

INFLUENCING YOUNG AMERICA TO ACT

SPECIAL COVID-19 RESEARCH REPORT - APRIL 2020

Research By:  Cause & Social
Influence)))

The *Influencing Young America to Act Special COVID-19 Research Report* series reflects the actions young Americans are taking related to the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic declared in the U.S. on March 11, 2020.

This special series is part of the Cause and Social Influence research initiative launched by INFLUENCE|SG in 2018. The initiative examines how Americans 18 to 30 years old (Generation Z and millennials) at any given time are influenced by and influence others to intentional action on social issues.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

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INTRODUCTION:

This brief presents results from the second of a four-part research series by the Cause & Social Influence initiative to track young Americans' actions related to the 2020 COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic. This study covers actions during the three weeks preceding April 17, or five weeks after the White House officially declared the pandemic.

Little changed from the first to the second study in how respondents felt President Trump is addressing the challenge. Almost two-thirds of young people (ages 18-30) said President Trump is handling the situation from slightly to extremely well (**63%** now, **65%** in the first study), along with nearly a third who said he's not handling it well at all (**32%** now, **30%** in the first study).

Local government played a larger role for young people than initially, becoming the number-one source of requests for respondents to take actions to prevent the spread of the virus. Concurrently, young people continued putting the most trust in nonprofits and local governments to do what's right during this time.

In another 30 days, we will conduct a third study to reflect how these times are affecting the social actions of young Americans. To download the first report, visit causeandsocialinfluence.com.

RESEARCH PROTOCOL:

For this second phase of the research, a quantitative approach was taken with an online survey fielded from 6 PM to 10 PM EST on April 17, 2020, to collect data about the actions taken by young Americans (ages 18-30) related to COVID-19 (Coronavirus) during the preceding one to three weeks. The survey had 1,190 respondents from a nationally representative sample based on census-projected ethnic and demographic composition. With this response rate, the data presented has a 95% confidence interval and 3% margin of error. Visit causeandsocialinfluence.com/research-april2020 for more information on the survey sample.

In analyzing data and drawing conclusions about behavior during this pandemic, researchers acknowledge the restrictions suggested and imposed by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), World Health Organization (WHO), the White House, state and local governments and employers. During the period covered by the survey, cities, counties and states were issuing various degrees of stay-at-home directives. Only essential services were open, with many limited to delivery and drive-through service. On April 16, both the *New York Post* and *The Washington Post* reported that the crisis had put more than 22 million Americans out of work.

2020 COVID-19 (CORONAVIRUS) TIMELINE



KEY FINDINGS

1. Local government had the most influence on whether young Americans acted to stop the spread of COVID-19 (Coronavirus).

In the first study, the majority of young Americans reported being made aware of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) from traditional news media, running counter to the stereotype that social media influencers have the most effect on this age group's behavior. This second study affirms that social media influencers are not wielding much influence during this crisis. Instead, Americans age 18-30 are listening to their local governments (**37%**) and family members (**30%**) to learn what to do to stop the spread of the virus. Causes and "acted on my own" tied for third place (**21%** each). As in the first week, celebrities and influencers are at the bottom.

Who Asked You to Take Action to Slow the Spread of COVID-19? (Select all that apply.)

37%
Local Government

21%
No One

21%
Cause or
Organization

21%
Peer/Friend

5%

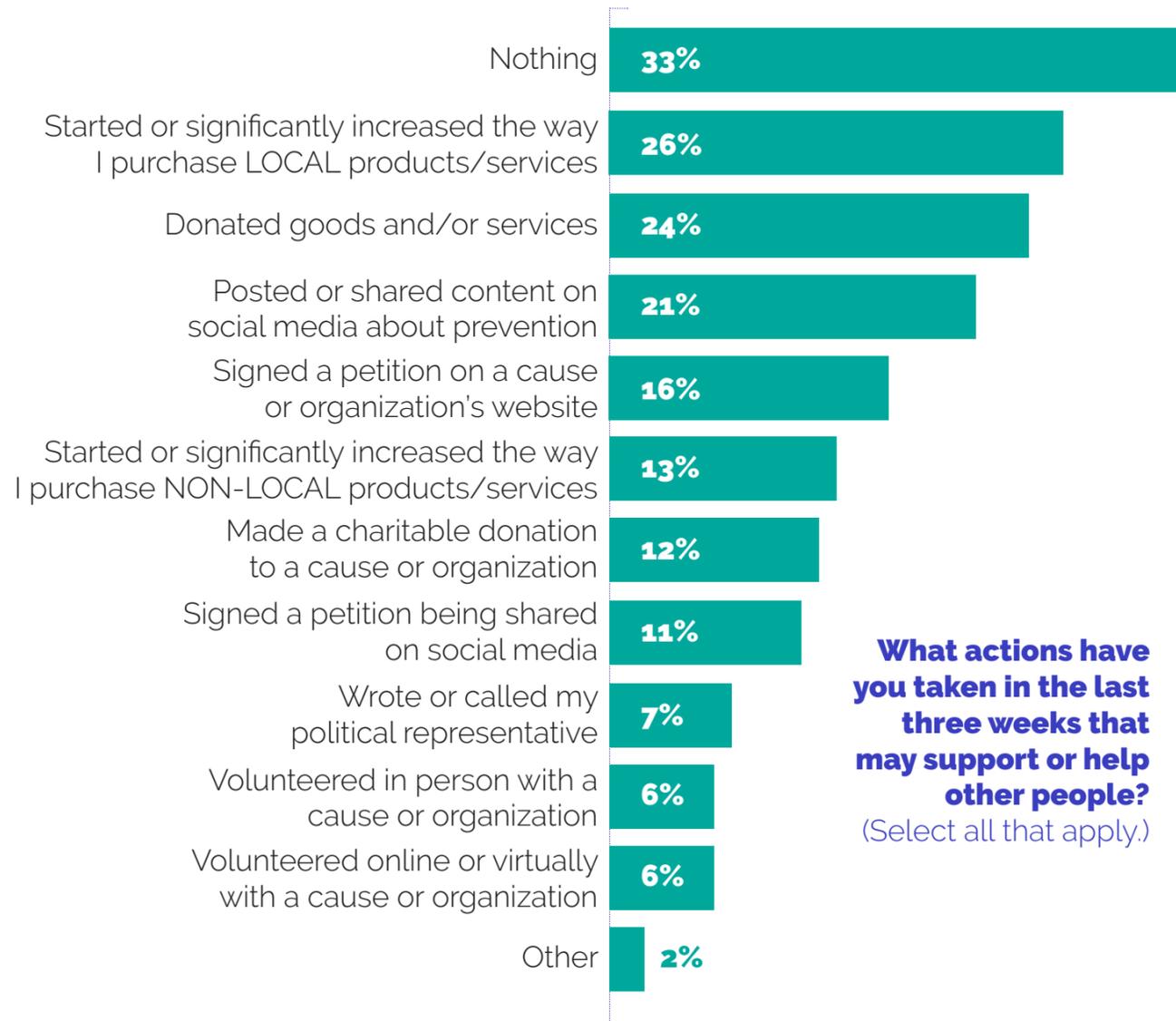
Celebrity or Influencer

Considerations for Future Analysis

- As these results show, local government can positively influence and be trusted by young Americans. After the pandemic, organizations should analyze these relationships to see what they can adapt and apply to their own outreach to this age group.
- As stated in the first report, conventional wisdom regarding the power of online influencers isn't holding true – at least in this wave of research; thus, either this power wanes during the most serious social issues, or too many studies are reaching only people who are highly digitally connected. Both theories are worth further exploration.

2. Supporting local business was the best way young Americans sought to support others during the pandemic.

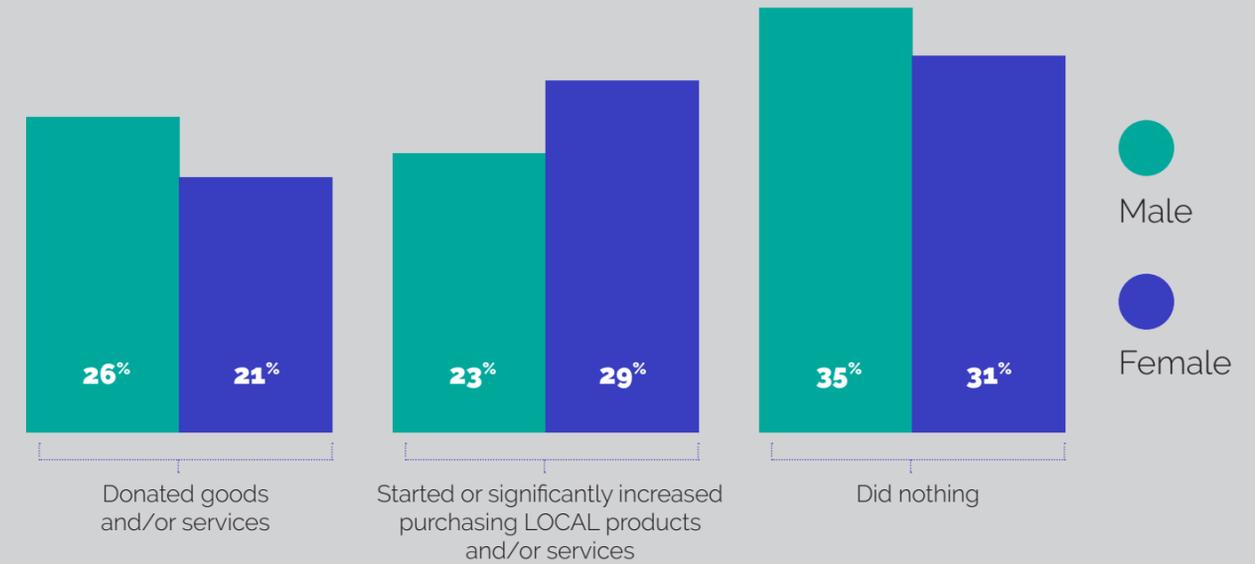
To young Americans, support for others doesn't have to be financial, such as a donation. They also see their consumer decisions and social media activity as ways to help people. At the same time, a third of these respondents said they have taken no actions that might help others.



Of all the actions they have taken to support others, they view the ways in which they purchase local products and/or services as the most influential action (**24%**). Donating goods and services is next (**16%**), while making a charitable donation is not seen as having much influence (**8%**).

Gender and Race Breakdowns

Males (**26%**) reported donating goods and/or services as the action they took to support others, while females (**29%**) reported making local purchases as the top action. A third of all respondents said they had done nothing to support others, with males in this category slightly exceeding females (**35% v. 31%**).



A larger percentage of people of color reported taking the following actions than white/Caucasian respondents:

- Donated goods and/or services (white/Caucasian **21%**, people of color **26%**)
- Signed a petition on a cause or organization's website (white/Caucasian **13%**, people of color **19%**)
- Posted/shared content on social media about COVID-19 prevention (white/Caucasian **19%**, people of color **24%**)

A larger percentage of white/Caucasian respondents than people of color reported taking no actions that might support others (white/Caucasian **39%**, people of color **26%**).

Considerations for Future Analysis

- By late March, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce predicted that this crisis was "likely to create permanent shifts in consumer behavior that retailers need to start preparing for." Young Americans are contributing to these shifts to support others. Will they continue these behaviors once social distancing is over?
- As we write this report, individuals are protesting against stay-at-home directives at the same time more celebrities and companies are using advertising, TV and social media to communicate about social distancing and remaining at home. The next wave of research may indicate whether the number of young people begin to move in different directions as the argument to re-open the economy heightens.

3. Healthcare reform tops the list of social issues young Americans made donations to, while they volunteered most for animals/animal rights.

During a time when healthcare and joblessness as a result of the pandemic have dominated the news and been addressed even in ads, a small percentage of young Americans (**12%**) chose to financially support healthcare reform, food banks and animal rights. Climate change, animal rights and food banks/healthcare reform tied as the top choices for young Americans that reported virtual and/or in-person volunteering (**6%** each).

To which of the following social issues and/or causes did you donate?



For which of the following social issues and/or causes did you volunteer?



Considerations for Future Analysis

- Are healthcare donations up because of the crisis, and will they drop after the pandemic is over?
- Does this interest in animal rights correlate with what happens in natural disasters? Could it be related to spending more time than usual with pets, deciding now is a good time to introduce a young pet to a new home, or even to the hype and viewership for movies and a popular entertainment TV series about exotic animals in captivity?

4. Almost 60% of young Americans were not receiving news about COVID-19 from online influencers.

Unlike the first report period, this survey covered a time when celebrities and online influencers were actively promoting actions to slow the spread of the virus. However, young Americans continued to look elsewhere for news about COVID-19, with nearly **60%** saying they have not received pandemic news from online influencers/content creators.

Influencers by Definition



Content Creator – an individual who grew their audience by creating content online and now uses their online presence as a primary profession.



Celebrity – an individual who is famous for their primary work done offline, though they may have an online presence.

Of those who did turn to online influencers for news, they relied on content creators (**30%**) over celebrities (**19%**).
(Note: Overall, as in the first study, young people are still relying on TV news media, news media websites and social media networks that share news.)

Considerations for Future Analysis

- Many celebrities have already begun to regularly broadcast programming online and over the airwaves from their homes, and more are deciding to do so. It will be interesting to see if increased availability of such options will alter where young people turn for pandemic news.
- Continued comparisons of these influences will help identify the impact of social issue influencers throughout the year.

Conclusion

This is the second of four reports at 7, 30, 60 and 90 days into the officially declared U.S. national emergency. As we head into the summer and fall, the actions and opportunities available to support others weathering this extraordinary time may change, as could the causes and issues young people normally support and attend to. We will continue observing their changing behaviors in real time. Ultimately, our biggest research interest is whether actions during this pandemic have a lasting effect on social issue involvement that makes causes and companies change the way they approach and engage young Americans in the future.