their guilty pleasures as a beneficial activity. Eighty-seven percent of the YAYA market even agrees that it's important to balance recreational drug/alcohol consumption with self-improvement activities. It doesn't stop at balancing though, with **52%** of respondents believing that microdosing mushrooms can be a beneficial treatment for mental health challenges. YAYAs are reframing what drugs mean to them, with **42%** agreeing it should be acceptable to be high on cannabis at work events where alcohol is served. The changing perception of this once taboo topic may stem from **64%** of the YAYA market selecting 'seeking an escape from anxiety, depression or mental health struggles' as a scenario that could lead them to experiment with drugs.



61%

believe cannabis  
is safer than  
alcohol

Recreational drug use can start with something as simple as wanting to be a better student, which **1 in 5** YAYAs believe can happen through occasional use of amphetamines. At the core of their desire is wanting to be the best student they can be, wanting to get the highest grade or, for some, just wanting to pass a class.



In general, the YAYA market believes acceptance toward many modern taboos such as recreational drug use, self-prescribed drug therapy, non-traditional relationships, sex work, sports betting, gambling, gender identity and sexual orientation are trending forward.



82%

agree that people  
should be able to  
do what they want  
as long as it doesn't  
harm anyone

50%

know someone  
addicted to cannabis





"I THINK IT IS A NEGATIVE THING IF  
YOU'RE JUST DOING LINES IN  
THE BATHROOM TO KEEP DRINKING,  
BUT IF YOU'RE USING IT TO COPE  
WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS,  
IT'S DIFFERENT."

PARTICIPANT 5

PARENTAL  
ADVISORY  
EXPLICIT CONTENT



# THE GREAT REBROUND

Along with being better students, lots of YAYAs also want to make some extra cash.

Right now, there is no better way to do it than betting on something they already watch: **sports**. In the minds of YAYAs, sports betting isn't about sitting at a poker table in a casino. Instead, it is a game of skill they can play with apps like **FanDuel** and **DraftKings** while enhancing the sports viewing experience. Seventy-five percent of the YAYA market agrees it's easier to be successful at sports betting if you are knowledgeable about sports.



The money YAYAs are winning isn't just going into their savings. Instead, **42%** of this audience views sports bet winnings as an investment similar to stocks and **52%** of them feel that money won from sports betting doesn't feel like real money. With this so-called "**fake-money**", YAYAs are choosing to spend it in various ways. Thirty-six percent use money won from sports bets as 'fun money' for hobbies, while **23%** use it for bills and groceries and **6%** use the money to place more sports bets.



However, how are they supposed to avoid gambling when the temptations are surrounding them on their phones and favorite shows?

Seventy-one percent of the YAYA market agrees that sports betting should not be advertised on TV, radio or social media. All that advertising can have a negative effect as a large majority (**94%**) agree it's easy to get addicted to sports betting and only **13%** percent would like to see more gambling mechanics in their e-commerce or investment experiences. If the temptation wasn't there, most of them wouldn't even bother to place these bets in the first place, with **72%** of YAYAs saying they would never bet on sports if it was not available online.





“I THINK THAT IT  
DEPENDS. LIKE, YOU  
COULD PUT AN INVESTMENT  
IN THE STOCK MARKET  
ON A SUPER RISKY STOCK.  
YOU COULD ALSO PUT A  
SUPER RISKY BET DOWN  
IN SPORTS GAMBLING.  
LIKE, I THINK THAT THEY’RE  
HONESTLY, PRETTY  
MUCH, HAND-IN-HAND.”

PARTICIPANT 3

59%

agree that their  
peers are aware  
of the dangers  
of sports betting

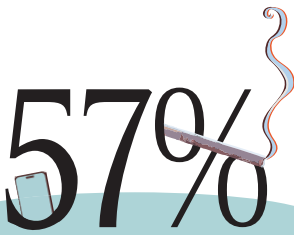
93%

agree it's easy to  
get addicted to  
sports betting, but  
33% believe it is less  
risky than other  
forms of gambling

\$

# THE EDGE OF COMFORT

The YAYA market overwhelmingly (**91%**) agrees the internet has desensitized people to taboo content. Yet, they are surrounded by it in movies, radio and TV. More than **60%** of those ages 10-24 said that sex and sexual content are not needed to advance the plot of TV shows and/or movies. In 2023, this number was below **50%** (Burrus, 2024). YAYAs also are surrounded by it in their daily lives, with **30%** of the YAYA market saying they know someone addicted to explicit sexual content.



**57%**

*agree addiction to social media  
is just as harmful to mental  
health as drug addiction*



**79%**

*agree society values punishment  
over rehabilitation*



**64%**

*believe people are  
becoming more isolated*






SNORTING LINES IN THE  
BATHROOM, DROPPING THIS  
MONTH'S RENT FOR A BET ON A  
THREE-WAY PARLAY OR DRINKING  
AFTER A HARD DAY ARE ALL THINGS  
THE NAYA AUDIENCE CHOOSES TO  
SIMPLY SHRUG OFF WHEN THEY SEE IT.  
YET, AFTER A PARTICULARLY GRAPHIC  
SEX SCENE IN THE WHITE LOTUS,  
THEY ARE AWKWARDLY SCROLLING  
THROUGH INSTAGRAM AND AVERTING  
THEIR EYES IN THE SAME SPIRIT AS  
WHEN THEIR PARENTS WOULD COVER  
THEIR EYES. WHILE THEY AREN'T AS  
VOCAL AS PAST GENERATIONS  
ABOUT EXPLICIT CONTENT, THEY  
STILL DEFAULT TO TURNING  
A BLIND EYE.





YAYAs aren't experiencing this particular taboo in just the media either. Explicit sexual content has expanded outside of the TV and moved closer to home with apps, like **OnlyFans**, on the rise. The explicitness is no longer just actors, it's their followers on social media, their classmates and all over their Explore page. This can lead to YAYAs struggling with their own thoughts around this trend of rising explicitness.



"WHEN I SEE  
CREATORS MAKING  
ONLYFANS CONTENT,  
I HATE THAT I  
AUTOMATICALLY  
ASSOCIATE IT  
WITH BEING  
DIRTY."

PARTICIPANT 11

"IT'S ALSO REALLY  
TRICKY BECAUSE  
WE HAVE PEOPLE  
MAKING MILLIONS OF  
DOLLARS ON, LIKE,  
ONLYFANS  
AND STUFF.  
SO IT DEPENDS  
REALLY JUST  
WHO YOU  
HAVE A  
CONVERSATION  
WITH ABOUT,  
YOU KNOW, IS  
THAT A STRONG,  
POWERFUL FEMALE  
FIGURE OR IS THAT  
JUST A GLORIFIED  
PORNSTAR?"

PARTICIPANT 8



# THE FINE



Gambling, drugs and alcohol abuse don't make YAYAs flinch, explicit content makes them shudder, but **judgement is what truly makes them walk away.** With a new wave of acceptance and inclusivity on the rise within the YAYA market, the latest spectacle and the biggest taboo is believing in taboos at all.

One of the strongest findings in our research was that **88%** of YAYAs agreed that acceptance is an expression of respect and **82%** agreed that people should be able to do what they want as long as it doesn't harm anyone else.

Even when asked for their stand on judgment, YAYAs were conflicted. Nearly half of YAYAs (**49%**) agree they would rather be accepting of all opinions than be forced to take a decisive stand and defend it.



"INCLUSIVITY MAKES IT  
REALLY HARD TO TELL  
PEOPLE WHAT THEY'RE  
DOING IS WRONG."

**PARTICIPANT 4**



# ALL TABOO



“YOU NEED TO BE INCLUSIVE OR ALL OF THE SUDDEN YOU'RE REACIST OR, YOU KNOW, YOU'RE SECTIST OR ALL THESE DIFFERENT THINGS IF YOU'RE NOT BEING INCLUSIVE. KIND OF A JUDGMENT FREE ZONE IS WHAT I THINK OUR SOCIETY HAS BECOME. LIKE, ‘WHO CAN TELL ME WRONG?’”

PARTICIPANT 10



# WARNING!

**Warning: The safety net you so carefully placed below you might not actually exist.**

The YAYA market has spent years weaving an illusion of security. They can't possibly get addicted to drugs, because they know how to use them "responsibly." They would never lose this month's rent betting on tonight's game because they did their research into the players and read up on their home and away stats. They would certainly never judge someone for the way they choose to make a living, because that would make them judgemental.

YAYAs walk through each of life's taboos on a fine tightrope, constantly balancing between control and chaos. In fact, **56%** of the YAYA market agree they toe the line between these two elements in their daily decisions. They expect that if they do fall, the safety net they have spent years convincing themselves was there will catch them.

But what if that net was never there in the first place? What if they have simply spent all this time convincing ourselves it was there so they could continue to make reckless choices without feeling so irresponsible? Without feeling so taboo? **Yet the real question remains and it is not what is taboo. . .**



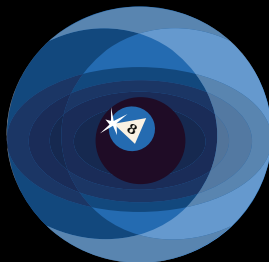
BUT WHAT HAPPENS  
WHEN WE STOP  
QUESTIONING IT?

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