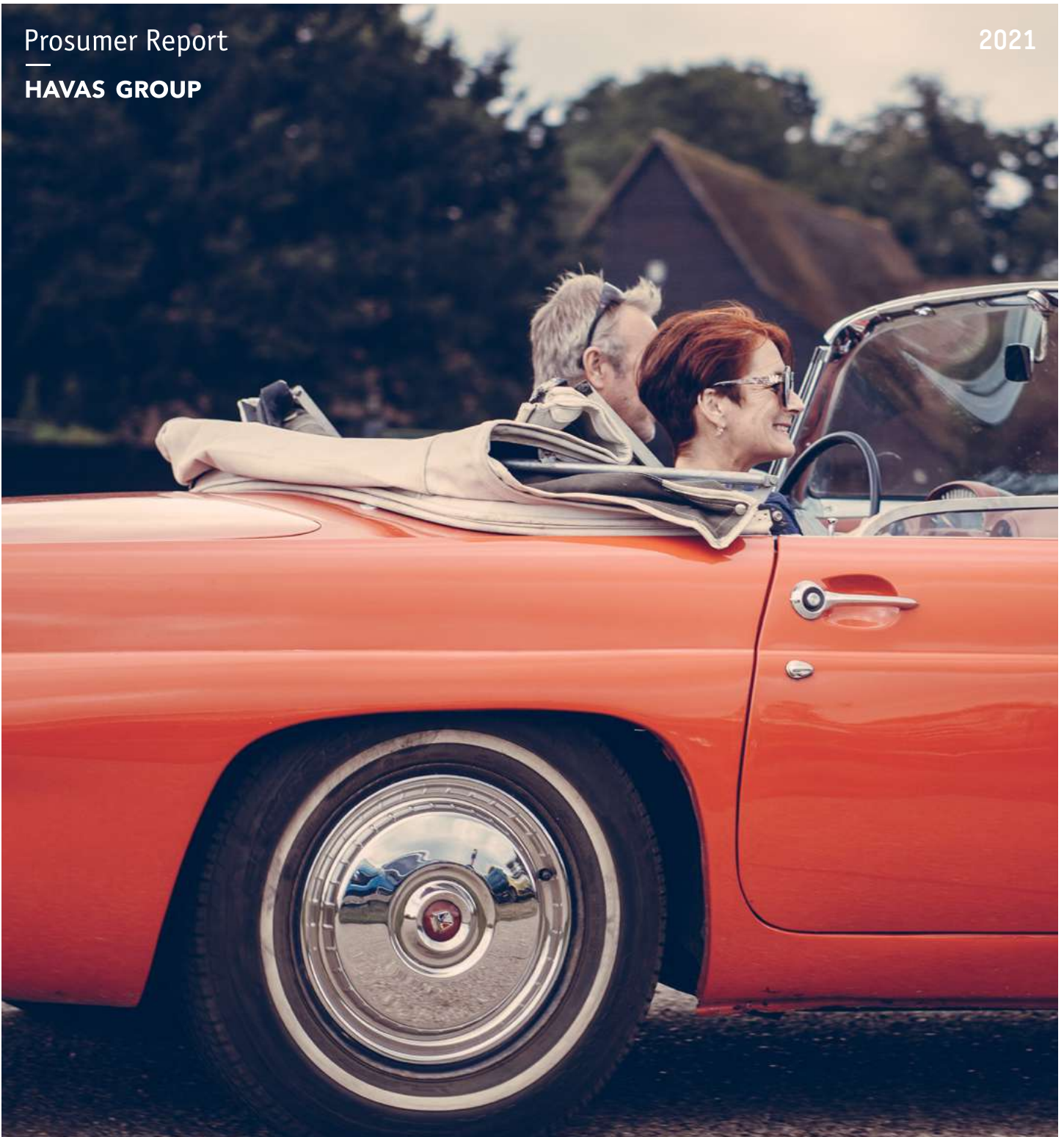


The Future of Aging

Prosumer Report
—
HAVAS GROUP

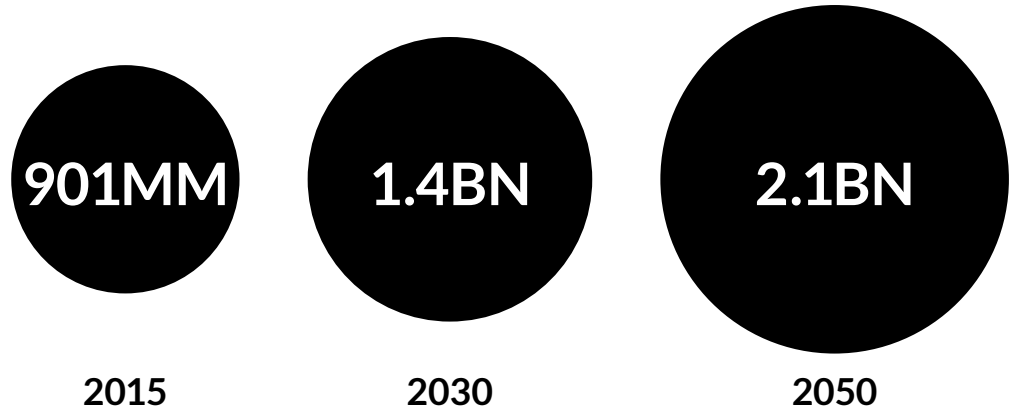
2021





In 1970, the median age of people worldwide was 22. In 2020, it was 30. In 2050, it is projected to be 43—nearly double that of 1970—and more than 1 in 5 people globally will be age 60 or older. The world is aging, with implications for society and companies. How will this demographic trend impact attitudes toward youth and old age? How will it affect consumer behaviors?

Total worldwide population aged 60+

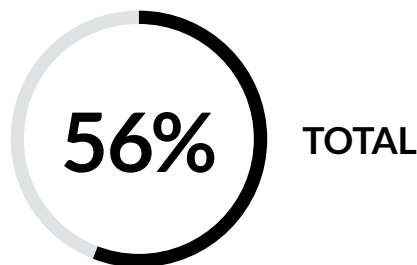


Source: [United Nations, World Population Aging \(2015\)](#)

In this Prosumer study, we surveyed 12,521 people in 28 countries and territories to understand the realities of aging in the 21st century. While the study encompassed adults aged 18 and older, this report focuses primarily on members of the baby boom generation: aged 55–75. In some instances, it also draws on findings from our youngest respondents, aged 18–34; for ease of reference, we call this group “millennials,” although it also incorporates the oldest members of Gen Z.

One thing the survey made clear: After decades of a global obsession with youth, most people are ready to dim the spotlight.

Society has grown too youth-obsessed



(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)



Boomers Invented Youth Culture

The baby boom generation—born between 1946 and 1964—can be credited with the invention of modern youth culture. We largely have them to thank for teenage rebellion, the notion of a generation gap, and a decades-long obsession with all things youth. For years, boomers defined youth culture—determining which music, films, foods, and political movements were “in.” And as they aged, they kept moving the bar, redefining what it means to be “young” or “old.” Suddenly, you were only as old as you felt. Forty became the new 30; 50, the new 40; and on and on. Age was no longer about year of birth or physical deterioration; rather, it was about one’s mindset. And few older people admit to feeling their chronological age. In an earlier [Prosumer study](#), conducted in 2012, nearly 2 in 3 Prosumers agreed: “I feel younger than my age.” And in the current study, more than 3 in 4 boomers and Prosumers agree that age is a mindset.

I feel younger than my age

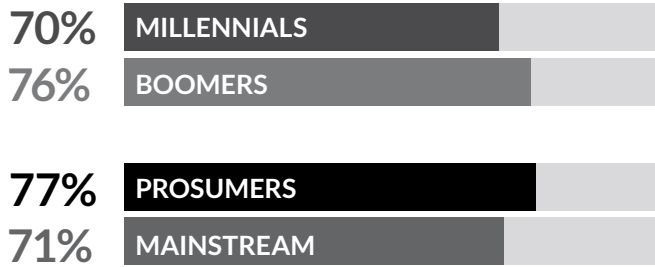
(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

62% PROSUMERS



56% MAINSTREAM

Age is more a matter of mindset than physical abilities

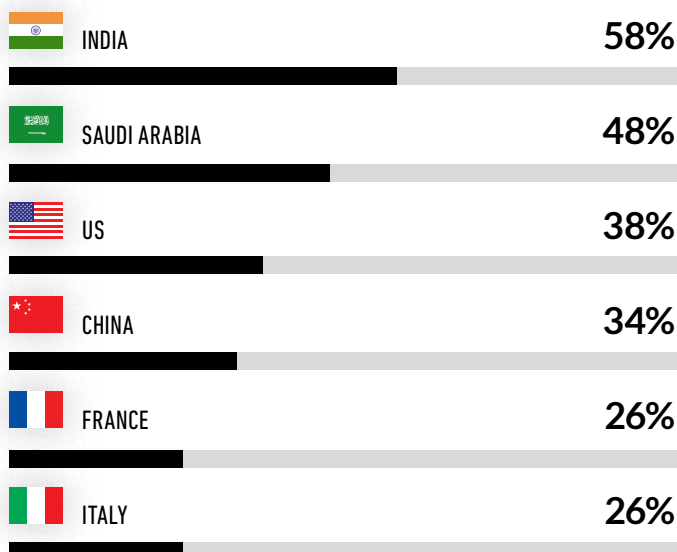


This boomer-driven attitude toward aging changed the rules, from at what age people are supposed to “settle down” to whom a person can date, to how someone of a certain age should dress.

I think it’s weird when a woman dates someone way younger than she is



PROSUMERS:



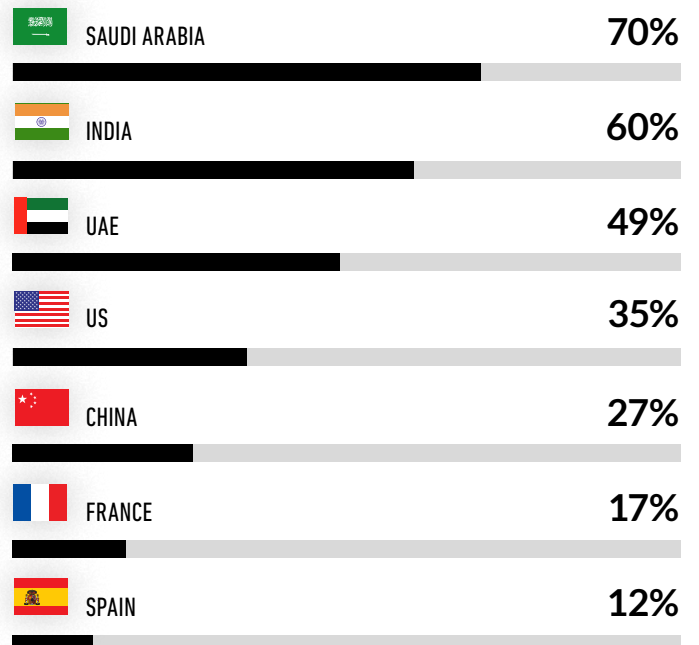
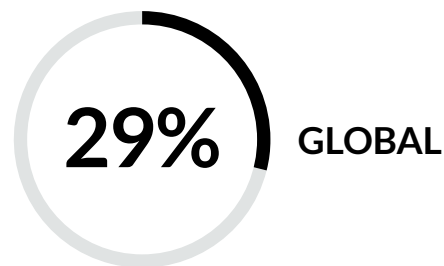
I think it’s weird when a man dates someone way younger than he is



When you’re a woman who’s over 60, you should start dressing more conservatively



PROSUMERS:

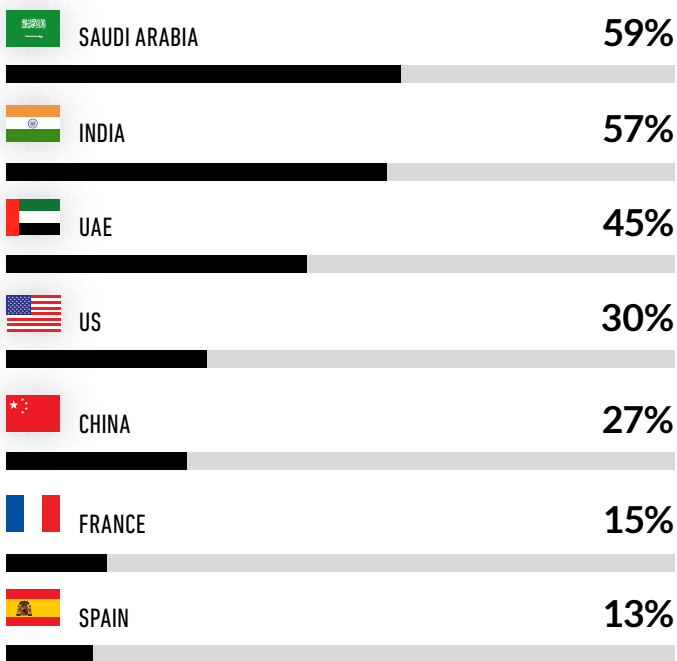
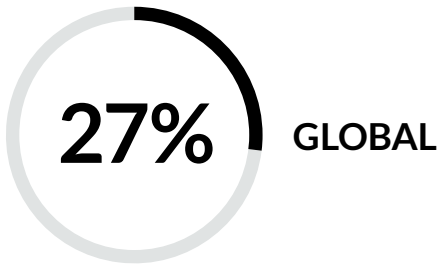


(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

When you're a man who's over 60, you should start dressing more conservatively



PROSUMERS:



For both men and women, dating a person half their age no longer elicits censure—or even a raised eyebrow from most. And jeans, T-shirts, and body-revealing clothes are widely considered appropriate, even well past retirement age.

Even as “**OK, boomer**” has entered the lexicon, this generation continues to hold sway and set the business and political agendas. And they still get props from younger generations for the leadership role they took decades ago in the fights for women’s equality and civil rights.

I admire baby boomers for:

Fighting for civil rights and racial equality



Fighting for women’s equality and reproductive rights



Still, there are signs that this generation that for so long has maintained a death grip on culture is finally beginning to come to terms with their vincibility. They may look and feel younger than people their age a generation ago, but they can’t stave off the realities of aging forever.

Baby boomers still wield enormous economic, political, and cultural power—but how long will it last? In exploring responses to this global survey, we identified two overarching tensions influencing boomers’ perceptions and behaviors: one involving the physiological and psychological realities of aging and the other concerning conflicts with the generations that ultimately will supplant them.



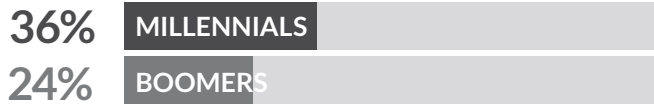
Tension 1:

When Reality Starts to Hit

For baby boomers, feeling old is not outer-directed. Old age is not as much about passing a particular milestone—becoming a grandparent or retiring, for instance—as it is about how they feel, physically and mentally, and how active a lifestyle they can enjoy. For them, aging is about loss: loss of function, loss of independence, loss of vigor, loss of enjoyment.

The point at which we start to feel old is:

When we retire



When we become grandparents



VS.

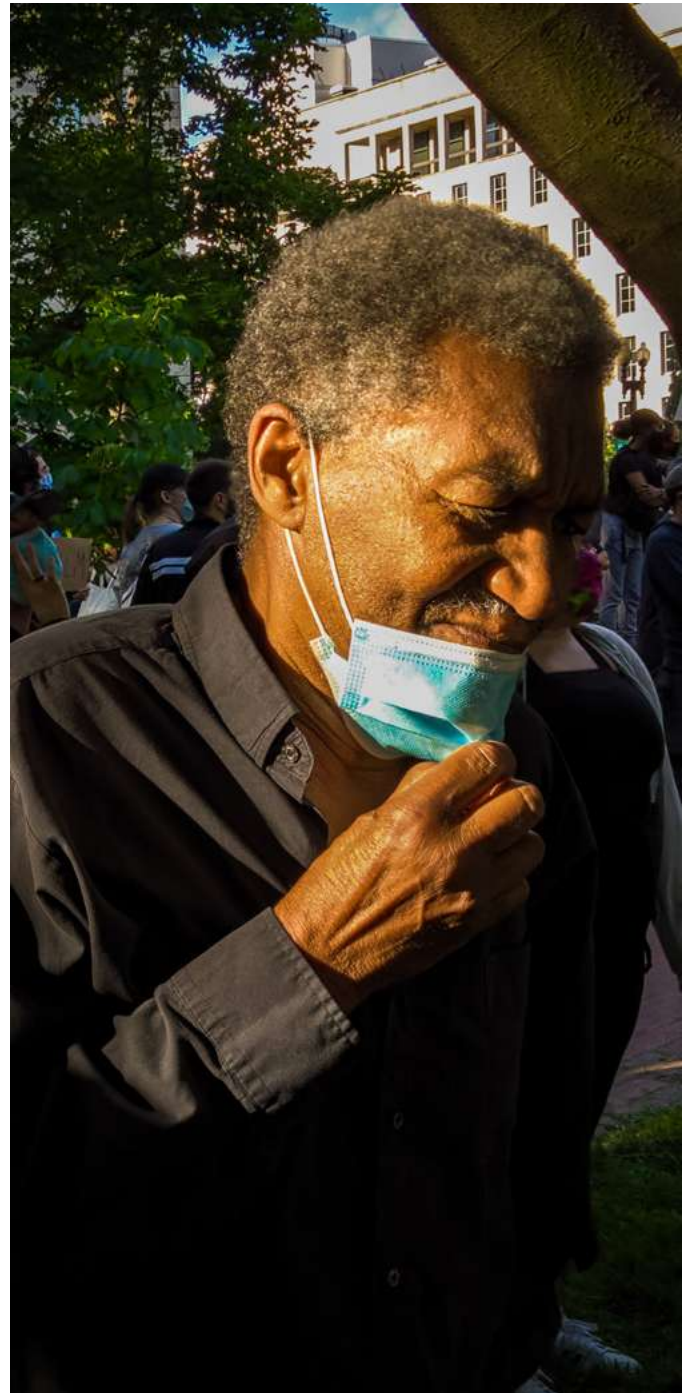
When we start having physical or mental weakness



When we realize it's harder to recover from everyday life events (e.g., jet lag, lack of sleep, strenuous activity)



To some extent, though, outside forces do impact one's sense of aging. Half of baby boomers and nearly two-thirds of respondents aged 18-34 believe the sheer pace of the world is making it difficult for older people to keep up. The speed of technological change contributes to this, of course, but so does the relentless onslaught of information, social media trends, memes, and pop culture content. How can anyone keep up?



The world moves so fast it's hard for older people to keep up



(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)



Even Youth Are Anxious About Aging

To varying extents, societies traditionally have venerated the aged, honoring the wisdom and experience of the elderly. Today, aging is widely considered less a badge of honor than a burden to be borne—by the individual and by the community.

We presented respondents with several aspects of aging and asked which worry them. What is especially striking is the consistency of responses across the age cohorts and also between Prosumers and the mainstream (not shown in chart).

Which aspects of aging worry you?

Illness or pain



Diminished physical capacity





Diminished mental capacity



Loss of independence



Being a burden to others

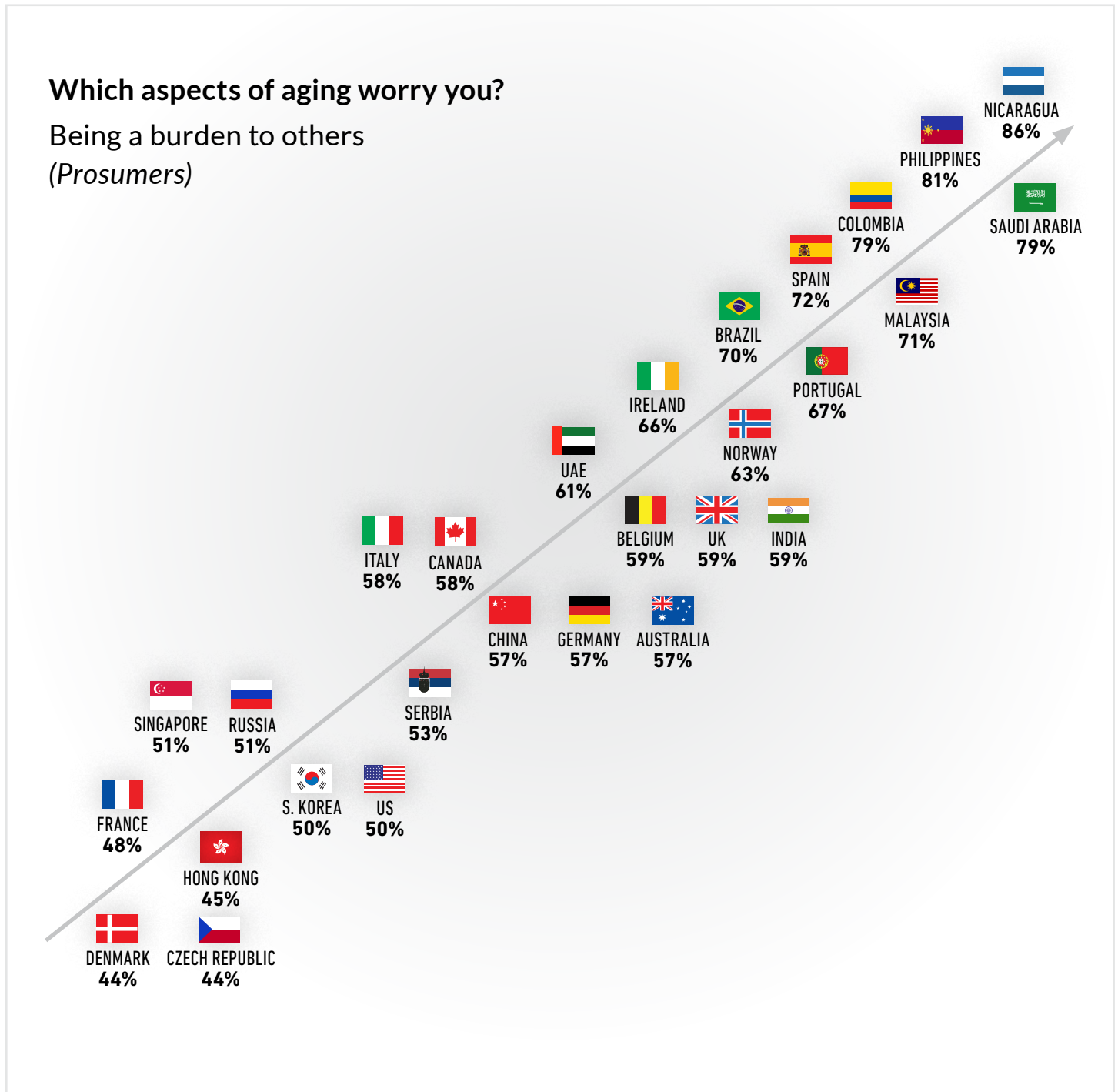


Running out of money



The potential for illness or pain is the primary worry of respondents of every age, but we also see strong concern related to a loss of independence and becoming a burden to others. This is reflected in [research](#) by geopolitics analyst Virginie Raison, who estimates that half of the global population will be dependent by 2050.

Fear of being a burden to others has a cultural component, and so we see, for instance, that Prosumers from Hispanic cultures (Nicaragua, Colombia, Spain) and even that have a historic Spanish influence (the Philippines) are the most apt to worry about being a burden—presumably to their spouses, children, or community. In Denmark, the Czech Republic, and Hong Kong, in contrast, only a minority of Prosumers worry that they will be a burden in their later years.





Boomers: Boosters or Busters?

We also see a cultural influence in whether people deem the elderly in general a societal burden. When we asked respondents to choose whether they are more inclined to consider the elderly contributors to society or a burden on it, the balance of opinion came down firmly on the former. Interestingly, three of the national samples most likely to worry about being a burden themselves (Nicaragua, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia) were the least likely to agree that elderly people in general are a burden. The real standout on this question was South Korea, where fully 57% of the sample was more inclined to agree that the elderly burden society rather than contribute to it.

Which comes closer to your point of view?

(Choose one.)

Elderly people contribute a good deal to society



Elderly people are a burden on society



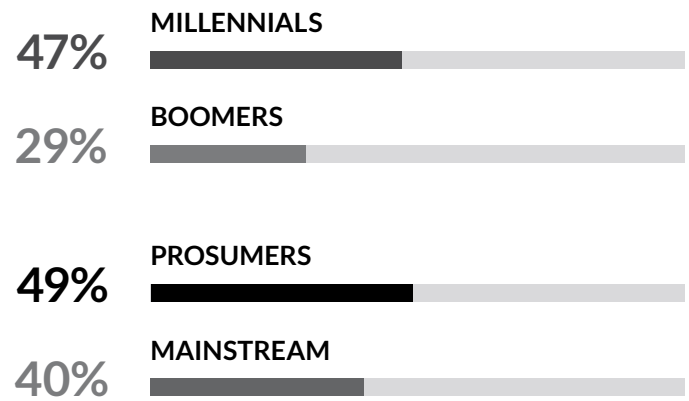


Youth Are More Open to Anti-Aging Technology

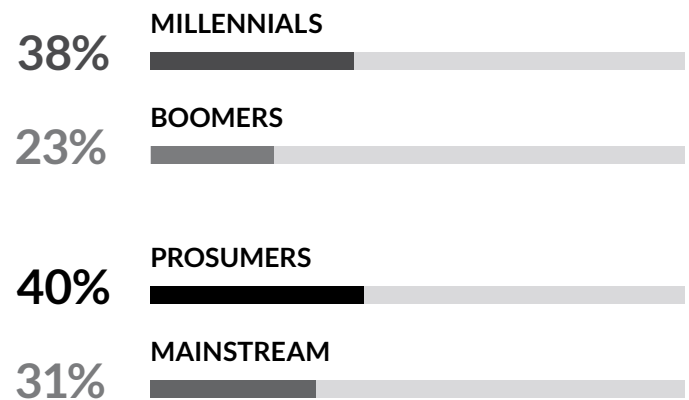
We are living in an age when science has shown its power to overrule nature. And yet our study reveals that the vast majority of people globally do not believe that society is ready to take advantage of new technologies and procedures that promise to ward off—or reverse—the aging process. We presented respondents with five scientific advances: implanted microchips to allow people to retain their memories as they age, DNA editing to delay the aging of cells, robotic implants to facilitate mobility, artificial intelligence (AI) to stimulate neurons, and blood transfusions drawn from young donors. A majority of boomers surveyed (55%) don't believe that most people would ever willingly undergo any of these procedures. In contrast, only 29% of the youngest cohort feel this way. Already, nearly half of those aged 18–34 believe most people would be willing to have their DNA edited to delay aging, and more than a third believe a majority of people would be willing to use AI to stay younger longer.

To stay younger, most people would be willing to:

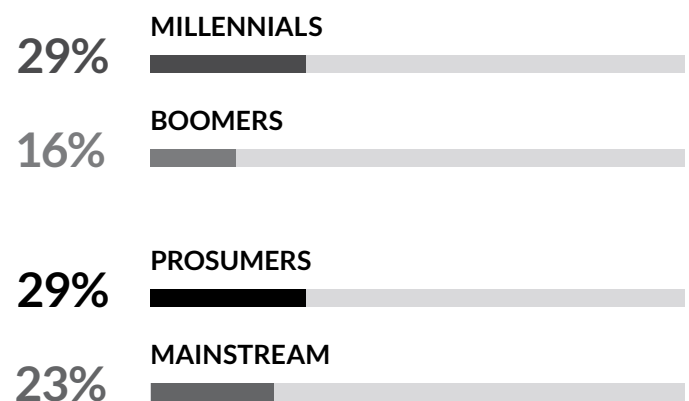
Edit their DNA to delay the aging of their cells



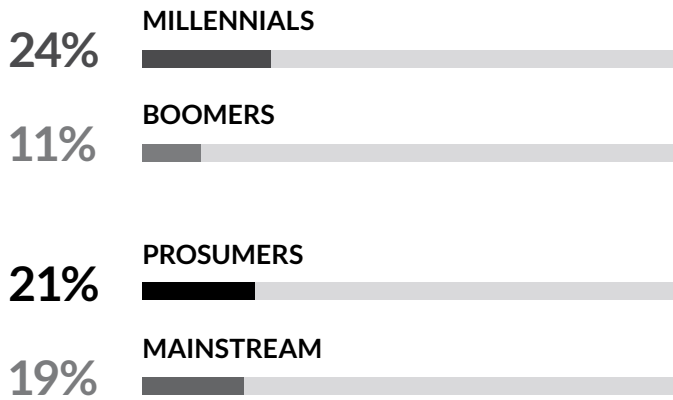
Use artificial intelligence to stimulate their neurons



Have a microchip implanted that retains their memories



Receive a blood transfusion from someone young



Asserting Control Over End-of-Life

Human euthanasia has been a divisive topic for decades, with headline-grabbing cases (e.g., Jack “Dr. Death” Kevorkian, Brittany Maynard, Noel Conway) reenergizing the debate from time to time. As of 2021, the practice is legal in around a dozen countries under specified circumstances. The results of our survey suggest that number will grow, as a majority of respondents (56%) agree that medically assisted suicide will become increasingly acceptable. Once more, there is a distinct cultural and religious component, with agreement rates on this statement ranging from just 10% of Prosumers in Muslim-majority Saudi Arabia to 86% of Prosumers in South Korea, where a majority of the population does not belong to any religion.

I think medically assisted suicide will become more and more socially acceptable



(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)



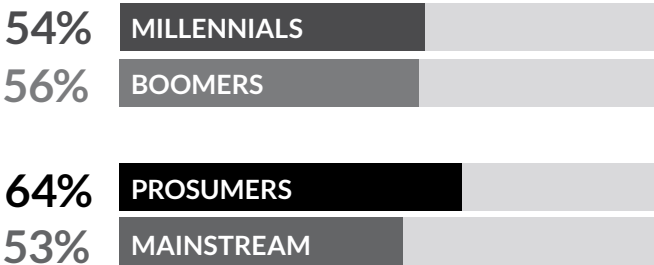
How Should Brands Address the New Realities of Aging?

The world is aging, but brands appear slow to adapt. A majority of respondents across the age groups resent the pressure advertisers and the media put on them to stay “forever young.” And nearly 2 in 3 Prosumers would like to see more people aged 65 and older depicted in advertising and media.

I resent the pressure advertising and the media put on me to stay “forever young”



I would like to see more people aged 65 and older in advertising and media/TV

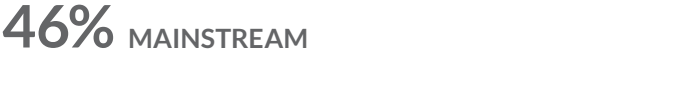


(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

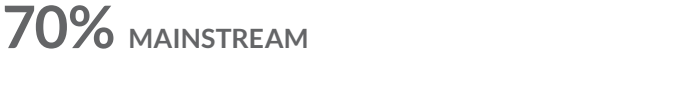


We also presented respondents aged 55 and older with a separate set of questions. Among that sample, 56% of Prosumers think brands focus too much on youth, marginalizing those who are middle-aged or older. And 72% want brands to stop stereotyping them based on age.

I wish brands focused less on youth and more on people who are middle-aged or older
(respondents aged 55+ only)



I want brands to stop stereotyping me because of my age
(respondents aged 55+ only)



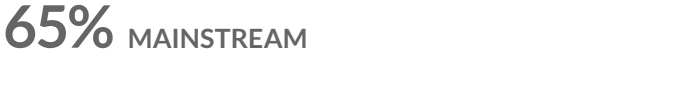
(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

To be fair, brands have to walk a bit of a tightrope. Among respondents aged 55 and older, nearly 3 in 4 Prosumers expect their favorite brands to adapt their products and services to better suit their needs as they age, and 71% prefer to buy brands that are not targeted to any one generation. So products and services need to be tailored to older consumers but marketed using more universal (non-age-specific) communication.

I expect my favorite brands to adapt their products and services to suit me as I get older
(respondents aged 55+ only)



I prefer to buy brands that are not targeted at any one generation
(respondents aged 55+ only)





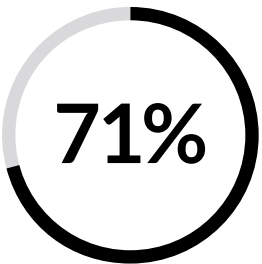
Tension 2:

Youth vs. Boomers

There will always be tensions between generations, but what we are seeing today reflects a more potent sense of uncertainty and even fear among youth. With Greta Thunberg calling out boomers in her **“How dare you?” speech** at the UN 2019 climate action summit, we can see that the climate change crisis has widened a generational fracture. While youth are protesting for change, 59% of boomers surveyed for our 2020 **ReACT** Prosumer study agreed: “Rather than going on strikes for the environment, children and teens would be better off staying in school.”

Youth has long been tied to idealism, but this new generation sees little reason to hope. In a six-country study Havas conducted in 2020, 7 in 10 respondents aged 18–34 said they are worried about their personal futures. The pandemic has exacerbated this concern and the generational divide, with 47% of Prosumers globally agreeing that the crisis has created new antagonisms between young and old. This attitude is more prevalent in some markets. Nearly two-thirds of respondents in France (63%) and 48% in the US, for instance, perceive increased intergenerational antagonism because of the pandemic; in comparison, just 29% in China do so.

I’m worried about my personal future

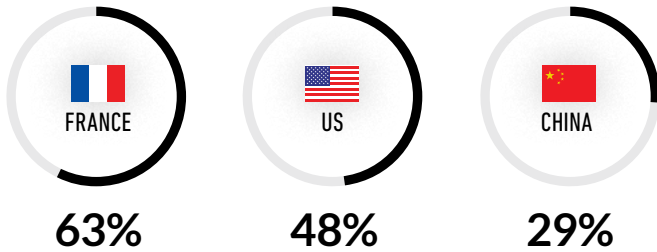


TOTAL
(MILLENNIALS)

(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

The COVID-19 crisis has created antagonisms between the young and old

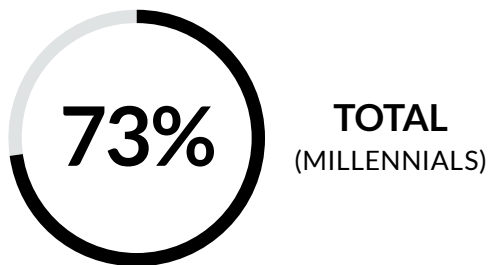
PROSUMERS:



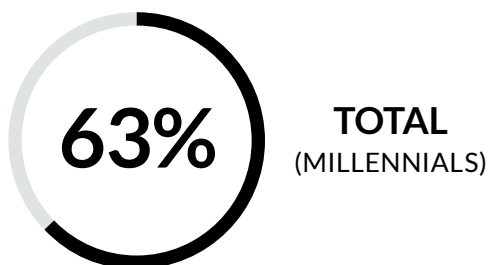
A Germ of Revolution Among the Young

Around the world, cries for radical change are in the air. Among respondents aged 18–34, 73% globally believe real change requires radical action, and 63% perceive the COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity for the world to start over with a clean slate.

It takes radical actions to bring about real change



The COVID-19 crisis will allow the world to start again with a clean slate



(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

Three Points of Rupture

When the baby boomers came of age in the 1950s through 1970s, there was no single point of intergenerational conflict. The Beat Generation in the US preached nonconformity and creativity. In France, the May 1968 movement fought for liberty and against patriarchy. And student demonstrations that erupted in Japan in 1968 centered on educational autonomy and school fees.

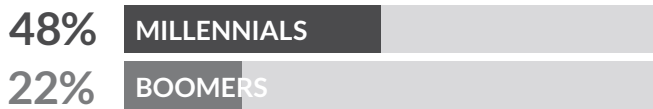
Similarly, in 2021, intergenerational conflict encompasses multiple causes and objectives.

Economic Rupture

Throughout this century, young people have been drenched in financial worry. Those who graduated from college around the 2008 global financial meltdown likely will never recoup the earnings lost as a result. And the student debt crisis continues to grow, especially in the US, where the debt stood at **\$1.68 trillion** at the start of 2021 and is growing six times faster than the national economy.

In some parts of the world, there is a sense that older generations have unfairly burdened the young. Globally, nearly half of those aged 18–34 (48%) say COVID-19 has increased the debt older generations owe to younger generations and that youth have been asked to sacrifice too much to protect their elders throughout the crisis. In France, that figure rose to 71% among Prosumers.

To protect the elderly from the virus, we have been asked to sacrifice too much of our economic growth/stability and our lifestyles



COVID-19 has increased the debt older generations have to younger generations



Technological and Cultural Rupture

Rock ‘n’ roll was seen as a sort of cultural blockade between young boomers and their parents a half century ago. It was a way for youth to rebel against a culture they considered overly conformist, conservative, and claustrophobic. In this century, there is no single genre that divides the generations. It is a clash of cultures colored by different tastes in music and entertainment but made far more severe by social media and apps that have broadened the gap between young and old. The generations now live in distinct worlds—and, to a large extent, the realm of youth is hidden from mainstream boomers.

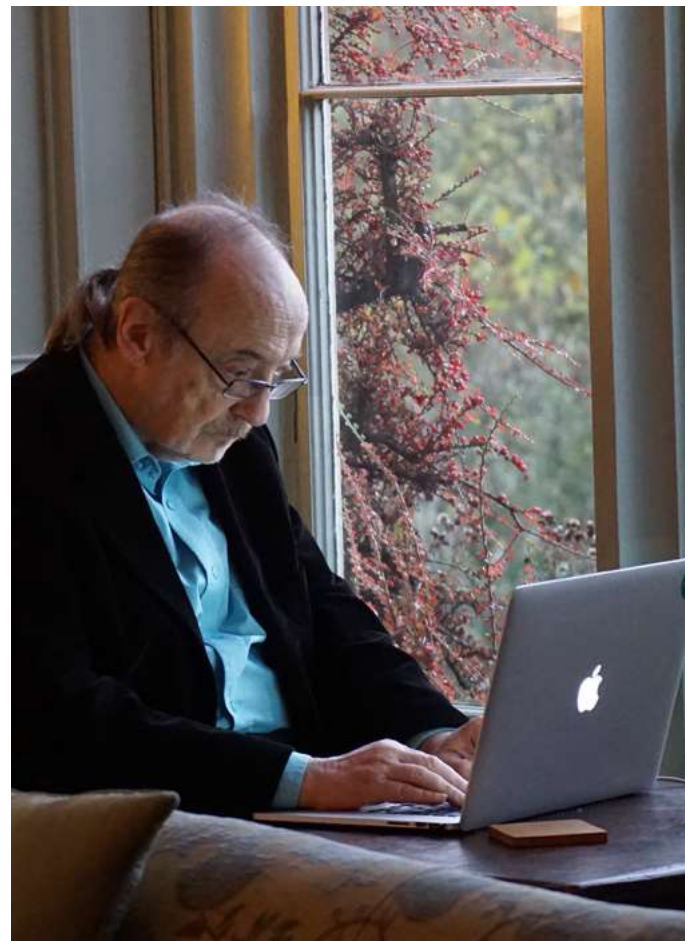
Globally, only **17%** of Internet users are aged 55 and older. And within social media, people tend to voluntarily segregate by age, with many older users content to remain on Facebook, while youth gravitate toward YouTube, Snapchat, TikTok, and whatever is the newest next thing. **Research** shows, for instance, that just 5% of people aged 56 and up in the US use Snapchat, compared with 48% of those aged 15–25.

The various age groups also use social media in different ways, with younger users far more apt to create content and use platforms as a means of self-expression and creativity. They join online communities to test out personas and define themselves, populating these universes with user-generated content.

Culture is no longer broadcast via mass media. Consequently, many older people are unable to connect with the references and celebrities emerging on new platforms. It’s not that they reject the new youth culture; they don’t even see it.

Ideological Rupture

Regardless of age, most people surveyed globally recognize that our planet is in trouble—and that radical action is needed to reverse course. The difference lies in how the generations approach change. In the 1970s, the push for change was all about “counterculture”—a fight for freedom and an absence of rigid rules. “It’s forbidden to forbid.” In the 2020s, it’s about “cancel culture”—an insistence on conformity to new expectations and generationally defined rules. It’s forbidden to cross the line, even when that line is constantly shifting.



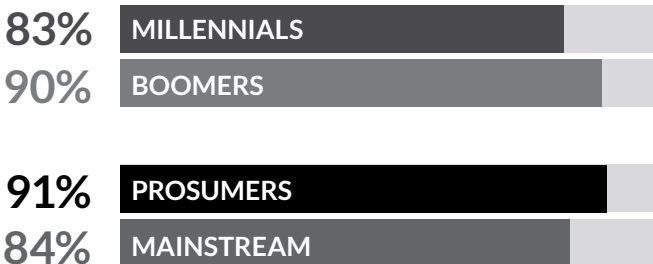
(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)



How Do We Address This New Generational Tension?

Globally, there is strong agreement that society benefits when intergenerational bonds are strong. There is also a prevailing sense that modern society is missing out on the wisdom of elders. By marginalizing the elderly and keeping them out of the emerging culture by means of an unbreachable digital wall, we are losing out on their full contribution.

Society benefits when intergenerational bonds are strong



I worry that modern society is missing out on the wisdom of elders



(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

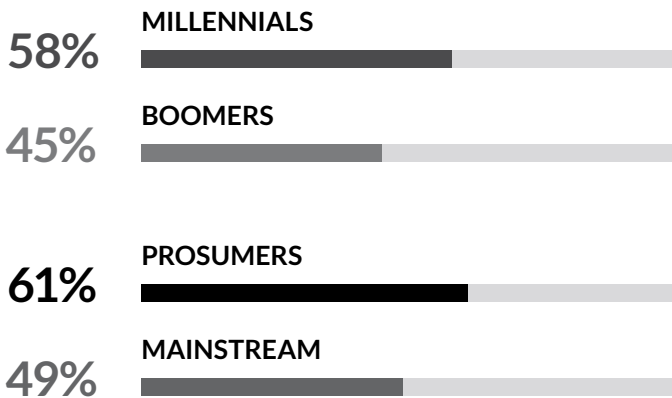
How do we fix this? Our study has identified three potential paths to progress.

Find a Better Balance of Power

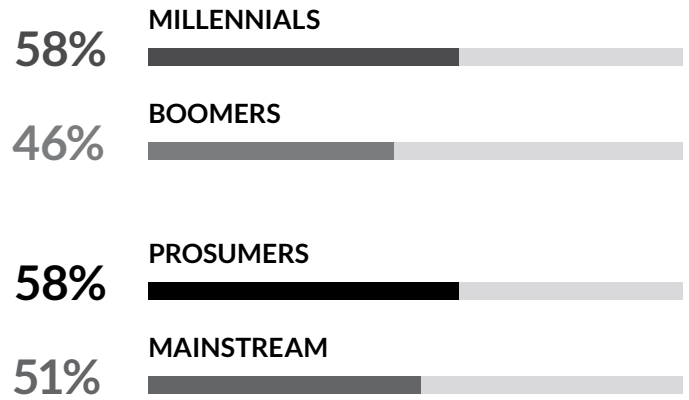
There is a widespread sense that older generations have robbed youth of their “fair share”—and of the opportunity to create a satisfactory life for themselves. Accordingly, most Prosumers in our global sample believe that better-off members of older generations have an obligation to share the wealth—literally. They want to see the elderly open up their bank accounts to support good causes (61%), their children and grandchildren (58%), and the economy (51%). And they want corporate executives to give younger people an opportunity to earn more money on their own, by making room for younger employees to rise up through the ranks.

Elderly people who have money have a duty to:

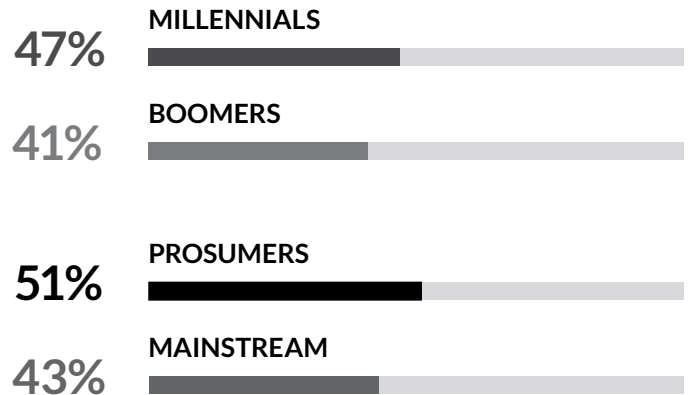
Support charities / good causes



Financially support their children and grandchildren

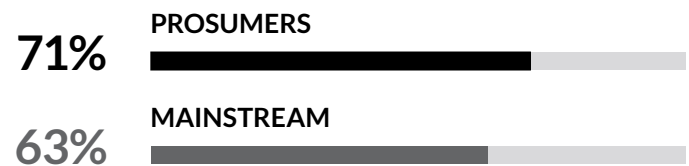
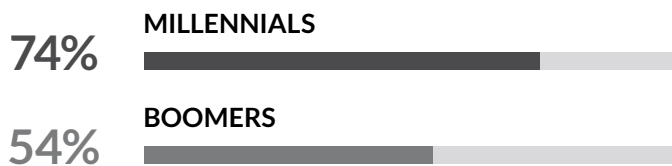


Spend it to keep the economy going



Company executives need to make room for young people

(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)





We saw in our 2020 **“Beyond COVID-19 Part II”** study that there is solid support, among Prosumers especially, for using public monies to reimburse young people in some way for the sacrifices they have been called upon to make during the pandemic. Around half of Prosumers would like to see taxes go toward helping young people complete their studies / pay off student loans or gain skills for a changing job market. Only around 1 in 5 Prosumers and a quarter of mainstream consumers are opposed to the notion of such reimbursements for youth.

To make up for the sacrifices youth made during the pandemic, taxes should go toward helping young people:

Gain new skills/certifications for a changing job market

54% PROSUMERS



46% MAINSTREAM

Complete their studies / pay off student loans

46% PROSUMERS



41% MAINSTREAM

Pay their living expenses

31% PROSUMERS



26% MAINSTREAM

Fund travel abroad

10% PROSUMERS



9% MAINSTREAM

Taxes should not be used for any of these things

19% PROSUMERS



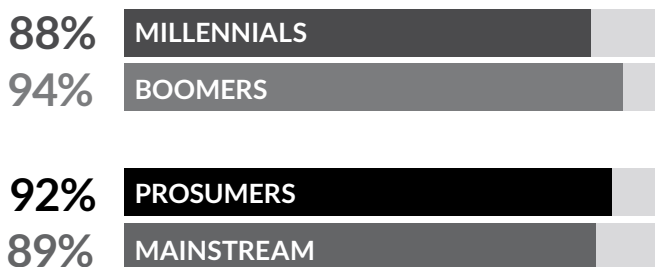
26% MAINSTREAM



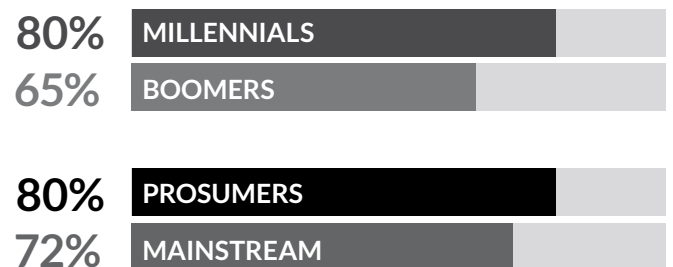
Create Bidirectional Mentorships

Our survey respondents are also in favor of more corporate mentorship—and not just from old to young but also in the opposite direction. Given the complexity of today’s business challenges, it would be difficult to argue with such an approach.

Younger employees could learn a great deal from their older colleagues



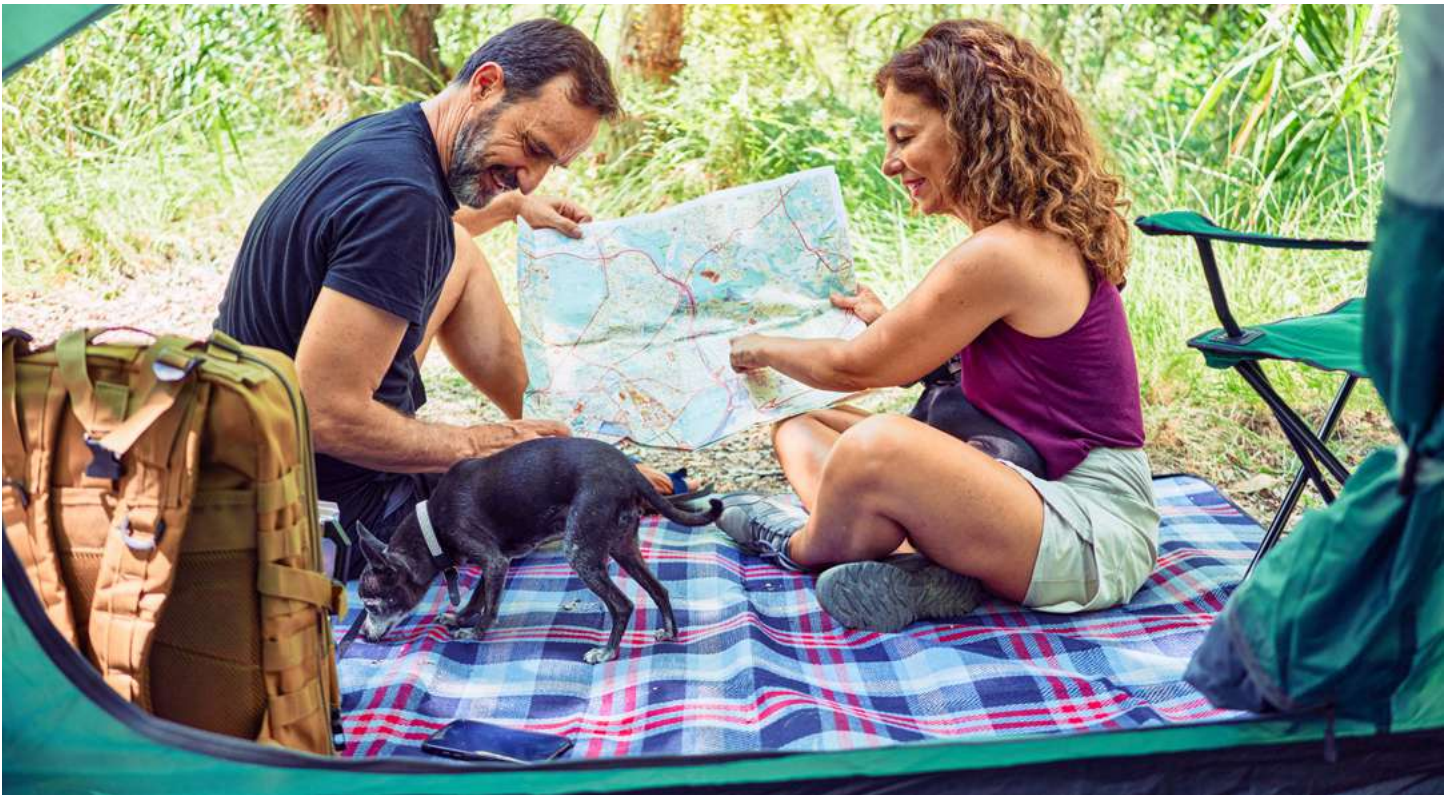
Older employees could learn a great deal from their younger colleagues



(% agreeing strongly/somewhat)

Reestablish Dialogue

Globally, 47% of Prosumers agree that the COVID-19 crisis and its economic fallout have created new antagonisms between young and old. There is a crucial need to overcome this rancor, including by opening up dialogue and cooperation between the age groups. We’re seeing brands attempt to bridge the divide, as AARP has done, for instance, with its **efforts** to teach seniors to Zoom.



In a Nutshell

We live in a youth-obsessed society that is growing older by the minute. And while the baby boomer generation has sold much of the world on the notion that age is a mindset, physical realities get in the way for most people over time—curtailing their independence and limiting the scope of their activities.

With the oldest boomers in their mid-70s, we will see this generation (reluctantly) cede power to the generations that follow. Economically, the transfer of power will be slow, with boomers currently holding onto the bulk of wealth in many markets. In the US, for instance, boomers hold an estimated 53% of **household wealth**, compared with just 26% for Gen X and 4% for millennials. Culturally, the transfer of power is well underway, as youth have bypassed what's left of mass media to create realms of their own.

For brands, the trick will be to create products and services tailored to aging populations while communicating in a way that doesn't pigeonhole consumers based on age. For society, the challenge will

be to give young people tangible reasons to anticipate a future better than today.

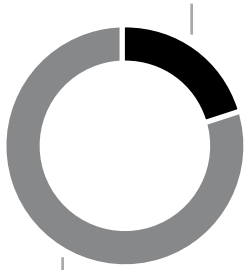
Studying the boomer generation and the issues surrounding their aging is critical to helping brands address emerging intergenerational tensions. How can we ease the weight the boomers represent for younger generations? What responsibility do people have for maintaining their health so as not to be a burden on society? What safeguards need to be put in place to protect those who cannot adequately care for themselves? The COVID-19 pandemic has brightened the spotlight on these questions and has made their resolution all the more urgent.

About the Study

In the first quarter of 2020, Havas partnered with Market Probe International to survey 12,521 people ages 18+ in 28 markets: Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Ireland,

Italy, Korea, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Norway, the Philippines, Portugal, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Singapore, Spain, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The survey sample was made up of **21%** leading-edge **Prosumers**



and **79%** mainstream consumers.

Who Are Prosumers?

Prosumers are today's leading influencers and market drivers. They have been a focus of Havas studies for more than a decade. Beyond their own economic impact, Prosumers are important because they influence the brand choices and consumption behaviors of others. What Prosumers are doing today, mainstream consumers will likely be doing 6 to 18 months from now.



MILLENNIALS
ages 18–34

GEN XERS
ages 35–54

BOOMERS
ages 55+

Respondents are segmented into these generations.

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VOLUME 38 | 2021