

Influencer Research:

How does negative YouTuber image impact sales for the companies they represent?

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Abstract

The notion of celebrity scandals or positive publicity having negative/positive influences on companies with which they partner, collaborate, or are otherwise associated with is not a new concept in the field of communications. However, the rising persona of the YouTuber creates unexplored territory within this jurisdiction. The researchers sought out and analyzed previous data to apply to their research on this topic and composed a 10-question survey to poll 86 participants on their views of companies amidst positive and negative phenomena surrounding YouTubers. The results showed that positive phenomena can lead to consumers having an improved perception of a brands image. In contrast, negative phenomena is often seen to be separate from that of company and will not diminish a person's opinion of a given brand, assuming the company in question takes proper steps to enforce the consumer's mindset that the YouTuber in question's negative actions are not representative of the views of the company as a whole.

Literature Review

Research Question: What is the correlation of a Youtuber's image and consumer opinions of the brands the Youtuber is associated with?

Throughout history, the public has looked up to celebrities across several media platforms as individuals of immense prowess or wisdom in their own crafts. A celebrity is defined as someone who is well known, so while the connotation may seem positive, it is possible for an individual to be famous for wrong-doings as well. The image of a celebrity is an important factor for consideration, for numerous famous people are endorsed by or representatives for a brand. Therefore, the way a celebrity acts may sway the public's opinion on the brand the celebrity is associated with. This point is supported by the "meaning transfer model", which assumes that consumers tend to purchase products to communicate or support an image or identity (Yang, n.d.). Studies on this topic show varied results.

A study done by K. Osei-Frimpong, G. Donkor, & N. Owusu-Frimpong (2019) show 500 respondents being surveyed about certain celebrities and the brands they are associated with using a questionnaire. The findings indicate that a celebrity endorser who has attributes such as attractiveness, trustworthiness, and familiarity have a positive influence on consumer's perception of quality, purchase intentions, and brand loyalty. However, celebrity endorser's negative publicity had no moderation effect on consumer purchase intention. Two separate studies, one done by D. Thwaites, B. Lowe, L.L. Monkhouse, & B.R. Barnes (2012) and another done by Ulun Akturan (2011), support this point, for their findings show that brands are mildly impacted by a celebrity's negative image.

Another study done by F.A. Carrillat, A. d'Astous, & H. Christianis (2014) show 165 men and women answering questionnaires that had them rate on a scale their perceptions of a

celebrity involved in a scandal, the brand endorsing that celebrity, and the brand competing with or associated with the initial brand. The results show that brands are less favorable when supported by an endorser who has done something negative. However, another study provided differing results. A study done by M. Sääksjärvi, K. Hellén, & G. Balabanis (n.d.) utilized three different studies that showed that a negative endorser can be effective as long as the brand is in a category where the consumers self-esteem is in question.

Other studies provide further factors that show a correlation between a celebrity's image and the brand they endorse, such as the celebrity's presence on social media (Maiorescu, 2017) , (Colapinto & Benecchi, 2014) or how closely the celebrity's established image "matches up" with the image of the brand (Davis, Kahler, Moran, & Liu, 2013) , (Byun, 2014) . While differing results have been explored and displayed, it can be assumed that there is some type of correlation between a celebrity endorser's reputation and the image of the brand they represent.

While the concept of a celebrity has existed for decades, a new type of celebrity has risen to the forefront in recent years. This new celebrity is known as a YouTube celebrity, for they gain a higher status and enormous followings based on the videos they post on YouTube. YouTube is a video streaming platform that has been in operation since 2005. Demographics from numerous ethnicities, races, or ages visit the site, but it finds immense popularity with adolescents, teenagers, and young adults. Companies snap at the opportunity to utilize the agents of this new phenomenon, and they find success in the symbiotic relationship that is sponsorships or brand deals. There aren't many studies done on the correlation between a YouTube celebrity's image and the image of a brand, due to the recency of companies endorsing YouTubers, so this study aims to provide some insight to these interactions and how they affect every day consumers.

The researchers developed two hypotheses:

H1. Youtubers viewed in good light will bring influx of business to companies.

H2. Youtubers facing public scandals will bring criticism or loss of business to companies.

Methods

The sample size for this survey was 86 participants. The primary demographic this survey was administered to was white females between the ages of 19 to 22. The results to the three demographic questions asked, age, gender, and ethnicity, are listed as follows. Age demographics presented that 81% of participants were 19 to 22 years of age, 9.5% were 23 to 26, 6% were 15 to 18, and 3.6% were 27 or older. The gender demographics were divided as 69.4% female, 27.1% male, and 3.5% who opted not to disclose this information. In results to ethnicity/nationality, 83.5% of participants were white, 4.7% were Black/African American, 4.7% were Asian, 3.5% opted not to disclose this information, and 1.2% specified their race as “Mixed Race: Black/White.”

In order to flesh out and enforce current data regarding the notion of scandals (be they positive or negative) involving public figures and how that affects companies they partner with, the researchers administered a 13-question survey intending to gather data on consumer opinions influenced by YouTubers. Ten questions on the survey were administered using a five-point Likert scale, categorized as the following, “1.) This would have very negative impacts on my views. 2.) This would have some negative impacts on my views. 3.) This would have no impact on my views 4.) This would have some positive impacts on my views. 5.) This would have very positive impacts of my views.” The questions were kept neutral and purposely did not identify any real YouTubers so as to reduce the number of potential confounding variables and allow the focus of the findings to be primarily on consumer views of positive and negative incidents. It is

assumed that the participants in the survey are aware that the actions of an individual do not represent the values of a company, however, the actions of someone associated with a company can leave a positive or negative impression on someone viewing their actions. The researchers attempted to match up survey questions so that the “worst” negative events matched up with the “best” positive events. A certain level of subjectivity was undertaken in order to categorize these events. The question order was randomized in order to prevent participants from anticipating following questions and answering preemptively/unthoughtfully. Three demographic questions were included and were not scrambled with the other questions and were instead kept at the end of the survey to avoid any unintentional bias. For the 10 questions there were five brands and five “YouTuber Content Styles” that were paired together, and each was given a positive and negative scenario. The subjectively chosen “worst” scenario and “best” scenario were paired together at random with a brand and content style, going down the list pairing the “second worst” and “second best” together and so forth on. The chosen content styles and brands were as follows, “Wealth and Luxury Goods/Gucci, “Shoe-Junkie”/Nike, mechanic/Honda, tech/Sprint Wireless, and Vlogger/Hulu.” The given positive and negative scenarios were paired as the following, listed (subjectively) from most intense to most tame, “1a.) Donating an organ to a child in need or 1b.) child molestation. 2a.) Working with make a wish foundation to surprise a child or 2b.) footage being released of the YouTuber saying the “N-word.” 3a.) Building a public school for children in need or 3b.) being exposed as a meth addict with footage of assaults occurring while high. 4a.) Donating a large sum of money to an environmental fund or 4b.) footage being released of a YouTuber going on a drunken nude run. 5a.) Footage being released of a Youtuber defending a group of minorities wrongfully being oppressed or 5b.) being convicted of a drunk driving incident.”

Results

The following results of the 10 content driven questions can be referenced back to the numbering system that labels the questions in the methods section (I.E.: “2b” or “5a” etc.) with “1a” being “Q1,” “1b” being “Q2,” “2a” being “Q3,” and so forth on. The assigned Likert scale numbers of 1 through 5 (one being the most negative, five being the most positive) are also referenced.

[**Q1:**{*91.9%* - 3.}{8.1% - 4.}] [**Q2:** {60.5% - 3}{24.4% - 2}{14% - 1}{1.2% 5}]
 [**Q3:**{51.2% - 4}{25.6% - 5}{23.3% - 3}] [**Q4:**{50% - 3}{33.7% - 2}{16.3% - 1}]
 [**Q5:**{41.9% - 3}{33.7% - 4}{22.1% - 5}{2.3% - 2}] [**Q6:**{66.3% - 3}{29.1% - 2}{3.5% - 1}{1.2% - 5}]
 [**Q7:**{54.7% - 4}{27.9% - 5}{17.4% - 3}] [**Q8:**{75.6% - 3}{18.6% - 2}{4.7% - 4}{1.2% - 1}]
 [**Q9:**{58.1% - 3}{25.6% - 4}{10.5% - 5}{5.8% - 2}] [**Q10:**{82.6% - 3}{14% - 2}{2.3% - 1}{1.2% - 4}]

This number set depicts the various modes collected during research, shown as the highest percentage (*italicized and listed first for each question*), and illustrates which number on the Likert scale is the most representative of the testing population for a given testing point. This data allows for clear evaluation of testing points to determine whether an overwhelming majority felt one way, shown by Q1, or if the participates where more divided with the majority being smaller, such as with Q5.

The following data chart depicts two sets of numbers per question. The first listed number represents the average Likert scale number for a given question, while the second number depicts the median result.

[Q1: 3.08 – Q1: 3] [Q2: 2.5 – Q2: 3] [Q3: 4.02 – Q3: 4] [Q4: 2.34 – Q4: 2.5] [Q5: 3.76 – Q5: 4]
 [Q6: 2.66 – Q6: 3] [Q7: 4.1 – Q7: 4] [Q8: 2.84 – Q8: 3] [Q9: 3.41 – Q9: 3] [Q10: 2.83 – Q10: 3]

The averages for the Likert numbers give a wholistic perspective on the acquired data. The mode represents the most prevalent views held by the survey takers, but the average

accounts for outspoken people in the data set who would otherwise not be evaluated due to the smaller percentage of answers chosen by them. For instance, Q2 had 60.5% of people in favor of 3 on the Likert scale, and while this is a majority, 39.5% of people would not have their data collectively analyzed if averages were not considered by the researchers. The average response was 2.5, which is 0.5 lower than what the mode would depict for the data.

The median is not grandly representative of the data, nor does it bring any unforeseen information or perspectives to the forefront when analyzing data. The five-point Likert scale used by the researchers is not conducive for drawing conclusions based on medians, however, the medians were included by the researchers to present a comprehensive view of the data set at hand.

Discussion

The study found support for H1, but it did not find support for H2. Respondents of the survey produced a correlation between a Youtuber and the brand sponsoring that Youtuber only when the Youtuber did something positive alongside the brand. Therefore, if the Youtuber was viewed in a positive way, the brand was viewed positively as well, assuming that the brand played an active role in the positive event. If the Youtuber participated in negative behavior, the study displayed little to no correlation between the Youtuber and the brand sponsoring that Youtuber. Respondents showed a neutral view when presenting their opinions on the brand sponsoring a Youtuber committing a negative action, for they were assumingly able to separate the identity of the Youtuber from their ideas of the brand.

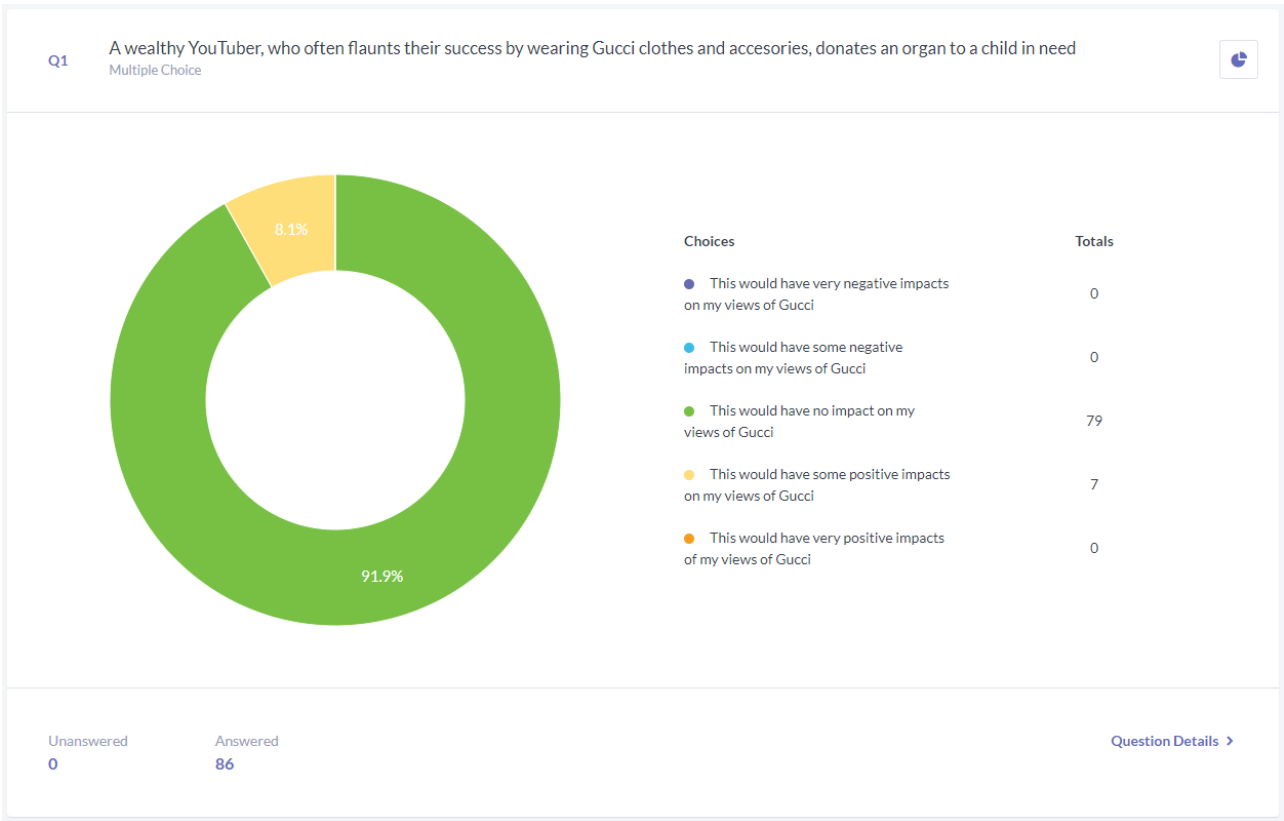
The limitations of the study included sample size and method of surveying. The sample size was limited by the choice of demographic. Although this limitation provided specificity, a larger sample size would have produced richer results. The researchers recommend for future

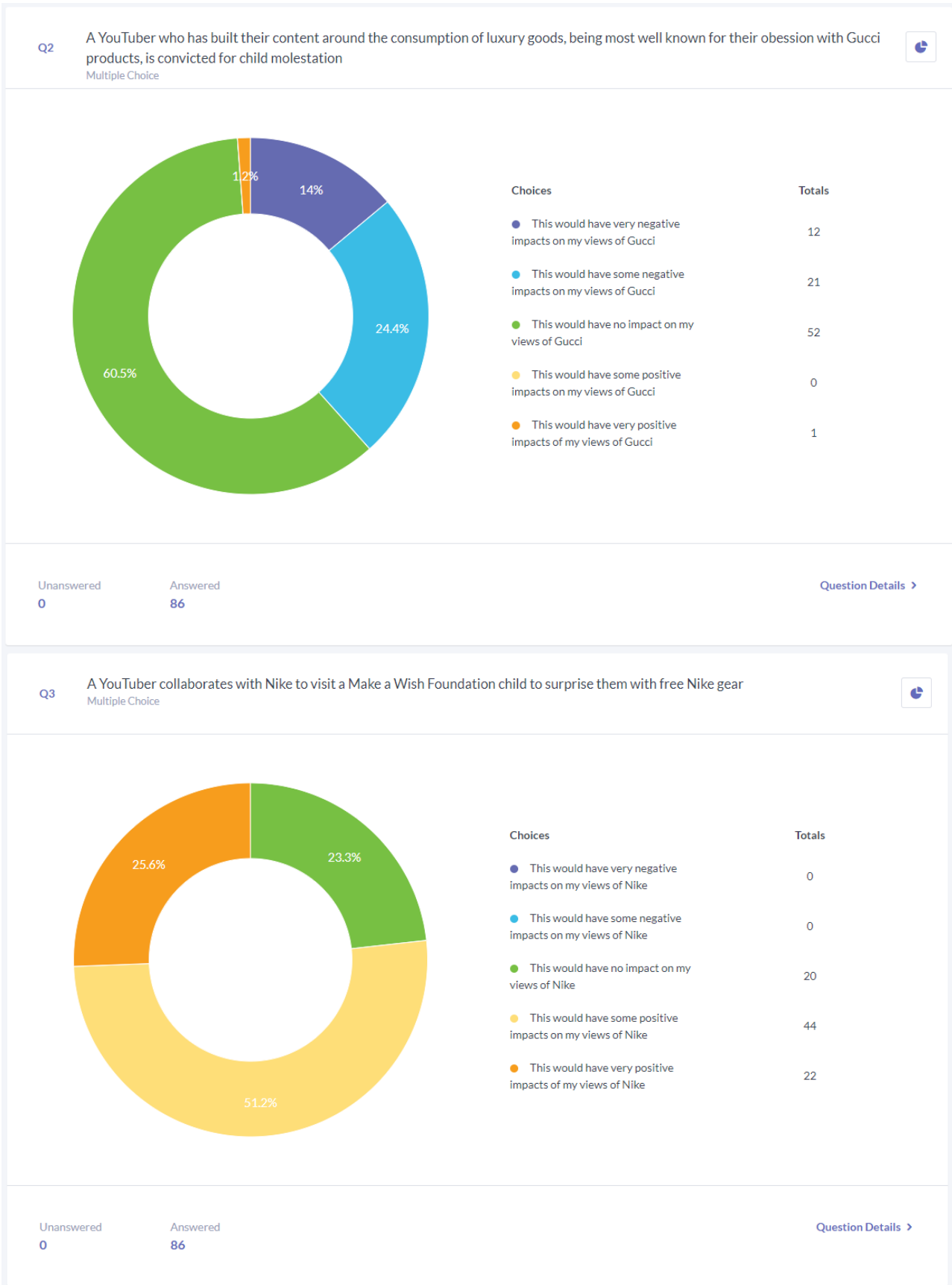
studies utilizing a sample size with variation in geographic area of living, age, ethnicity, and race. The method of surveying also could have been improved upon by employing a variety of methods, rather than just a single online survey. The researchers recommend conducting qualitative studies in future studies, such as interviews or focus groups, to provide more personal input and details that can enhance the quantitative data. Any quantitative surveys should also be delivered on various platforms, such as print rather than just online.

As future generations become increasingly engrossed in consumer culture, it seems that this phenomenon comes with a heightened ability to separate the wrong doings of one individual with the perceptions of a company. This can hopefully prevent future PR crises and allow more attention to be put in confronting the individual rather than the company and its innocent workers.

Appendix

The following pages include visual representations of the data gathered during research, as well as the specific phraseology of the questions used to gage participant views and opinions.

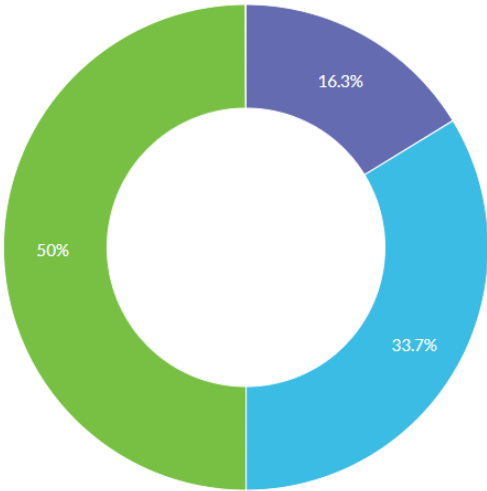




Q4

A YouTuber, who frequently promotes and partners with the brand Nike, has videos surface of them using the N-word followed with other racist derogatory remarks

Multiple Choice



Choices	Totals
This would have very negative impacts on my views of Nike	14
This would have some negative impacts on my views of Nike	29
This would have no impact on my views of Nike	43
This would have some positive impacts on my views of Nike	0
This would have very positive impacts of my views of Nike	0

Unanswered0

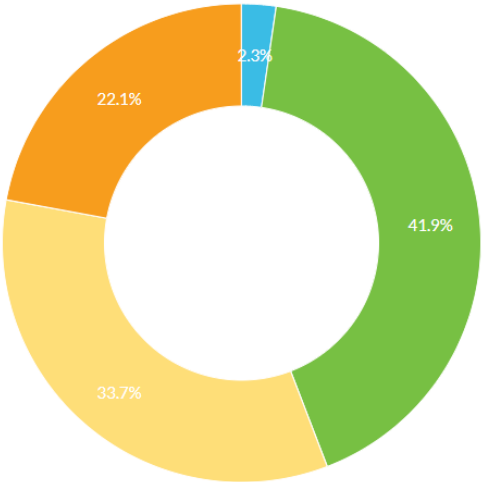
Answered86

Question Details >

Q5

A successful auto mechanic YouTuber is an ambassador for Honda and used their personal funds to build a new public school for children in need

Multiple Choice



Choices	Totals
This would have very negative impacts on my views of Honda	0
This would have some negative impacts on my views of Honda	2
This would have no impact on my views of Honda	36
This would have some positive impacts on my views of Honda	29
This would have very positive impacts of my views of Honda	19

Unanswered0

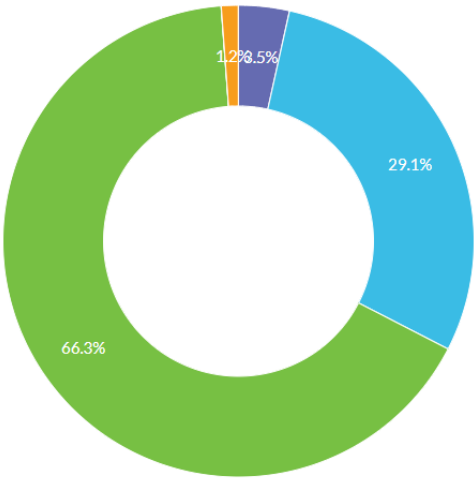
Answered86

Question Details >

Q6

An automobile focused YouTuber, who has partnered with Honda as a brand ambassitor, is discovered to be an avid meth user and footage them assaulting people while high has gone viral

Multiple Choice



Choices	Totals
This would have very negative impacts on my views of Honda	3
This would have some negative impacts on my views of Honda	25
This would have no impact on my views of Honda	57
This would have some positive impacts on my views of Honda	0
This would have very positive impacts of my views of Honda	1

Unanswered
0

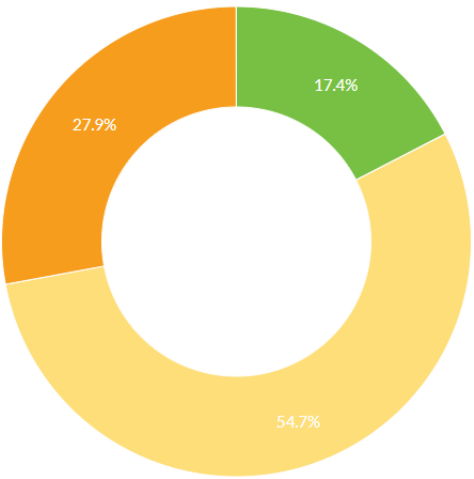
Answered
86

[Question Details >](#)

Q7

A YouTuber focused on advancing tech to enhance environmental care is working with Sprint Wireless to donate a large sum of money to various environmental funds/charities

Multiple Choice



Choices	Totals
This would have very negative impacts on my views of Sprint Wireless	0
This would have some negative impacts on my views of Sprint Wireless	0
This would have no impact on my views of Sprint Wireless	15
This would have some positive impacts on my views of Sprint Wireless	47
This would have very positive impacts of my views of Sprint Wireless	24

Unanswered
0

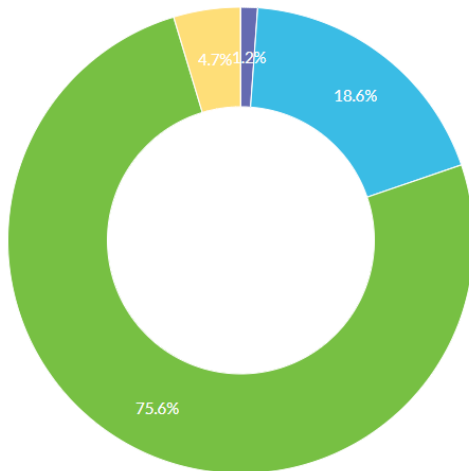
Answered
86

[Question Details >](#)

Q8

A tech YouTuber, who has a brand deal with Sprint Wireless, goes on a drunken nude run and is charged with public indecency

Multiple Choice



Choices

- This would have very negative impacts on my views of Sprint Wireless
- This would have some negative impacts on my views of Sprint Wireless
- This would have no impact on my views of Sprint Wireless
- This would have some positive impacts on my views of Sprint Wireless
- This would have very positive impacts of my views of Sprint Wireless

Totals

1
16
65
4
0

Unanswered
0

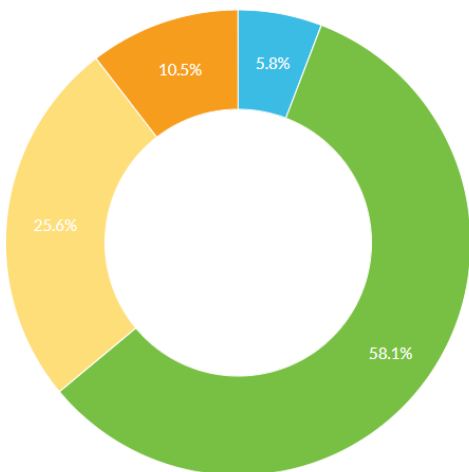
Answered
86

[Question Details >](#)

Q9

A viral video is released of a YouTube Vlogger, known to promote and advocate for Hulu, fiercely defending a group of minorities being wrongfully treated in public

Multiple Choice



Choices

- This would have very negative impacts on my views of Hulu
- This would have some negative impacts on my views of Hulu
- This would have no impact on my views of Hulu
- This would have some positive impacts on my views of Hulu
- This would have very positive impacts of my views of Hulu

Totals

0
5
50
22
9

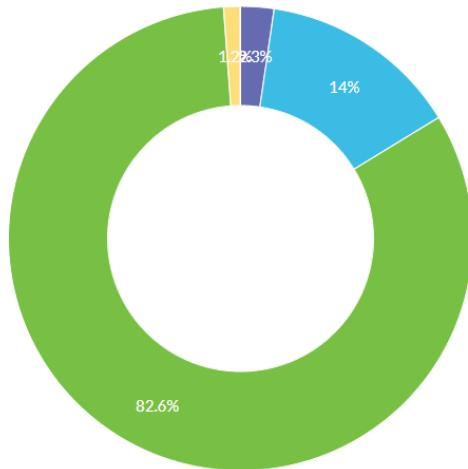
Unanswered
0

Answered
86

[Question Details >](#)

Q10

A lifestyle YouTuber/Vlogger, who is sponsored by Hulu in every video, is convicted of drinking and driving
Multiple Choice



Choices

- This would have very negative impacts on my views of Hulu
- This would have some negative impacts on my views of Hulu
- This would have no impact on my views of Hulu
- This would have some positive impacts on my views of Hulu
- This would have very positive impacts of my views of Hulu

Totals

2
12
71
1
0

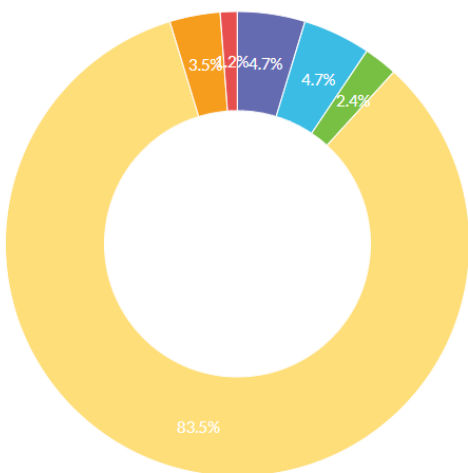
Unanswered
0

Answered
86

[Question Details >](#)

Q11

Which best represents you?
Multiple Choice



Choices

- Asian
- Black/African American
- Hispanic/Latin@
- White
- Prefer Not To Say
- Other (Please Specify)

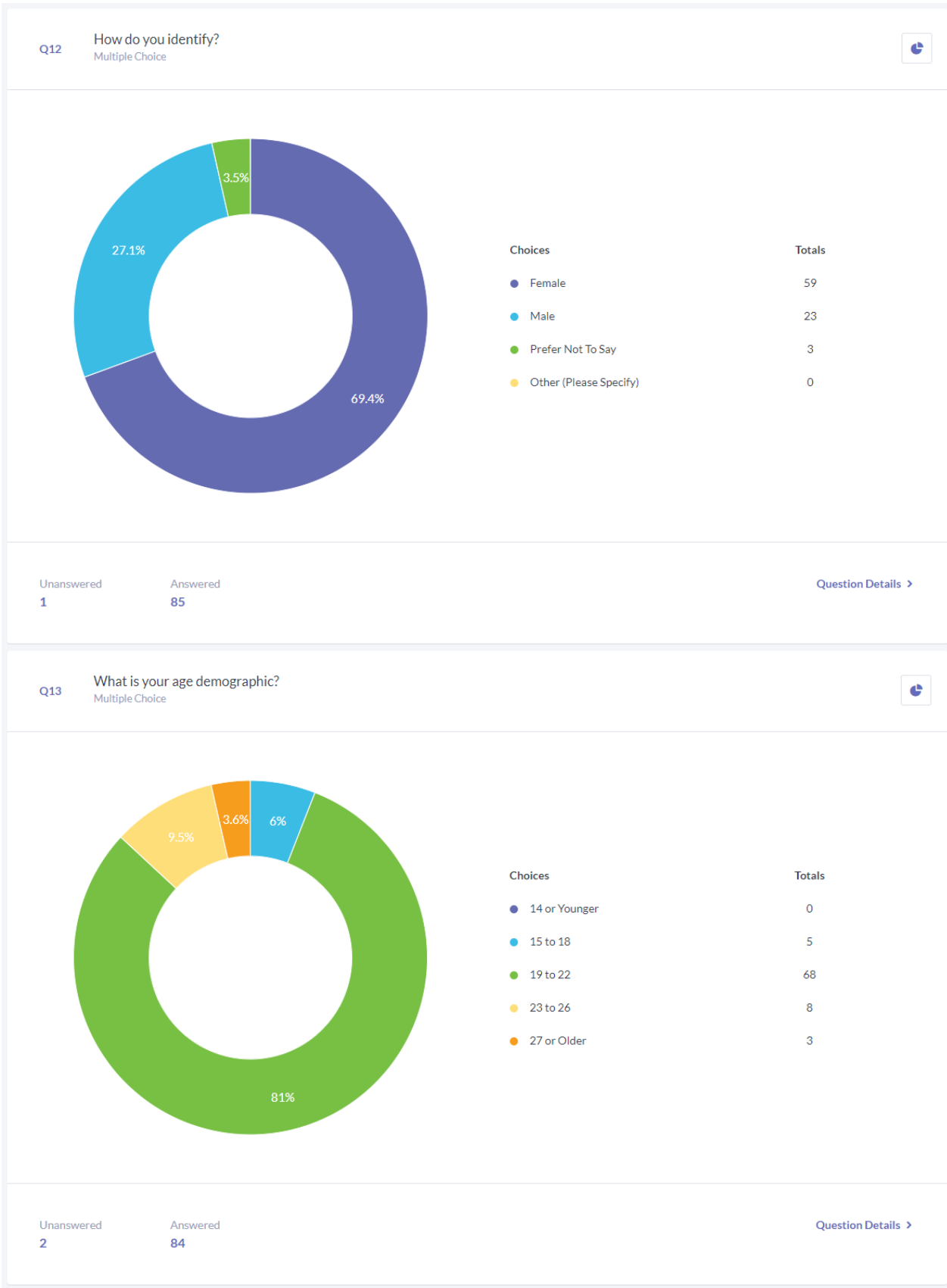
Totals

4
4
2
71
3
1

Unanswered
1

Answered
85

[Question Details >](#)



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