

Attitudes Toward Coronavirus Vary Among Age Groups; Marketers Will Need to Look Past Anecdotal Stereotypes

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New polls on consumer responses to the coronavirus pandemic reveal that when it comes to fear, finances and boredom, generational stereotypes may not hold true.

Amplified by social media and other online platforms, some anecdotal narratives have suggested that millennials are relatively unconcerned about COVID-19—while others have depicted older people as the ones who are least worried.

But various rapid-response polls conducted over the past several weeks show a more intricate patchwork of anxiety across age groups—whether it’s fear of being infected by the virus, fear of taking a severe financial hit, or simply fear of inactivity during a period of widespread lockdowns.

For instance, an [ABC News/Ipsos poll](#) of 512 US adults, fielded on March 18 and 19, found people across age groups saying they were worried about getting the coronavirus. Among 18- to 29-year-olds,

83% said they were worried about this, as did 75% of 30-to-49s, 79% of 50-to-64s and 82% of those 65 and older.

There was a similar pattern in [polling from The Economist/YouGov](#) (fielded March 15 to 17) in the proportion of US adults saying they were at least somewhat worried about getting the virus—55% of 18-to-29s, 62% of 30-to-44s, 56% of 45-to-64s and 52% of those 65 and older.

When it comes to the pandemic's effects on financial health, surveys found sharper variations among age groups, with concerns skewing younger. In an [Elon University survey](#) conducted on March 16 and 17, 80% of 25-to-44s said they were worried about their “personal financial situation,” vs. 78% of 18-to-24s, 74% of 45-to-64s and 62% of those 65 and older.

A [survey from personal finance app Tally](#), conducted from March 11 to 13 by The Harris Poll, found 59% of millennials saying they had taken or planned to take steps to preserve cash due to the pandemic’s effects on the economy. The figures were markedly smaller among Gen Zers (44%), Gen Xers (47%) and boomers (35%).

59%

Millennials who took or planned to take steps to preserve cash due to the pandemic's impact on the economy

Tally survey conducted by The Harris Poll, March 2020

That dovetails with [Pew Research Center data](#) from March 10 to 16, when employed US adults were asked whether they could keep up with basic expenses if the pandemic put them out of work for at least two weeks. Forty-two percent of 18-to-29s said it “would be difficult” to do so, vs. 32% of 30-to-49s, 32% of 50-to-64s and 19% of those 65 and older.

With the economy at large just beginning to feel the impacts of the pandemic, there is less variation by age in the proportion of people saying they've already been financially affected. In The Economist/YouGov polling, 25% of 18-to-29s reported being "financially affected by the coronavirus," along with 24% of 30-to-44s, 28% of 45-to-64s and 21% of those over 65.

Additionally, people are feeling anxious about being stuck in their homes for an indefinite period. Some are turning to streaming services to help stave off boredom and inactivity while social lives are on hold. A [Morning Consult survey](#) of US adults fielded from March 13 to 16 shows young people are especially inclined to stream content while staying home. In this survey, 26% of millennials said they expected to spend more money on streaming movie/TV services due to the pandemic, vs. 16% of Gen Xers and 15% of boomers. And 18% of millennials said they expect to spend more on music streaming services, vs. 10% of Gen Xers and 5% of boomers.

Young people certainly feel the need to be entertained as they're socially distanced from their friends. Among those ages 18 to 29, 58.9% said they were seeing their friends less, and 42.7% said they were dating less, according to a [Forbes Under 30 Poll](#) completed on March 18.

Of course, varying priorities regarding things like entertainment will be less important to consumers—and thus less important to marketers—as the detriments of the pandemic become increasingly clear for people of all demographic groups.